

Deconstructing the Other Woman:
Evelyn Lau and the Feminist Adulterer

by

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Abstract

This thesis is an exploration of the representation of female adultery in literature from a feminist perspective. I am looking at "classic" texts of adultery that were prevalent in the 19th century and relied on a certain gendered language of adultery, placing the act of adultery and the female adulterer within a moral and social framework. This language relied on double standards and stereotypes around sexual transgressions and attitudes toward women, turning the novel of adultery into the novel of female adultery. I believe there is a feminist reading of adultery and this thesis focuses on the work of recent women writers, Margaret Atwood, Elizabeth Smart and Evelyn Lau, who all use the traditional language of adultery and subvert it, opening up a space for a feminist reading of the adultery plot. In particular I am interested in the work of Evelyn Lau and how she takes her reading of the adultery plot beyond the limited explorations of Atwood and Smart, and creates a narrative around the language and spaces of adultery. Using feminist theories of deconstruction as a framework for looking at Lau's texts, it is possible to read her narratives as potential sites for a feminist reading of female adultery.

Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Table of Contents	iii
Chapter I Introduction.....	1
Chapter II Feminist adultery novels	10
Chapter III Evelyn Lau	26
Chapter IV Conclusions	54
Notes	59
Works Cited	61

I
 "You want to read yourself (in a mirror) and Anna a
 fictional mirror of a male reading a woman.
 Perhaps you can un/read her, set her free."¹
 - Aritha van Herk, *Places far from Ellesmere*

The "other woman" needs to be un/read. She needs to be unread, deconstructed and rewritten. She needs to be set free from the language of adultery, a language that is usually described in literature according to a specific language and set of symbols that involves a dichotomous approach to presenting women within a distinct social and moral framework. The "mistress," the "other woman," or the "cheating wife," are usually described in writing as they are considered in society - evil and immoral women defined against a sub-text of dichotomies and double standards that represent a wider societal attitude. The gendered language of the adultery plot equates women with property and constructs marriage as an infallible and morally superior institution. The "other woman" is therefore considered inherently immoral and disruptive and is reduced to being marginal within a text.

I believe that there is a feminist reading of adultery that contrasts this patriarchal representation. Certain female authors subvert the standard "fallen woman" image and create a feminism out of the notion of "otherness." The work of Canadian writer Evelyn Lau provides an interesting and provocative example of this reading. Instead of attempting to eradicate the notion of the "other woman," Lau works from within the stereotypical and patriarchal framework and subverts the image. By deconstructing the language of adultery and working from within it, Lau creates a feminist discourse that reclaims the notion of "otherness" and creates a feminist adulterer. She creates a complex narrative that explores the spaces of adultery and the gendered language of the adultery plot. In this thesis I will explore Lau's text using theories of feminism and deconstruction. It will examine how deconstruction can be used as a feminist tool for

subverting traditional roles and stereotypes around women and adultery. I am interested in the feminist possibilities that arise through reading a text about female adultery as subversive because the "other woman" has always held a contrary position within feminist theory and literary history.

Much of my work deals with the language of adultery and the subverting of a standard way of representing the "other woman" within a text, therefore theories of deconstruction will be crucial for understanding the complexity of the adultery novel in general and the ways in which Lau unravels these complexities. I will be exploring deconstruction as articulated by Jacques Derrida and considering how his theories of deconstruction have been taken up by feminists. Feminist theorist Drucilla Cornell suggests that deconstruction is a productive way of challenging "the rigid structures of gender identity which have devalued women and identified them with the patriarchal conventions of the gender hierarchy" ("Gender, Sex and Equivalent Rights" 281). Deconstruction can be used here to examine ontological restrictions and to explore the possibilities of being "other" by working from within a problematic that has already been established (Cornell, Beyond Accommodation 18). In the context of this thesis, an oppressive and gendered literary language is the problematic which needs to be deconstructed and reconstituted. This language must be understood to be an established tradition that is oppressive because of its perceived immovability and can only be deconstructed by its usage rather than its denial. Cornell specifically uses Derridean deconstruction in her work on gender inequality and says that Derrida "understands that because he writes within the problematic of gender opposition that has been established, he cannot simply dislocate himself from it" (86). Derridean deconstruction can be used as a critical strategy to analyze and explore the notion of feminist adultery novels. A deconstructive reading of a text enables the critic to attempt

to locate meaning in "areas which traditional criticism has seen as marginal" (Belsey 601).

Catherine Belsey suggests that the procedure of deconstruction is "to identify in the text the contrary meanings which are the inevitable condition of its existence as a signifying practice, locating the trace of otherness which undermines the overt project" (601). The overt project of what becomes known as the novel of female adultery is to contain the female adulterer within the moral framework of the text that relies on a patriarchal and oppressive notions of gender relations. In "Choreographies," an interview with Derrida, Christie McDonald defines Derrida's act of deconstruction as a "two phase program" (447). The first phase of deconstruction involves a reversal or subversion where "opposed terms would be inverted" and a "previously subordinate term, might become the dominant one" (447). However, McDonald points out that simply reversing a power balance reinforces a duality and reconstitutes a hierarchy (447). She says that Derrida's second phase of deconstruction would attempt to bring about change as well as subversion and a "new concept would be forged simultaneously" (447).

The writers of feminist adultery novels do not dislocate themselves from the conventional language of adultery already in place. Instead they work from within it to expose dichotomies and double standards and to deconstruct the gendered representations of "other women" and female adulterers. I believe that Evelyn Lau challenges the "rigid structures of gender identity" that Cornell discusses in her work by deconstructing the traditional adultery formula in literature that places marriage at the centre of the narrative and reduces the "other woman" to a marginal position in the text. Lau's novel directly challenges these conventions by affirming the other and allowing the "other woman" to have an alternate subjectivity and a voice from within the main narrative body of the text rather than from the margins. Lau's text also demonstrates the possibilities of a deconstructive reading that has two stages, much like the two-phase

Derridean reading that McDonald outlines. Simply reversing a stereotype and placing a previously marginal character at the centre of a narrative is perhaps not enough and may ultimately reinforce gender stereotypes. A feminist deconstructive reading would suggest the need to take a subversive strategy to the next stage and create new possibilities for a reconstitution of the "other woman." While Lau will successfully create an alternative way of reading female adultery the question remains as to whether she takes her characters in a new direction. While I believe that her text can be read as feminist, it could also be misread as reinforcing gender stereotypes through a simple role-reversal. I hope to show that Lau's text is a complex and sophisticated narrative of adultery that can, in fact, open up some new and interesting areas for feminism.

Bill Overton has identified the novel of female adultery as being connected to the notion of women as the inhabitants of the domestic space that are the property of men. The "other woman" occupies the spaces of adultery outside of the home - restaurants, hotels, and bedrooms and the "other woman's" language is primarily a language of desire and the body. The body also becomes a site upon which the negotiations of adultery are inscribed. The spaces of adultery in the adultery plot are important because they identify the spaces that are outside of the institution of marriage. Lau creates an interesting map of spaces in her text and creates a type of spatial grid that works contrary to the notion of domestic space and the home. The connection of the novel of female adultery to women and the private sphere is key for understanding how and why Lau constructs her narrative in opposition to the domestic space and creates alternate, subversive spaces for the "other woman" to inhabit. Her approach to the spaces of adultery illustrates what Sharon Marcus calls the topography of the text, the "ways in which narration itself ... inscribes spatial relations" (Marcus 10). Lau uses the spaces of adultery and the heterotopic spaces in between to create a textual map that leads the reader away from a traditional reading of the female adultery plot and down

many new roads.

Deconstruction, then, provides some exciting possibilities for feminism and for exploring the gendered language of adultery that we shall see at work in the novel of female adultery. An exploration of spaces within the text will also reveal some interesting possibilities for a subversive reading of the "other woman." However, the notion of the "other woman" has remained problematic within feminism and needs to be explored further in order to understand how Lau's texts can be read as feminist. The work of feminist theorist Helena Michie is useful for understanding the position of the "other woman" within feminist theory. She suggests that

contemporary feminism is still embedded in the familial idiom that has given us, at different moments and for different purposes, the 'patriarchy' of early second-wave feminism, the 'sisterhood' invoked as its enemy, and the 'm/other' of feminist psychoanalytic theory. (Michie, *Sorophobia* 175)

She claims that much feminist rhetoric is still embedded within the "master trope" of family that maintains the "other woman" as outside of the family and therefore outside of the scope of feminist theory. This is not to say that there have not been inclusions of the "other woman" in feminism. Embracing otherness and reclaiming it has been a feminist tactic of many feminists of colour and other marginalized women's groups who felt that they had been excluded from many feminist agenda's and theories. However, despite the fact that feminism has now come to be seen as multiple, not simply one ideology that is exclusive, there are still some areas that seem beyond the reach of feminist analysis such as female adulterers and "other women." Michie's analysis is particularly relevant then, because female adultery is inextricably linked to the institution of marriage and notions of family that come with it. Lau's "other woman" exists outside, against and also within the notion of marriage. She is somewhat of a paradox - unable to exist without marriage but never allowed completely within it.

The language of adultery is often described according to an age-old metaphor that constructs it as a female crime and a moral wrong. A double standard of sexual morality has been deeply entrenched in Western society. This standard dates back to antiquity when women were more severely punished than men for adultery and were subject to adultery laws that equated them with property and demanded high moral standards (Overton 2). Michel Foucault points out that notions of adultery and fidelity have had little to do with sex, but are connected to notions of power and ownership and female sexuality as controlled by men (Foucault 143-144). In ancient Greece, adultery was considered to be an offense against men because men held authoritative power and control over the women in their lives, whether they were wives, daughters or sisters (Foucault 146). Women were ultimately powerless and were defined by their social and moral value, while men were only held accountable for their actions within a patriarchal system that maintained them as morally and socially superior.

In his book The Novel of Female Adultery, Bill Overton points out that this double standard means that the "novel of adultery is in effect the novel of female adultery" (1). Narratives that focus on adultery are primarily about the sexual transgressions of women and "it is likely that there would have been no novel of female adultery at all if men had not responded to an acute sense of female sexuality as disruptive" (15). The narratives, therefore, suggest that women's sexuality should be controlled. By making women wholly responsible for the act of adultery and denying them agency in their own sexual behaviour and encounters, the writers of female adultery novels are using their texts as a means of constraint. Their words become words of warning to both men and women and demonstrate the ideology that the moral and social actions of women are dependent on how the men in their lives monitor and control them. The novels of female adultery send a message to male readers that adultery is inevitable if they do not control their wives behaviour. Moreover, women

receive the message that their sexuality is not their own and that sexual transgression on their parts is a moral affront to the social standing of their husbands and is a punishable offense.

Overton believes that the novel of female adultery is also a result of social tensions regarding women and their association with motherhood, family, marriage and property, and he says that "the fact that novels of female adultery have stood for so long as the novel of adultery suggests how large a part ideology plays in deciding meanings" (2). Although the definitions and concepts of adultery vary across cultures and historical periods, Overton points out that they have always involved a gender bias that places men in a position of power (2). This ideology influenced the way that novels of adultery were written, the result being the novel of female adultery. As Overton states:

No classic novel, let alone any fictional tradition, is based on male adultery. The widely used term 'novel of adultery' is therefore a misnomer which masks a gender bias both in the novels themselves and in the critical discourses within which they have been interpreted. This is why I employ the term 'novel of female adultery' instead. (vii)

Although Overton initially discusses the "social tensions" around women and adultery in terms of 19th Century literary texts and ideology, he suggests that the novel of female adultery becomes a type of formula for commenting on and controlling women's sexuality and that "the restriction of the canon of the novel of adultery to novels of female adultery is one example of ideological determination" (10). He also notes that the canon cannot be separated from the social and historical context of the particular time in which the novel was written and the function of marriage in that society (10). The novel of female adultery, then, is ideologically specific to time and place. However, the formula that Overton alludes to is in a sense, timeless; it is the literary scarlet letter that is passed from adulterous woman to adulterous woman. The canon and language of the female

adultery novel has persisted, framed by the notion that women should be wives and mothers and regard marriage as a privileged sanctity. The figure of the female adulterer or the “other woman,” and the trope of the female adultery plot threaten patriarchal order and the heterosexual notions of marriage and family and how women are supposed to behave. Using language as a constraint and creating a standard framework about adultery and sexuality, the novel of female adultery is a way of maintaining a social “norm” that reinforces gender inequality and essentialist notions of women, marriage and family.

