

Bury Theatre Workshop  
Betrayal by Harold Pinter  
Unitarian Meeting House, Bury St Edmunds  
Saturday 29 September 2018

This intriguing play uses reverse chronology to explore the development of a seven-year affair between Jerry (Tim Lodge) and Emma (Paula Hughes). Like time-lapse photography, played backwards, it starts with the shrivelled, mouldy fruit of dead passions and ends with the full flush of a gorgeous and tempting forbidden fruit as the drunken Jerry tries to seduce Emma on her wedding day.

Jerry is best man to Emma's husband Robert (Adam Thurkettle) who, it turns out, is not as oblivious to the affair as Jerry imagined.

The two men work in publishing, a slippery world of fictions where respect for the work of best-selling authors may be feigned or real.

Robert, played with monumental gravity by Thurkettle, is a man of few words who expresses his friendship with other men through physical activity – the ritual game of squash where, in his mind, there is no place for a woman. An acute observer, he sees no need to show his hand.

Jerry's transition from the older man, more jaded and detached to the exuberant young seducer, was well depicted by Lodge. Jerry fights shy of real commitment to Emma, using his wife and family as a shield to maintain a distance between them but painfully remembering the date when Emma became pregnant by her husband.

Emma is perhaps the most deceptive of the three characters, maintaining layers of illusion and mystery about her true nature and actions. Hughes showed us the sweet young bride, the cheery little housewife, the mistress, the businesswoman, each one an effective vignette.

The cast was completed by Gemma Pattle, as the waiter bringing bottle after bottle of wine to the table as Robert and Jerry lay open their wounds in an Italian restaurant. Her cheery "Buon appetito!" contrasted nicely with the gloomy nature of the men's conversation.

Director John Levantis has done a workmanlike job of bringing this complex play to the stage, with the action moving from one end of the playing space to the other, between two rows of enthralled spectators.

I wonder what it would be like to see the play without having an advance explanation of its structure. Audience members were visibly consulting the programme to check where, and in what year the action was taking place. Would we be able to work it out without a hint? Who knows.

In any case, this was a thought-provoking play of shifting illusions, beautifully presented by a strong cast.

Gayle Wade, 30 September 2018