

roman fever edith wharton analysis

Roman Fever: Edith Wharton's Masterclass in Repressed Desire and Societal Constraints - A Deep Dive Analysis

Introduction:

Edith Wharton's chilling novella, "Roman Fever," is more than just a tale of two women vacationing in Rome; it's a potent exploration of suppressed desires, societal expectations, and the devastating consequences of unspoken truths. This in-depth analysis will dissect Wharton's masterful storytelling, exploring the narrative's layers of deception, the complex character dynamics of Grace Ansley and Alida Slade, and the lasting impact of their carefully constructed lives. We'll unravel the symbolism, examine the themes of jealousy, ambition, and the destructive power of secrets, ultimately revealing why "Roman Fever" remains a timeless masterpiece of psychological realism. Prepare to delve into the simmering tensions and unexpected revelations that make this novella so compelling.

I. Unmasking the Characters: Grace Ansley and Alida Slade

Wharton masterfully crafts two seemingly opposite yet deeply intertwined characters in Grace and Alida. Superficially, Alida appears the victor - the glamorous socialite with the seemingly perfect life and successful daughter. However, a closer examination reveals a brittle façade masking deep insecurities. Her relentless pursuit of social status and her cutting remarks betray a vulnerability rooted in her past. Grace, on the other hand, appears more subdued, almost meek. But her quiet demeanor hides a steely determination and a profound capacity for both love and revenge. The narrative expertly reveals the simmering resentment and unspoken rivalry between these women, a rivalry fueled by a shared past and a lifelong competition for social dominance and romantic fulfillment. Wharton uses subtle shifts in narrative perspective to show how each woman perceives the other, highlighting their subjective interpretations and contributing to the overall ambiguity of their relationship. This subtle character development is key to understanding the novella's power.

II. The Power of the Unspoken: Secrets and Lies at the Heart of Roman Fever

The central tension in "Roman Fever" stems from the carefully guarded secrets that simmer beneath the surface of polite conversation. Wharton skillfully builds suspense through subtle hints and implied meanings, leaving the reader to piece together the fragmented truths. The revelation of the letter, ostensibly written by Alida to Babs, is a pivotal moment. This act of calculated deception, aimed at humiliating Grace, reveals the depth of their animosity and the long-held resentments that have fueled their rivalry. However, the truth that emerges is far more complex and devastating than anyone anticipates. The unspoken truth about the clandestine meeting decades prior explodes the carefully crafted narratives both women have maintained for years. This reveals the profound impact of societal expectations on women's lives, forcing them to suppress their desires and conform to

rigid social norms.

III. The Symbolism of Rome and its Significance

Wharton cleverly utilizes the setting of Rome to enrich the novella's thematic depth. Rome, a city steeped in history and romance, serves as a powerful backdrop against which the women's personal dramas unfold. The ancient ruins and the vibrant city life create a compelling contrast to the stale, restrictive social circles the women inhabit. The juxtaposition highlights the enduring power of the past and its influence on the present. The Palatine Hill, with its breathtaking views, represents both the allure of the past and the fragility of memory. The romantic setting underscores the themes of love, loss, and the enduring power of the past. The seemingly idyllic vacation in Rome becomes a crucible, forcing the women to confront their pasts and the consequences of their choices.

IV. Exploring Themes of Jealousy, Ambition, and Revenge

"Roman Fever" is a masterclass in exploring complex human emotions. Jealousy acts as a potent catalyst, fueling the rivalry between Grace and Alida. Their competition extends beyond social standing; it encompasses romantic love and maternal pride. Alida's ambition for social success is juxtaposed with Grace's quieter ambition – the quiet strength and self-assurance that enables her to finally unveil the truth about her past. The revelation of past secrets leads to a potent expression of revenge, albeit a passive one. Grace's quiet disclosure of the truth, initially presented as a weapon of destruction, ultimately functions as a form of liberation. It shatters the carefully constructed facade of Alida's life, forcing her to confront her own shortcomings and the devastating consequences of her past actions.

V. The Lasting Impact and Legacy of "Roman Fever"

"Roman Fever" continues to resonate with readers today because of its enduring exploration of universal themes. Wharton's depiction of female relationships, societal constraints, and the destructive power of secrets remains relevant and insightful. The novella challenges traditional gender roles and sheds light on the complexities of female identity in a patriarchal society. Its psychological acuity, its exploration of repressed desires, and the devastating consequences of unspoken truths ensures its place as a significant work of American literature. The novella's enduring appeal lies in its ability to capture the intricacies of human relationships and the devastating consequences of societal pressures, making it a timeless exploration of the human condition.

VI. A Detailed Outline of "Roman Fever" Analysis

Title: A Deep Dive into Edith Wharton's "Roman Fever": Unmasking Secrets and Societal Constraints

I. Introduction:

Brief overview of "Roman Fever" and its enduring relevance.