Female adultery is a term used by Overton to describe a married woman having an adulterous affair with another man. Perhaps two of the best known examples of novels of female adultery are Leo Tolstoy’s Anna Karenin² and Gustave Flaubert’s Madame Bovary. Both texts can be read in terms of Overton’s definitions and can be considered “classic” texts of adultery that mark the beginning of the formulaic approach to female adultery in literature. Although both Tolstoy and Flaubert are consciously writing critically about society, the basic elements of the adulterous relationships in their texts reflect contemporary social and moral attitudes toward women, marriage and sexuality in the 19th Century and stereotypes around these attitudes that are still reflected in much recent literature. Women are supposed to desire marriage and family and are expected to find fulfillment within these institutions. Female sexuality is considered to be dangerous and unpredictable, especially outside of the institution of marriage. The main common feature of Madame Bovary and Anna Karenin is that Emma and Anna, the female adulterers, both die. This is a typical construct of the female adultery plot that contains the “fallen woman” within the boundaries of the text. She may have transgressed sexual and marital boundaries but she is killed off to lessen her threat to society. She becomes an example of how women should not behave. Although Emma and Anna both defy their gendered roles as wives by having affairs,

they are both ultimately punished for their transgressions with death. Both commit suicide: Emma takes poison and Anna jumps into the path of an oncoming train.

Suicide is the male authors preferred ending for the adulterous woman because it suggests that she feels remorse for her actions and cannot live with the label of "adulterer" after the inevitable "outing" of the adulterous relationship and the ensuing rejection by her social group and typically her lover. Suicide suggests a realization of a wrong and a responsibility for those actions. It reinforces the female adulterer as "other" and guarantees that she will not repeat her actions; suicide shifts responsibility for the death of the female adulterer away from the author or society to the woman herself. The husband and larger social group portrayed in the text may have wanted to persecute her, but they do not have to and can maintain a moral and behavioral superiority that readers are most commonly supposed to identify with. Tolstoy and Flaubert both use female adulterers as tools for critiquing social and moral constructions of their contemporary societies. However, they ultimately reinforce gender stereotypes in regards to female adultery with the deaths of these characters, and they reinforce the underlying message that freedom in this form is always wrong, both in fiction and reality.

The interpretation and definition of the term "adultery" has gone through many changes throughout the centuries, dating back to ancient Roman law that defined adultery as something that only women could be charged with (Overton 3). The general assumption is that in order to be considered an adulterer, one must be married. However, Overton points out that in the novel of adultery the double standard of morality, the attitude toward women's roles in marriage, family and sexuality, and the deep-rooted sexist attitudes towards sexual transgression in general are fundamental in gendering the plot and maintaining adultery as "female" (3). My definition of female adultery is wider than Overton's primary definition, and includes the "mistress" or "other woman." The "other woman" is traditionally defined as the unmarried, female lover of a

married man. Therefore, I think it is necessary to include the "other woman" within the definition of female adultery because she knowingly transgresses the boundaries of marriage and sexuality.

The "other woman" is also somewhat of a paradox, as Victoria Griffin suggests in her book The Mistress. According to Griffin "On the one hand the mistress seeks to live outside and undermine the institution of marriage; on the other, she is as subject to the institution as the wife, being defined by it" (19). The triangle of lover-husband-wife is the most commonly used formula for novels of female adultery and "other women," and has been reproduced in many genres throughout literary history. The "other woman" is also disposed of in some way in the female adultery plot, again through death, suicide, or extreme remorse or distress that borders on insanity. The focus of female adultery plots with "other women" is usually the marriage she has transgressed. The marriage must remain intact, with the husband having a change of heart and returning to the family and the moral superiority of the forgiving wife. The lover can be everything from an evil seductress to a weak suicidal woman. She is disposable and again represents everything a woman should not be. She is always "other," defined by and against the high moral standing of the wife.

II

How, then, is it possible to create a feminist version of the adultery novel? As Helena Michie states in "Not One of the Family:" "Feminism has come to occupy a contradictory place with regard to family" and feminists have been accused of being anti-family and "home-wreckers" (59). In response to this, Michie says that many feminists attempt to "reclaim and subvert the notion of family. However, this does not include the woman who is outside the family - the other woman" (59). Michie also points out that

many contemporary feminisms are “still embedded in the familial idiom” and rely on the master trope of family for their theories - “the ‘patriarchy’ of early second-wave feminism, the ‘sisterhood’ invoked as its enemy, and the ‘m/other’ of feminist psychoanalytic theory” (Sorophobia 175). Although these terms a part of valuable analytic processes within the language and theories of feminism, the “other woman” can only be exiled from the family, the result being a “convenient and articulable space for the exile of otherness” in general where “all that is troubling, adulterous, troublingly adulterous within the family and within the wife, can be impersonated by the other woman” (Michie 175). Michie says that “to begin to acknowledge the possibility of the other woman one must work through the texts of other women; to move outside the family is to chart the places made accessible by its idiom” (Sorophobia 178).

In order to write a feminist adultery novel I believe that it is important to deconstruct and subvert the stereotypical notions of otherness found in female adultery novels without eradicating difference altogether. The writer of the feminist adultery novel uses the otherness of her protagonist to create an alternate subjectivity and voice, and to survive the literary deaths of her predecessors. She is not exiled outside of the family but chooses to be outside of the family. There are many contemporary writers who have taken up the idea of the “other woman” in their work and have attempted to rewrite the traditional representation of adultery. Like Evelyn Lau, Margaret Atwood and Elizabeth Smart both tell stories of adultery that have the “other woman” at their centre. Atwood’s The Robber Bride is a satirical and funny approach to representing the “other woman” and Smart’s By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept is a poignant tribute to the role of the lover. Both are subversive, but are they feminist? These texts are interesting to consider in relation to Lau’s Other Women because all three texts employ elements of what I call the feminist adultery novel to some extent. Atwood and Smart provide useful examples of feminist adultery novels because they both explore

the trope of the novel of female adultery. Moreover, these texts illustrate how Lau creates a even more complex representation of the feminist adultery novel by moving her "other woman" and her narrative beyond the feminist possibilities of Atwood and Smart.

Margaret Atwood's The Robber Bride includes one of the most infamous "other women" in contemporary literature. The Robber Bride is the story of three women who have known each other since college and have fallen into a lasting friendship due to their experiences with another woman who turned their lives upside down. Atwood begins her narrative in the present, with Tony, who is on her way to meet Roz and Charis for their monthly lunch date. Atwood gives us a glimpse of the mysterious "other woman," Zenia, who has had a great impact on all their lives but is now believed to be dead. As Tony is preparing to meet Roz and Charis for lunch she is thinking about her relationship with Zenia and the guarded relief that her death brings: "She frequently thinks of Zenia, more frequently than when Zenia was alive. Zenia dead is less of a threat, and doesn't have to be shoved away, shoved back into the spidery corner where Tony keeps her shadows" (14). At the end of the first chapter Atwood reveals that Zenia is not actually dead. With "a conscious pelvic swagger" (150) Zenia re-enters the lives of the three women and prepares to wreak havoc in chapter two. As the book unfolds we learn how Zenia came to be in the lives of these women, as they themselves try to understand why she has returned.

Atwood presents the reader with a despicable woman, a classic example of an evil seductress who will stop at nothing to get what she wants. In this case what she wants appears to involve the men in the lives of Tony, Roz and Charis. Zenia uses these women, manipulates them for whatever she needs, and manages to steal their partners as well. She then disappears from their lives without a second thought and becomes the stereotype of the seductress who will pursue her desires regardless of

who may get hurt. These desires are both financial and sexual and are constructed as a selfish necessity for Zenia. She becomes the stereotypical monstrous woman who appears to have no soul and embodies the notion that "other women" are inherently evil - a notion that is used in traditional adultery novels to represent the female adulterer. Zenia is the "other woman" that everybody loves to hate; she has no shame and is relentless. She represents the "idea" of adultery that presides within the marital centre of every novel of female adultery - the "idea" that only a person so inherently evil would dare to destroy the sanctity of marriage. However, Atwood's Zenia is so awful that it is impossible to dislike her. Atwood cleverly creates a parody of a "type" of woman and in the process breaks down the formula of the adultery plot and the clichés and stereotypes that identify the "other woman" as marginal.

However, Zenia is certainly not a marginal character. She is persistent and she is complete in her role: "Zenia has never been *almost*, even at her most fraudulent" (53). In the course of the story we learn that Zenia was the mysterious and charming girlfriend of Tony's friend West, a man they met in college who would later become Tony's husband. Tony gave Zenia money, wrote her papers for her and believed Zenia's stories of a doomed and miserable childhood. When Zenia suddenly disappeared without a trace, Tony's comforting of West led to their relationship. Zenia, however, was not finished with them and returned as suddenly as she left to reclaim West as her own. Again, Tony takes him in when Zenia has finished with him and moved on to her next victim. Roz's husband Mitch is another conquest for Zenia. She meets him after Roz believes she has changed and offers her a job at the magazine she runs. Zenia embezzles money and has an affair with Mitch, taking him with her when she leaves. She also finds her way into Charis's home, pretending to have cancer so that Charis will look after her. When Zenia's lies are uncovered she leaves Charis's house with Billy, Charis's partner and the father of the child she is expecting. The three women become

close friends due to these experiences and are always wary of Zenia's presence in their lives, even when she is presumed dead: "Zenia is nothing if not vengeful. Being dead won't alter that. She'll think of something" (564).

Atwood uses a specific language to describe Zenia that is consistent with the language associated with "other women" - the language of taking. Zenia is considered the only person with any agency in any of the situations. This is typical of the female adultery novel where the man is unable to resist the power of the "other woman" and becomes a victim himself when the relationship is over. Atwood describes Zenia in much the same way:

What is her secret? How does she do it? Where does it come from, her undeniable power over men? How does she latch hold of them, break their stride, trip them up, and then so easily turn them inside out? It must be something very simple and obvious. She tells them they're unique then reveals to them that they're not. (559)

What is interesting about Atwood's text is that she does not try to explain Zenia's behaviour in any way. She uses language that suggests that Zenia has the power to take what she wants and will do so no matter what. There is no moralizing framework to Zenia's story and the weaknesses of the men do not confirm that Zenia's actions are evil. Instead, Atwood makes the men complicit in each scenario and the responsibility for the adultery is not solely with the "other woman." The traditional novel of female adultery suggests that the man has temporarily lost his mind while immersed in an affair, but he is always saved by the "good" of marriage and the "good" of his wife and family. He is forgiven because he realizes that he was seduced by evil and that marriage is his salvation. By contrast, Zenia's male victims remain just that - victims. They are not saved in anyway because Atwood does not allow them to have any agency at all. The gendered power dynamic of the traditional female adultery plot is not reinforced in The Robber Bride, and marriage itself is presented as the consolation prize rather than the

ideal to which women are supposed to aspire.

Atwood undermines the institution of marriage in her text by presenting it as unstable and by having both her male and female characters not trust in the security and safety it is supposed to bring. Zenia unpins the institution of monogamous, life-long marriage and disrupts the ideal of marital fidelity. In the traditional adultery plot, the wife would welcome her adulterous husband back into the home realizing that he felt remorse. In Atwood's text, the marriages and partnerships may survive Zenia but they are unstable and filled with resentful feelings, with Zenia still a part of each day: "They never mention Zenia, Tony because she thinks it will upset West, West because he thinks it will upset Tony. Zenia does not go away however. She hovers, growing fainter, true, but still there, like the blue haze of cigarette smoke in a room after the cigarette has been put out. Tony can smell her" (264).

Atwood also disrupts the character of the "other woman" by having her be completely unremorseful, cold and calculating. In the traditional female adultery novel laid out by Overton, the "other woman" would ultimately feel regret for her actions and defer to the idea that she is inherently an immoral, bad woman. Anna Karenin and Emma Bovary are framed within narratives that do not allow them to be guilt-free and they are both killed off to guarantee that they will not change their minds and to ease the fears of the readers. Zenia, on the other hand, uses guilt as a means to an end - she pretends to feel guilty for her actions and gains access to the lives of Tony, Charis and Roz. Atwood disrupts the notion that a woman who behaves badly (such as an "other woman") will ultimately feel remorse and attempt to redeem herself. Zenia only redeems herself in order to do more damage. Atwood also undermines the function of guilt in the female adultery plot by having the wives and partners feel guilty. Zenia turns the tables on Roz, Charis and Tony and makes them feel guilty for not believing her.

