

INTIMATE KNOWLEDGE:  
Adultery's Effects in Short Fiction

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## Intimate Knowledge: Adultery's Effects in Short Fiction

I am the child of adulterous, well-read people.

My parents were unlikely ever to meet. My father is a descendant of the Poindexters of Poindexter, Mississippi. His family knew the Falkners before William added the "u." They read him and they knew the Percys and read Walker Percy, too. When he was small, my father and his mother lived for a while with his grandparents; he remembers listening to the sound of a servant breaking kindling in his bedroom to get his fire ready before dawn. They weren't much sexed-up as a rule, my father's family, or at least they had a sense of decorum, but they bequeathed him entitlement and invincibility, and if he didn't directly inherit adulterous habits from them, maybe how he ran around later was in reaction to their closeted ways.

My mother was the tenth of eleven children in a family of migrant workers. She never used that phrase, "migrant workers." She called her family "sharecroppers," but I realize now that they had to follow the work, picking cotton in Missouri and oranges in Arizona, sometimes living in government labor camps. My mother was born along the way in Arkansas. Her father was half-Cherokee, half-white. He ran away when he was eight, returning twenty years later to marry his brother's fourteen-year-old stepdaughter. My mother was the only person in her family to attend college. She got an undergraduate degree in English at the University of California, Berkeley, but dropped out of the master's program when my sister was born. Some of the unions in my mother's family were casual (not to mention intramural), but when there was marriage there were tales of sexual misbehavior, men run out of town, including my grandfather. My mother received a legacy of loose arrangements, and something quite the opposite of my father's

birthright: a sense that anyone's role in the drama of human work and difficulty was so small as not to matter at all.

As if class, temperament and history wouldn't nix monogamy between these two people, add that my mother was married when she met my father. They were living in Hawaii where her husband was an Army officer and my father was a private in the typing pool. Hawaii, military, adultery – they told themselves, From Here to Eternity. My father's cordial, strained meetings with my mother's husband; the many times my mother tried to leave the island and couldn't, and the one time she did, the last time, when she left everything she owned behind; the six long months she was in Reno waiting for the divorce – all this was the foundation of our family mythology. There was nothing about their emotions, their antecedents, their *story* to suggest that my parents would be happy in the most middle-class and quotidian arrangement: marriage, suburbs. But romance had carried them out of Hawaii and through Reno, so they must have thought it could carry them through anything, to eternity. And in a way it did, just not together.

In their early lives, my parents suffered from different kinds of poverty. In my father's upbringing, it was a poverty of depth and spirit. The white, upper-middleclass Mid-South paid attention to the surface. In part, this has to do with the massive job of denying problems of race and class. Make a life's work out of ignoring *all that*, and while you're at it, don't admit your body; don't follow your heart; love is duty, not desire – a culture of denial. Late in life as she lay on the kitchen floor having a seizure caused by brain tumors she'd kept secret for months, my grandmother said to my father, "Son, this is unpleasant. Let's talk about something else." In my mother's life there was just plain old poorness – a squirrel in the pot if you were lucky, three to a bed – and a poverty of

intellect. Long before they met, my parents found the richness of literature. My father read to tap into passion; my mother read for privacy and elevation. They sought out Cheever and Updike, Doris Lessing and Lawrence Durrell. Would my sister and I have happened if our mother hadn't read Justine? How did my father feel when he read in Joan Didion's Democracy that a woman miserably married in the Pacific writes a note saying, "Who do you f--- to get off this island?"(24) Were they surprised to find these writers troubling over situations like their own? I suspect they were comforted that what could have seemed tawdry had a culture it could claim. Maybe, like most children, I don't give them enough credit. Maybe they knew it was impossible to point the heart or to know its final direction.