Thesis statement outlining the key aspects of the analysis.

II. Character Analysis:

In-depth examination of Grace Ansley and Alida Slade's personalities, motivations, and relationships. Exploring their contrasting social roles and the complexities of their interactions.

III. The Power of the Unspoken:

Analysis of the secrets, lies, and deceptive narratives within the novella.

Examining the significance of the letter and its revelation.

Discussion of the impact of unspoken truths on the characters' lives.

IV. Symbolism and Setting:

Interpretation of the symbolism of Rome and its relevance to the narrative.

Analysis of how the setting enhances the thematic development.

V. Themes:

Detailed exploration of jealousy, ambition, revenge, and societal expectations.

How these themes interconnect and drive the narrative forward.

VI. Conclusion:

Summary of key findings and insights from the analysis.

Reflection on the lasting impact and legacy of "Roman Fever."

VII. Explaining the Outline Points

The outline above provides a framework for a comprehensive analysis of Edith Wharton's "Roman Fever." Each section builds upon the previous one, offering a layered understanding of the novella's complexities. The detailed explanation of each point would encompass specific textual evidence, literary devices used by Wharton, and a thorough discussion of their thematic implications. This would involve close reading of the text, identifying key passages and dialogues, and interpreting their significance within the broader context of the narrative. For example, the section on "The Power of the Unspoken" would deeply examine the letter, its impact on both Grace and Alida, and its symbolic representation of the power of unspoken desires and societal pressures. Similarly, the section on Symbolism would go beyond a simple description of Rome to analyze its symbolic representation of time, memory, and the weight of the past, highlighting the use of imagery and evocative language by Wharton to enhance these symbolic undertones.

VIII. FAQs:

1. What is the central conflict in "Roman Fever"? The central conflict revolves around the long-standing rivalry and unspoken resentments between Grace Ansley and Alida Slade, fueled by a shared past and a secret that dramatically alters their perceptions of each other.
1. What is the significance of the letter in "Roman Fever"? The letter is a pivotal element, triggering a chain of revelations that shatter the carefully constructed façade of both women's lives and expose the truth about their past.

1. How does Wharton use setting to enhance the narrative? The setting of Rome, with its historical weight and romantic atmosphere, serves as a powerful backdrop, highlighting the contrast between the ancient past and the characters' present lives.
1. What are the major themes explored in "Roman Fever"? The novella explores themes of jealousy, ambition, revenge, societal expectations, the destructive power of secrets, and the complexities of female relationships.
1. What is the significance of the title "Roman Fever"? The title itself is symbolic; "Roman fever" refers to a mild illness, but it also alludes to the intense, simmering emotions and passionate desires that are concealed beneath the surface of the narrative.
1. How does Wharton portray female relationships in "Roman Fever"? Wharton depicts a nuanced and complex portrayal of female relationships, highlighting both the rivalry and the underlying understanding between the two women.
1. What is the narrative style of "Roman Fever"? Wharton employs a sophisticated narrative style characterized by psychological realism, subtle character development, and a masterful use of implication and suggestion.
1. What is the ending of "Roman Fever" and its significance? The ending is both shocking and ambiguous, leaving the reader to contemplate the consequences of the revealed truth and the enduring impact on the characters' lives.
1. How does "Roman Fever" reflect the societal constraints on women in Wharton's time? The novella reveals how societal expectations and gender roles limited women's choices and forced them to suppress their desires and conform to rigid social norms.

IX. Related Articles:

1. Edith Wharton's Psychological Realism: An exploration of Wharton's signature style and its

effectiveness in portraying complex characters and themes.

1. The Role of Women in Edith Wharton's Novels: A study of the portrayal of women and their social standing in Wharton's works.
1. Symbolism in Edith Wharton's "Roman Fever": A closer examination of the use of symbolism and its thematic significance.
1. Comparing and Contrasting Grace and Alida in "Roman Fever": A detailed comparison of the two main characters and their relationship dynamics.
1. The Impact of Secrets in Edith Wharton's Fiction: An analysis of the role of secrets in driving the plots and shaping the characters in Wharton's novels and short stories.
1. Edith Wharton and the Gilded Age: A look at Wharton's life and how it influenced her portrayal of the wealthy elite in her works.
1. Literary Criticism of "Roman Fever": An overview of critical essays and interpretations of Wharton's novella.
1. "Roman Fever" Adaptations for Stage and Screen: A discussion of different adaptations of "Roman Fever" and their interpretations of the source material.
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her father's family. She was also related to the Rensselaer family, the most prestigious of the old patroon families. She had a lifelong friendship with her Rhinelander niece, landscape architect Beatrix Farrand of Reef Point in Bar Harbor, Maine. In 1885, at 23, she married Edward (Teddy) Robbins Wharton, who was 12 years older. From a well-established Philadelphia family, he was a sportsman and gentleman of the same social class and shared her love of travel. From the late 1880s until 1902, he suffered acute depression, and the couple ceased their extensive travel. At that time his depression manifested as a more serious disorder, after which they lived almost exclusively at The Mount, their estate designed by Edith Wharton. In 1908 her husband's mental state was determined to be incurable. She divorced him in 1913. Around the same time, Edith was overcome with the harsh criticisms leveled by the naturalist writers. Later in 1908 she began an affair with Morton Fullerton, a journalist for *The Times*, in whom she found an intellectual partner. In addition to novels, Wharton wrote at least 85 short stories. She was also a garden designer, interior designer, and taste-maker of her time. She wrote several design books, including her first published work, *The Decoration of Houses* of 1897, co-authored by Ogden Codman. Another is the generously illustrated *Italian Villas and Their Gardens* of 1904.