Zenia systematically befriends and betrays each of the three women over three

decades, and then returns from death to do more damage. Again, Atwood is disrupting the traditional adultery plots such as Madame Bovary and Anna Karenin by allowing Zenia to cheat death. Death is the ultimate punishment given to Emma and Anna by Flaubert and Tolstoy and it suggests a finality to their so-called perversions of proper moral behaviour. While the deaths of Anna and Emma pose as warning to “other women” that their sexual transgressions will lead to a deserved punishment, the death of Zenia suggests that the “other woman” is not so easily disposed of and will keep returning.

Zenia lies and cheats her way into the lives of Tony, Roz and Charis more than once, pretending to be sorry but showing her true colours if she doesn't get her way. Atwood creates a true villainess in Zenia, a woman who can turn on her “friends” without blinking:

‘You don't believe me, do you’? says Zenia. Her face has gone still.
‘Well, help yourself to some righteous indignation, you little snout. You always were the most awful two-faced hypocrite, Tony. A smug dog-in-the-manger prune-faced little shit with megalomaniac pretensions ... you sit on poor West as if he's your own fresh-laid fucking egg!’ (608)

Zenia is a chameleon who can change in an instant to become the woman best suited for whatever situation she is in. She can blend into the lives of Tony, Roz and Charis as their friends and she can just as easily step away and change into a different Zenia. Atwood is ambiguous about Zenia's “true colours” consciously disrupts our reading of Zenia's character. The quote above may suggest that Zenia has let her guard down and let Tony see the “real” Zenia, but it could just as easily be another method of gaining access to whatever she wants. Atwood does not reinforce the moral superiority of the wives by reinforcing Tony as inherently good or by having Zenia become desperate in her exile. In fact Zenia is quite the opposite and seems to revel in the fact that she has been confronted.

Atwood twists the narrative of adultery as betrayal by having Zenia claim she did Tony, Roz and Charis a favour by ridding them of unfaithful men who were bad for them: "'Don't be a priss,' says Zenia. 'You should give me a medal for getting him off your back'" (645). Zenia has no regrets about the men she has left in her wake, and she also makes the women in the story complicit in the adultery. She suggests that they made it easy for her, inviting her into their homes and into their lives, allowing themselves to be manipulated. There is no external social or moral framework invoked in the novel to represent marriage as an impenetrable force. Marriage in The Robber Bride is unstable, unprotected, unpredictable and undesirable. Atwood disrupts all the conventions of marriage in her adultery plot. The game of adultery is played by the women in the text and the men are reduced to pawns in the game to be either protected or destroyed. It is the men who are disposable in Atwood's narrative, not the "other woman." It is the men who make themselves ill with desperation for their lover, the men who commit suicide from grief and remorse, and the men who are made marginal and "other."

Atwood subverts the novel of female adultery by creating a character that embodies all the fears and anxieties that the traditional adultery plot warns against. Zenia is so excessive that she becomes a parody of the "other woman" and an effective way of undermining the institution of marriage and the representation of the "other woman." Zenia does not want to become the wife in any of the stories; she wants to be the lover. Marriage is meaningless to Zenia - it is simply something that she has to bypass in order to get what she wants. As a ruthless, and seemingly heartless "other woman," Zenia successfully subverts the adultery plot and reclaims the language that is supposed to maintain her as marginal. She plays an integral part in every relationship and marriage in the text but has no desire to be involved in marriage in the traditional way.

Marriage, then, is an fundamental element of the female adultery plot that grounds the narrative in a moral framework and is often perceived as an infallible institution. Marriage is central to the narrative of The Robber Bride but Atwood undermines the notions of marriage as ideal with her use of sardonic imagery and an irresistibly abominable "other woman." Marriage, however, is a more serious element in Elizabeth Smart's By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept, a fictional retelling of her long-time affair with poet George Barker. Published in 1945, some forty-eight years before Atwood's The Robber Bride, By Grand Central Station is a surprisingly subversive account of an affair. The narrator recounts the events of her relationship with her married lover in fluid, lyrical prose that reads like a poem or letter to her lover. Marriage is an integral part of the story from the beginning and the wife is introduced into the narrative before the husband: "But it is her eyes that come forward out of the vulgar disembarkers to reassure me that the bus has not disgorged disaster: her madonna eyes, soft as the newly-born, trusting as the untempted" (Smart 17).

Smart sets up the dichotomy between wife and lover immediately, reluctantly placing herself as the "other woman," against the image of an ideal wife. However, Smart's narrator plans to infiltrate this marriage and she suggests that the wife's innocence will be her downfall: "How can she walk through the streets so unknowing, and not have people and dogs and perpetual calamity following her" (18)? The lover's wife is set up as a naive woman, who has no idea that the narrator desires her husband. She is characterized as the loyal, innocent wife who would have no reason to doubt her husband, not because he is trustworthy but because she is the perfect wife. This lack of knowledge on the wife's part is also considered to be a form of protection for her: "Sitting nymphlike in the pool in the late afternoon her pathetic slenderness is covered over with a love as gentle as trusting as tenacious as the birds who rebuild their continually violated nests" (Smart 22). The narrator describes the wife as an autumn bird

who knows nothing but “feels foreboding in the air” (27) and she says of her lover: “I entirely renounce him for only her peace of mind” (18). It is as if Smart’s narrator is blaming her lover in advance for allowing his wife to feel secure in their marriage, with the undertone that it won’t be easy to betray someone so protected and innocent. Her feelings for the wife, however, do not stop her from pursuing the husband into an affair that would last for many years.

Placing the wife in the narrative from the beginning is an interesting device in terms of the adultery plot because it places the husband in the position of the morally corrupt character. The husband is constructed as the one to blame for his wife’s innocence and, therefore, responsible for any pain she might feel as a result of the adultery. Smart’s narrator does not implicate herself in the adultery at first, placing the onus on the husband for both betraying the wife and for putting the narrator in the position of the lover, who must then pursue her desired relationship. What is interesting here is that Smart sets this up in the first few pages of the story, letting the reader know that the narrator is a somewhat reluctant “other woman” who does not fall easily into the role of seductress: “And I went into the redwoods brooding and blushing with rage, to be stamped so obviously with femininity, and liable to humiliation worse than Venus’ with Adonis, purely because of my accidental but flaunting sex” (20). It is as if she wants to get the cliché of becoming the lover out of the way at the beginning so that she can then focus on the real heart of the narrative - the relationship between the narrator and her lover as something distinct from the marital relations that begin the story. The presence of the wife at the beginning of the novel is almost an annoyance for the narrator, an unforeseen glitch in her plan that she must deal with. Although the wife is present throughout the story in different ways, she is never present again with the power that she possesses at the beginning as she “smiles happily across the room with a confidence that appals” (17). The power shifts as the “other woman” places

herself in the centre of the narrative and the centre of her lover's life where the wife should be.

This shift in power is most noticeable in the language that Smart uses to describe the affair. The narrator moves in and out of a type of poem to her lover, addressing him directly in some passages. The narrator always speaks in the first person. The lover is either "you" or "him" but the wife is always "she" or "her." The narrator never directly addresses the wife, even at her most desperate when she is imagining husband and wife together during intimate moments. For the narrator the relationship she has with her lover is the "real" relationship and she describes the wife as if she were, in fact, the lover: "It is she he is with: he is with her: he is not with me because he is sleeping with her" (86). The power shifts again as the relationship progresses with the wife appearing more often in the narrative as the frustration and grief grow for the narrator. However, the wife never draws blame or malice from the narrator. It is the husband who is represented as being at fault:

My love is crucified on a floating cross, and cries out hoarsely my name in the night. His wife hears and her eyes burn holes in the darkness across the room. My love has a bandage like a bowel of pain around his neck, where lately he cut his throat. (107)

While the narrator may feel grief, pain and longing, the burden of the relationship lies with the husband, and it is the double burden of both women that the narrator acknowledges.

Although, the narrator lets the wife into her story, the story never loses sight of the narrator as its core. By Grand Central Station is a novel of mythic proportions in which the narrator experiences loves and losses with epic grandeur. She compares herself to tragic heroines such as Dido, Leda, Venus, and compares her relationship to the Trojan War and the Fall of the Roman Empire. What is significant about this narrative is that as the "other woman," the narrator places herself at the centre of the story and

while she may feel sorry for the wife, this pity results from the husband's behaviour not her own. By comparing her story to other tragic love stories and disasters, the narrator is placing her story first, suggesting that her loss is greater than the loss of a marriage: "The pain was unbearable, but I did not want it to end. It lit up Grand Central Station like a Judgment Day" (103). Despite the pain, however, the narrator also knows she is the "other woman" and does not seem to express any desire to be her lover's wife. She is, in fact, in a similar position to the wife who has been "othered" and placed on the margins of the narrative. The narrator wants her lover to be with her but she does not seem to need marriage. By identifying herself as "other" she knows that her only option is to take that role and make it central to her story. In the process she creates a complex link with the character of the wife because she is "othering" herself much like the wife but she places her own otherness at the centre of the narrative. By centering her own otherness, the narrator is displacing the character of the wife even further away from the centre of the narrative and from her lover.

Atwood and Smart, then, both have unique approaches to the adultery plot and create "other women" who are certainly subversive. Their texts contain elements that can be read as feminist and that explore the subjective possibilities that Helena Michie says are only possible outside of the family (Michie 175). Although By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept has many possible feminist elements and the narrator can be read as a feminist character, the text as a whole ultimately falls short of a feminist reading and rewriting of the female adultery novel. Smart places her narrator at the centre of the narrative, leaving no doubt that the story belongs to her. However, Smart's narrator is not a shameless character like Atwood's Zenia and her feelings of remorse for the wife are complicated by the fact that she accepts them as part of the course of her relationship. She does not simply feel sorry for the wife but she also feels

sorry for the husband and for herself because they have to deal with these feelings. Her feelings towards her lover's wife and their interaction are perceived as a normal part of the relationship the narrator shares with her lover. Smart writes about feelings of guilt, jealousy, and remorse towards the wife as if they were a natural part of any relationship. In this way, the narrator does not appear as a devious seductress, but simply as someone who is "possessed by love" (Smart 39). The narrative is also written in the first person, the voice of the "other woman" that is so often silenced or constructed around a marital relationship. The fact that the narrator claims her own "otherness" and speaks for herself can be read as feminist. So can the paradoxical nature of her writing which allows for both interaction with and banishment of the figure of the wife and results in the institution of marriage being completely undermined.³

However, the fact that the wife is allowed so much space in the text is problematic. Although Smart does reduce the wife to a marginal character for much of the text, her presence serves as a reminder of the marriage that frames the story. Smart's narrator is not able to completely subvert the image of the wife and let her go from the narrative. Her presence at the edge of the narrative is an interesting way of maintaining the narrator at the centre of the story, but it also creates a certain instability for the narrator and for her role in the text as the "other woman." As Michie says, "to move outside the family is to chart the places made accessible by its idiom" (Michie 178). The same can be said for marriage within the adultery plot. The female adulterer and the "other woman" are inextricably linked to marriage, yet live outside of its spaces and ideology. Without marriage there would be no female adulterer. She relies on being both inside and outside of it. What Michie is suggesting is that "other women" need to take advantage of the spaces made available to them by being exiled from marriage and family, to create a space of their own that subverts the dichotomies that maintain them as marginal and allows them the fluidity of crossing those boundaries. For the

feminist adulterer, the wife plays a crucial role in creating this space because she herself must be exiled and deconstructed; she represents the marriage that is being subverted. Smart does exile the wife in the text to an extent, but the narrator allows her into her own emotional life and fails to maintain her as other. She becomes real to the narrator in her imagination, more so than in the flesh, and the remorse she feels reduces them both to the role of "other" and shifts the centre of the narrative to a shared space and a common emotion: "If I am suffering, think what she has suffered - a hundred times more and without hope, and I was dazzlingly happy on top of her profound and excruciating misery" (Smart 85-86). By equating the wife's emotions with her own, she is collapsing the notion of the "other woman" and inviting the wife back from the margins. This complex relationship between the narrator and the wife of shared feelings and space also shifts the narrator from the centre of the narrative and makes her vulnerable. Smart, therefore, reinforces a negative and oppressive dichotomy between the wife and the "other woman."

