

BETRAYAL

A PLAY BY HAROLD PINTER

EDUCATION PACK



BURTON TAYLOR
STUDIO



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THE LIFE AND WORK OF HAROLD PINTER

Harold Pinter (1930 - 2008) started his career as a moderately successful actor, but died just over five years ago as one of the most influential, successful and innovative writers of the twentieth century.

Pinter was born in Hackney, and after some years experimenting on the school stage, went on to Study at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art. He did not complete the course, but later continued studies at the Central School for Speech and Drama. During his time at the former he was fined for refusing National Service on grounds of conscientious objection, and was in fact politically active throughout his life; he frequently spoke publicly and passionately on a number of sociopolitical matters, most notably about the abuse of state power around the world, including, recently, NATO's bombing of Serbia.

In 1958 Pinter wrote "there are no hard distinctions between what is real and what is unreal, nor between what is true and what is false. A thing is not necessarily either true or false; it can be both true and false. I believe that these assertions still make sense and do still apply to the exploration of reality through art. So as a writer I stand by them but as a citizen I cannot. As a citizen I must ask: What is true? What is false?" Through this critical dissemination of lived experience Pinter wrote twenty-nine plays including **Betrayal**, **The Birthday Party**, **The Homecoming** and **The Caretaker**, and twenty-one screenplays including **The French Lieutenant's**



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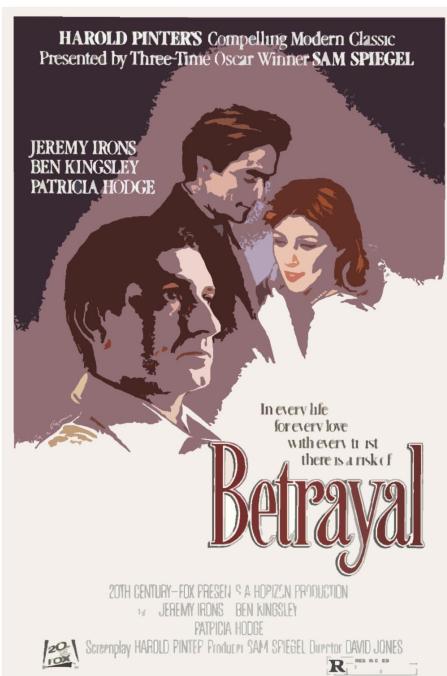
Woman, The Servant and **The Go-Between**. Pinter also directed many productions featuring both his own work, and that of Joyce, Mamet and Gray.

His career was decorated with accolades and prizes, including the Nobel Prize, Shakespeare Prize, the European Prize for Literature, the Pirandello Prize, the David Cohen British Literature Prize, the Laurence Olivier Award, the Legion d'Honneur and the Moliere D'Honneur for lifetime achievement. He also received honorary degrees from eighteen universities. In 1999 He was made a Companion of Literature by the Royal Society of Literature.

STAGE TO SCREEN: THE PLAY, FROM NT TO TV AND BEYOND

A seminal work of the playwright, Betrayal explores the complexities of a love affair between three characters, charting deceit, deception and destruction.

The play unfolds in reverse chronology moving beginning in 1977 and ending in 1968. Roger Ebert observes, in his review of the 1983 film, based on Pinter's own screenplay, "The 'Betrayal' structure strips away all artifice. It shows, heartlessly, that the very capacity for love itself is sometimes based on betraying not only other loved ones, but even ourselves."



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Productions of the play have been staged in London, Sheffield, New York, Australia, Honk Kong, Italy and Buenos Aires. The enthusiasm at its revival in New York in 2013 (the show set the Broadway record for highest weekly gross in the week ending December 19), illustrates the powerful effect Betrayal has in captivating audiences. The most recent Broadway production which closed in early January 2014, starring Daniel Craig, Rachel Weisz and Rafe Spall received high praise, as it has done since its London premiere, for which it was awarded the 1979 Olivier for Best New Play. Betrayal was swiftly adapted for the screen by producers Sam Spiegel and David Jones; the adaptation critically well received.