By the time I was in elementary school, I was aware of the things my parents hid from each other, practical things like how time was spent, but joys and sorrows, too, the whys of a mood or a withdrawal. My father tended toward tough, genteel women like his mother. My mother, whose father had been (among other things) a faith healer, was attracted to Episcopal priests. I understand now that some of their deepest passions were intense flirtations and longings, not full-on affairs. My father was late coming home because he'd gone across town to help a woman with her flat tire. (He couldn't change a tire – his people hired that kind of work out – but I do believe he was being literal about the task; he is Irish, but not *that* good at metaphor.) My mother kissed a married man in a phone booth; she kept his picture in her desk drawer. These things were adulterous, but were they affairs? They were occupations, involvements, distractions. Regardless of the state of undress, they created a duality, one thing happening, something else effecting. I think of Joseph Conrad's The Secret Sharer, in which the captain of the ship keeps a

stowaway in his cabin. Thank god I don't know how much sex my parents had with other people, but I do know they had secret sharers.

My sister's method of dealing with our messy family life was to invent board games, systems of endurance and reward. She was attempting to cast what we lived in as sport; it was her hope and incentive to get to the end. I was the reader, both of books and people; I wasn't interested in getting anywhere. It was a luxury and a privilege, it was leisurely, to learn people just like you got to know characters, reading their self-explication and divining their deep reasons. I was learning about paradox. Sub-terrain and surface had so much texture, more to grab onto than the slick surface of a board game, where the whole idea was to zip to the final square. Life was a story, page by page and day by day, and it wasn't just what people said and did in their lives, their *stories*, it was how the understory affected the narrative line. In our family, the presence of an outside romance was the continuous understory. In our family, there was always, fascinatingly, more than one thing going on.

How did I know all this? my sister asks me. We're both over forty now. She's earned a living and built a satisfying career developing board games for companies like Scholastic, Milton-Bradley, Cranium. My personal life has been my profession; it's frustrating, but not surprising, that it hasn't rendered the same sort of worldly success: married, divorced, remarried – affairs, often with writers. A Grace Paley character says, “I have always required a man to be dependent on, even when it appeared I had one already.” (177). This life makes up my resume, along with two children, a creative writing degree-and-a-half.

My sister's question makes us both uncomfortable. Children shouldn't know too much about their parents, but how is it that one child comes to know more than the other? My mother crossed the line a few times, telling me more than was healthy, but I think even before that I had a love of narrative and an understanding that the good stories are subject to underground currents, invisible triangulation, the folds of paradox: intimate knowledge. I tell my sister I've been like this from birth, and it feels true. (I was early-on suspicious of the mother in The Cat in the Hat. What kind of fun was she off having while all that hell was breaking loose?) I was born susceptible, and the material sure was there.

The story of my life has been shaped by two forces: adultery and writing. I am the get of a transgression assisted by literature; I grew up in a household that dealt in love and secrets – art, word, and deed. When our parents finally broke up and my father married the woman he'd been having an affair with for years, I took off for San Francisco with a married man – a writer – and started my first degree in creative writing. In a crude attempt to break the family pattern, I got married right out of college to a man who'd been raised on comic books and television, but I couldn't make it stick: I cheated on him with an editor. The editor and I didn't have a soundtrack to our affair so much as a bibliography: the mini-controversy over literature-predicting-fact in Tom Wolfe's The Bonfire of the Vanities; a story called "My Mistress" by Laurie Colwin; an erotic passage in The Sound and the Fury. Even now my work habits are cast like an adultery. I'm not a writer who can wake up every morning and hit the work for three hours, diligent, chore-

like. I have to take my stories to a hotel for a weekend where we go sleepless and without food as we ravish each other.

As a reader, my book-lust has tended to short stories. The novels I've loved have been few, select. Such a commitment, remaining faithful for so many pages! What if I found myself with a different set of interests during that long slog? What to do with needs unmet and two hundred pages to go? I've set aside more novels than I've finished. I choose instead the truth-in-a-snapshot of the short story. Give me the weekend in the hotel room: limitless passion in limited space.

