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## Reimagining 'Betrayal': A Filipina perspective on Pinter's 1978 classic | Pauline Joy M. Gutierrez

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4-5 minutes



From left: Vanessa White, Victor Lirio, James Bradwell and James Cooney star in Repertory Philippines' reinterpretation of Harold Pinter's *Betrayal*.

A STARK white set adorned with Pacita Abad's *Paris in the Fall* painting sets the stage for Repertory Philippines' reinterpretation of Harold Pinter's classic drama *Betrayal*. The warm hues of the Parisian autumn scene, in stark contrast to the play's exploration of human complexities, foreshadow the emotional journey ahead.

Director Victor Lirio takes a bold approach, weaving a fresh perspective into the fabric of Pinter's timeless, Olivier Award-winning tale. While the script remains unchanged, Lirio reimagines the narrative through the lens of Emma, a Filipina-British immigrant portrayed by London-based actress Vanessa White.

This shift brings new layers to the story, prompting audiences to explore themes of social and gender inequality alongside the universal nuances of love, betrayal and memory.

Set in London and Venice, the play follows Emma, entangled in a seven-year affair with her husband Robert's close friend Jerry

(played by James Bradwell and James Cooney, respectively).

In the opening night of *Betrayal* at the Carlos P. Romulo Auditorium of the RCBC Theater, Lirio explained: "I wanted to explore the world of betrayal through a Filipina British gaze, specifically that of a woman. This also allows me to see how it resonates with younger Filipino audiences, juxtaposing contemporary Filipino Catholic values with the play's themes."

He added, "I wanted a woman to have a strong position and control the narrative, even as it unfolds."

Emma embodies a multifaceted character. Beyond the affair, she possesses a rich tapestry of experiences and aspirations. The play opens in her gallery (replacing the original bar setting) with a prelude scene titled "The Installation." Lirio described it as "motivated by Emma's desire to justify a major decision in her present by revisiting her past."

White, embracing her Filipino heritage, breathes life into Emma. "I remember when I auditioned for this role, and Victor told me that if I went on as Emma, I would be a first-generation Filipino immigrant. I would be using myself as my own identity rather than trying to be a white person," she shared.

"So, I think that it was really important to draw material from yourself rather than trying to fit into a mold that I've been conditioned to fit in for the longest time," she added.

Lirio further emphasized the authenticity by highlighting the organic attraction between Emma and Jerry. "We wanted to portray their relationship beyond mere deception, showcasing a genuine connection between two individuals," he explained.

Miguel Urbino's brilliant set design and John Batalla's expert lighting serve as a canvas. The ever-present Pacita Abad piece draws the audience's attention, symbolizing the past's influence on the present. The artwork becomes more than just a backdrop; it guides the audience as the play manifests in a unique reverse-chronological order, starting after the affair's end and ending at its beginning.

As the play concludes, we return to Emma's gallery, forced to grapple with the characters' choices and the enduring impact of their actions.

Through this reimagining of *Betrayal*, Lirio hopes to not only showcase Filipino talent but also expand the legacy of the play by offering a fresh perspective which reminds us that the dynamics of human relationships transcend cultural boundaries.

**Betrayal will run at the Carlos P. Romulo Auditorium (RCBC Theater), Makati City, until March 17. For ticket sale information, visit Repertory Philippines at [www.repertoryphilippines.ph/](http://www.repertoryphilippines.ph/).**