Betrayal's beating passion, painstakingly detailed verbal sparring and balance is emblematic of the author's own unique style. Indeed, his style has been so influential and imitated that a name was coined: this way of writing theatre is 'Pinteresque'. The term is an adjective for this atmosphere, but also one which the Swedish Academy defines as what "Pinter restored to theatre ... its basic elements: an enclosed space and unpredictable dialogue, where people are at the mercy of each other and pretense crumbles." It may have been anarchic and strange on first viewing, but such drama throbs with theatrical - but relatable - life.

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SYNOPSIS

"Each time I see it I discover something new in this story of multiple betrayal which reverses conventional chronology." Michael Billington

Emma is married to Robert, a publisher. But for seven years, she has been having an affair with Jerry, a literary agent and Robert's best friend. The play begins in with an edgy and revealing first-time reunion between the former lovers two years after their affair ended. Whilst they easily slip into conversations reminiscent of the past, Jerry undercuts the meeting with questions about Emma's new lover, Casey, whom he coincidentally represents. As the conversation turns to relationships and marriage, Emma reveals she and Robert are divorcing. To her surprise, he has been betraying her throughout their marriage with other women; Jerry cannot help asking the inevitable. Did she tell Robert about their prolonged affair? Silence. He asks again and she admits she told Robert last night in their mutual declarations of honesty.

Later that day, Jerry invites Robert around to his house; he wants to talk, apologise, repair his friendship. A friendship he assumes has been undermined by Robert's discovery. However, Robert reveals that he has known about the affair for four years and therefore, was wholly aware of Jerry's betrayal for the final two years of their supposed secrecy. The only noticeable change in their relationship; that they no longer play squash together.

The play then begins its reverse chronological progression, rewinding the clock back two years to the end of Jerry and Emma's affair. Their relationship feels stale and decayed; they scarcely meet and the flat they sit in, their intended love-nest, has failed to live up to Emma's idealistic expectations; that it would be different, an escape from her marital home. They agree to give up the home, an evocative symbol of their dying relationship.

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A year earlier. Jerry visits Robert and Emma at home. Robert knows. He thinks Jerry knows he knows. Jerry thinks Robert doesn't know. Emma knows everything. All three play the traditional game of friendly chat while, at the same time, engaging in the game of hiding their complicity in and their knowledge of the betrayal (or rather, betrayals). And each watches the other's accomplishment in acting out his or her role. The seemingly trivial dialogue and the simplest of dramatic settings is manipulated into a sophisticated game that discloses the real tensions and conflicts that are being played out beneath the placid surface. This is reflected in Emma's putting Ned (hers and Robert's son to bed), whom we know was conceived while Jerry was abroad. As their banal exchanges continue, Jerry enlightens the group of another, extraneous betrayal: Casey has left his wife living nearby. Jerry and Robert also plan to play squash, but Jerry reveals that first he is visiting New York with Casey.

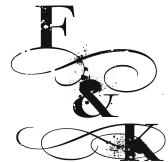


The play rewinds back another year and unexpectedly the next three scenes progress chronologically; Robert and Emma are on holiday. Robert and Emma are on holiday, intending to visit Torcello tomorrow. Emma is reading a book by

Spinks, another author whose agent is Jerry. Robert says he refused to publish it because there is not much more to say about betrayal. Robert has discovered that Emma has received a private letter from Jerry. He confronts Emma, who admits they are having an affair. When Emma and Robert have returned from holiday in Venice, they both meet with Jerry. Whilst in the flat, which Emma is attempting to make a second home with purchases like a tablecloth from her

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holiday with Robert, Jerry reveals that despite the affair he continues to lunch with Robert. Meanwhile, when Robert and Jerry meet, Robert gets drunk over lunch with Jerry. His knowledge of the affair layers their conversation, he says he hates modern novels, and that he went to Torcello on his own and read Yeats; but that Emma and Jerry both love literature...Jerry, undermined by Robert's knowledge, declares about it, "how should I know? She's your wife."

The play lurches back a further two years, to a time when Robert is unaware of the clandestine relationship of his wife and best friend. Emma and Jerry talk in their flat about the nature of their betrayal since Emma asks Jerry whether his wife suspects about them. However, the focus on their betrayal shifts a more immediate act of disloyalty, Emma reveals she is pregnant with Robert's child. A child she conceived while Jerry was away.