Our parents are our very own Olympians. From their image and provisions we make ourselves in the first go-round or we'll not be made at all. But after the initial shaping comes expansion: ultimately to be just like them is to fail. Any impartial observer would have agreed that I, in my twenties and thirties, was surpassing my parents as reader and cheater, and I was on-track to become an adulterous *writer*. There were plenty of those! I'd get my image and sustenance from these new parents, these new Olympians.

Why, then, at forty, did my being feel undernourished? The answers from the outside had been coming at me for years: from the bad diet. From the yummy, non-nutritive life of secrets, of course. Adultery can't be allowed because it feeds nothing. It emaciates you or eats away at the substantial. "I'm thinking of having an affair," I told a small-town therapist I didn't keep for long. "Oh, you can't do that," he replied. I'd never been able to accept these kinds of answers. Adultery feels rich to me because it seems to tell the truth about life: one thing is happening, another is effecting. And even as I was



ready to put it aside, I wanted to incorporate its lessons. Lives, like stories, are complex. To read them straight is to deny the power of art.

What if, at midlife, you didn't use any god at all to shape yourself? What if you released your parents, just let them be human, and you took your lovers down from the high place? Married the first time and in the affair with the editor, I wrote a story in which a female character is on her knees, looking up at her lover with her mouth "open like a baby bird:" sustenance, worship. After a couple of decades in this position, my neck was starting to hurt. What would happen then, without any gods at all? How about no sustainers other than the self?

The first thing you'd need, I thought, was some kind of guide. Not a god, and not another lover, not even another person, but, still, a companion – something seasoned and ambiguous, something which acknowledged the world as you understood it, with its many folds and influences, but didn't demand a certain way. I was back at short stories.

There was a time when I looked to stories like "My Mistress" for a how-to, yet the more I read, the more I saw not answers but correlation. An affair was like a short story, I began to see. In life and in literature, someone was not getting what he or she wanted; in their page- and time-limits, art and reality worried over truncation, yet both story and affair could be seen as complete in their confines. If, in the interest of concision, the ending of a short story must be touched at its beginning, so, similarly, is the end of an adulterous affair built into its beginnings: the blocked desires which caused the affair in the first place are a fundamental part of that which will not allow it to last. Familiar at a blood level with the role of adultery in daily life, I began to ask of its stories: what does adultery do?

Tension, rapture, irony: these are adultery's effects in short fiction. My reading over the last twenty years shows three primary manifestations of these conditions. In certain stories, adultery serves as a subject. In others, its presence is felt from offstage, serving to ratchet-up the tension by virtue of its non-disclosure. And in some stories, adultery has a ripple-effect, resonating to connect past to present.

The most common kind of adultery story is one in which the affair is the subject, like "The Lady with the Toy Dog," by Anton Chekhov. It tells the story of an affair, it mimics the shape of an affair, it affects place like an affair. These things are romantically familiar to me, they connect my one hand to art, the other to life. I was comforted, almost flattered (I felt companioned) by what Chekhov did.

He starts his characters out on holiday without their spouses in Yalta. Gomov is a veteran adulterer, successful in his Moscow life, the father of two, but unhappy in marriage. (He fears his wife.) Anna is more innocent, but married to a dullard. She is the lady seen walking her small dog on the waterfront. Gomov sets his hat for her. They start an affair which looks like a fling, not unlike many he's had before. After a few weeks, Anna leaves, Gomov goes back to Moscow. They should be done. But the love, the longing (which springs from distance), will not die. Gomov, from whose perspective the story is told, cannot forget Anna. He goes to her town to find her, and when he does, she promises to come to him and reignite their affair. All along, they think it will have an end, but it never does, and they are left at the close of the story with no end in sight. This is a paradox of adultery – the love is forever (from here to eternity) or you wouldn't

bother, but you must know on some level that it's doomed, and its doomedness is part of what makes it so urgent.

Anna and Gomov's affair influences the physical shape, the format, of the story, defining the four numbered sections which correspond with the stages of the characters' love. These stages could be described as a beginning, a romance, a deepening and a commitment. Chekhov's separation of them calls attention to their individual validity. It also serves as a kind of necessary segregation of understanding: if lovers knew what was coming their way, would they carry on?

