Betrayed Affinities

All is fair in love and war, but Harold Pinter’s 1978 play Betrayal raises the question of whether romantic guerilla warfare is worth pursuing despite the often high number of casualties remaining after everyone goes their separate ways. Pinter’s aptly-named drama presents a love triangle between a man, Robert, his wife, Emma, and his best friend, Jerry; unfolding in backwards chronological order, the play reveals the series of betrayals that each character commits in order to prevent one of the others from abandoning him or her, as well as to maintain the reputation of their families within their chic literary art circles.¹

When the performance first debuted in 1978 at the National Theatre in London, Dennis Kennedy described it as an “elegant disappointment.”² “The characters and their petty, bourgeois concerns fail to suggest a significance wide enough or deep enough to justify sustained interest,” Kennedy wrote.³ “The situation is ordinary, clichéd in fact […] It remains flat. Betrayal is a play of surfaces.”⁴ But Betrayal’s frequent revivals around the world -- three in London since 1990, one in New York in 2000, one in Australia in 1999 and one in Hong Kong in 2004 -- speak to the contrary. In fact, it appears that Pinter’s story was not only not insignificant, but relevant and appealing to cultures all around the world. After its most recent 2011 revival, The Independent praised Pinter’s writing albeit not finding its new performance satisfying, “Betrayal is ingeniously structured, resembling a series of troubled memories, romantically nostalgic in part,

¹ For further discussion of the motivations driving the individual characters and the power dynamics among them, see Linda S. Wells’ “A Discourse on Failed Love: Harold Pinter’s Betrayal” in Modern Language Studies 13.1 (1983) pp. 22-30.
³ Ibid.
⁴ Ibid.
but also raking over the past to detect every latent hint of duplicity, or -- more regretfully perhaps -- searching for some prior era of innocence.”

Because at first Betrayal focuses strictly on a love triangle, many people mistake the search for something to pertain strictly to Emma -- her search to find in Jerry what she missed in Robert. But Katherine H. Burkman also points to the relationship between Robert and Jerry as one where the men are trying to replace each other with one woman, Emma. Burkman refers to Pinter’s own description of the play: “the play is about a nine-year relationship between two men who are best friends.” But when one considers either of the two other major characters, Casey and Judith, both of whom remain offstage and thus invisible to the audience, it becomes very clear that the search for the next best thing is pertinent to all the characters in the play.

Chronologically, the relationship which existed before any other was the one between Robert and Jerry and was altered when Robert moved on to Emma, perhaps because him and Jerry had drifted too far apart due to maturing, in Jerry. Somewhere during this, Jerry also moved on to replace Robert with Judith. But as we observe with the passage of time, Emma also changes and becomes more compatible with Jerry rather than Robert, as we see by the literature the characters are drawn to. Robert and Jerry start out reading Yeats at the beginning of their friendship. But Jerry soon moves on to Casey, whom Emma at that time rejects. But as their


6 See Katherine H. Burkman, “Harold Pinter’s Betrayal: Life Before Death: And After” in Theatre Journal 34.4 (1982) pp. 505-518. Burkman makes an interesting argument for what Rene Girard calls triangular desire, “a situation in which two men, through the mechanism of imitative desire, wish to possess the same woman.” According to Girard, imitative desire has to do with transferring the feelings of love and desire between the object which one wants to directly possess and the object which actually inspires the feelings but is for one reason or another unattainable. In this case Burkman implies that Jerry desires to possess Emma because he actually feels a strong connection to Robert. Girard and Burkman both strongly highlight that imitative desire is not necessarily homosexual, as much as dealing with very strong feelings of connection.

7 Burkman, Ibid.
affair progresses, Emma and Jerry agree on Spinks. Robert had already rejected both and therefore rejected Jerry and Emma. But Emma is now the growing character, and while Jerry finds Casey’s next novel to signal his moving over the hill, Emma at that time embraces it thus growing past Jerry and moving on to a relationship with Casey.

Essentially, the characters in the play are much like free-floating and highly-reactive atoms searching for a mate to balance and stabilize them; this search is complicated by their incessant aging which brings about growth and expansion. Like children who are always growing out of their clothes, the characters of Betrayal consistently grow out of their partners.