By Grand Central Station, then, falls short of a feminist rewriting of the female adultery novel. She creates a narrator who has feminist characteristics but does not successfully subvert her "otherness" or completely reclaim it. In The Robber Bride Atwood draws upon myths, fairy tales, stereotypes and patriarchal notions of women to make a point about how women have been portrayed. She creates a monstrous character in Zenia, a character that epitomizes Michie's point that the exiling of the "other woman" to a marginal, non-familial space results in a "convenient and articulable space" for all otherness to reside (Michie 175). Zenia embodies the madonna/whore dichotomy that posits a chaste innocence against an seductive evil and characterizes her both as victim and as predator. She plays the role of the victim when she is in the process of duping Roz, Charis or Tony, but it is a predatory neediness that is constructed in order for Zenia to gain access to their lives. Atwood uses the

contradictory images of a poor, helpless woman and an evil seductress for the same character and makes Zenia all the more despicable because she pretends to be a victim. In the character of Zenia, Atwood captures many stereotypes and images that are used to represent women and turns them upside down. Zenia plays the role of the battered woman, the terminally-ill-woman, the abused-as-a-child woman, the penniless-and-turned- to-prostitution woman, and of course, the "other woman." She is described as being overtly sexual and frigid, chaste and promiscuous. She represents "all that is troubling, adulterous, troublingly adulterous within the family and within the wife" (Michie 175).

Zenia is a feminist character because she does what she pleases and survives independently of men and marriage and because she reclaims the stereotypes of being the "other woman" that would ordinarily maintain her as marginal. However, the fact that Zenia is such an excessive character and a parody of the traditional depiction of the "other woman" limits a complete feminist reading of the text within the context of the adultery plot. A parody is a literary term that "imitates the serious manner and characteristic features of a particular literary work ... and other features of a serious literary genre" (Abrams 18). Atwood's novel can be read as a parody of the female adultery novel because, like Overton, Atwood identifies the adultery plot as a being framed by a patriarchal and gendered language which she consciously subverts. Overton's critical exploration of the adultery plot reveals that the novel of female adultery is a term that should be used to describe the genre of the novel of adultery (Overton vii), but he does not suggest any means of subverting this tradition. Atwood employs all the tropes and themes present in the novel of adultery, identifies it as gendered so that it becomes the novel of female adultery, and then subverts that tradition by making a mockery of it and all its characters.

However, there is a certain amount of safety in the character of Zenia because

she is so awful that she is humorous. Atwood makes fun of the genre of the novel of female adultery and of the stereotypes that have bound women within a patriarchal textual language. However, she does not really deconstruct the character of the "other woman" and Zenia really has no where to go, no way to develop. Her possibilities as a subversive character end with her death. Atwood describes Zenia as having lost a fight at the end of the story: "because wherever else Zenia had been in her life, she had also been at war. An unofficial war, a guerrilla war, a war she may not have known she was waging, but a war nonetheless" (Atwood 687). Perhaps Atwood is suggesting that survival is hopeless, that women like Zenia would never be allowed to survive, not in the real world and certainly not in the world of literature where history is stacked against them. By killing Zenia at the end of the novel, Atwood alludes to the tradition and fate that created Emma Bovary and Anna Karenin and "other woman" in general. It is a shame that Zenia had to die and I would have liked her death to be more ambiguous to allow the possibility for returning again. Atwood's novel is brilliant and, indeed, very funny, but I think that it cannot be entirely read as a feminist adultery text. Zenia cannot be completely subversive because as long as she is perceived as parody I don't believe that she poses a real threat to the patriarchal language that Atwood is mocking, and her death suggests that, in the end, she is disposable like the "other woman."

Parody is perhaps a limiting term to use when looking at Atwood's text as feminist and although she undermines the institution of marriage with the character of Zenia, she also makes it difficult for the reader to take this subversion seriously as all her characters become rather foolish, including the "other woman." Her novel reads almost like a Shakespearian comedy of errors where she uses an inappropriate subject such as adultery with all the trimmings of suicide, betrayal, and deception, to parody the institution of marriage as a whole. However, she manages to make a mockery of the "other woman" in the process and denies any possibility for Zenia to completely reclaim

her “otherness” and remain subversive. Parody is an effective means of resistance and subversion in terms of marriage in The Robber Bride but does not leave many options for the character of the “other woman.” In this sense Atwood’s text also falls short of a feminist reading.

III

Adultery is a topic that Evelyn Lau often confronts in her work, especially the representation of the “other woman.” Her work includes poetry, fiction, short stories and autobiography, each one dealing in part with adultery. Lau is a fascinating writer to consider when exploring the female adultery plot because she explores the theme of adultery in all her work and consistently seeks out ways in which to subvert the traditional novel of female adultery. Lau writes about the “other woman” with a stark honesty. Her words are startling because they are familiar; they are the words of the adultery plot that Lau gives back to the “other woman.” She most often writes about a young woman involved in an affair with an older, married man and at first her stories seem to be common place - a relationship destined to end before it begins. However, Lau does not fall into the trap of the female adultery plot so easily, and a close examination of her work reveals a multi-layered approach to writing about the “other woman” that deconstructs the standard literary tropes of the adultery plot, creates alternate spaces of adultery within the text and opens up the possibility of a feminist reading.

In her novel, Other Women, Lau writes about Fiona, a young woman who pursues a relationship with Raymond, an older, married man. The title of Lau’s novel is a bold statement that suggests difference from the beginning. Lau chooses a title that is provocative and straight to the point, there is no shame and no hiding behind a different title. The shock value of the title is also productive in terms of undermining the moral

framework usually associated with tales of adultery. Writers of “classic” texts of adultery such as Tolstoy and Flaubert, use the names of their “other women” as the titles for their works, but there is a distinct message that this sends. Tolstoy’s Anna Karenin suggests that Anna is going to be the subject of the book; that it is her story. However, the notion of adultery is not introduced immediately and the delay provokes a certain amount of shock and judgment when Anna becomes involved with her lover. The reader may not have expected to find a story about adultery and might have been disappointed by Anna’s actions and feel morally affronted by her behaviour. Naming the book after the heroine suggests that Tolstoy considers Anna somehow responsible for what happens, that the reader should not forget that it is her story on those grounds. She also stands alone in the title of the book, and with this title Tolstoy signals the potential for Anna to be held solely responsible for the events in the book.⁴

Flaubert’s title Madame Bovary amounts to much the same thing, except that he adds a formality to his title that emphasizes the social implications of Emma Bovary’s actions. Anna Karenin also has her husband’s name but the implications of this are not immediately obvious from the title. By calling Emma Madame in the title, he draws attention to the fact that she is married and therefore has a moral and social obligation to be a perfect wife. It also suggests that her main function is as a wife, and that first and foremost her responsibilities are to her husband. Lau’s novel does the exact opposite. She chooses a title that suggests adultery from the beginning and she does not set up the “other woman” for a fall in the eyes of the reader. Lau claims the title and the identity of “other woman” for her protagonist, deconstructing the notion that she belongs to someone else and refusing to name her. Emma Bovary and Anne Karenin both bear the mark of belonging to someone else because they have their husband’s names.

Lau’s narrator must claim her title as the “other woman” in order to deconstruct it and, although this naming places her within the narrative rather than completely outside, it

also emphasizes that her identity as “other” is crucial for understanding the narrative and that it reflects the paradoxical nature of the “other woman,” who exists both outside of and within the marital relationship. Drucilla Cornell describes deconstruction as having a commitment to “break open the prison of what has been called ontology, which becomes a prison precisely because it seems to shut out all our other possibilities as ‘unreal’” (Cornell, Beyond Accommodation 18). Cornell identifies Derridean deconstruction as “undermining ... the hierarchization of gender identity which has become ‘second nature’ to us” (Cornell 18). By naming her book Other Women, Lau is simultaneously undermining the expectation that the “other woman” is a marginal character while maintaining her difference - her status as other. The title of the book opens up the possibility for recognizing that which Cornell calls “unreal” and allows Lau to claim the “other woman” as a valid subject.

The title also implies more than one other woman and suggests that Lau is reclaiming the term for the Anna Karenins and Emma Bovarys throughout literary history. It is also not simply a general term within the narrative because it describes both the mistress and the wife. Although Fiona’s character is often described in contrast to Raymond’s wife, it is the wife who slowly becomes the other woman throughout the novel. Fiona obsesses about Raymond’s wife the way a wife might perhaps obsess over a mistress: “I wanted to know Helen’s body so well I could climb in and zip up her skin around me”(Lau 184). Fiona fantasizes about making love to Helen, watching Helen and Raymond in bed, and in a particularly violent fantasy she imagines Helen being raped by a stranger. The worlds of these two women only cross once, briefly and in silence. Lau’s novel takes place in Fiona’s world; Helen only appears in fantasy, in photos or on the other end of the telephone. Her voice is never heard except in Fiona’s head. She is in every sense “other.”

The construction of the relationship between Fiona and Helen is one of the most

interesting aspects in this novel. Lau completely disrupts the image of the perfect marriage and the untouchable wife through Fiona's fantasies involving Helen. Unlike Elizabeth Smart, Lau does not allow feelings of remorse for Helen to enter her narrative and Fiona never thinks of her as being betrayed by her husband in the way that Smart's narrator does. Rather, Helen is represented as someone who is in Fiona's way. She is the reason that Fiona cannot openly have a relationship with Raymond, and it is Helen who comes to represent the institution of marriage and the "type" of woman that Fiona will never be. Any remorse that Fiona feels for Helen involves her role as part of a marriage: "She feels a genuine sorrow for Helen, the Helen that is at this moment and can never be duplicated again, the Helen whose world is stable and whose husband is trustworthy" (Lau 79). Helen represents the ideal vision of marriage and the idea that wives are supposed to silently and loyally trust their husbands without question. Helen represents a security taken for granted that also means a loss of power because Fiona knows that she can enter Helen's life at any given moment, turn things upside down and pursue what she seems to want most - Raymond: "She has fantasized a hundred times about phoning Helen at her office, making her cry out with a few words about her husband's soft kisses on Fiona's face and hands and belly" (Lau 77). However, Fiona's feelings for Helen are more complicated than simply wanting to hurt her with news of her husband's infidelity. Her feelings are tied to her identity as the "other woman" and the complex relationship, both in fantasy and reality, that she shares with Helen.⁵

Her thoughts of hurting Helen are in fact quite violent and it is as if Fiona is reacting to the notion of marriage as a whole and the fact that Helen has fulfilled the expectations of her gender, becoming a woman that has an other. It is the ideal image of marriage that Fiona despises and that she recognizes as maintaining her within her limited role: "But to look at them as they are in the paper makes Fiona feel as if she does not exist; in the public's perception of what is real, she does not" (Lau 76). This acknowledgment

of herself as the “other woman” in a world that considers her to be inherently morally corrupt, is a way of placing herself within the established problematic that is crucial for deconstructive reading of the text (Cornell, Beyond Accommodation 18). Lau deconstructs the language of adultery through the relationship between the “other woman” and the wife. She is again emphasizing the fact that without a wife there can be no “other woman” and instead of critiquing the act of adultery, she critiques the marriage that makes it possible.

Fiona's distrust of marriage shadows her feelings of resentment for Helen throughout the story and Helen is usually described in terms of her role: “She thinks of her strong hands around Helen's fine, wifely neck” (78). Rather than describing the “other woman” as a seductive and devious character who seeks out a man to ruin, Lau treats Helen as if she is the “other woman.” Fiona becomes obsessed with Helen and her behavior is suggestive of a stereotypical suspicious wife, looking for signs of her husband's infidelity. Fiona imagines Helen in bed with Raymond and looks for them together when she is out. She even scrutinizes a photograph of the two of them for evidence of her relationship with Raymond:

Nausea rises in a sour wave inside her as she searches Raymond's face for some evidence of their affair, not knowing exactly what she is looking for but expecting it to be there - a small bruise, a hint of lipstick, the crescent shape of her fingernails on the backs of his hands. (73)

It is more than a role-reversal, however, but a means for Lau to analyze marriage in general and the roles of gender within it.