In the first chapter, the characters are introduced and the possibilities are set in motion. Gomov decides to pursue Anna. She lets him come close at a restaurant and then they take a walk. Here, adultery is a potentiality, and the mood is light and anticipatory: "and then began an easy, playful conversation as though they were perfectly happy" (82). Anna is twice described as laughing (she never laughs again); their banter about Yalta and her husband's job is bright. This section is shaped by the titillation around whether or not they will become lovers. We're left with this question hanging at the end of section one.

This fresh and forward energy is as necessary to move the reader into the second chapter as it is to move the lovers into each other's arms. But Chekhov knowingly segregates the stages of the affair; things get a little darker in part two as Gomov and Anna become lovers and Anna struggles with her remorse. This section, and this stage of their affair, is characterized by a more intense kind of romance, a see-saw of self-pity and guilt. *Will-they-or-won't-they* is replaced by *should-they-or-shouldn't-they*, though they are, all the while. But neither lovers nor readers know of the difficulties to come, so even

with the remorse at play, Anna and Gomov are still having a fling. When Anna returns home, they assume it's over. Literally and literarily, the chapter has closed on their relationship.

The next chapter of life and story is characterized by a deepening of the relationship which takes place mostly while the protagonists are far apart. I risk being too literal with the multiple meanings of the word "long," but the connections keep coming to me. Chekhov makes this the *longest* section to emphasize the difficulty of separation. They are a *long* way apart, a sense of *longing* builds. Marriage is what's near and permanent; adultery is defined by the difficulties of distance and the crush of time. The most common use of the word *long* I can think of when discussing marriage is some variation on, "We've been married a very *long* time."

At first, Gomov goes back to Moscow with a kind of relief. His heart expands to include other joys, and his vision is high and global: "When the first snow falls, the first day of driving in sledges, it is good to see the white earth, the white roofs; one breathes easily" (87). But he begins to miss Anna and to see her sunny image in the corners of his life.

The affair is largely inactive in this chapter, but its absence is what shapes the story and forces it forward. The characters suffer the trial of being apart and they come back together more committed than ever. This is an important paradox for characters and readers. Just as Anna is cause of and cure for Gomov's affliction, the affair is tension and relief for the story: if it causes tension, shouldn't there be relief when it is absent? But it is a relief relieved only by the application of more tension.

In the fourth chapter, the ironies fold again, mimicking the many layers of secrets and difficulty. This chapter begins, “And Anna Sergueyevna began to come to him in Moscow” (92). These words are almost elegiac, establishing a biblical permanence, giving the feeling, “It was ever thus.” The adultery is becoming like a marriage. On his way to their assignation, Gomov walks his daughter to school and talks to her about the weather. On arrival at her hotel, he asks Anna, “Well, how are you getting on down there?” (93) like a husband speaking to his wife: “What kind of day did you have?” This section is shaped by the understanding that the lovers are nowhere near the end of their relationship and that despite all the pressures on it, how it must go on in the airless atmosphere of secrets and hotel rooms, as Chekhov writes in the last line, “the end was still very far off” (94). Adultery requires that the characters live in a paradox – together and apart, permanent yet fragile, trusting but hidden. Whether this is damaging or just the true mechanics of love, Chekhov leaves readers to determine.

The affair between Gomov and Anna even affects how Chekhov described place. Gomov and Anna’s affair has three backdrops – Yalta, Moscow and Anna’s city, referred to with wicked cleverness as “S.” (Mustn’t name the town – an affair’s a secret, remember?) Their affair begins in Yalta. With its parks, pavilions and palms, this seaside resort is a place where romance is easy. “The sea was strangely luminous; the water lilac, so soft and warm” (82). Even an inconvenience like heat gets a romantic role: the constraining hot days provide the necessary counterpoint to mild evenings when the lovers can walk along the quay.