In his 1809 novel Elective Affinities, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe explored the idea of infidelity in human relationships resulting from an innate, possibly chemically-driven instinct to search for the most compatible mate, even in cases of persons already attached:

In the chemistry of his time the term “elective affinities” was used to denote the mutual attraction of two substances that retain their overpowering force, even though both are already chemically linked to others. In such a case, the bound substances will separate and establish a new bond with their kindred by choice. Love, too, is such a power; like a blind force of nature, it destroys every higher order, reducing its victims to the level of unfree elements of nature.\(^8\)

In the case of Goethe’s Elective Affinities, there are two relationships, or “molecules”, that get broken down and re-bond throughout the novel. Charlotte and Edward are the two substances whose marriage, or “chemical bond” is disregarded as they separate to bond with the Captain and Ottilie, respectively. For Charlotte and Edward, this behavior isn’t unusual as they had both previously been married. Although Edward’s first wife dies so their marriage does not end immediately due to Edward’s affinities becoming invested in Charlotte, his affinity for her does

develop before his wife’s death. Charlotte on the other hand allows herself to be pursued by Edward, and obtains a divorce from her first husband, although we are not intimated to the details of that situation.

Goethe’s theory of attraction focuses on the idea that the strongest bonds usually occur either between complete opposites that compliment each other, or almost identical personalities which like two drops of water mix into one:

“Let me try and see,” said Charlotte, “whether I can understand where you are bringing me. As everything has a reference to itself, so it must have some relation to others.” “And that,” interrupted Edward, “will be different according to the natural differences of the things themselves. Sometimes they will meet like friends and old acquaintances; they will come rapidly together, and unite without either having to alter itself at all -- as wine mixes with water. Others, again, will remain as strangers side by side and no amount of mechanical mixing or forcing will succeed in combining them. Oil and water may be shake up together, and the next moment they are separate again, each by itself.”

Edward explains to Charlotte chemical concept of “elective affinities.” His example already humanizes the chemical reaction as he compares the interactions between inanimate substances to those of people. His point about substance not having to change is an important one within the context of the novel. As his acquaintance with, and thus attraction toward Ottilie grows, Goethe’s descriptions of her begin to echo those of Edward. As Ottilie and Edward’s love develops, the two begin to resemble one another more and more. “‘It appears to me,’ said Charlotte, ‘that, if you choose to call these strange creatures of yours related, the relationship is not so much a relationship of blood as of soul or of spirit.’”

This natural attraction is contrasted sharply by the strangers who refuse to mix despite all efforts, in this case Edward’s marriage to Charlotte. They had been married for a number of years

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10 Ibid. pp. 34.
at the time the novel begins, and although not experiencing any obvious discomforts, they have undeniably retained their individual traits:

The others listened, and were sufficiently surprised to hear how perfectly Ottilie had taught herself the piece -- but far more surprised were they at the way in which she contrived to adapt herself to Edward’s style of playing. Adapt herself, is not the right expression -- Charlotte’s skill and power enabled her, in order to please her husband, to keep up with him when he went too fast, and hold in for him if he hesitated; but Ottilie, who had several times heard them play the sonata together, seemed to have learnt it according to the idea in which they accompanied each other -- she had so completely made his defects her own.\footnote{Ibid. pp. 60-61.}

Charlotte’s playing could suit Edward, but she had to compromise her way of performing in order for the piece to function. Meanwhile, Ottilie acts as a blank slate which is filled with only the qualities that compliment Edward. While Edward and Charlotte had been growing independently in their marriage, like oil and water or two strangers growing side by side, since her arrival at the castle Ottilie has been growing in a way that made her more suitable a match for the older Edward.

