Sample Essay

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Traitors Trade Away Lives

A betrayal hurts, but a betrayal by a loved one is even worse. In Shakespeare’s famous play *Macbeth*, a man deals with greed, power, and guilt. Macbeth is told by three witches that he will soon have more power than he ever dreamed. He soon takes all the wrong actions to place himself in the power position he thinks he deserves. His wife Lady Macbeth is a strong influence on his decision to murder his way to the top. Soon after Macbeth’s first murder, he goes mad with guilt and carries out acts he would never have thought of in his right mind. What Macbeth overlooks is the fact that his wife betrayed him. Lady Macbeth is the reason Macbeth feels compelled to commit the initial murder of King Duncan. He goes on to murder many more, and eventually be murdered himself. Betrayal among family members is not uncommon, but it is unexpected. In the book *Stealing Heaven* written by Elizabeth Scott, Danielle is raised by her mother to take what is not hers. The two hop from town to town breaking into extravagant houses stealing whatever will make the most money. Danielle (Dani) has never been taught any different than the lifestyle her mother has showed her. After they make a trip to a small well-off town, Heaven, Dani soon realizes what she has missed out on in life—friends, boyfriends, school, and a home to come back to every night. One thing leads to another and Dani is forced to pick between her mother’s life of crime and her own life of freedom. Dani’s mother betrays her daughter by not ever showing her a proper life, and hiding the wrong nature of their lifestyle. Eventually, Dani chooses herself over her mother, but this hurts people along the way. *Macbeth* and *Stealing Heaven* are two stories that only share one commonality: the archetype of a traitor. Both books possess an unexpected traitor; their betrayals differ, but both create a lasting effect on the loved ones they betrayed.

Lady Macbeth’s first appearance in *Macbeth* foreshadows her deep, evil roots. From the first mention of Macbeth possibly becoming King, she has the thought of murdering her way to the top. She poisons her husband’s mind, because she knows exactly how much effect she has on him. Part of the reason Macbeth so easily falls for his wife’s corrupted plan is because he does not expect his partner in life to lead him down the wrong path. Macbeth praises his wife when he is fooled by her, saying, “bring forth men-children; for they undaunted mettle should compose nothing but males!” (Macbeth `1.7. 73-75). He believes his wife is so smart and powerful that she should be the man herself. But Lady Macbeth actually betrays Macbeth by doing exactly this. She has an ominous desire to be unsexed by the “spirits that tend on mortal thoughts” (1.5. 36). Holstering manly and evil thoughts adds to her betrayal of her husband and her positions as a wife and a woman. Her various pleas to the spirits to change her to a man show her true intentions. She is not afraid to go after what she wants. Lady Macbeth bullies Macbeth into her ideas by “her strong-nerved ambition” that “furnishes ribs of steel to ‘the sides of his [Macbeth] intent’”(Hazlitt 171). Lady Macbeth uses her influence on Macbeth to give him the false confidence he needs to commit the murders she thinks are necessary. Her influence on Macbeth eventually leads to his insanity and, shortly after, his death. Lady Macbeth is not the only traitor in literature that betrays someone she loves; many traitors are tempted to betray the people closest to them.

Dani’s mother betrays her daughter the first time she ever included her in unsafe criminal activities. Dani was raised as a thief with no knowledge of what a real childhood felt like. Her mother does not give her the opportunity to explore the world on her own, educate herself or make real friends. She does not teach her right from wrong, or even that stealing from others is bad. She describes stealing as “a type of high, something I could never get from buying it from the store” (Scott 113). Her daughter trusts her mother and believes that stealing isn’t that bad afterall. But as Dani grows older, she realizes that the life she lives is not fulfilling, but it is not until she sees what a real life could be when she knows her mother has betrayed her. Throughout the book, Dani’s mom acts as the child in their two person “family”. Dani gets the coffee, the groceries, and worries about paying the bills. Her mother knows her daughter would never leave her, so she uses that power to manipulate Dani into being the responsible one. But what her mother does not realize is that she is responsible for betraying her daughter. Numerous times she leaves Dani at home for days on end without money, she acts like she doesn’t know her in public, and pressures Dani into doing her dirty acts for her. Her mother’s betrayal forces Dani to reevaluate her life and decide how she will live the rest of it.

The two works illustrate major differences in the effects the traitors have on the ones they betrayed. Lady Macbeth’s betrayal causes Macbeth to go insane, and carry on with his wife’s evil doings. He does not realize his wife ever betrayed him, even though Lady Macbeth knows that she did. She knows the wrongness of her actions when “her mind has closed down around itself” while she is trying to rid the feeling of guilt from her clean, but bloody-feeling hands (Low 215). Eventually, she comes to understand that her mind will never open back up, and she is stuck with the actions she’s taken. Even after her death Macbeth continues to plot his power surge by the means of murder. He carries on with these actions because even though Lady Macbeth is dead, “they are exactly in tune” (Chapman 151). His wife has put so much influence in his mind, he can’t sore out which thought is his own. Macbeth has no sane thought left in his head, only the thoughts Lady Macbeth put there. In contrast, Dani’s mom’s betrayal causes her to change her life for the better. She realizes that life is much more than stealing and even though ever wrong can’t be righted, she takes every action to try. In Dani’s life-changing conversation with her mom she tells her, “I want a house, furniture, pictures, and a family. I want to earn those things, not steal them” (Scott 156). She takes the betrayal that has been brought on her and turns it to something positive. In contrast, Dani’s mom never realizes she has betrayed her daughter. She criticizes Dani when she wants to live a life of morality and doesn’t understand her need for redemption. The differences between how the traitors and the betrayed are affected illuminate the unavoidable effects of the betrayals.