Moscow, on the other hand, cultivates isolation, not cozy romance. At first, this is tonic to Gomov. On the day of his return, rather than walking arm-in-arm with his warm

lover, he bundles himself in his “fur coat and warm gloves, and took a stroll through Petrovka, and ... the places he had visited lost all their charms” (88). The layers he puts on symbolize an insulation from others and at first he seems relieved to be without a lover. “Anna Sergueyevna, he thought, would be lost in the mists of memory and only rarely would she visit his dreams ... just as other women had done.” (88) But this state is fleeting. When full winter arrives, Gomov is still not free from the spell of Yalta, of Anna and their time there. And when images of her return, they bring the light and warmth of Yalta with them. “His memory was lit by a light that grew ever stronger” (88). The affair emphasized all that was bright and warm about Yalta; now it has transformed Moscow into a cold trap Gomov must endure alone.

He decides to go to Anna’s city, but things are no cozier there; it’s like Moscow without the “card-playing, gourmandizing [and] drinking” (89). His hotel room is grey with dust, has a cheap grey rug. Anna’s house is surrounded by a “long, grey fence spiked with nails” (89). When the lovers are separated, settings are described in chill monochromes; in the fourth chapter, back in Moscow, Anna and Gomov are together so decisively that the setting matters almost not at all. It is described only as “the ‘Slaviansky Bazaar’” (93); we hear only that Anna’s room is upstairs and has a window. They could be in any generic, confining space the role of which would be to illustrate that although their love is unlimited, their circumstances are curtailed.

“The Lady with the Toy Dog” has lots of offspring. Stories in which affairs happen, like “My Mistress,” “Hotel Terminus” by Donald Barthleme, “Adultery” by Andre Dubus, Alice Munro’s “Five Points,” James Salter’s “Platinum,” are pretty

common, and they are the strayer's anthem. But as I learned to read more deeply, I discovered a rarer kind of story, one which more subtly mimics the effect of adultery without romanticizing the relationship. These stories corresponded to my experience as a child when my parents were fooling around. Eudora Welty's "No Place for you, My Love" was a revelation. Here is a story in which an affair is happening, yes, but entirely off-stage. I remembered the Greek origins of the word *obscene*: it's a theatrical term which means that which takes place out of the scene, off the stage. (I like this definition because it takes away the tang of the gross.) *That's what an affair does*, I thought on reading the story for the first time; it shapes from the sidelines and from underneath. Nobody's talking about it, but, whoop! there it is. My parents' secret relationships influenced what part of town we lived in, where we shopped. I could return library books late without being fined because of my father's relationship with the librarian. When I was at the worst part of my troubles as a teenager, in a troubled relationship I kept secret from my parents, my mother sent me for counseling to a priest she had a crush on. "No Place for You, My Love" looks at how the unspoken controls and corrupts. It also tackles the multi-layered experience adultery engenders, the secrets-upon-secrets dis-reality.

"No Place for you, My Love" takes place in New Orleans and points south. A man and woman meet at lunch when the parties they are with combine in a convivial, Southern way. The man and woman, who are never named, are Northerners, identified as out of place from the first line of the story. "They were strangers to each other, both fairly well strangers to the place" (465). New Orleans, two unpartnered strangers at a rowdy luncheon – it's the right set-up for adultery, but the story takes another direction.

The second paragraph begins, “The moment he saw her little blunt, fair face, he thought that here was a woman who was having an affair” (465). The perspective at this moment is the man’s but it shifts throughout the story, weaving multiple points-of-view in a way that honors the complexity, the tenuous hold on identity, of romance. The woman knows instantly she’s been discovered. “It must stick out all over me, she thought, so people think they can love me or hate me just by looking at me. People in love like me, I suppose, give away the short cuts to everybody’s secrets” (465). But instead of affirming the man’s guess, she clams up. “Of all human moods, deliberate imperviousness may be the most quickly communicated – it may be the most successful, most fatal signal of all” (466), writes Welty. The man reads the woman right a second time, and he clams up, also: “two people can indulge in imperviousness as well as in anything else” (466).