Ottilie does not originally start out as the object of Edward’s reverence. Prior to Charlotte’s own union with Edward, she considers Ottilie as a suitable match for him and tries to gently manipulate Edward into taking interest in her. Unfortunately, at the time Edward is too enamored with Charlotte herself to take notice of any other possibility on the horizon. And perhaps, Edward also wasn’t ready just then to be in love with Ottilie even if he didn’t love Charlotte, since attraction appears to be all about who is the most compatible match at a given moment. Ottilie only becomes the perfect object of Edward’s adoration after she has sufficiently altered herself to reflect him:
He looked at her -- he looked at the transcript. The first few sheets were written with the greatest carefulness in a delicate woman’s hand -- then the strokes appeared to alter, to become more light and free -- but who can describe his surprise as he ran his eyes over the concluding page? “For heaven’s sake,” he cried, “what is this? this is my hand!” He looked at Ottilie, and again at the paper; the conclusion especially, was exactly as if he had written it himself. Ottilie said nothing, but she looked at him with her eyes full of the warmest delight. Edward stretched out his arms. “You love me!” he cried.\textsuperscript{12}

Ottilie’s alteration of her handwriting was a result of imitation; she spent days re-writing an act of sale originally handwritten by Edward, and her own hand began to match his as a result of prolonged exposure to it. Transcribing it took her days. And yet, Edward takes Ottilie’s change of herself as the highest honor, and the truest demonstration of her love for him.

A similar situation occurs among the characters of \textit{Betrayal}, as different relationships are forged, betrayed and broken. Although the first interaction between characters we see is between Jerry and Emma, and occurs in the post-math of the affairs involving all three of the main characters, the relationship that precedes everything is the friendship between Jerry and Robert:

He used to write to me at one time. Long letters about Ford Madox Ford. I used to write to him too, come to think of it. Long letters about… oh, W. B. Yeats, I suppose. That was the time when we were both editors of poetry magazines. Him at Cambridge, me at Oxford. Did you know that? We were bright young men. And close friends. We, we still are close friends. All that was long before I met you. Long before he met you.\textsuperscript{13}

Jerry and Robert’s friendship was the “chemical bond” that preceded the marital bonds between Robert and Emma and Jerry and Judith. Their relationship used to also very much resemble that between Jerry and Emma at the time that this conversation takes place. Jerry used to write long letters about literature to Robert, just like he now writes them to Emma. Though they weren’t exactly lovers (although it’s never explicitly denied), Robert and Jerry were equals; they had

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid. pp. 90.

things in common, similar tastes. And Robert liked Jerry a lot more than he ever liked Emma, as he tells her in Venice. Perhaps they were reflections of each other, like Cambridge and Oxford are each other’s counterparts, and each was a king, or poetry editor, of his respective domain. But the problem with Robert and Jerry’s relationship was that it ran its course. “We were bright young men,” Robert says. And though he makes sure to highlight that they were and still are friends, he does not insist on their youth. He’s aware that they’ve both grown, matured, and consequently changed.

This growing and maturing process is responsible for the drifting apart and eventual disintegration of relationships in Betrayal, just as it is in Elective Affinities. People change, and thus must dislodge their affinities and place them into another object:

I’m a bad publisher because I hate books. Or to be more precise, prose. Or to be even more precise, modern prose, I mean modern novels, first novels and second novels, all that promise and sensibility it falls upon me to judge, to put the firm’s money on, and then to push for the third novel, see it done, see the dust jacket done, see the dinner for the national literary editors done see the signing in Hatchards done, see the lucky author cook himself to death, all in the name of literature. You know what you and Emma have in common? You love literature. I mean you love modern prose literature, I mean you love the new novel by the new Casey or Spinks. It gives you both a thrill.14

When Jerry and Robert first met they both spent their time reading and discussing Yeats, but since then Jerry has moved on. He and Emma now share the bond that once linked him to Robert, and it’s Emma to whom he writes letters. Robert on the other hand has not moved past Yeats. When he finds out about the affair he goes off to Torcello, the island where he took Emma to when they first got married, to read Yeats in solitude.

