



Adultery

By Louise DeSalvo

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Just after Louise DeSalvo gave birth to her first child, her husband confessed that he was having an affair. After surviving the crisis in her marriage, she began to read and write about adultery to explore the question of why people cheat. The result is this fun and compassionate book that draws upon the lives and works of literary figures such as Edith Wharton, Virginia Woolf, and Henry Miller to offer a transforming understanding of infidelity and marriage.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Is talking about sex a kind of foreplay? Is reading *Madame Bovary* the first step on the road to ruin? In this playful analysis of the writerly life, Louise DeSalvo explores the relationship between reading about adultery, committing adultery--and writing about adultery. Sound simplistic? The formula worked for authors as diverse as Edith Wharton, Sylvia Plath, and even Robert James Waller, whose mega-bestselling *Bridges of Madison County* is, after all, about an extramarital affair.

And it also worked for DeSalvo herself--although she is not an adulterer, but an "adultery survivor" who must come to terms with her fantasies about adultery in order to heal her marriage. Her husband was a young medical resident when he had the affair that changed her life; DeSalvo was surprised to find that he did not want to leave her and their infant son but hoped instead to keep the family together. Before DeSalvo could let herself be fully present again in the marriage, however, she had to put the ghosts to rest. It's hardly surprising that, as a creative-writing professor (and the author of *Writing as a Way of Healing*), she does so by taking pen in hand to reconstruct the affair in her imagination, using writers like Colette, D.H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf, and Alfred Kinsey as her guides and revealing something frequently overlooked in our contemporary model of infidelity: adultery is often a *folie à trois*, not merely *deux*. --Patrizia DiLucchio

From Publishers Weekly

In a tart and entertaining treatise on adultery, Hunter College professor DeSalvo (*Writing as a Way of Healing*) offers sometimes dueling perspectives based on personal experience and objective curiosity. Fueled by the memory of her husband's infidelity during the early years of their marriage and by her own indiscretions with respect to former boyfriends, the author seeks to examine why people cheat and why they then love to talk and write about their perfidy. Written in a breezy, stream-of-consciousness style, the book is more than a social critique. It also serves as a portrait of a marriage that has survived adultery, as a memoir of growing up under the threat of a father's violent outbursts and as an exploration of adultery's prominence in literature, from Dante's *Divine Comedy* to the Kinsey report. DeSalvo leaps from her husband to Colette, from minor anecdotes to major hypotheses, without sacrificing clarity or sincerity. The work is tied together by literature just as, DeSalvo speculates, adultery binds its participants through the process of storytelling. She stirs the still-smoldering embers of the Clinton-Lewinsky affair as proof that Americans love a good story and all the more if it involves sexual indiscretion. In attempting to map the "uncharted and often unpredictable emotional terrain" of adultery, she provides an intelligent and thought-provoking inquiry into why sexual infidelity will always fascinate us. Agent, Geri Thoma, Elaine Markson Literary Agency. (Aug.) Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc.

From Library Journal

The myths and details of infidelity--the stolen kiss, the home shattered by a younger woman, the afternoon tryst that repeats over the course of years, and the passionate awakening brought on by a forbidden love--are the stuff of great literature and changed lives. In this swift, engaging literary memoir, DeSalvo (*Breathless*) retells her own adultery story (her husband's affair almost destroyed their then young marriage) as she examines adultery in literature and public life, from Dante to Wharton and Woolf and from Waller to Lewinsky. These stories, and the lives behind them, full of "yearning, loss, desire, sorrow, autonomy--are...the fundamental bedrock of the chastened human soul." And they fascinate and compel us even as they disgust or frighten us. DeSalvo's moving literary exploration is great preparation for her real work: resolving the betrayal in her own marriage. She confronts the complex issues of longing, loyalty, and fragile but persistent autonomy with vigor, ultimately reinterpreting the nature and purpose of this lifelong

union. Recommended for public libraries. A Rebecca Miller, "Library Journal"
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Users Review

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