If Helen is more like the “other woman” than Fiona, then marriage becomes more like adultery. Lau frames Fiona's story with the notion of marriage as most novels of female adultery do. However, marriage is seen as the threat and Lau seems to be suggesting that it is a burden, particularly for women. Fiona sees marriage everywhere in the novel and while she is reminded of what she will never have with Raymond, she

views marriage with a lack of trust and a feeling of dread: "They had the thinness and pallor of students, yet their rings weighed their fingers down the way rings weight the hands of wealthy matrons" (Lau 33). This image of a newly married couple suggests that marriage is perhaps a burden and the image of rings weighing heavily on the hands of wealthy matrons alludes to a sense of being jaded, with the rings as a constant reminder of social roles and expectations. Fiona distrusts marriage and cannot relate to her friends who appear happy. She asks of them "how are things really going with her?" suggesting that their contentment is an act to hide the real story, and that marriage could not possibly make them happy. It is marriage that is described in terms of cliches rather than adultery, with married couples described as "wearing matching sweatshirts and tennis shoes" (35) resembling "the couples in life insurance commercials" (73).

The couples in the novel who appear to be happily married are seen through Fiona's eyes as if they were not quite real. She feels a quiet contempt during the party of an old married friend who "had gotten heavier and wore his shirt tucked loosely into his trousers" (93). The guests at the party consist mainly of married couples who talk in "low, polite tones" and wear "comfortable shoes and no makeup" (94-95). Fiona finally asks her friend if he is happy: "'Yes, I am,' he said. His eyes gleamed, I thought with pleasure" (97). Lau writes his answer in a very provocative way, as it could suggest that he is indeed happy and it shows, but also hints that he only appears happy. Lau chooses her words very carefully throughout the text, disrupting expectations and throwing shadows of doubt on what claims to be real and true. This is especially so of her representation of marriage and all its associations of being the ideal aspiration and goal in life.

Lau also undermines the notion of marriage in her text by having many of Fiona's non-married friends also be "other women" and it becomes clear that she is instantly more comfortable with other people who reject marriage somehow. The "other women"

in the text are the “other women” of Lau’s title and also represent the “multiplicity of sexually marked voices” (Derrida 448) that Derrida identifies as necessary to transgress the boundaries of a hierarchical, oppressive order. In the case of the female adultery novel that order is written in the form of marriage, family, and the social and moral expectations of women. Helen fulfills these moral and social expectations - she is heterosexual and married, successful but devoted to her husband. She also maintains a distinct public image that demonstrates that she is a “proper” married woman and she is usually at her husband’s side during public events. These social and moral expectations are also fulfilled by Fiona’s friends whose party she feels uncomfortable at. They are also heterosexual, married and own property but they also have a child - the ultimate fulfillment of a woman’s expected social role. The “other women” of Lau’s text act in direct contrast to these socially acceptable women. Derrida says that “It is that order that a problematics of woman and a problematics of difference ... should disrupt along the way” (Derrida 448). The “other women” in her text are married friends who have lovers or have lost lovers. They are Beverly Hills matrons, and Hollywood stars juxtaposed with homeless women and prostitutes. They are women at dinner parties who seek out their next lovers and they are even drag queens in a club whose “faces hideously open, their hearts tumbling around behind their great false breasts” (Lau 24).

By creating multiple characters that are “other women” in some way, Lau certainly problematizes the notion of marriage and gender expectations. She creates a “problematics of woman and a problematics of difference” (Derrida 448) in her text by creating characters who are usually marginal and silenced and giving them more agency and movement within the text than Helen or her friends have. Lau successfully critiques the institutions of power that maintain certain women as marginal and other and problematizes their perceived difference through her use of them as functional characters in Fiona’s story. This creation of multiple others has the effect of keeping Helen on the

edges of the narrative and her representation controlled by Fiona's fantasies. She is also an "other woman" in the text, but as we have seen, she represents marriage and embodies the order that Lau is deconstructing. Helen's place in the text is complex. She is necessary in her role as the wife in order to define the the notions of the "other woman" that Lau subverts. However, she is also somewhat disposable and because she remains a part of Fiona's imagination she can be manipulated and maintained as "other."

In traditional adultery novels, marriage is disrupted but eventually smoothed out. The wife remains superior or the person whom the mistress aspires to be. In Lau's book, Fiona has no desire to marry Raymond. She cannot imagine her life without him and she loves him desperately, but marriage is not something she wants or needs. Marriage and the image of the wife is relevant for Lau's work but remains the outside element that can be manipulated or disposed of by Fiona. It is something that stands in her way and makes her "otherness" unbearable. She can physically destroy the photos that she obsessively collects of Helen and can destroy Helen in her fantasies:

I had one fantasy I could hardly bear to admit even to myself. In this, I would be standing behind a pillar in a parking lot, watching a set of keys being knocked out of Helen's hand as she walked alone to her car after work ... I imagined myself watching unflinchingly as the white, faintly circled skin of Helen's throat met the mirrored flash of a stranger's knife ... I only wanted to see the pain in her face, the strange stillness that the worst pain can sometimes produce, the masking of her features. (Lau 186)

While Raymond talks to his wife on the phone Fiona thinks that she "could open her mouth, and with just a few words, enter Helen's life" (Lau 8), but she does not. It is crucial to Lau's novel that Fiona and Helen never know each other except through Raymond: "We lavished our love and our care on the same man and yet, our hands and mouths sliding over your skin, we did not touch each other" (Lau 192). Helen is still the wife and Fiona is the mistress, but it is Fiona's story. It is her we feel for, her pain we

empathize with. As Cornell points out "women are imprisoned by stereotypes because their options are limited by forced sexual choices" (Cornell, "Sex, Gender & Equivalent Rights" 291). In many adultery novels that sexual choice is the good wife or the bad mistress, the madonna or the whore. Lau breaks out of these stereotypes, placing herself at the centre of a narrative, claiming her place as the "other woman" on her own terms.

It is Lau's vivid language and startling style that keeps Helen outside of Fiona's world. Lau constantly changes voice from third person omniscient to first person narrator where she often addresses Raymond directly. Fiona has a voice, as do Raymond, friends, strangers and many of the "other women" within the text. Helen, however, does not have a voice. When she is talking on the phone to Raymond it is his side of the conversation we hear, with her answers being imagined by Fiona. Fiona and Helen cross paths once in the novel but do not exchange words: "Helen turns towards her with a polite smile waiting to be introduced" (79). Lau keeps Helen as the "other woman" by creating a language of passion that, due to her status as wife, Helen cannot share. Fiona can be intimate with Raymond and imagine him being intimate with Helen, but Helen has no agency in these scenes. Fiona can imagine herself making love to Helen and being intimate with her: "I wanted to put my face against her chest and listen to her heartbeat climb towards orgasm" (Lau 184), but just as easily she can imagine something violent: "She thinks of her strong hands around Helen's fine, wifely neck not yet ruined by lines and wrinkles, choking her until she moans and spits up Raymond's love" (Lau 78).

Fiona's imagination and thoughts of Helen are very vivid and it is her body that is lavishly described and imagined, not that of the "mistress." It is Helen who is described as seductive and beautiful, not Fiona. Lau constructs an imagined role reversal between Helen and Fiona until it is Helen, with her "necessary pair of wifely blue eyes" (Lau 27)

who becomes the “mistress, the rival, the sexual threat” (Michie 60). Lau problematizes the notion of the standard dichotomy of wife and lover in adultery novels without dislocating herself from the traditional language of the female adultery novel. Lau completely undermines the notion of marriage as morally superior by constituting Helen as “other” and by stressing Fiona’s lack of desire for marriage.

Fiona’s relationship to marriage is not completely about denial, however, and Lau’s use of the idea of marriage emphasizes the paradox of the “other woman” described by Victoria Griffin. Griffin suggests that the “mistress” seeks to undermine the institution but is also dependent on it and as subject to it as the wife (Griffin 19). Lau illustrates this point well in Other Women with Fiona’s reaction to the ultimate symbol of women and marriage - the wedding dress. Marriage is an unavoidable reality for Fiona both in her relationship with Raymond and in her day-to-day activities. When she is at her most vulnerable during her affair, Fiona cannot seem to avoid symbols and images of marriage:

I saw the store where the orange dress had hung, the dress you thought I had coveted that night over a year ago ... Now the dress had gone, but the window was still lit, and I could clearly see the three wedding dresses that stood behind the glass ... The three white dresses hung stiffly in their glass room, away from the wind storm. (145)

A place that held a memory of Raymond now holds a reminder that she is “other.” However, Lau describes the dresses as being stiff, reinforcing the formality and uneasiness that is used to describe marriage in the rest of the book. It could be Helen wearing one of those dresses, stiff in her role as a wife. The image of the glass is also interesting as it suggests two things. On the one hand, the wedding dresses are protected behind glass from the “storm” of adultery that Fiona embodies. On the other hand, the woman who wears the dress supposedly becomes a wife and could be seen to be contained within that role just as the dresses are contained within the glass. The

wife is shielded from danger by the glass but also unable to defend herself. There is also a certain naivete suggested by the presence of the glass because the wife can see through it but it also acts as a boundary. Lau has many carefully crafted images like this throughout the books that suggest an ambivalence towards marriage on behalf of Fiona. Fiona is upset by the image of the wedding dresses in the window but Lau complicates the description of the scene to remind the reader of the complex relationships between marriage and adultery within the text.

The wedding dress, then, is not simply a symbol of marriage and Fiona's yearning to be Raymond's wife. She does not really want to be Helen, she just wants Helen to be gone. Any imaginings she has of being Raymond's wife are tempered by ambivalence and fear and the reminder that her role as the "other woman" is defined by marriage. In another scene with a wedding dress, Fiona finds herself standing in front of a store window, "tears running down her cheeks, in front of a Laura Ashley display of a lacy wedding dress the colour of English cream" (Lau 110). This image may suggest a longing for something that appears unattainable for Fiona and a desire to be a bride, but it could also be read as Fiona lamenting the loss of something inherently female. It is as though she is being denied access to being a woman through her transgression of marital boundaries and her role as the "other woman." Lau is collecting the image of Laura Ashley, the idea of English cream, and a lace dress together to conjure the image of a "lady," the kind of lady that Emma Bovary and Anna Karenin were expected to be, and the exact opposite of what Fiona finds desirable.

Lau makes this distinction between the "feminine" symbol of the white wedding dress and Fiona's complicated feelings about her role as the "other woman" and the role of wife she is supposed to desire. The wedding dress represents the essentialist notion that all women want to be brides because they are women. Lau undermines this point with a scene where Fiona is trying on clothes and imagines a different reflection in

the mirror: "I see myself in a wedding dress crumpled and stained; black buttons decorate my breast. I hold a fistful of dead red roses, brittle as dried bloodstains, and walk through incense so thick it leaves a trail of ashes across my gown" (57). This image is a complete contrast to the image of the perfect white dress, which is supposed to represent the perfect bride and the perfect woman.

Fiona, then, is inextricably linked to Helen in ways that are linked to marriage but often separate from the dichotomy of the wife and the "other woman." In this way, Other Women is similar to By Grand Central Station because Lau allows Fiona to engage with the idea of Helen separately from Raymond. Smart exploits the conventional attitude towards marriage and adultery, as does Lau, creating a space for the "other woman." It is possible to conceive of Smart's heroine as a feminist adulterer due to her acknowledgement of her paradox, her exploitation and denial of the institution of marriage and her defiant defence of her love. However Smart's narrator does not completely control the image of marriage and of the wife as Lau does. Smart's other woman constantly talks about the pain and suffering of the wife and equates it with her own. She allows the wife into her world and all the guilt that comes with it: "If I am suffering, think what she suffered - a hundred times more and without hope, and I was dazzlingly happy on top of her profound and excruciating misery" (86). Smart collapses the notion of the other woman when she allows the wife to have emotions in her fantasy. As Helen Michie points out, there is a certain danger in "the incorporation of the other...into sameness" (Michie 60). Lau does not allow Fiona and Helen to have the same feelings in Other Women. It is crucial for Lau to avoid "sameness" and to construct Helen as "other" in order to subvert the standard stereotypes of the wife and lover.