Early in the play, we learn that Robert has hit Emma in the past, and many readers tag this instance and other hints at Robert’s brutality in the play, like his preference for squash which

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is described as “violent”, as the sole reason for Emma’s infidelity. But Emma does not exhibit any of the signs of a victim of domestic abuse. She does not appear to fear Robert when she tells him of her affair. She is shaking, but it’s unclear whether it’s out of fear or fury at his persistent drilling of the topic. And in the scene following, when Jerry comes over to their house after having tea with Casey, after he leaves, Emma falls into Robert’s arms and sobs, and they kiss. It’s a tender conflicted moment, but not one filled with fear. Robert knows about the affair, he taunts Jerry with subtext, but Emma doesn’t seem afraid, or at least there’s no such evidence in the script.

Some directors can choose to include the element of fear in their particular production, but the 2011 performance did not. In it, the two above-mentioned scenes are incredibly poignant. Ben Miles’ slow, predatory movement across the stage as Robert when the Downs are in Venice is so sexy that one wonders why Emma would ever think of looking elsewhere. ¹⁵ “Ned is one year old,” he hisses. But then she tells him about the duration of the affair and he pounces across the stage toward the bed with his hand raised, ready to strike her. “Did you hear what I said?” Miles roars. The passion of that moment, the diagonal line across the stage, it’s the very line between love and hate, violence and passion. “Yes! He’s your son! Jerry was in America!” The lines in the script are not punctuated with exclamation points, just periods, but Kristin Scott Thomas screams them desperately as she hides her face into the pillow. She looks tiny at that moment, the only instance in the play when she looks genuinely terrified of Robert.

But he doesn’t hit her. And as she looks up, he puts his hand on her head and turns it up to him hatefully. “I’ve always liked Jerry. To be honest, I’ve always liked him rather more than

I’ve liked you,” he says, inches away from her face. It’s a moment of heartbreak; he wants to break her heart, maybe break her skull, the way she broke his heart and crowned him with horns. “Tell me, are you looking forward to our trip to Torcello?” he says in a voice that sounds more like he’s proclaiming war.

In the following scene however, the first one we see where Robert knows about the affair while interacting with Emma and Jerry, it appears as if Robert and Emma are playing on the same team due to staging. Emma’s chair sits sideways in the front center of the stage; she’s facing Jerry, but Robert strolls dangerously behind her, and puts his hands on her shoulders possessively while delivering his speech rejecting her lunch proposal. “You see, at lunch you want to talk about squash, or cricket, or books, or even women, with your friend, and be able to warm to your theme without fear of improper interruption. That’s what it’s all about.” He kisses the top of her head loudly before looking up at Jerry pointedly. “What do you think, Jerry?” It’s complete possession. “Your serve,” he might as well be saying. It’s an invisible game of squash, and Robert is destroying his astonished opponent.

They change the subject, Jerry says that he’s going to America with Casey and Emma moves out of her chair, out of Robert’s hands and onto the couch next to Jerry where she perches herself tentatively. It almost appears as if she’s trying to appease him after Robert’s attack, but he finishes his drink and hurries out the door soon after. As the door closes after him, Emma picks up the empty wine glasses and walks slowly towards the center of the stage while Robert walks back toward her after returning from showing Jerry out. She pauses, he comes to her and kisses her possessively and she succumbs to him; she responds. But then she breaks away and falls limply into his arms, her head on his shoulder, sometimes sobbing into his chest. He holds her,
resting his chin on her head. It’s a poignantly intimate scene. Emma had just watched her husband defeat her lover and leave him scurrying with his tail between his legs, rather confused; she’s back in the arms of her “brutish” husband.

There must therefore exist another reason for her feeling unsatisfied in her marriage other than Robert’s “violence”, and that reason is growth, just like Jerry’s. Though Emma likes Casey’s second novel, she rejects his first:

EMMA: It may be the best thing he’s written but it’s still blood dishonest.
JERRY: Dishonest? What’s dishonest about it?
EMMA: I’ve told you actually.
JERRY: Have you?
ROBERT: Yes, she has. Once when we were all having dinner, I remember, you, me, Emma and Judith, where was it, Emma gave a dissertation over the pudding about dishonesty in Casey with reference to his last novel. ‘Drying Out.’ It was most stimulating.16