The traitors and the betrayed share some common characteristics from the undesirable actions that transpire. Both Dani and Macbeth feel guilty only because the traitors force them into actions they otherwise would have not taken part of. Dani feels guilty because she has stolen so much, and never repented for her actions. When she comes across the situation where her mother asks her to steal from her only friend, the guilt overcomes her. Macbeth’s guilt is because of his actions, but his actions are because of his wife. They both trusted their traitors because they were family. Dani and Macbeth trusted them to lead them down a path that was morally correct, not a path of destruction. According to Keaton Ziem, “trust is the key element that’s involved in the traitor’s story” (WritersCafe.org). Lady Macbeth earned Macbeth’s trust by planting her roots in Macbeth’s mind. Dani’s mom has the automatic trust from her daughter just by being related. Dani and Macbeth did not see the betrayal coming or recognize it until long after it happened. The shattering of the trust between both relationships causes the climax in both books along with the main conflicts. Macbeth and Dani feel pressure from their friends to do the right thing. Banquo (Macbeth’s closest friend) pleads Macbeth to rethink the prophecy the witches told him, and not to take it too seriously. Macbeth obviously does not listen to him, but his friend’s opinion weighs heavily on him. Dani’s first friend shows her what life can be like, and makes a real social life look appealing. Her friend’s influence plays a big part in the confidence Dani builds to stand up to her mother. The guilt, the trust and the negative influences lead to the conflicts and climaxes in the stories.

The traitors and the characters they betrayed are all affected in numerous ways by the betrayals. Macbeth and his wife both slowly lose their minds because of the guilt they feel. Lady Macbeth actually betrays her husband even further by dying from guilt and leaving him to deal with the events she forced him in to. Her character goes through a major change at this point in the play. Instead of being the strong and powerful woman she once was, she is now too weak. Her weakness emphasizes how much effect the sins have on her and her husband. Macbeth starts to see imaginary figures and ghosts that haunt him daily. He sees the ghost of his close friend Banquo, whom he killed out of fear. The first time Macbeth imagines a bloody dagger floating above his head, the reader knows that his mind has been changed. A completely opposite effect takes place in Dani. She makes huge strides in putting her life in order. She stands up to her mom, admits to stealing, and goes after the life she wants. Her mother never feels the effects of the betrayal like her daughter does. Although she becomes very ill (like Lady Macbeth) with cancer, (unlike Lady Macbeth), she never realizes her wrongdoings. The book never dictates exactly if her lifestyle caused her illness or if it was just bad luck. Her illness, like Lady Macbeth’s, proves that her “high” she gets off stealing cannot last forever, and Dani sees that as a sign to change. It is implied that Dani’s decision to leave strikes a nerve with her mother, possibly because so many people before have left her before. Macbeth’s decision to poorly deal with his guilt eventually leads to his downfall. Both main characters are affected greatly by the betrayal; Macbeth slowly falls to his death while Dani makes exponential changes for the better.

The betrayals do not only affect the characters involved, they affect the story as a whole and enhance the meaning of both works. In the case of *Macbeth*, Lady Macbeth’s betrayal highlights Macbeth’s weaknesses. It shows that if Macbeth was not coaxed into the murders by his wife, he would have shaken off the unverified prophecy the witches initially told him. Lady Macbeth’s character as a traitor creates more of a somber mood throughout the entire play. The reader is aware of Lady Macbeth’s lack of reasoning behind wanting to murder others, while Macbeth is falling into her hands. Her plan starts to collapse when Macbeth begins to see ghosts. The play thickens as Macbeth’s mind darkens. In *Stealing Heaven* Dani’s actions all reflect her mother’s betrayal. Her decisions to participate in the heists, lie, and take care of her mother are all because she never knew different. Dani often wonders what her life would be like with a “real mom”. Without her mother raising her in a life of crime, Dani would not be who she is or know what she knows. The story is enhanced by the underlying conflicts between Dani and her mother and Dani and herself. Both books share the fact that as the main characters evolve, the climax of the story becomes nearer. Macbeth skips down the dark path as his vision becomes clouded. Later he is killed because his wife gave him enough confidence to believe his is invincible. Dani’s mother’s betrayal becomes apparent when Dani sees what life could have been. Both books use their endings as a way to tie the betrayals back into the main plot. Dani and Macbeth’s final actions are a direct influence of their traitors and would not have ended the same without them.

Lady Macbeth and Dani’s mom are completely different characters with polar opposite lifestyles, but they share the title of a traitor to the family members they betrayed. Shakespeare and Scott write their stories in two different styles that both manifest drama to complete their character’s adventures. Lady Macbeth is a wife who betrays her husband by tricking him, belittling him, and leaving him to face the consequences alone. Her presence is essential to Macbeth’s actions. Without her influence, he would not have clouded his mind with sinister thoughts that translate into actions. As a traitor, Lady Macbeth single-handedly destroys the life of her husband and many others that are lost along the way. Dani’s mother’s consequences are not as directly disastrous on the people she wrongs. She raises her daughter as a criminal and expects her to take on the life that she has created for her. Dani knows her mother betrayed her and recognizes her as a traitor. Her mother’s influence does not reach past her actions, for Dani’s mind is her own. Dani’s mother provides an interesting conflict for Dani for when she must choose between the life she’s known and the life she is meant to have. Both traitors have guilt from their actions whether they recognize it or not. In two diverse ways, their guilt indirectly puts an end to their betrayal. Lady Macbeth dies because she cannot handle herself and Dani’s mother becomes extremely ill and is no longer to steal when Dani leaves. *Stealing Heaven* and *Macbeth* construct two contrasting stories of a traitor and their betrayal. In both the cases of Macbeth and Dani, their traitors changed their attitudes, their minds, and their entire life.

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