

The three prayers to darkness essay

[Sociology](#), [Violence](#)



Macbeth's three prayers to darkness could be called the turning points of the play. Each time one of them is recited, the course of the play changes; characters change and react differently to stressful situations. The one preaching the prayer varies; one is by Lady Macbeth and the other two by Macbeth himself.

Nonetheless, the purpose is always the same; it calls out for evil, a supernatural evil to do the sin of man. Curiously, the degree of evil that the prayer calls out for varies each time. This difference in degree of evil is what causes contrast and similarity between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. The first prayer to darkness is recited by Lady Macbeth; it will reveal her true character, as well as show contrast between her and Macbeth. She summons the "spirits that tend on mortal thoughts", and asks to be unsexed (Act 1, Scene 5, 39-40). With this, she mainly asks to be stripped of her womanhood: her kindness, her sympathy, and even her humanity. It is because of this ripping of womanhood that this prayer creates contrast with Macbeth. Macbeth was recognized to be brave, but kind in the beginning; Lady Macbeth herself criticizes the kindness that he has.

From the moment Lady Macbeth asks to be filled "from the crown to the toe topfull of direst cruelty", she and Macbeth psychologically clash (Act 1, Scene 5, 41-42). Lady Macbeth has become tainted; now that she's called the "murd'ring ministers" her blood is "thick". Macbeth, in the meantime is still honorable because his intentions are still pure, in contrast to those of Lady Macbeth after this prayer to darkness. The second prayer to darkness is performed by Macbeth. This is the prayer that shows his dark intentions for the first time. Unlike the last prayer, this one will show an evil pattern

between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. He demands the stars to hide their fires, not letting light see his “black and deep desires” (Act 1, Scene 4, 51).

Oddly, Macbeth appeals to blindness, something Lady Macbeth did too at the end of her prayer. Macbeth calls forth no power of evil, but he desires “the eye [to] wink at the hand”, he wants his actions and desires for power to be unknown; Lady Macbeth wants this as well (Act 1, Scene 4, 52). She commands the night to shroud itself in the “dunkest smoke of hell” (Act 1, Scene 5, 50).

Therefore, the pattern between the two characters is created; both want the situation to remain cloudy and unknown in order for vil things to happen.

Their inner motivation for the prayer is pretty much the same: Macbeth’s “black and deep desires” and Lady Macbeth’s “fell/fierce purpose”; the desire for Macbeth to be king. For that reason, it is evident that Macbeth and Lady Macbeth share a similar personality at the time... a greedy one. Finally, the third prayer to darkness is executed by Macbeth. However, unlike his last prayer, this one will show a huge contrast between Lady Macbeth and Macbeth.

The prayer takes places after Duncan’s murder, but at this time Macbeth is hungry for power, and he’s about to kill again. This time, Macbeth asks the “seeling night” to help him commit murder once more. The contrast is best demonstrated when Macbeth asks “night’s black agents” to “cancel and tear to pieces that great bond which keeps [him] pale” (Act 3, Scene 2, 49-50). He commands the evil power to use its “bloody and invisible hand” to do this (Act 3, Scene 2, 48). In other words, Macbeth is again demanding that

things remain hidden, but this time he also asks for the evil power to kill Banquo and Fleance while “ the eye of pitiful day” is blindfolded. Hence, the contrast appears between the two characters when Macbeth’s soul becomes even more corrupt.

Lady Macbeth has been shown to be monstrously evil, but now with this prayer, Macbeth has finally outmatched her. His demand to continue violence and murder only makes Macbeth and Lady Macbeth go in different mental directions; she will begin to question the necessity of murder while he will continue to do it. The three prayers to darkness create severe changes in a character’s personality. It is until the prayer is said that a true character’s personality is revealed at a certain time; only these reflect true desires.

The contrast in these innermost desires is what ultimately creates contrast between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth; the same applies with similar desires. In the beginning, Macbeth appeared to show a similar desire to that of Lady Macbeth, but as the situation turned more into his favor, power corrupted him; Macbeth’s last prayer to darkness shows a greater evil on behalf of Macbeth. As Macbeth got more power, his prayers to darkness became more sinister; even more than those of Lady Macbeth.