# Book Review/Compte rendu

**Gabriella Turnaturi**, *Betrayals: The Unpredictability of Human Relations*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007. 146 pp. $US 22.00 hardcover (978-0-226-81703-3)

A brief, tidy book, *Betrayals* is a welcome glimpse into a largely neglected area of social relations. A satisfactory explication emerges and the only major concern is brevity. Turnaturi's use of exemplars and examples drawn from history and fiction, from Homer to Updike, makes *Betrayals* accessible, readable, and interesting for scholars, students, and perhaps general readers.

Betrayal is traditionally viewed as a symptom of a disturbed personality or a malicious choice (p. 26). Turnaturi offers a nuanced view, focused on underlying threats to value emphasis, cohesion, and, most important, social relations, present and future. She confirms that betrayal is a definitive social act.

Turnaturi explains why and how betrayal is an asymmetrical rearrangement of role content, started by one when others are perhaps unaware. Betrayal disrupts personal or societal relations. The gravity of the breach — the betrayal — means the relational disruption is almost surely permanent. When trust breaks, suggests Turnaturi, the betrayed seek new arrangements and new relations as they embrace heightened wariness. Given the seriousness of the act, can we again trust the betrayer? Betrayal is a loss for everyone.

In the middle three chapters, Turnaturi examines betrayal as it appears in fiction, theatre, and history. She uses the notion of the stranger, from Simmel, to combine Joseph Conrad with Shakespeare for an exploration of how our need for relations ensures betrayal. An analysis of the relations of Elizabeth I and the Earl of Essex reveals how role content (governance, romance), role conflict (monarch, lover) and role distance (loyalty, obedience) shape betrayal, leading to a schismogenesis. Jesus, betrayed by Judas and Peter, confirms that everyone is vulnerable and shapes resulting discussion of the act. The archetypal act by Judas suggests all are able to betray, and Peter underscores its inevitability. Each middle chapter stands on its own. This allows readers to integrate personal reading and examples from films or video games. Opening the material and discussion to general readers, as Turnaturi does, is commendable.

If relations are to flourish, social disclosure is necessary to define inclusion and create intimacy. Exchanging secrets may be the most treacherous form of disclosure. Regretfully, the rich potential that a chapter about secrets promises goes unfilled in *Betrayals* because there is too much description and too little integration of the disparate.

A consilient ending provides meaning. This is especially true for the literature of social relations (e.g., Erving Goffman, Georg Simmel and Lyn Lofland), which roams widely, as do relations. In *Betrayals*, Turnaturi opts to apply further her explication of betrayal, rather than delve into meaning. As in a Raymond Chandler novel, *Betrayals* never honestly ends, instead sputtering and fading before stopping.

Turnaturi nevertheless remains provocative. She suggests betrayal emerges from complexity (p. 111). Until the 16th century, ideology, the state, and religion formed the most complex relations, and treason was a principal form of betrayal. After that, social relations grew increasingly complex; forms of betrayal multiplied and, today, adultery may be most harmful. Until the 16th century, argues Turnaturi, betrayal was a societal act, whereas, today, it is the act of an individual. The word, "betrayal," still carries the gravitas Turnaturi assigns to its 16th century results, and well it should. In the private realm, adultery chips away at the feasibility of the family, damaging trust, loyalty, and fidelity. Adultery also threatens commitment to and perhaps economic investment in home, children, and future. In the public realm, the betrayal of thousands of investors, by Bernard L. Madoff, for example, leaves many retirees destitute and several smaller universities in financial danger.

Madoff fuels the news media, as do the infidelities of presidents, prime ministers, and celebrities. Media coverage of betrayals, now morphed into less weighty deceits, adopts an indifferent tone (p. 122). "While Hillary's Away Bill Plays" is a feature of "Late Night with David Letterman." "Entertainment Tonight" and *People* magazine report that celebrity betrayals resolve with a cheque or a week in rehabilitation. What once toppled monarchies now sells mops. Turnaturi touches on the media, but doesn't fully consider media effects, most likely a result of trying to cram too many ideas into only 130 pages.

To the extent deceit is today the most common form of betrayal, the absence of Paul Ekman's work on deception, is noteworthy. This weakens *Betrayals* and exposes a seeming denial of the contributions of empirical research. Turnaturi mentions the empirical perspective, but prefers to view betrayal as an integral part of life, with the central roles — betrayer and betrayed — byproducts of socialization (p. 28). The distinction is bewildering as she ostensibly places betrayal beyond social or clinical science.

Still, there are many reasons to recommend *Betrayals*. The book offers a reasoned introduction to an important, but often overlooked, topic in social relations. It extends understanding, implies a theoretical agenda, and its shortfalls are minor. Translated from Italian, *Betrayals* is well written and edited. Scholars and students of social psychology, especially sociologists, will find *Betrayals* useful and interesting, as will many general readers.

*Carleton University* George Pollard

**George Pollard** (PhD Concordia, 1987) is Associate Professor in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Carleton University, Ottawa.

gpollard@conncect.carleton.ca