Lau also uses this technique in her poetry and again subverts the image of adultery from within the framework of stereotypical images. "The Other Woman" is an ambiguous poem. The title again suggests adultery and that the poem will be about a

mistress. However, Lau constructs a brilliant poem from the perspective of the mistress who creates someone else as other. The narrator of the poem imagines her lover talking to a therapist about his affair with a woman, the narrator. Unlike Other Women where Lau creates Helen as the other woman on the fringes, without a voice, in this poem it is the lover who does not speak. Both women in this poem talk to the lover. The other woman in this poem could be any one of the women in his life - his wife, his therapist or his lover. The wife becomes even more displaced because she is an underlying presence that is never directly mentioned. The lover takes the place of the wife and becomes threatened by the female therapist: "who after all can compete with a good analyst / aged to brilliance / the lamp she tilts on your face offers a gentler caress / than my fingertips" (Lau, Oedipal Dreams 32). What is interesting about this poem is the way in which Lau plays with conventional stereotypes and images of the other woman. She undermines the double standard of morality that is pervasive in attitudes about women's sexual transgression and stereotypical portrayals of female adultery. Lau exposes these stereotypes of adultery and oppressive representations of the "other woman" by playing with them in this poem.

The narrator (the mistress) describes her relationship as a standard and somewhat clichéd affair "more satisfying than the fleeting entertainment of a visit to my apartment on your lunch hour" (32) and describes herself as a "fallen woman" (33). The so-called mistress seems dishevelled and almost pathetic, comparing herself to the therapist who "needs no paint or perfume or husky bedroom undertones" (33). The mistress is scared and vulnerable, afraid she will lose her lover who is "preoccupied with an assortment of lies" (33). The mistress has taken on the role of the wife. It is the therapist who is portrayed as the dangerous threat to stability. The difference in Lau's poem is that the stability is in the form of an adulterous relationship.

What is extremely clever about Lau's poem is that the other woman, the

therapist, uses "the seduction of the couch" (32) to expose more clichés and stereotypes about adultery. The therapist is described as "aged to brilliance" and the narrator is described as a "girl" (32). The implied reasons for the affair "about core conflicts and unipolar depression and something as simple/ as mid-life crisis" (33). These elements, commonly associated with adultery, remind us that we are reading about an extra-marital affair even as we are asked to sympathize with the mistress. The therapist is constructed as a sly and manipulative seducer who "offers...a glass of whiskey" (33) and "is warm as a womb" (33). The reader is reminded that adultery is perceived as wrong and transitory but Lau constructs the therapist, not the mistress, as the other woman. Lau completely subverts the notion of the young, seductive vixen who steals a man away from happiness but never separates herself from the existing language of affairs. Lau manipulates what Derrida would call "the performative power of language" (Cornell, Beyond Accommodation 18) and acknowledges the possibility of the other woman as someone who moves far beyond a traditional and pervasive stereotype.

While considering Lau's poem "the Other Woman" it is interesting to note that nowhere in the poem does Lau mention the words adultery or mistress. From the title of the poem we assume that it is going to be about a mistress, the "other woman" being the phrase most associated with adultery. It is Lau's use of conventional stereotypes that frame the poem as a story of adultery and it is her clichés that define the personas in the poem. Lau understands that the stereotypes and notions of the "other woman" are metaphors that can be restyled and reinterpreted to challenge patriarchal conventions that surround adultery. The fact that adultery is readily assumed as the topic of the poem purely because of Lau's use of stereotypes and clichés is precisely the reason that Lau has used them. She consciously draws the reader into a common and familiar space, instantly recognizable, and then breaks down all the

conventions by subverting the theme. The fact that the reader recognizes these stereotypes as being associated with adultery is the point I believe Lau is trying to make and ultimately trying to subvert.

Space is also an fundamental element of the adultery plot that Lau treats in an interesting way because she moves her narrative outside of the traditional domestic spaces - kitchen and bedroom - that are most generally associated with marriage and family. Her narrative takes place among the spaces of adultery - the hotel lobbies and bedrooms, restaurants, and bars. There are also the spaces that are in between - the heterotopic spaces of cabs and elevators that are constantly moving, taking the lovers from one world to the next. I identify these spaces as the spaces of adultery because they work in direct contrast to the "marital" home in the text and are the actual spaces within which the act of adultery takes place. These spaces are important because they remove adultery from the territory of marriage and act as hybrid spaces, partly domestic but without the familial associations. These spaces also blur the boundary of public and private. The hotel bedroom, for example, is a private room within a public building. The "other woman" can transgress these spatial boundaries, gaining a power that she cannot hold within the marital home.

As Bill Overton has pointed out, the novel of female adultery in the 19th Century was fraught with social and ideological meaning due to women's association with marriage, property, family, motherhood and the home (5). Female adultery was considered a moral defamation of the virtues associated with family, the virtues that women were supposed to uphold at all cost. This meant that women could not have an adulterous relationship, and they were also responsible if their husbands did. Married women were somehow responsible for not being a good enough wives if their husbands strayed outside of the marital home. Overton goes on to say that for these reasons, male adultery was "considered to be of little or no consequence" in the adultery

plot, and that the adultery of unmarried women ("other women") was virtually ignored (5). However, I think it is precisely for these reasons that the spaces of adultery that occur in Lau's novel are so important: they raise a point that Overton does not consider - that the removal of adultery from the domestic space undermines that space altogether. Without the physical space of the family home in the text, the actual family is further removed from the narrative and the "other woman" therefore poses a threat to the notion of the home as she can not be controlled according to the boundaries of the male-dominated family property.

In the texts of Tolstoy and Flaubert the actual act of adultery does not always transgress the boundary of the marital home and take place in the house. However, the actual location of the act of adultery is overshadowed by the fact that the narrative itself is connected to gendered notions of property and ownership. Emma and Anna are associated with property in the same way that the marital home is considered property. They belong to their husbands just as their homes do. removing their adultery from the marital home does not have a subversive effect because their sexual transgression are considered an affront to the men in their lives and an assault on their property. Inside or outside of the domestic space, adultery is still constructed as crossing a boundary of a male-dominated family property. Lau, on the other hand, disrupts the institution of marriage in general in order to undermine the notion of women as property and creates alternate spaces of adultery that are completely disconnected from this idea.

In her book Apartment Stories, Sharon Marcus identifies the topography of a narrative as the way the text inscribes spatial relations: "the ways that narration establishes zones as exterior and interior, mobile and fixed, global and local, publicly open and privately opaque" (Marcus 10). She goes on to say that spatial relations in the 19th century narrative were linked to an increasing anxiety around the public and private spheres and women's roles within them (Marcus 149-151). Emphasis was

placed on the house rather than the apartment building because the house represented a clearer boundary between the domestic space and the public space and was reinforced the notion of property and ownership (Marcus 149-151). Marcus illustrates this point with the example of Balzac's Physiologie du Mariage, an 1829 manual for the prevention of female adultery that suggests that men should invest in property that was free-standing, set back from the street and surrounded by a walled garden. Such property held the threat of adultery at bay because it would be harder for a woman to leave the property or another man to enter unseen (Marcus 55). A man's property, which included his wife and children, would therefore be safe from violation. Bill Overton suggests that the novel of female adultery became popular in the late 19th Century, in part, because of the ideological notions about women and the domestic space identified by Marcus (Overton 12). The family and home were considered to be women's responsibility and the threat of sexuality outside of marriage needed to be controlled (Overton 12). This ideology no doubt contributed to the fact that adultery was considered a violation of the home as well as the marital relationship, and the domestic space became the central element in the female adultery novel.

Lau sets up the dichotomy between the domestic space and the spaces of adultery right from the beginning of the book, when Fiona meets Raymond in a hotel room and waits while he talks to his wife on the phone: "She watches him pace beside the bed, its covers now smooth as the layer of icing on a fresh cake" (Lau 6). Lau combines the organized crispness of the hotel room with the symbol of the bed that represents both the adultery and the marital relationship on the other end of the phone. As Raymond is pacing by the bed, talking to his wife, Fiona is imagining that same bed with the tumble of sheets that suggest intimacy: "His face in bed the night before ... the cream-coloured sheets around their bodies" (4). This opening scene is very provocative because it reads as if the "other woman" has called her lover at home.

Fiona is imagining the space as hers and Raymond's, with Helen's phone calls an interruption into her "domestic" scene. Although Raymond is the one who let Fiona in to the room, and it is his conversation with Helen that keeps Fiona sitting in silence, Fiona still maintains control of the space because she knows that the sound of her voice could change everything and that she "could scream past his protective body and across the distances, her own name. Fiona!" (7) The marital relationship is unstable in this scene, and it is Helen who is on the outside.

Helen may be on the outside but it is Fiona who eventually leaves the hotel room, knowing that Raymond will call his wife back the moment she has gone. Although this act ultimately shuts Fiona out of a private moment between Helen and Raymond, Lau frames the entire scene with an interesting spatial dynamic. Raymond is talking to Helen when Fiona arrives, while she is there and once she leaves. However, immediately before and immediately after these moments occur, Fiona occupies the public space of the hotel hallways and lobby. This space acts as a transitional space, the public area surrounding the private room where Fiona can move easily without borders. In these spaces Fiona is completely the "other woman" and it is this identity that allows her access to this space in a way that Helen would not have. Fiona's reasons for being in this space are inextricably linked to her role as Raymond's lover, a role that belongs in the hallways and bedrooms of hotels. Standing outside the hotel room door, Fiona says that she "knocks for a while longer - stealthily, like a lover, and then sharply and impatiently, like a maid making her morning rounds" (2). She equates herself with a maid, someone whose appearance in a hotel hallway would not be unusual and someone who has access to the bedrooms without question and can pass through the physical border of the doorway as part of her role. As the "other woman," Fiona knows how to be in this space, and her role is not questioned when she "walks out into the lobby among the bellhops and businessmen" (13). The presence of the "other

woman" within the walls of a hotel are as commonplace as the maid's.

Lau ends the opening scene with Fiona leaving the hotel room silently, deferring to Raymond's wish that she not let Helen hear her. The parting of Fiona and Raymond in this scene is uncomfortable because Fiona remains silent and does as he asks without question. While this illustrates the complex feelings of obsession and desire that Fiona feels for Raymond, it also seems to set up an impenetrable boundary between Fiona and Helen, with Raymond in control and both women silenced. Lau is perhaps trying to set up the boundaries of the relationship between Fiona, Raymond and Helen that she will eventually break down, because she does not allow Raymond, or the notion of marriage, this much power again. However, as Fiona leaves the hotel, through the hallways and lobby, she finally makes a sound: "After a moment she realizes it is a sound she is making with her own shoes. It seems incredible to her, that at last she is making a sound" (13). Something as simple as heels clicking on a hard surface allows Lau to give Fiona her voice back. Fiona's sound does not simply resonate within the walls of the bedroom, instead it echoes within the main body of the hotel, as is she claims her right to that entire space.

Lau allows the reader to see Fiona within the spaces of adultery in a way that is very different from the other spaces and places in the text. She does this through the use of mirrors which also allow Fiona to see herself as the world might view her. Lau gives a detailed description of Fiona as she walks through a hotel and sees herself in "the mirror at the end of the hall, her body emerging inside the antique frame knotted with vines and roses" (1). This particular mirror is interesting because it seems to be a typical design for a hotel but it also seems like it would fit in the home of a wealthy family such as Raymond's and Helen's. Indeed as Lau develops her narrative, it seems to match Helen's personality and taste: "the photograph showed her wearing cream-coloured slacks with sharp creases, and a cashmere sweater stitched with pearls" (181). At this

moment however, Fiona sees herself in the mirror, emerging from the surrounding space into the frame as she has done with Raymond and Helen's marriage. Lau describes Fiona in a seductive way with a mouth that is "soft, red, always ready to apologize" and regarded by men as "her best feature" (2). Again, this is the closest likeness that Lau allows to a cliché of the seductress, ready to please and defer to her lover. Appearing in the mirror for the reader to see, Fiona embodies a stereotype, a sexualized image of the "other woman." However, just as easily as she appeared in the mirror, she can disappear. She can remain within the frame and the image for as long as she likes and can manipulate that image. Lau does not give us a full image of Fiona again as completely as this one and the clichéd notion of the seductress is broken down from this point on.