The play ends at the beginning of Jerry and Emma's relationship; during a party at Robert and Emma's house, a drunken Jerry catches Emma off guard in her bedroom and announces that he is infatuated with her. At the climactic moment of this revelation, Robert walks into the bedroom, disturbing this declaration and highlighting its insidious nature. Jerry continues his drunken diatribe about Emma's beauty, now including an ignorant Robert in the conversation. Unsuspecting he leaves the room again and as Emma turns to leave, Jerry grabs her arm. A commanding symbol of their mutual recognition of their current betrayal and its intended continuation.

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THE PINTER PAUSE

"A pause in Pinter is as important as a line. They are all there for a reason. Three dots is a hesitation, a pause is a fairly mundane crisis and a silence is some sort of crisis. Beckett started it and Harold took it over to express that which is inexpressible in a very original and particular way, and made them something which is his...." Sir Peter Hall

Perhaps the most famous characteristic of Pinter's writing is the 'The Pinter Pause'. Each instance creates a rich 'language of the unsaid' that any reader or performer must approach with careful consideration; often what is not said reveals the most about a character's true feelings or objectives. The pauses demand that a reader or a company appreciate and explore a character's psychology beyond the text we simply see on the page, opening Pinter's scenarios to stimulating and ever-changing interpretation; we must engage with his plays personally and imaginatively as on the whole there are no right or wrong answers for the reasons behind these pauses.

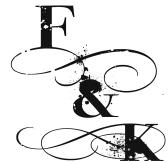
How does this make us feel towards the characters? Does it make them seem more like real people from everyday life? Or could these pauses be used to create an unsettling and distorted picture of reality?

A company must make a clear decision for every pause and how to honour it and with what emotion. These pauses are never 'empty'; often a message is loudest left unsaid but signified through gesture or facial expression.

When approaching Pinter, it is often fruitful to imagine what lines could be said to fill the pauses. What is it that the character would really like to say? And why don't they?

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There is a danger of treating these pauses with a holy reverence however, which can often impede a company or reader in their appreciation of a text. Whatever your interpretation of a text, one should always strive for a verisimilitude of intent and subsequent outcome. As Pinter says...

"These damn silences and pauses are all to do with what's going on ... and if they don't make any sense, then I always say cut them. I think they've been taken much too far these silences and pauses in my plays. I've really been extremely depressed when I've seen productions in which a silence happens because it says silence or a pause happens because it says pause. And it's totally artificial and meaningless. When I myself act in my own plays, which I have occasionally, I've cut half of them, actually."

THEMATIC DEVELOPMENTS

How does our understanding and response to a story alter when it is told in reverse chronology? Betrayal's narrative structure is unconventional and challenging. It asks us to reconsider our conception of beginnings and endings, of climaxes and 'logical' narrative and character development.

At first, it might perhaps seem abnormal and disorientating. However, why is it that the vast majority of all narratives follow the same beginning, middle and end chronological construction? Does anything ever truly have a beginning and an end? How close is a conventional narrative to our own appreciation of events in our lives as they occur? Do our memories have an inherent and perfectly constructed linear narrative?

In Betrayal's story, we follow the complicated twists and turns in the lives of Emma, Jerry and Robert. By placing the events of their relationships largely in reverse, we must alter our approach to what we see; how do we know what pieces of information are important? How does knowledge of the future alter our appreciation of the past?

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This is demanding for the audience, and therefore, the characters and their activities are placed under much greater scrutiny by us in order that we can piece together the whole. The audience engages with the protagonists in such a way that the present tense of their action and motivation supersedes gratifying linear development or resolution of plot.

The clear manipulation of narrative in the play is an expression of the artifice of time and the presentation of any sequence of events, in whatever form, that in turn, reflects the artifice of theatre and performance. All theatre is a 'trick' to some extent. How close do you think theatre should be to reality? If at all?

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The 'Betrayal' in the play's title refers not only to Emma and Jerry's affair, but to all the characters – the three are constantly betrayed by each other physically and emotionally. Betrayal need not only be between husband and wife. One betrays friends just as easily as one betrays oneself. The events of the play examine why it is we choose to make decisions we know are 'wrong'. Is it to hurt somebody else? Is it to make one's own life more enriched? In what way?