

## Repertory's 'Betrayal' is not your typical extramarital affair drama

7–9 minutes

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***The play, originally by Harold Pinter and directed by Victor Lirio, places a Filipino-British lens on a Western script***

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Harold Pinter's "Betrayal," directed by [Victor Lirio](#), is [Repertory Philippines'](#) first production for its 87th season.

Adapted by Lirio, a Manila-born, New York and London-based actor and theater director, the show features London-based Filipino actors James Bradwell, James Cooney, and Vanessa White, with understudies Jef Flores and Regina De Vera.

The play most notably employs a reverse chronological structure to tell the story of an extramarital affair. The tale surrounds Robert, his best friend Jerry, and his wife Emma, and is inspired by [Pinter's own seven-year affair](#).

The approximately one hour and 30-minute play is devoid of the screaming and the waterworks you'd expect from a Filipino production—not to mention one that is about third parties. Yet, "Betrayal" is not your typical extramarital affair drama, thanks to a Filipino-British lens on an originally Western script.

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**"Betrayal" through the eyes of Victor Lirio**





Robert (James Bradwell) and Jerry (James Cooney) | Photo by John Fernandez courtesy of Repertory Philippines

“When you say ‘let’s do Harold Pinter in Manila,’ it’s not quite a box office proposition,” reminisces Lirio during the opening night for “Betrayal.” And perhaps due to its subdued, dialogue-heavy exposition, confidence in the play’s marketability might have been put into question. But let’s not forget, if there’s anything Filipinos love, it’s seeing themselves represented and portrayed.

“Betrayal” is not simply about an extramarital affair, it’s about a Filipino-British extramarital affair.

“I was interested in exploring the world of ‘Betrayal’ and Pinter and examining it from a Filipina-British gaze, specifically that of a Filipino woman. It’s often been explored from the perspective of a white British man in his mid-40s,” says Lirio. “I was curious how it would resonate with the millennial and generation Y in Manila, and

if you also layer the contemporary Filipino Catholic values and juxtapose that with the themes of the play.”

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Pacita Abad pieces hang as the primary backdrop for “Betrayal,” under the guise of art brought over by Vanessa White’s Emma for her gallery | Photo by John Fernandez courtesy of Repertory Philippines

But the decision to explore the Western script under such lens was also inspired by Lirio’s very own experience overseas in New York and London. “It’s interesting because we’ve been trained in drama school and we’re trained in classical work, but we still have to portray white people roles. What’s in this play that can be Filipino is what I really wanted to explore. And Emma, being a head curator of a gallery in London, that I liken to the Saatchi—I thought, “if Emma, a Filipina woman is the head curator of the Saatchi in London, then she will be bringing a badass Filipina’s work in London such as [Pacita Abad](#).”





The cast and production team of “Betrayal” | Photo by John Fernandez courtesy of Repertory Philippines

Bradwell echoes a similar sentiment. “I make the joke—I didn’t know I was Asian until I started training to be an actor. Because that was the time when I was really told that this is how this industry in the UK will see you, and this is how they will pigeonhole or box you. I didn’t like leaving training, three years of prestigious training, thinking there was a limit to what my experience in the industry could be. This is a wonderful sort of conclusion to breaking down that idea. That’s been a really interesting thing to reflect on and it’s been a deep privilege to create here.”

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**With respect to the material**





James Bradwell, James Cooney, and Jef Flores | Photo by John Fernandez courtesy of Repertory Philippines

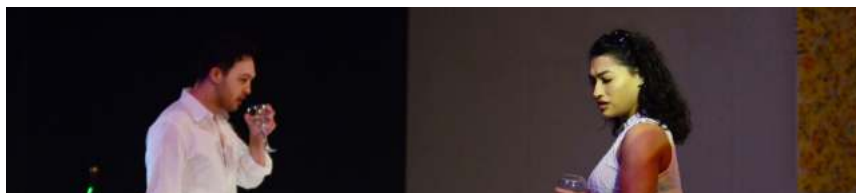
Adaptations, remakes, and reboots are often heavily critiqued because of how they compare to the original. Unnecessary changes are frowned upon, but at the same time, maintaining a 1:1 ratio is considered uninspired and unoriginal. When asked how his iteration of “Betrayal” compares to Pinter’s and other past stagings, he shares:

“The relationships are intact, the text is intact, the consequences are intact, and what’s at stake for each character is intact. Basically, the only difference is the world of the play. But the play as it is, as Harold Pinter wrote, is exactly what he’d written.”



Prior to the final act, a dialogue-less scene features both Emma and Jerry, emphasizing the deep attraction between the two | Photo by John Fernandez courtesy of Repertory Philippines

Lirio adds, “And the other thing that we devised was a justification of—we wanted to tell the story of Jerry and Emma, for it to not be 100 percent based on deception and cheating—that there was an authentic organic attraction between the two individuals.”





Robert and Emma | Photo by Boboy Ramiro courtesy of Repertory Philippines

For a drama about third parties and extramarital affairs, there is an apparent lack of confrontation and heightened emotions. In particular with Robert's character, his discovery of Emma's infidelity was met with indifference and an almost defeated sigh. And while his demeanor can be approached with the understanding that their marriage was already on the verge of falling apart, his apathy seems plausible. Bradwell, through a deeper examination of his portrayal, suggests otherwise.

"Where do you go to get to your status in society if you've had to claw that much harder? How much are you going to let that shatter over something that happens to you in your life? Robert and Jerry are both very high-powered individuals in their careers. I think it means that Robert has placed himself at a very precarious point where he needs to be perceived as powerful, as successful, no problems. These are the things we can play with as British-Filipinos, the second generation—the struggle of coming to another country and making good on the new life given."

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The Filipino experience, in the case of "Betrayal," is not merely tossed around for the sake of lip service. Rather, instead of being shoehorned into the plot, it is seamlessly woven into the very character of the play's figures—one that it doesn't even find the need to explicitly mention.