



Betrayals

Charles Palliser

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At once a hypnotic murder mystery, scathing literary parody, soap opera, and brilliant pastiche, *Betrayals* is an astonishing virtuoso performance by a modern master of literary gamesmanship in the tradition of Vladimir Nabokov and John Barth.

The novel unfolds in a series of seemingly unrelated narratives, each written in a different style -- indeed, in a different genre. There is an obituary for a Scottish scientist and Nobel Prize winner, written by a colleague who clearly relishes his death. Early in the century, a train in the Scottish Highlands heads down the wrong track during a winter snowstorm, and the passengers are forced to abandon the train, resulting in the death -- or is it murder? -- of one of them. An inane publisher's reader summarizes the plot of a tacky hospital romance novel, which ends in a gory murder all too reminiscent of Jack the Ripper. Even a report on a contemporary academic controversy explodes into a scandal of plagiarism, shattered reputations, paranoia, and suicide -- or is it murder made to look as such?

As Palliser deftly teases out each new situation, it becomes clear that they are all variations on a single outrageous theme: a distinguished figure in some intellectual pursuit -- science, literature, academia -- becomes obsessed with the success of a rival and schemes his demise, only to botch the job out of sheer monomania. Like the scorpion that stings itself to death, each plotter becomes a victim of his own plot; each betrayer changes places with the betrayed in an intricate dance of deception, revenge, and revelation.

A challenging, engrossing, utterly original work of art, *Betrayals* is also pure joy to read -- a book that will make you laugh out loud, turn pages madly in pursuit of the next plot twist, and above all, marvel at the supreme ingenuity of a fictional puzzle in which the unlikeliest pieces fit together perfectly.

From the Hardcover edition.

Betrayals Details

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Author : Charles Palliser

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From Reader Review Betrayals for online ebook

Bettie? says

snow
Christmas

Opening - *Professor Ritchie writes: So small is the world of immunotoxinology that it is not surprising - though somewhat ironic - that it should fall to myself to write the obituary of William Herbert Dugdale. The fact that I have outlived him is an irony that his mordant sense of humour might have equipped him to appreciate.**

The fun starts with that little star at the end of the above opening, for it denotes a very telling footnote.

Somewhere, and I think it is attributed to Twain, there is a quote which about being smart is SO secondary to being intelligent and this is round about where this tale is.

Quincunx (1989) - 5*

The Sensationist (1991) - 1* (an experiment((?)) that didn't chuff me up at all)

Betrayals (1994) - back to the Gothic riddles - 3*(just)

Lisa James says

This book is a story inside a story inside a story, where the story twists & turns through many characters, & then back around to the first. It's fascinating, murder, mystery, African myths, & Jack the Ripper all figure in this story as it layers & layers throughout.

Trish says

Did you enjoy House of Leaves? How about A History of the World in 10 1/2 Chapters? Do you like puzzles? Murder mysteries?

Betrayals is a collection of seemingly disparate narratives: an obituary for a scientist written by a colleague who seems to delight in his rival's passing; the tale of four passengers stranded on a snowbound train, seemingly told by two very different people, with the stories the passengers tell one another to stave off cold and fear embedded within in it Canterbury-style; a somewhat unfavorable report on a manuscript that blends romance, horror, and references to Jack the Ripper; an account of a creepy academic cult of personality involving deconstruction, semiotics, psychology, buggery, and murder (also including references to both a Kipling story in which a boy's tongue is cut out and an Arab tale of revenge); a tale of a sultan's vengeance, translated from Arabic; a story, told to hotel guests by an old judge, that includes the perfect murder and how a parson's regret over the death of a boy leads to his suicide; the diary of a bookshop clerk who is obsessed with Jack the Ripper and the Armytage death, has difficulty telling fact from fiction, and befriends a professor/writer who is spins outlandish theories about the soap that comes on before his favorite detective show, which is currently embroiled in the investigation of a string of serial killings that appear connected to a stage play dealing with a number of historical figured, including Oscar Wilde, Sherlock Holmes, Gladstone,

and Jack the Ripper; a series of letters from the author of successful potboilers to the less successful author of war novels who is seeking feedback on his new work, a story of sex, violence, and corruption in old Hollywood; an account of a once-successful author who met his downfall when he attempted to appropriate the work of another man in a complex scenario involving a book in which a once-successful author meets his downfall by attempting to appropriate the work of another man in a complex scenario involving a book in which a once-successful author meets his downfall by attempting to appropriate the work of another man (yes, seriously); a review of the book *Down on Whores*, published soon after the death of its author, a professor/writer who is believed to have been behind a series of murders and attacks; a summary of a controversial thinker's interpretation of a Kipling tale in which a boy's tongue is cut out; a goddman Index of Names that might have been helpful to know about from the very beginning.

Are you with me? Probably not. I have a burning desire to read this book again, with other people. I need a book club, or a class, or at the very least a partner.

Do you like crimes? Do you like puzzles? Are you feeling post-modern?

"To exist is to be betrayed, since we exist for others only by virtue of what we betray of ourselves to them."