Pinter does not clarify whether the conversation which the characters recall occurred before or after the affair has already started. It would make most sense if it happened during the affair since that would give Emma personal bias to hold against Casey’s novel about a perfectly happy family in London as it would remind her of her own marriage underpinned by a dark secret. However, Robert’s perfect recollection of the situation and Jerry’s failure to remember it imply that perhaps Emma’s rejection of Casey came at a time when she still had feelings for her husband and felt uncertain about the affair. She projected her own feelings of dishonesty, and maybe even guilt, onto Casey’s work. This signals could mean that perhaps Robert and Emma’s relationship did not fall apart because of some major flaw in its structure like Robert hitting her, but as a result of them growing apart. After all, we know that Robert also didn’t love Casey’s first novel and Jerry had to convince him to publish it.

Jerry does quite a bit of convincing in *Betrayal*. Just as he has to convince Robert about publishing Casey’s “dishonest” first novel, he has to convince Emma to take him on as a lover:

JERRY: You’re beautiful. *He goes to her.* Listen, I’ve been watching you all night. I must tell you, I want to tell you, I have to tell you --
EMMA: Please --
JERRY: You’re incredible.
EMMA: You’re drunk.
JERRY: Nevertheless. *He holds her.*
EMMA: Jerry.
JERRY: I was best man at your wedding. I saw you in white. I watched you glide by in white.
EMMA: I wasn’t in white.
JERRY: You know what should have happened?
EMMA: What?
JERRY: I should have had you, in your white, before the wedding. I should have blackened you, in your white wedding dress, blackened you in your bridal dress, before ushering you into your wedding, as your best man.
EMMA: My husband’s best friend.
JERRY: No. Your best man.
EMMA: I must get back.17

Throughout this entire exchange, Jerry pursues Emma who is already married to Robert. He flatters her and appeals to her beauty, and yet she rejects him. When he first begins, she cuts him off. He tells her of his admiration, and she dismisses it by blaming it on the alcohol. He tells her of his aspirations for ravishing her, and she reminds him of where his loyalties should lie: with her husband. In that one sentence she outlines both her relationship to Robert and Jerry’s, both of the utmost importance and intimacy. He doffs his friendship making a choice, he wants to be her best man, not Robert’s. Her response is to return to the party, and therefore return to Robert.

Clearly, at this point, Emma and Jerry are not reading the same books. Jerry so hyperbolizes his praise of Emma that it resembles the old courtly tradition of writing poetry about a subject which sometimes proved almost unworthy of the verse it inspired:

Look at the way you’re looking at me. I can’t wait for you, I’m bowled over, I’m totally knocked out, you dazzle me, you jewel, my jewel, I can’t ever sleep again, no, listen, it’s the truth, I won’t walk, I’ll be a cripple, I’ll descend, I’ll diminish, into total paralysis, my life is in your hands, that’s what you’re banishing me to, a state of catatonia, do you know the state of catatonia? do you? do you? the state of… where the reigning prince is the prince of emptiness, the prince of absence, the prince of desolation. I love you.\textsuperscript{18}

Jerry over-embellishes his adoration of Emma. She becomes an image, a muse, an other-worldly creature.\textsuperscript{19} His expressions seem poetic but not genuine. When he says, “you dazzle me” he really means to dazzle Emma not that she has dazzled him; he also calls her “a jewel,” a title reflecting worth and possession.\textsuperscript{20} This evokes Yeats’ style of idealizing poetry: “I had a thought for noone’s but your ears: / That you were beautiful, and that I strove to love you in the old high way of love.”\textsuperscript{21} But she does not speak this language. “My husband is at the other side of that door,” she responds. She’s still putting her loyalty to Robert first.

But, as we know, Emma eventually gives in to Jerry’s persuasion and they leave Robert in the land of Yeats alone. It’s interesting to note that there’s never any mention of literature that Robert and Emma both agreed on, only that they both disliked Casey’s first novel. But once Emma gives in to Jerry, she looks past Casey’s first novel and learns to appreciate Spinks, another author whom Jerry discovers and Robert rejects.

ROBERT: You think it’s good, do you?

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid. pp. 136.