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for attention to detail and its accurate portrayal of how the 19th-century East Coast American upper class lived, as well as for the social tragedy of its plot.

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roman fever edith wharton analysis: *The Buccaneers* Edith Wharton, Marion Mainwaring, 1994-10-01 Edith Wharton's spellbinding final novel tells a story of love in the gilded age that crosses the boundaries of society—soon to be an original series on AppleTV+! “Brave, lively, engaging...a fairy-tale novel, miraculously returned to life.”—The New York Times Book Review Set in the 1870s, the same period as Wharton's *The Age of Innocence*, *The Buccaneers* is about five wealthy American girls denied entry into New York Society because their parents' money is too new. At the suggestion of their clever governess, the girls sail to London, where they marry lords, earls, and dukes who find their beauty charming—and their wealth extremely useful. After Wharton's death in 1937, *The Christian Science Monitor* said, If it could have been completed, *The Buccaneers* would doubtless stand among the richest and most sophisticated of Wharton's novels. Now, with wit and imagination, Marion Mainwaring has finished the story, taking her cue from Wharton's own synopsis. It is a novel any Wharton fan will celebrate and any romantic reader will love. This is the richly engaging story of Nan St. George and Guy Thwarte, an American heiress and an English aristocrat, whose love breaks the rules of both their societies.

roman fever edith wharton analysis: Teenage Wasteland Anne Tyler, 2020-09-29 First appearing in the pages of *Seventeen Magazine*, “Teenage Wasteland” has become one of Anne Tyler's most widely beloved short stories—an affecting and masterful portrait of a life interrupted and a family come undone. Daisy Coble had been a good mother, and so she was ashamed to find out from Donny's teacher that he had been misbehaving. He was noisy, lazy, disruptive, and he was caught smoking. At night, she lay awake wondering where she had gone wrong, and how she could have failed as a parent. Unsure of herself, Daisy follows the advice of professionals, and hires Donny a tutor with some unusual ideas to set the boy straight. But, has the gap between them grown too wide to bridge? A Vintage Short.

roman fever edith wharton analysis: The Wheel Spins Ethel Lina White, 2022-11-13 *The Wheel Spins* is the novel about young and bright Iris Carr, who is on her way back to England after spending a holiday somewhere in the Balkans. After she is left alone by her friends, Iris catches the train for Trieste and finds company in Miss Froy, chatty elderly English woman. When she wakes up from a short nap, she discovers that her elderly travelling companion seems to have disappeared from the train. After her fellow passengers deny ever having seen the elderly lady, the young woman is on the verge of her nerves. She is helped by a young English traveler, and the two proceed to search the train for clues to the old woman's disappearance. Ethel Lina White (1876-1944) was a British crime writer, best known for her novel *The Wheel Spins*, on which the Alfred Hitchcock film, *The Lady Vanishes*, was based.

roman fever edith wharton analysis: Don't Get Caught Kurt Dinan, 2016-04-01 *Oceans 11* meets *The Breakfast Club* in this funny book for teens about a boy pulled into an epic prank war who is determined to get revenge. 10:00 tonight at the water tower. Tell no one. —Chaos Club When Max receives a mysterious invite from the untraceable, epic prank-pulling Chaos Club, he has to ask: why him? After all, he's Mr. 2.5 GPA, Mr. No Social Life. He's Just Max. And his favorite heist movies have taught him this situation calls for Rule #4: Be suspicious. But it's also his one shot to leave Just Max in the dust... Yeah, not so much. Max and four fellow students—who also received invites—are standing on the newly defaced water tower when campus security catches them. Definitely a setup. And this time, Max has had enough. It's time for Rule #7: Always get payback. Let the prank war begin. Perfect for readers who want: books for teen boys funny stories heist stories and caper comedies Praise for *Don't Get Caught*: This caper comedy about an Ocean's 11-style group of high school masterminds will keep readers guessing.—Kirkus Reviews Genre-savvy, clever, and full of Heist Rules...this twisty tale is funny, fast-paced, and full of surprises. Fans of *Ocean's 11* or *Leverage*...will find a great deal to enjoy in Dinan's debut.—Publishers Weekly Not only is *Don't Get Caught* the best kind of underdog story—heartfelt and hilarious—but it's filled with genuine surprises up until the very last page, which features one of my favorite endings in recent memory.