Tiffany says

There was a lot that I liked about this but it was so much work to try to piece everything together and I kind of got bored with it by the end of the book.

Lisa Daleiden-brugman says

Eck. I can't really rate this because I actually abandoned this book. Too many freaky stories leading to some odd dreams.

Ann Jones says

What a book! I am what could be described as an endurance reader and it has taken me 3 months to read it, when I normally read a book a week. I have finally finished the book but am still ploughing through the pages and pages of lists of the characters at the end, trying to make sense of it all. The stories were so complicated that most of the time I actually felt stressed trying to understand what was going on, especially Chapter 7 which was quite incomprehensible to me. (I wish I had not read it on kindle because I often felt the need to look back to check on previous chapters).I kept feeling that it was all very clever but I was just not getting it. It was funny in places and quite shocking in others and so different to Palliser's other books which I have loved. I am not quite sure what to make of the book to be honest and feel I should have given myself 5 stars for finishing it but nevertheless feel it deserves 3 stars for his achievement of finally bringing all the myriad threads together at the end!

PS I have just bought a hard copy - not finished with it yet!

Nigel says

So, Father's Day - also Bloomsday, it turns out - what's a doting Dad to do? Me, I spent most of it on the porch enjoying the low clouds, the cool breeze, the distant cries of unicyclists on the Square and read *Betrayals* by Charles Palliser. Eventually I went inside and read it some more, because the grey clouds did what grey clouds do and chased even the unicyclists away.

Betrayals was an unalloyed pleasure from first to last, and a reread at that. Since at least two of the disparate ten chapters are devoted in part to abstruse literary theory where the pleasure of reading is likened to an orgasm and reader and text can be, in assorted variations, phallic or emasculated, and in demanding answers from this book I'm being authoritatively phallic and in concealing these answers the book is being deceitfully phallic or silent and phallic or wordless and emasculated and, yes it's wall to wall phalluses at times, wrestling with phalluses, worshipping phalluses and occasionally lopping the unfortunate phalluses off. Let us ponder for a moment the similarity of phallus and fallacy. I bet Derrida liked that one.

So much for the literary theory sections, which also, it should be stated, incorporates poisonous academic rivalry, half-mad, half-depraved philosophers, murder, suicide, attempted murder and even a spot of plagiarism. This isn't even the start, that would be the obituary with the little sting in the tail, something of a theme with this book, then there's the Christie-esque story of travellers caught in a snowstorm and some tales within tales. Mysteries, murders, betrayals, lies, confessions and a parade of the least reliable narrators this side of Pinocchio's nose, constantly betraying themselves and each other with slip-ups, omissions and general cluelessness. In fact, the only narrator prone to telling the truth is the diarist in the longest, arguably central, chapter, and he has some difficulty telling fact from fiction, and befriends someone with a tendency to blend fiction with fact.

This is a reread from me, and fortunately I remembered that you will not end this book with the mysteries solved. Some, yes, some, no, some you're not too sure of. Perhaps the text supplies you with everything you need, perhaps not, I certainly haven't worked it out yet if it does. What it is is immensely clever and fun, pasticheing a variety of modern genres, satirising the worlds of academia and publishing, interrogating the divide between true crime and fictional crime as well as high art and entertainment. You'll either run a mile from this or find it the most fun you can have on a rainy Father's Bloomsday when the unicyclists are out, but if you work out who lured the old lady to her doom and why, please let me know.

Patrick says

Though brilliant in the embedded plot twists and intertwining, I felt that the author was 'Too Clever by Half' and lost me (and most readers I'm sure). I felt that I caught some but not all of the inter-relationships between the separate stories in this novel. This left me frustrated that there were connections I know I should have seen, but that I didn't connect and so only understood the top two-thirds of the total plot twists and tricks.

I think this is a very well written book, but to be appreciated, I think it would be wise to read in a literature class when sub-plots and plot connections are brought into the light of day. Otherwise, I fear many will feel as I do that it was just too convoluted to grasp completely.

Ian says

I remember enjoying Palliser's *The Quincunx* when I read it many years ago, and his *The Unburied* when I read that about ten years ago. But neither really prepared me for *Betrayals*, which I thought absolutely superb. It's a type of postmodern fiction I especially like, in which a number of disparate stories eventually form an overall story from the hints and clues they drop. *Betrayals* opens with a report of a group of people trapped by snow in a train in late Victorian Scotland. To pass the time until rescue, they each tell a story from their past. These plant the seeds for the plot of the novel. Which is in turn presented by a series of unrelated narratives, the best of which concerns an unsophisticated serial killer in Glasgow and an academic who is fixated on a Scottish soap opera and a Gaslgwo-set crime show (which is a pitch-perfect piss-take of *Taggart*). Also very good is a pastiche on Jeffrey Archer and his career, which skewers him extremely well. Palliser missed a few tricks, and some of the narratives do suggest they contain more clues than is actually the case, but this is definitely worth reading.

Jeannie says

A clever set of related documents - newspaper clippings, diaries, book chapters, letters - that shed partial light on a "famous" Scottish murder mystery. Very, very funny and addictive. Do not read this book if you like to close the final page and feel that you've wrapped the story up! I'm still thinking about it - and I've read this book twice!