Even though they’ll spend the rest of the day and most of the evening together, they only once, and wordlessly, break out of their shells. Welty’s theme is this tragedy, the failure to connect. The failure is related to the woman’s adultery – she’s already in something incomplete and broken: “that hopelessness” (466), as the man describes it to himself, and there are already secrets. Even the tacit nature of their agreement not to speak intimately is itself unspoken. Everything’s under wraps.

When the luncheon ends, the Southerners go off to do what comes naturally on a hot afternoon in the days before air conditioning: take a nap. But the Northerners, unaccustomed to leisure, locked in their imperviousness and their unspoken connection, decide to take a drive. From here on, they are moved by their inability to say. Although the trip is mysterious to both of them – Where are they going? And why? What will



happen? – they’ve made an agreement not to question, not to connect. Their lack of communication encumbers them so thoroughly that they have to drive until they reach the end of the road.

They go south of New Orleans. This seems impossible, and it is – there is no land south of New Orleans, no *real* estate, but there is something mythic, something Dantean. The strangers are on a moral journey into a land made unreal by the secrets and lies they won’t admit.

The trip takes on a funereal quality. “Below New Orleans there was a raging of insects from both sides of the concrete highway, not quite together, like the playing of separated marching bands” (467). The reference to marching bands alludes to what New Orleanians call “second line,” the jazz parade of local funerals. The characters are on opposite sides of the car, listening to their own music. All along the drive, Welty describes flowers: “a saucepan full of cut zinnias” (468), “packed bouquets of zinnias, oleanders, and some kind of purple flowers” (472). The locals in the bar at the end of the road are dressed in flowered shirts and dusted in geranium-scented talcum. “The half-dozen slot machines along the wall were suddenly all run to like Maypoles” (476). These flowers have two jobs. On the one hand, they speak to the possibility of redemption: Welty is begging her characters to see that life, growth and color are the opposite of imperviousness. On the other, the flowers decorate the funeral of connection and care.

The unreal-estate south of New Orleans isn’t just blooming, it’s crawling with creepy things, too. Insects, crayfish, shrimp, “a kind of spider web of old wires in the rafters” (475) of the bar. Some local boys lead an alligator onto a ferry. “Dead snakes stretched across the concrete like markers” (471). These are subterranean symbols

conjured up by the underground force of secrets. The man and woman dance in a bar in Venice, where the road ends at the Gulf. Over his shoulder and not really to him, the woman whispers, “I get to thinking this is what we get – what you and I deserve. And all the time it’s real. It’s a real place – away off down here.” (477). Hell is real. Their inability to let go of secrets has taken them to its bottom circle.

But Welty doesn’t condemn her characters. They don’t take the redemption she offers (although they do finally find a moment’s unspoken connection when they dance), but she never gives up; she holds them in compassion. They return to New Orleans in the buggy, steamy dark. Lost on the southern margins of the city, the man drives around in traffic until he gets his bearings. “We’re all right now” (480), he says as they come into The Quarter, but the reader knows better – they’re as lost as ever. The woman has been sleeping; she wakes, tells him how to find her hotel. As they separate on a handshake the man says, “Forgive” (480), a final attempt at connection. And although the woman does, she never tells him so. “And that is just what she did, forgive him. Indeed, had she waked in time from the deep sleep, she would have told him her story” (480). But this sleep of imperviousness, of secrets and the selfish particularity of romance, has kept them apart.

My attitude toward my parents’ way of living was also imbued with the mysteries of revelation. I wonder not just what I knew about their secret lives, but when I knew it. And were there circumstances in which what I later learned lit up some previously dark corner? This certainly happened when my father’s affair of many years, the affair with

the woman he finally left my mother for, was discovered. “So, *that’s* why he comes home late every night. . . .*That’s* why he went on those trips by himself. . . .”