\textsuperscript{19} In A Lover’s Discourse Roland Barthes explores the idea of losing the loved one while in the process of worshipping them under the phrase “To Love Love”: “Explosion of language during which the subject manages to annul the loved object under the volume of love itself: by a specifically amorous perversion, it is love the subject loves, not the object.” (Hill and Wang: 1978) pp. 31. Wells’ further diagnoses the connections between Barthes and Pinter in her essay “A Discourse on Failed Love: Harold Pinter’s Betrayal” \textit{Ibid.}

\textsuperscript{20} See Burkman’s \textit{Ibid} for an interesting discussion of Emma as an object of desire shared by Robert and Jerry and competed over. According to Burkman, Robert knows about Emma’s affairs with other men, and though he loves to play squash

EMMA: Yes, I do. I’m enjoying it.
ROBERT: Jerry thinks it’s good too.
[...] ROBERT: Oh… not much more to say on that subject, really, is there?
EMMA: What do you consider the subject to be?
ROBERT: Betrayal.
EMMA: No, it isn’t.
ROBERT: Isn’t it? What is it then?
EMMA: I haven’t finished it yet. I’ll let you know.
ROBERT: Well, do let me know.22

This conversation does overflow with double meaning. Robert had just come to the realization that his wife and his best friend are having an affair and have, potentially, for a long time. He feels betrayed, cuckolded, foolish. But one of the first things Robert points to as evidence of Emma and Jerry’s affair is the book. Emma is reading a book that he didn’t like, that he had perhaps mentioned as disliking around the dinner table, but Jerry recommended it and so she’s reading it. Furthermore, it’s an ignominious book, one about betrayal, the very sin Emma is guilty of. And she enjoys the book, her and Jerry both do, implying that they have moved past feeling any sort of remorse for Robert.

And yet, despite Emma’s objecting that Spinks’ book concerned betrayal in the scene when they’re in Venice, one wonders whether she would disagree with that in the opening scene, which takes place a couple of years from then, when her and Jerry’s affair and her marriage to Robert is over:

EMMA: We had a long talk… last night.
JERRY: Last night?
EMMA: You know what I found… last night? He’s betrayed me for years. He’s had… other women for years.
EMMA: And he betrayed me for years.
JERRY: Well I never knew that.

EMMA: Nor did I.

[...]

JERRY: What a funny thing. We were such close friends, weren’t we? Robert and me, even though I haven’t seen him for a few months, but through all those years, all the drinks, all the lunches...we had together, I never even gleaned...I never suspected... that there was anyone else...in his life but you. Never. For example, when you’re with a fellow in a pub, or a restaurant, for example, from time to time he pops out for a piss, you see, who doesn’t, but what I mean is, if he’s making a crafty telephone call, you can sort of sense it, you see, you can sense the pip pip pips. Well, I never did that with Robert. He never made any pip pip telephone calls in any pub I was ever with him in. The funny thing is that it was me who made the pip pip calls -- to you, when I left him boozing at the bar. That’s the funny thing.23

Emma’s description of her discovery focuses on the fact that Robert has betrayed her for years. She seems to completely either forget or disregard her affair with Jerry; it appears as if the divorce that they’ve decided upon resulted strictly because of Robert’s secret infidelities while he had lived with the knowledge of hers for years. Jerry brings up their affair, but it’s not a way of justifying Robert’s trespass. It almost seems as if Jerry’s disbelief lies in the fact that they betrayed him first, that he couldn’t have betrayed them. Emma considers herself the only injured party but Jerry’s speech reveals that he too feels the pangs of it. He immediately begins to question the intimacy of their friendship and feels betrayed because Robert didn’t tell him he was being unfaithful. Through keeping this information from Emma and Jerry, Robert betrayed them both and Jerry sees this while at the same time beginning to simultaneously suspect and also realize that a man would only keep something like this from his best friend if he thought his best friend would betray him to his wife. Of course in Robert’s case, his best friend had already betrayed him with his wife, which Jerry suddenly realized Robert had known for years.