Roxana says

Nabokovian, macabre, witty; the reviewer who called this a "labyrinthine pastiche" was spot on. Wickedly clever - too clever by half, as one character's book is called - and tangled in a gloriously elaborate tangle of murder, deceit, storytelling, and, of course, betrayals. I was completely fascinated by this book and kept flipping back pages to return to clues and foreshadowing moments sprinkled through earlier chapters, or just to giggle knowingly over sly callbacks and connections. A deviously brilliant eyebrow-raise at the range of genres and ways we tell stories.

Keith says

I loved Charles Palliser's *The Quincunx* and so I bought this slimmer novel in hopes that he would rekindle some of the magic I found in the earlier book. A couple of weeks ago my wife was looking for a new book and, although I hadn't yet read this, I gave it to her. She laughed her way through it and after finishing it she insisted I read it immediately. Naturally I did so and after finishing it she asked me, "well did you like it?" I replied, "No, it was terrible." To which I received the rejoinder, "now maybe you'll be more careful in what you recommend."

I guess it goes to show that even a favorite author can strike on a path that one might not like. And a valuable lesson it was too.

Mazel says

Il est interdit à quiconque, sous peine des sanctions les plus graves, de déflorer l'histoire de ce livre. On

avancera donc ici avec une extrême précaution...

On confirmera simplement, pour tous ceux qui seraient tentés, en cours de lecture, de prendre ce récit pour un recueil de nouvelles, que l'ouvrage qu'ils ont entre les mains est bien un roman.

Oh, certes, un roman un peu compliqué, tout en fausses pistes, fausses portes et fausses barbes (mais les cadavres et les crimes sont vrais).

Plusieurs histoires ont l'air de partir dans tous les sens et les personnages peuvent s'absenter sans crier gare, mais c'est pour mieux se retrouver — au chapitre 7 — ...et se trahir (dans toutes les acceptions qu'on voudra bien donner à ce terme) un peu plus tard.

Un professeur rédige après la mort de l'un de ses confrères une notice nécrologique qui tourne au règlement de comptes venimeux...

Cinq voyageurs réunis par hasard dans un train sont témoins d'un crime que chacun d'eux a peut-être quelques bonnes raisons de commettre...

Les uns et les autres racontent des histoires à dormir debout mais où une terrible vérité semble se faire jour.

Un professeur (encore !) enseigne une nouvelle théorie de la fiction, mais ses élèves doivent s'engager par écrit à ne rien divulguer des découvertes du maître...

La rédaction d'une biographie vaut à un témoin un peu trop curieux de se retrouver égorgé...

Un « serial killer » s'en prend aux infirmières sous le regard vide du vieil Esculape...

Un homme politique doué pour la littérature écrit un roman entièrement plagié sur le manuscrit d'un pauvre auteur qu'il empoisonnera pour plus de sûreté — en quoi il se trompe lourdement.

Moralité de tout cela : on n'est jamais si bien trahi que par soi-même.

On l'aura compris, *Trahisons* est un roman vertigineux, gouverné par un humour féroce.

Roman farci de culture aussi : toute l'Angleterre de la Belle Époque semble s'y être donné rendez-vous par figures mythiques interposées — Sherlock Holmes, Oscar Wilde, Jack l'Éventreur...

Enfin, par-delà l'histoire et ses chausse-trapes, nous est instillé ce soupçon : à quoi bon inventer des théories du roman puisque chaque roman réussi se doit de déjouer notre attente, de violenter les règles du savoir-écrire comme du savoir-vivre, et subvertir par-dessus tout le discours des professeurs (Palliser, ne l'oublions pas, enseigne à ses heures la littérature à l'université !).

Seule demeure après tout, entre les doigts de celui qui veut analyser l'oeuvre qu'on lui donne à lire et l'intérêt qu'il lui porte, cette buée dorée : le plaisir du texte, moyen et fin de toute littérature.

on ne se méfie jamais assez des livres et des histoires qui s'y racontent, et la littérature entretient avec la vie une liaison qui n'est décidément pas de tout repos. Ce que professait déjà, il y a un siècle de cela, le regretté Wilkie Collins (l'auteur de *Pierre de lune* et de *La Dame en blanc*), ici clairement désigné comme le maître de Palliser.

Confirmation étincelante du talent de Charles Palliser, l'auteur du *Quinconce*. Son nouveau roman, *Trahisons*, polar métaphysique en forme de labyrinthe, est à déguster frappé : comme un champagne... où

l'auteur n'a pu se retenir d'instiller quelques gouttes d'un délicieux poison. (extrait - Phébus)

Leif says

I don't really know what to say.

A series of stories start name dropping each other throughout the narrative.

Extremely interesting, but ultimately frustrating. I only understood about half of the connections and those, tenuously at best. Still, another great from Mr. Palliser.

Kim Salivonchik says

Charles Palliser wrote my most favorite book: The Quincunx. I actively sought out more of his works and this was it. This book was horrible in comparison that I couldn't even finish it. I highly suggest The Quincunx but, not this.