Foreshadowing, back-casting, ripple effect – adultery resonates. I found an apt definition of foreshadowing in a place I wasn’t looking for it, a book called Reading the Fire: Essays in the Traditional Indian Literatures in the Far West by Jarold Ramsey. “The overall effect of . . . foreshadowing, I imagine, is to deepen the tense imaginative bond between the hero and the listeners (or readers): we come to share a detailed secret knowledge that will be for the hero the basis of highly risky actions and for us the basis of highly dramatic expectations” (89). This has to do with storytelling (and -writing); it also relates to life and affairs. “Detailed secret knowledge” is what I felt I carried as I watched my parents yanked around by their unspoken complications. “Highly risky actions” and “highly dramatic expectations” are phrases which feel intimately linked to adultery. (So, while we’re at it, does “reading the fire.”)

All this is useful in understanding James Salter’s story “Comet.” In “Comet,” the affair is not the story, as in the Chekhov story, nor is it happening concurrently with the time of the story, as in the Welty. Yet it causes disruptions and pulls, acting beneath the surface then exploding into the moment. When it is revealed, the revelation busts everything up, even though the affair is long over. Salter uses detailed secret knowledge like time-rigged explosive devices. The reader watches as he plants them along the story’s path, raising risk and expectation, and then triggers them in the crucial scene.

The story begins with Philip and Adele’s wedding. They’ve both come from other marriages, though we learn in the first pages that neither was the catalyst for the end of the other’s previous union. They settle into a life together, but Adele finds their life

disappointing. One night at a dinner party, Adele, who has been drinking a lot, tells the other guests about the affair Philip had at the end of his first marriage. Her betrayal makes certain the end of this current marriage.

Like some affairs, “Comet” is a very short story packed with emotional explosions. Like some affairs, it is more deep than long. The story is told in the third person with a shifting point of view. Salter moves fluidly in and out of intimacy with his characters just as he moves fluidly through time, choosing to honor a lyric method of storytelling over the linear.

In the first paragraph, in the description of the wedding, we read of Adele, “All her friends were there. She believed strongly in friendship. The room was crowded” (3). Two paragraphs later, Salter writes, “Loyalty – it came from her childhood as well as the years of marriage [referring to her earlier marriage], eight exhausting years, as she said – was her code” (4). Salter has planted some detailed secret knowledge about Adele – she wants to be seen as stalwart – and our expectations have been raised: just how loyal will she prove? Salter comments on this a few lines later, when Adele is talking about a fishing trip she took with her first husband, Delereo (she likes to tell stories about him, which should warn poor Philip). They chartered a boat to Bimini from Florida, a supposedly simple trip. “It began that way but ended differently” (4), writes Salter, using the tale-within-the-tale to foreshadow the fate of Philip and Adele’s marriage.

After this introduction, Salter doubles back to describe Philip. He does this from his omniscience and from Adele’s point-of-view, providing from these distant perspectives a portrait of a man who is rather detached. “He was mannerly and elegant, his head held back a bit as he talked, as though you were a menu” (5). “That was his

persona, capable and calm” (5). “She liked his appearance, which was a bit worn, especially around the eyes. It made her feel he was a real man, though perhaps not the man he had been. Also he was smart, as she explained it, more or less the way professors were” (5). His manner, persona, appearance, all these things are on the surface. Here the detailed secret knowledge is a question: why is this guy so distant? Salter hints at the answer in “a bit worn, especially around the eyes,” and “though perhaps not the man he had been.” Something has happened to Philip. Something has worn him down.

Having established the characters, their marriages and antecedents, Salter arrives at the central scene, an autumn dinner party. Among the guests is a computer expert, “... a nitwit, it soon became apparent...” (7) who offers the toast, “ – To the end of privacy and the life of dignity” (7). This is another ripple from an explosion yet to happen; mannerly, elegant Philip will have his privacy and dignity invaded by his supposedly loyal wife.