When Emma and Jerry reflect back on their affair as a thing of youth, Emma mentions that she drove past their old apartment recently, the main stage of their afternoon delights, and

saw new residents coming out of the building. When Jerry asks about them, she says simply, “Oh… young people.” Their apartment has become synonymous with their affair, and the affair with youth. The last name they took the flat under, Green, was gone when Emma looked for it. “That’s because we’re not there anymore. We haven’t been there for years,” Jerry says. But this doesn’t just mean that they haven’t been lovers for years, they haven’t felt how they used to feel, they’ve changed, they’ve aged. Perhaps that’s why Emma has taken a new lover -- Casey:

JERRY: Anyway, what’s all this about you and Casey?
EMMA: What do you mean?
JERRY: What’s going on?
EMMA: We have the occasional drink.
JERRY: I thought you didn’t admire his work.
EMMA: I’ve changed. Or his work has changed.

Though Emma suggests herself that she has changed, and it makes sense since something had to occur in order for her relationship with Jerry to no longer work, the possibility of Casey changing to suit her tastes seems more plausible. We learn that Casey’s second book is much different from his first, which Emma considered “dishonest.” In Scene 4 Jerry says that Casey has left his wife and three children and moved out, and will write about it next. Naturally, since it no longer focuses on the topic of an impossibly perfect family and resembles the true state of Emma’s life, she would like it. It could no longer be “dishonest.” The switch in Casey’s marital status also occurs in the scene where Emma and Jerry’s affair begins to show its cracks. Robert knows about it and probes Jerry with subtleties in front of Emma, but she also seems to face troubles within herself. Her collapse into Robert’s arms and their kiss seems like the most honest

24 Ibid. pp. 22.
25 Ibid.
interaction we see between them, or maybe even any of the characters in the play. It represents a moment of weakness for Emma, one where Robert is actually there to catch her, and suggests that she may be falling out of her infatuation with Jerry.

While Casey becomes available and his work turns “honest,” Jerry regresses. He does not share Emma’s recognition of his second novel. “He’s over the hill,” he says of Casey.27 And we learn that he’s returned to reading Yeats, the writer that brought him and Robert together in the very beginning. Therefore we see that while Casey appeared to have grown into Emma, Jerry grew away from her, but in a deteriorating way. Literature aside, Casey is also a better match than Jerry because he has officially broken off his relationship with his wife, and at that time, Emma had broken off her relationship to Robert, so that they could actually be together. They’ve eliminated the obstacle of their respective homes and families that stood in Jerry and Emma’s way.

Throughout both Betrayal and Elective Affinities as well, people keep searching for a partner who resembles them most closely, like a mirror, because it’s human nature to love oneself best. “Man is a true Narcissus; he delights to see his own image everywhere; and he spreads himself underneath the universe, like the amalgam behind the glass.”28 And so, Edward needs an Ottilie to mimic his handwriting and keep tune with his playing, while the characters in Betrayal need their significant other to agree with them on matters of literature in order for their relationships to survive:

For characters to experience the exhilaration of narcissism, the presence of the other is a necessity. Thus the absence of the other means the absence of the self’s echo, and for

27 Ibid. pp. 43.

characters who find self-definition and self-direction in others, the idea of solitary existence is intolerable.\(^{29}\)

Without a counterpart to reflect them back onto themselves, the characters of *Betrayal* wither away like the characters in *Elective Affinities*. After Otilie starves herself to death, Edward follows in the same fashion. And every time Emma leaves Jerry, he falls ill: when she returns from Venice he complains of having a cold, when they meet after breaking up, he’s hungover; perhaps he felt driven to drinking after Emma and Robert both left him. He does lose all direction however and retreats back to his comfort zone which preceded everything, Yeats. Meanwhile, Emma moves on to Casey who appears to have most directly paralleled her trajectory through marital and love life. And though we don’t know what Robert’s reading, but we know that he’s taking the family to the Lake District for vacation that year so perhaps it’ll be Wordsworth or Coleridge or someone else transcendental from that area. Either way, Robert has moved past Jerry as well, leaving him to stand alone just as he does between the scene changes in the 2011 production.

**Works Cited**


