

Macbeth's Bravery

In Act 1, Scene 2, of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, the word "brave" is used twice on one page. The word is first used to describe the sergeant who aids Malcolm in the battle against Macdonwald. He is hailed as a "brave friend" because of how he fought: "like a good and hardy soldier" (1.2.3). The term reappears once the sergeant tells how Macbeth overcomes Macdonwald. Macbeth is said to have "faced the slave" and "to have unseamed him from the nave to the chops" (1.2.20, 22). The words "[he] carved out his passage" show that Macbeth's actions were deliberate (1.2.19). Thus, Macbeth consciously confronts the enemy and takes control of his fate in this way. Macbeth is described as "brave Macbeth," and the sergeant goes on to say "well he deserves that name" (1.2.16). In this context, bravery is seemed to be defined as the conscious choice to fight. Macbeth and the sergeant are both praised for their military prowess, but more specifically for "facing" the enemy, this constitutes bravery (1.2.20). From the very beginning, Macbeth is said to be a brave character. However, Macbeth's bravery is brought into question at the end of the play when Macduff calls him a coward. Despite Macbeth's many faults, cowardice is not present during Macbeth's downfall. This renders the description of Macbeth as a coward inaccurate. Macbeth's bravery can be seen at the time of his downfall in his readiness to fight, his unwillingness to yield, and his confronting of life and death. These are all moments where Macbeth is seen fighting.

Bravery is defined as the decision to fight. With this definition, Macbeth can be labeled as a coward because of his words "I'll not fight with thee" to Macduff (5.6.61). One could argue that Macbeth refuses to fight Macduff because of an earlier sentiment of his: "my soul is too much charged with blood of thine already" (5.6.43). This refusal is not cowardly, but compassionate. He is trying to overlook one man in the fight because of earlier acts of blood.

Furthermore, Macbeth's momentary "cowardice" does not fill even a quarter of a page in Shakespeare's play. Macbeth's countenance changes moments after Macduff speaks, and Macbeth then welcomes the fight and says "I'll throw my warlike shield," (5.6.72), the word "warlike" reminding the reader of all the previous battles Macbeth was a part of. Because of this immediate change in attitude, Macbeth's refusal to fight could be seen as a simple blip. Macbeth immediately rejects and dispels the cowardice, making it seem like it never existed.

In addition, Macbeth talks on his immunity to fear to Seyton: "Direness, familiar to my slaughterous thoughts, cannot once start me" (5.5.14-15). In this paragraph, he claims that he has become steely to terrors—he has all but "forgot the taste of fears" (5.5.9). This immunity speaks to Macbeth's bravery since it can cause one to stay and fight instead of flee. It is only when the witches' description of one not born of woman comes true through Macduff that Macbeth momentarily tastes fear and cowers. Up until this point, Macbeth truly was "lion-mettled" as the third apparition advised him to be (4.1.89). However, any person might cower when they are confronted with his or her demise. Macbeth's momentary lapse in bravery when Macduff presents the possibility of death cannot be counted against him for these two reasons.

Bravery can also be seen with Macbeth's valiant facing of the possibility of death. After his lapse, he commands Macduff to "lay on" and says "damned be him that first cries, 'Hold enough!'" (5.6.72, 73). Thus, he welcomes the outcome the fates have decided for him and dies a "fairer death" as Seyward says deaths on the battlefield are (5.6.86). However, Macbeth is more weary of life than death. Macbeth confesses "I 'gin to be aweary of the sun" and "[I] wish the estate o'the world were now undone" (5.5.49, 50). Both these statements allude to Macbeth's unhappiness with life. Macbeth's soliloquy about life and its fleetingness allows one to assume