With the nitwit is a woman who has just learned that her husband has been having an affair for seven years and may have fathered a child with his lover. As the dinner guests discuss the technicalities of betrayal, Adele, who has already spilled one glass of wine in her drunkenness and poured another, weighs in. She tells the dinner party about Philip’s affair with his son’s tutor during his first marriage. Her manner of telling is reckless and coercive; she gets details wrong purposefully in order to make Philip correct her, making him complicit in the recounting. “ – They’d been married fifteen years, since he was nineteen. – We hadn’t been married fifteen years” (9). “ – They had three children, she said. One of them retarded. – He wasn’t retarded” (9). In short, she is violently disloyal. All the time-bombs Salter planted throughout the story go off in order.

Adele even refers to Philip, whom she's initially called "smart," as "stupid." " – So stupid marries her anyway" (9), she says.

Philip leaves the table. Outside, he stands with his back to the house looking at the sky. When Adele stumbles out to find him, she asks what he's looking for. " – The comet, he said. It's been in the papers" (11). With her drunkenness, which stands as an analog to her lack of vision, Adele can't see it. "It's that extra one, by the Pleiades" (11), Philip tells her. Salter's next comment, "He knew all the constellations. He had seen them rise in darkness over heartbreaking coasts" (11), casts us back to the time of the affair, Philip's "Two years in Mexico City, oblivious to the wreckage" (10). " – Come on, you can look at it tomorrow," says Adele. " – It won't be there tomorrow. One time only," (11) responds Philip, casting back himself to his, "love when you lose the power to speak, when you cannot even breathe" (8). His own detailed secret knowledge is hard-won; he understands the fleetingness of events, how they shoot through the sky like a comet.

My parents are in their seventies now, both remarried. If their philandering isn't behind them, I'd like to know less about it than ever. This year, I realized I'm finally happily married, even though I've been married to the same man for thirteen years. There is something about how we've endured the boring and the dramatic – betrayal and detachment in their many forms – which makes me proud and content. We've weathered something together. I love that.

And I still love adultery. I love how it taught me complexity: paradox from the cradle. I appreciate it that my parents were cheaters, that they struggled with love. Better

that than something bitter. I am grateful for what my affairs brought me. I'm not sure I'd know how to love with kindness and patience if I hadn't had to love under secret pressure. Maybe not everybody would feel the same, but that's how it feels to me.

And I think adultery, all the ways it came into my life, made me a better reader and a better, braver writer. The answers aren't easy. Stories are complex. In the good ones, something ought to be going on under the surface, some secret forces, a little intimate knowledge.

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The purpose of fiction is to extend, broaden, deepen, enrich, and expand the consciousness and souls of the many readers who will experience many literary works over many years. Using different figures of speech, writers make their works accurate, vivid, and memorable. And such a great role is played by irony, epithets, repetition and phraseological units in the investigated within this Diploma Paper Somerset Maugham`s short stories. So, the Work is devoted to the study of his figurative language. Thus, for choosing this topic there were several reasons. First of all, it was interesting to intimate knowledge of something – detailed knowledge of something. The brothers have an intimate knowledge of the inner workings of the regime – English dictionary. An Intimate Knowledge of the Night – is a work of horror fiction by Terry Dowling, first published in 1995. The structure is that of a short story collection with a framing narrative, but the work has an overall unity that has led to it being considered a novel by some. The volume – Wikipedia. intimate – [in – ; ] for v. [, in – „] adj. [altered (infl. by the v.) < earlier intime < Fr < L intimus, superl. of intus, within: see INTESTINE] 1. pertaining to the inmost character of a thing; fundamental [the intimate structure of the – English World dictionary. Intimate relationship – Intimacy redirects here. knowledge, which is gained through intimate interaction, is stored in cognitive schemas. The extent to which these schemas are accurate and reflect shared meaning. trust, shared knowledge, and understanding are still developing, so intimate thoughts and feelings may be hidden or expressed more cautiously (e.g., Altman & Taylor, 1973; Aune, Aune, & Buller, 1994). on relational stage and their partner`s tactile preferences. In short, the relationship trumps the trait when the two conflict (Guerrero & Andersen, 1991, 1994), illustrating the importance of relational context.