In another hotel room with Raymond, the lovers look at themselves together in the bedroom mirrors: "What did we look like together, you and I, hotel sheets tumbling around us. Were we viable?" (18) As they are leaving the room together, Fiona sees their reflection in the mirrors of the lobby: "I was briefly shocked that we bore no traces of our transformation in the mirror, that someone could have walked past us, seeing only another couple in that hotel of conventions and assignations" (18). They can easily move through the lobby unnoticed but the act of looking in the mirror makes them real and allows Fiona to confirm their identities as illicit lovers, who are both shocking and normal. In the hallway mirror Fiona embodies the image of the "other woman," in the bedroom mirror she and Raymond embody the image of lovers in bed, in the lobby mirror they reflect the image of an ordinary couple or business acquaintances walking through a hotel. The mirrors enable Lau to manipulate the perception of Raymond and Fiona and to illustrate the transitory nature of the spaces they occupy that allow them to move in and out of their identities. The fact that Fiona was only "briefly shocked" (18) because she and Raymond did not look like lovers in their reflection emphasizes the fact

that in the hotel space they are not required to define their relationship; it exists within a space without borders. The hotel is a space where everyone is "other" in some way and Fiona can choose to embrace her otherness or deny it. In this way the dichotomy that maintains Fiona as "other" is deconstructed. Lau has created a space that does not dislocate itself from the physicality of the affair but allows for movement and redefinition within it.

The hotel becomes a space of adultery which is both public and private, where the "other woman" can claim her identity without fear within its walls but can also move freely from lobby, to hallway, to bedroom, and can move through the boundaries of the hotel through "the glass doors that lead into the wild, dark city" (13). Lau is showing that the hotel may seem like a space that contains the "other woman" and keeps her away from the sanctity of the marital home, but in fact the hotel undermines the notion of home by mimicking its safety. The "other woman" can move freely within the hotel and also transgress its boundaries. The hotel is also not a static space in the sense that there are hotels in every city and Lau moves Fiona and Raymond from one hotel to another. The spaces of adultery are everywhere and therefore the "other woman" is everywhere, which is in direct contrast to Helen's domestic space which is always in the same place. Helen is limited by spatial and geographical boundaries in a way that Fiona will never be due to her status as "other." Lau undermines the safety of the marital home in this way by having Fiona move from place to place, and although she is never within the home of Raymond and Helen, she could be.

The spaces of adultery, then, are subversive spaces that directly challenge the notion that women are extensions of marriage and property within the traditional adultery plot. Lau has carefully constructed these spaces and uses glass in an interesting way within the text and within the spaces of adultery. There are sheets of glass everywhere in the places that Fiona goes, from the glass doors of the hotel to the glass windows that

house the wedding dresses. The use of glass in the narrative again illustrates Victoria Griffin's notion of the "other woman" being a paradox (Griffin 19). She can see through the transparent barrier but it remains a barrier none-the-less. However, glass may also appear to be real but may be an illusion or distort reality and perception. It is an unstable border that Lau makes good use of with various hotel doors:

Gesturing for me to follow, you continued through the circling glass doors, unable to stop or turn back. I did not know that I would see you always as I was seeing you then, caught in the doors like an image pressed into a book, the doors turning and you helplessly turning with them. (Lau 115)

Raymond is in flux at this moment. He does not belong to Fiona's world but he does not belong to Helen's world either. He is in the revolving world between marriage and Fiona, between his wife and the "other woman." Fiona can pass through this doorway into the space of the hotel, transgressing the border that is marriage. Fiona is constantly passing through doorways and entrances but Helen does not really move throughout the narrative, except in Fiona's fantasies. Fiona's movement is made possible by Lau's use of the spaces of adultery.

The glass doors are distinct from the hotel bedroom doors that Raymond closes and locks behind Fiona "the bolt chiming in the silence of the hallway" as she either enters the room or leaves it. This heavy, opaque door symbolizes the dichotomy between the wife and the "other woman." They can never both be in the same space at the same time and Fiona's identity is different depending which side of the door she is on. If she is inside she is completely the "other woman" but linked to Raymond. If she is outside she is in the transitory place described above that allows her to claim that "otherness" for herself. Outside of the room, the border of the door that Raymond usually closes in order to phone his wife places Fiona in more of a fluid space, with borders that are easily transgressed through revolving transparent glass doors. Even though the bedroom door is supposed to protect Helen from Fiona, Raymond places

her in a more vulnerable position because he has no control over the surrounding space. The glass doors act as the barrier between Fiona and Helen that Lau can manipulate. They can be transparent or opaque, or frosted to create a distortion. They can be open or closed, or revolving to create a state of flux. Glass is its own deconstructive entity, acting as a border that Fiona is able to access but Helen and Raymond cannot. Raymond is caught in between and Helen cannot transgress the border because the idea of glass is connected primarily to the spaces of adultery that she does not have access to due to her status as wife.

The use of glass also suggests a certain danger because Fiona describes the restaurant where she first had a drink with Raymond as being full of glass and mirrors and as "a vast expanse of sharp angles" (143). She is unable to return there after their relationship is over without imagining his reflection or catching a glimpse of him in the fractured light. While the image of glass adds an interesting dimension to the aspect of understanding both sides of a boundary, it is also a deceptive border. It is deceptive because of its illusive transparency that might allow Fiona to be up against it before she realizes it is there. As a metaphor for the dangers of adultery, glass works very well and as a deconstructive tool it is also effective because Fiona may spend many moments behind a glass door watching Raymond drive back to his wife, but she can also see her own reflection, the reflection of the "other woman."

The spaces of adultery, then, are spaces that work in a contrary manner to the notion of the family home that is often central to the ideal of marriage and a fundamental part of traditional narratives of female adultery. However, there are also the spaces in the text that have no distinct place - the spaces of the cabs, elevators and other vehicles. The relationship between Raymond and Fiona consists of many moments when they are taking their leave of each other, usually in separate cars:

We descended together to our separate vehicles ... Your car described a curve down the driveway in front of the hotel and onto the street. My taxi

followed closely behind, the driver oblivious to everything ... of course it was actually very ordinary - two cars, one of them a taxicab, for a brief moment on the same street downtown. (27-28)

Lau combines the contrary notions of being with someone but separate from them, the way that the "other woman" is both within and outside of the institution of marriage. Fiona and Raymond are not defined by these spaces, but they are defined by the ones they have just left and the ones they move toward. However, there is a sense of movement and transition within the cars, a sense of the unknown. Fiona could at any moment shout "follow that man" (27) and change the course of their journeys. These spaces are important because they contain a certainty and an element of the unknown like the adulterous relationship: "The traffic would pass on the street behind you, merging and separating in its dependable pattern ... you slipped inside your car and I inside mine, bending our bodies towards our different destinations" (28). Fiona has known from the beginning of her relationship with Raymond that he would never leave his wife and although this causes her pain, it also allows her to completely claim her identity as "other." As with the moments in the cars, she is always moving towards or away from Raymond.

In a particular provocative scene, Lau describes a journey that Fiona has taken in a cab that leaves her stuck in traffic outside of Raymond's office building. There is a passing parade that contains sparkling floats that were "ambling down the road like giant cakes, topped by women in aprons who swung their hips and called out words she could not understand" (47). Fiona is stationary outside of Raymond's building while a confusion of domestic symbols and noise goes by in a parade that is "In Celebration of the Year of the Family" and which the cab driver dryly announces is "some government crap" (47). Just as Fiona begins to relax and is "drinking in the noise" she thinks that she sees Raymond in an office window "lured ... by the noise in the street below" (47-48). However, before any clarity is available the cab begins to move again into traffic. This

scene is extremely interesting because of Lau's decision to make the parade about family and to have Fiona lured by it and imagining Raymond doing the same thing. It is the heterotopic space of the cab and its movement that carries Fiona away as the parade resumes its course in the other direction. Lau breaks down the dichotomy between the "other woman" and the family by having Fiona able to move past it. She can enter these scenes but she cannot participate, a fact that is emphasized by the parade moving away from her. The two are oppositional but will often come into contact and Lau suggests that while the "other woman" may be inextricably linked to notions of marriage and family, she will never be a complete part of it unless she denies her "otherness."

These heterotopic⁶ spaces, then, delineate what Christie McDonald has described as Derrida's "two-phase program" of deconstruction (McDonald 447). The first of two deconstructive stages entails a subversion and breaking down of binaries that would allow for a previously subordinate term to become a dominant one (447). The second phase is what Derrida sees as having the potential to bring about change through the forging of a "new concept" (447). The spaces of adultery in Lau's novel that have no place, such as cabs and elevators, could be read as being a part of both phases. They are subversive spaces in the sense that they are bridges between the world of Fiona and Raymond's adultery and the rest of their lives, and they also transgress those boundaries through their movement. It is the movement of these spaces that opens up the possibility for forging new concepts because these spaces are in a constant state of flux and defy static definition. Within the second stage of deconstruction, "the relationship of one phase to another is marked less by conceptual determinations (that is, where a new concept follows an archaic one) than by a transformation or general deformation of logic" (Derrida 449). Within the heterotopic spaces of the cabs, for example, Fiona's difference is not determined as oppositional or

positional. When she inhabits the spaces of adultery such as hotels, her identity as the "other woman" is complete and needs to maintain its opposition to Helen in order to remain in the centre of the narrative. However, in the moving body of the cab Fiona's identity is in flux and the logic of her identity is also unstable. It is perhaps this instability that creates the possibility for a reconstitution of identity and subjectivity because at these moments Fiona is in a transitional space. She is not defined by the space of the cab and therefore she has the potential to move in a new direction both symbolically and physically. She is subversive at this point because she has the freedom of movement and a knowledge of that freedom.

There is potential here for a new concept of the novel of adultery that can be read as feminist. The heterotopic spaces carry the lovers from place to place but they rarely end up at the same destination. The roads that the cabs travel on, the elevators between floors, the escalators in the lobbies and even the hotel hallways are all transitional spaces that lead somewhere and nowhere at once. They form a kind of map that Lau's novel of female adultery moves within, a grid or framework that plots the lovers' routes. There are different cities in the book but the maps would all be the same - they lead from hotel, to restaurant, to airport, but they never lead to home. By home, I mean the domestic abode that is associated with marriage and the place where Raymond lives with Helen. There seem to be no roads leading to or from her space, no maps that lead Fiona to Helen or Helen to Fiona. In this way, Helen is denied access to the central narrative and Fiona is able to maintain Helen at the edges. The fact that the map of Other Women does not lead Fiona to Raymond or to Helen suggests that there is potential that it will lead her somewhere else, perhaps completely away from the female adultery plot and into a narrative that does not require an "other." However, for the purposes of a feminist reading of Lau's text, Fiona's endless journeys that seem to constantly be in transition create an interesting and somewhat subversive space in which

to map a feminist adultery novel that is not grounded in patriarchal notions of women and marriage. For Emma Bovary and Anna Karenin there can be no spaces of adultery in the same context that Lau uses them. As discussed above, these two women were considered property and maintained accordingly within the textual spaces of the novels. Any transgression of the domestic space or attempt to create alternate spaces are negated by the fact that Emma and Anna are inextricably linked to ideas around women as property. Fiona does not belong to Raymond or to anyone and therefore cannot be constructed in the same way and Lau's spaces of adultery are thus perceived as feminist.

Finally, the body acts as a type of space in Lau's work. It is both a site for the act of adultery and an inscribed site that incorporates a map of its own. Elizabeth Grosz suggests that an individual's history is marked on their body, inscribed by social processes, history and our own compliance in marking our bodies (Grosz 143). She states that these bodily inscriptions "do not create a map of the body but [creates] the body precisely as a map" (139). Lau describes the body as a marked object in her novel, using it to mark the difference between Fiona and Helen:

She is trying to leave a mark upon him. That is why she bites his mouth as if to draw blood, to break the skin's elastic surface and taste his opened flesh. That is why she buries her face, her breasts in his hair, leaving it scented and unruly. She wants only to leave some mark of her passing on his body, so she can point to it later in a photograph and say, I did that. (74)

Fiona wants to leave some trace of herself on Raymond's body and disrupt Helen's life. It is her way of entering Helen's world and remaining a part of Raymond without entering the spaces of their marriage. She secretly leaves her mark on Raymond in the hope that Helen will find it: "the lipstick clinging to you like a leech, ripe, undisturbed, waiting for the necessary pair of wifely blue eyes to fix there" (27). Her desire to mark Raymond is described as a way of entering Helen's life, so that his body will resemble a map that

leads Helen to Fiona. It is interesting that much of the corporeal description within the book relates to Helen and Fiona rather than Raymond and Fiona. Of course Lau describes the intimacy shared between Fiona and Raymond, but what becomes more important is the intimacy that Fiona imagines with Helen. It is as if Fiona wants to mark Helen with her otherness, and wants Helen's body map to point towards Fiona. Helen's body becomes a space that Fiona uses in her imagination to negotiate her relationship with Raymond and to rewrite her own body map: "I wanted to examine between her legs with the probing interest of a physician, to explore the inches of her skin for marks, moles, wrinkles, to measure the proportion of muscle to fat, the density and porosity of her skeleton" (184). Although Fiona may seem to be examining Helen because she has a desire to be in her place and be like her, she also fantasizes about her in a violent way, where Helen is attacked by a stranger so that "her vagina would remember forever the whorl of his thumbprint and the bladed edges of his nails" (185).