that Macbeth finds life to be torturous. He compares life to “a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage and then is heard no more” (5.5.24, 25). Thus, he thinks life is inconsequential and meaningless. “Poor” alludes to life’s lack of richness, and “frets” furthers the idea of a player being tormented. His exclamation of “Out, out, brief candle” shows Macbeth desiring death. However, Macbeth is later seen to battle death. Macbeth says “bear-like I must fight the course,” saying that he will fight like an animal (5.6.12). Also, he claims “I’ll fight till from my bones my flesh be hacked” (5.3.32). Thus, he is fighting against death. Macbeth’s words “Why should I play the Roman fool and die on mine own sword,” (5.6.40, 41), tell us that Macbeth is too proud to commit suicide. However, this might not be pride so much as bravery. Macbeth is condemning suicide, which is sometimes thought of as the easy way out. Macbeth’s endurance and fight when he longs for an end is an example of bravery. He is brave enough to withstand life even when he has come to despise it. To be able to withstand horrors such as not having “honour, love, obedience, [or] troops of friends” is bravery (5.3.25). This endurance holds with the play’s definition of bravery since Macbeth is fighting the torments of life with his decision to stay alive.

Macbeth’s fighting spirit at the time of his downfall further proves Macbeth’s bravery as well (since bravery is defined as the gal or will to fight). Macbeth is disgusted with those that are afraid of the fight. He calls his servant “lily-livered” and a “boy” because of his apparent fear (5.3.14). Thus, the definition of “bravery” in the play could be added to in order to touch upon fear (if one desired to heed Macbeth’s view of bravery). Macbeth is seen countless times as not fearful in the final scenes. Macbeth says such things as “The mind I sway by and the heart I bear shall never sag with doubt nor shake with fear” and “hang those that talk of fear” (5.3.9-10, 34). It could be argued that Macbeth is not fearful because of his feelings of invincibility as a result

of the witches' prophecies. If this were true, he is only brave because of their misleading predictions of triumph. However, Macbeth is brave even after he is confronted with possible defeat: Birnan Wood has come to Dunsinane and Macduff was not born of woman. He says "yet I will try the last," meaning he will fight fate (5.6.71). With this act, Macbeth is fighting the witches' prophecies, Macduff, and death. His valiant words, "I will [still] try" do not even show a hint of fear. Further statements by Macbeth that show his fighting spirit are "Whiles I see lives, the gashes do better upon them" and "blow wind, come wrack, at least we'll die with harness on our back" (5.6.41, 5.5.51,52).

In continuance, Macbeth bravely challenges Macduff's authority when he refuses to yield and grovel at Macduff's feet (5.6.67). Macduff is now viewed as more powerful because of the witches' prophecy, so Macbeth's fight for his pride can be described as a brave act. Macbeth refuses to succumb to Macduff's view of how he should live out the rest of his days and be remembered. Macduff says Macbeth's face will be "painted upon a pole" as "rarer monsters are" (5.6.64, 63). Macbeth's answer to this is "I will not yield" (5.6.66). This spurs him on to his final fight.

In conclusion, the third apparition of the witches tells Macbeth to "be lion-mettled and proud" (4.1.89). However, one might argue that the witches' third apparition simply encouraged Macbeth to continue to be "lion-mettled" since Macbeth is described as untamable on the first battlefield. His sword is said to have "smoked with bloody execution" and he "fixed his [enemy's] head upon our battlements" (1.2.18, 23). This is a description of a man that does seem to have a spirit and courage of a lion. The insertion of "lion" in the line "As sparrows, eagles, or the hare, the lion," (1.2.35), further brings to mind this idea of Macbeth being a lion. In Macbeth's downfall, he continues to be lion-like. Macbeth refuses to yield to Macduff, he

maintains his fighting spirit, and he confronts the horrors of life and death. All of these actions heed to the play's definition of bravery on the first few pages: the conscious choice to fight. Macbeth being compared to a lion is only one example of Macbeth being compared to an animal. Macbeth compares himself to a bear as well when he says "bear-like I must fight the course" (5.6.12). This furthers the idea of Macbeth having a fighting spirit. Lions are especially viewed as brave animals.