The mixture of intrigue, desire and violence that Fiona feels when she thinks of Helen indicates the complex feelings of obsession and desire she feels for Raymond, a desire that she wishes "could be solidified into a tangible object she could squeeze out of his wife" (78). She does not blame Helen for being Raymond's wife, but she understands that Helen is standing between her and Raymond. By examining every inch of her body in her fantasies, Fiona is looking for difference rather than sameness. She wants to know what Helen smells like, what she wears to bed, how she brushes her hair, and she wants to know how she behaves with Raymond: "I imagined Helen's tired face buried in the back of your neck... and the positions in which, half-waking in the night you would coax her limbs" (183). However, as her obsession with Helen leads to violent fantasies it becomes evident that Fiona does not desire to be like Helen. She is simply trying to understand the map that is Helen's body in order to find the best way to divert Raymond to her own map. Fiona's obsession with Helen is about difference and

Lau, again, creates a subversion of the traditional female adultery plot by maintaining Helen as the objectified, female body, controlled by the "other woman."

IV

Evelyn Lau, then, creates a complex narrative of desire and obsession within the spaces of adultery. I believe that her narrator is a feminist character because she directly challenges the stereotypes and oppressive discourses that were part of the traditional novel of female adultery. Lau claims an identity for Fiona from the beginning by naming the book Other Women and subverts the notion that otherness is a characteristic that should be placed on the margins. Fiona is central to her own narrative, claiming her story as her own, and not deferring to the image of the ideal wife. Helen is marginalized in her role as the wife and is denied access to the main body of the narrative due to her status as wife. Lau contains Fiona within the centre of the narrative through a complex weaving of spaces that are inaccessible to Helen. She also creates alternate spaces in between that give Fiona mobility throughout the narrative and allow her the potential to move beyond this story. Lau does not let Fiona die like Anna Karenin or Emma Bovary. Instead, Fiona survives the fate that her literary predecessors were destined for and Lau writes her out of the cliché. Lau deconstructs the tropes of the female adultery novel and creates a narrative that allows for a feminist reading.

Her text can be read as a successful deconstruction of a literary tradition, but does Lau take her ideas in a new direction as a full and subversive deconstructive reading dictates? Are there any new possibilities for feminism within the pages of Lau's work? As we have seen, the heterotopic spaces suggest that there is the potential for Fiona's character to move in a new direction. They suggest a fluidity of boundaries that make transgression easier for the "other woman." However, there are some similarities in the

work of Atwood, Smart and Lau that suggest a potentially new reading of female adultery located within the relationship between the "other woman" and the wife. Atwood's text is primarily about the relationship between Roz, Charis, Tony and Zenia, as Zenia uses her friendships with these women to get what she wants. The story belongs to all the women, not just Zenia. Smart's novel involves the wife in the narrative from the beginning, and the wife moves in and out of the narrative as the narrator attempts to keep her on the margins but lets her into her emotions. Lau's novel develops a more complex relationship between the "other woman" and the wife as Helen becomes prominent in Fiona's fantasies. In all three narratives, the wives are inextricably linked to the "other women," suggesting that there is perhaps another approach to writing the novel of female adultery and to reconstituting female sexuality within the adultery plot.

In the introduction to her book Between Men, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick suggests that the triangle of two men who desire the same woman in the 19th Century novel was presented as heterosexual desire but was really about the relationship between the two men (Sedgwick 474- 475). The hidden homosocial and homosexual aspects of this literary traditions are directly linked to gender difference, the structure and constitution of sexuality, and the access that men and women have to power (Sedgwick 464). Sedgwick is suggesting that there is a sub-text to narratives that focus so intently on the rivalry between men for the attention of one woman and I would argue that this resonates with my reading of the female adultery plot. Although the wives in Smart and Lau's texts may not be actively positioning themselves in opposition to the "other women," they are construed as rivals in the narrators' imaginations. Atwood, however, openly discusses the rivalry that Tony, Roz and Charis have to engage in to deal with Zenia. Sedgwick points out that the "diacritical opposition between homosocial and homosexual seems to be much less thorough and dichotomous for women, in our

society, than for men" (464). Is there a possibility, then, that these narratives of female adultery are not simply about adultery but about the women's desires for one another? Could this be the new direction that the feminist adultery novel will take? Are the boundaries between homosocial and homosexual desire blurred in the adultery plot?

Men do become peripheral in these narratives to some extent, particularly in Atwood's text. However, the relationships that Roz, Charis, and Tony share with Zenia are not really intimate. Atwood chooses to focus on different stereotypes around different types of women - Roz is a workaholic business woman, Charis is a crystal-wearing, yoga teacher and healer, and Tony is an introspective, university professor. They all find Zenia charming and seductive, but they are bound to the heterosexual plot due to the stereotype that Zenia embodies. She is a seducer of men, a man-eater who preys on specific men and exposes their weaknesses. It would perhaps be the ultimate subversion if Zenia did desire women because her sexuality would completely undermine the gendered plot that Atwood is so cleverly criticizing.

Smart's narrator has a more complex relationship with her lover's wife and at times the two characters are hard to tell apart. Smart allows the narrator to feel emotionally connected to the wife through the act of her husband's betrayal and in the process allows the wife into the centre of the narrative. While I believe that this ultimately reinforces the female adultery plot and hinders a feminist reading, it is interesting to consider the boundary between the wife and the "other woman" within the context of Sedgwick's analysis. The relationship between Smart's narrator and the wife does not simply blur the boundary between homosocial and homosexual desire, but actually blurs the boundary between the self and the other. The narrator does not name herself or any of the other characters in the novel and it is difficult to decide whom she is referring to on many occasions. The "other woman" almost becomes the wife in some scenes which suggest that their intimacy takes place on the body of the husband. It is

perhaps a subconscious projection on behalf of the narrator, or perhaps a deep longing to be her lover's only partner. Smart, however, maintains what Sedgwick calls "obligatory heterosexuality" which is a "consequence of such patriarchal institutions as heterosexual marriage" (465). Smart maintains a level of intimacy in her writing between the wife and the "other woman" that reinforces the feelings that both women have for the husband. He does not have much agency in the narrative, but he does not become disposable like the men in Atwood's narrative.

Lau, on the other hand, creates an extremely intimate relationship between Fiona and Helen, albeit through fantasy. Fiona's fantasies about Helen could be seen as an act of adultery insofar as she does not share her thoughts with Raymond or anyone else. The fantasies have a voyeuristic quality to them, which adds an element of excitement to the narrative. It is interesting, though that the most intimate moments between Helen and Fiona are also the most violent, suggesting that Helen is a danger to Fiona's relationship and is being punished. This element adds a certain eroticism to Lau's narrative and suggests that Fiona is finding what is missing in her relationship with Raymond through her fantasies about his wife. However, Lau also keeps the intimacy with Helen safely within fantasy and therefore Helen has limited agency. This lack of agency creates a power dynamic not unlike the traditional representation of adultery where Fiona takes the role of the married partner and Helen becomes the "other woman." I don't think it is possible to read Lau's text as being about lesbian desire because of the fantasy. The fantasy is a successful feminist tool for maintaining Helen on the edges of the narrative, but does not allow for a fluidity of boundaries around sexuality. However, the fact that Lau considers a relationship between Helen and Fiona at all is promising, and suggests that perhaps a relationship between the wife and the "other woman" would constitute the ultimate subversion of the female adultery plot and a completely successful feminist adultery novel.

The idea of a feminist adultery novel is provocative and interesting. Fictional narratives have the potential to create subversive and progressive female characters that reclaim the ultimate label of other - that of the "other woman." The feminist adultery novel is also a productive means to analyze the gendered language and images that have been pervasive in most narratives involving marriage. The "other woman" can be used as a deconstructive entity to disrupt patriarchal categories and stereotypes and transgress gendered boundaries that maintain them on the margins. Evelyn Lau's Other Women is a good example of a text that successfully undermines the institution of marriage, reclaims the notion of "otherness" for her narrator, and deconstructs the language of the novel of female adultery to create a feminist adulterer and new possibilities for a feminist approach to the "other woman."

NOTES

¹ Aritha van Herk, *Places Far From Ellesmere*, Red Deer Alberta: Red Deer College Press, 1990. 82. Places Far From Ellesmere is a rediscovery and retelling of *Anna Karenin* by Leo Tolstoy. Aritha van Herk imagines that Anna has agency in her story and is able to change the ending.

² Throughout my thesis I have cited the 1978 Revised Penguin Classic edition of Anna Karenin by Leo Tolstoy. The notes of this edition contain the following information from translator Rosemary Edmonds: "I prefer the form Anna Karenin, since the feminine form (Anna Karenina) is not usual in English" (9). For this reason I am using the same form of Karenin even though the form Karenina is more commonly used.

³ It is interesting to note here that By Grand Central Station is a fictional re-telling of an actual event. The notion of fictional autobiography holds even more potential for a feminist reading and reconstitution of the "other woman." The fact that Smart has chosen to call her narrative fictional is perhaps indicative of the limits that this text imposes on a feminist reading because of the perceived safety that fiction provides. The reclaiming of "otherness" and the complex relationship of the wife and the "other woman" in the text that I identify as feminist, would perhaps be even more provocative and subversive if the author claimed it as her own story. However, for the purpose of this reading I am exploring the narrative as fictional and as Smart's interpretation of the traditional female adultery novel.

⁴ Although Karenin is Anna's husband's name and the masculine ending of the word may imply a gendered reading of the title, it is not commonly used in Russia and does not imply ownership of Anna by her husband. Paul Goldschmidt says that Russian surnames are usually written to correspond with the gender of the subject, therefore Karenina is the correct form of Anna's name (Goldschmidt). It is a person's

patronymic name that suggests ownership and a gendered reading and it is interesting to note that Tolstoy has not included Anna's. However, Russian naming processes are complicated and there are many variations and interpretations. Rosemary Edmond's translation appears to be for convenience and does not suggest that Anna's name is an indication that she is the property of her husband. I am not suggesting that the notion of women as property is not present in the novel, but simply that the title should not be read as such.

⁵ The complex relationship between Fiona and Helen that appears in Fiona's fantasy also has a sexual undertone to it and Fiona's obsession with Helen is extremely sexually charged. While this is an important interpretation of Lau's text and to the relationship between the wife and the "other woman," it is not something I will be addressing in detail. I will discuss this issue further in regards to the body within the spaces of adultery and also in my conclusion with a discussion of female desire in the adultery triangle. I feel that an exploration of the sexual aspect between Helen and Fiona is not completely relevant to my deconstructive reading of the female adultery novel as Fiona and Helen do not actually meet. Rather, I signal this reading as a potentially new site for reading the female adultery novel as feminist and as a reconstitution of female sexuality contrary to its patriarchal restrictions.

⁶ It should be noted that I am not using Foucault's definition of heterotopia and heterotopic space. I am using the word heterotopias to describe the spaces that are in-between, the spaces with no place. Foucault's notion of heterotopic space is concerned with notions of time and space. Heterotopias are spaces in which contradictory elements are juxtaposed and are a "simultaneously mythic and real contestation of the space in which we live" (Foucault 24). Although Foucault's notion of heterotopic space is very provocative to consider in terms of the spaces of adultery, for the purpose of this thesis I am using a more general definition of heterotopia.

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