I'm highly inspired to prank someone right now. -Lance Rubin, author of Denton Little's Deathdate Witty, charming and always surprising...Call it Ocean's 11th Grade or whatever you like, Don't Get Caught snatched my attention and got away clean. -Joe Schreiber, author of Con Academy and Au Revoir Crazy European Chick

roman fever edith wharton analysis: *How to Read Literature Like a Professor* Thomas C. Foster, 2017-05-16 The classic guide, now available in a hardcover edition—a lively and entertaining introduction to literature and literary basics, including symbols, themes and contexts, that shows you how to make your everyday reading experience more rewarding and enjoyable. While many books can be enjoyed for their basic stories, there are often deeper literary meanings interwoven in these texts. *How to Read Literature Like a Professor* helps us to discover those hidden truths by looking at literature with the eyes—and the literary codes of the ultimate professional reader, the college professor. What does it mean when a literary hero is traveling along a dusty road? When he hands a drink to his companion? When he's drenched in a sudden rain shower? Ranging from major themes to literary models, narrative devices and form, Thomas C. Foster provides us with a broad overview of literature—a world where a road leads to a quest, a shared meal may signify a communion, and rain, whether cleansing or destructive, is never just a shower—and shows us how to make our reading experience more enriching, satisfying, and fun. This revised edition includes new chapters, a new preface and epilogue, and incorporates updated teaching points that Foster has developed over the past decade.

roman fever edith wharton analysis: *The Art of the Short Story* Dana Gioia, R. S. Gwynn, 2005 52 great authors, their best short fiction, and their insights on writing--Cover.

roman fever edith wharton analysis: *Roman Fever* Robert Ward, Roger Brunyate, 1993

roman fever edith wharton analysis: *Desiree's Baby* Kate Chopin, 2017-04 *Desiree's Baby* BY Kate Chopin is about the daughter of Monsieur and Madame Valmond, who are wealthy French Creoles in antebellum Louisiana. Abandoned as a baby, Desiree was found by Monsieur Valmond lying in the shadow of a stone pillar near the Valmond gateway. She is courted by the son of another wealthy, well-known and respected French Creole family, Armand. They marry and have a child. People who see the baby have the sense it is different. Eventually they realize that the baby's skin is the same color as a quadroon (one-quarter African)-the baby has African ancestry. At the time of the story, this would have been considered a problem for a person believed to be white.

roman fever edith wharton analysis: *Daisy Miller* Henry James, 2017-03-16 At the little town of Vevey, in Switzerland, there is a particularly comfortable hotel. There are, indeed, many hotels, for the entertainment of tourists is the business of the place, which, as many travelers will remember, is seated upon the edge of a remarkably blue lake—a lake that it behooves every tourist to visit. The shore of the lake presents an unbroken array of establishments of this order, of every category, from the grand hotel of the newest fashion, with a chalk-white front, a hundred balconies, and a dozen flags flying from its roof, to the little Swiss pension of an elder day, with its name inscribed in German-looking lettering upon a pink or yellow wall and an awkward summerhouse in the angle of the garden. One of the hotels at Vevey, however, is famous, even classical, being distinguished from many of its upstart neighbors by an air both of luxury and of maturity. In this region, in the month of June, American travelers are extremely numerous; it may be said, indeed, that Vevey assumes at this period some of the characteristics of an American watering place. There are sights and sounds which evoke a vision, an echo, of Newport and Saratoga. There is a flitting hither and thither of stylish young girls, a rustling of muslin flounces, a rattle of dance music in the morning hours, a sound of high-pitched voices at all times. You receive an impression of these things at the excellent inn of the Trois Couronnes and are transported in fancy to the Ocean House or to Congress Hall. But at the Trois Couronnes, it must be added, there are other features that are much at variance with these suggestions: neat German waiters, who look like secretaries of legation; Russian princesses sitting in the garden; little Polish boys walking about held by the hand, with their governors; a view of the sunny crest of the Dent du Midi and the picturesque towers of the Castle of Chillon. I hardly know whether it was the analogies or the differences that were uppermost in the

mind of a young American, who, two or three years ago, sat in the garden of the Trois Couronnes, looking about him, rather idly, at some of the graceful objects I have mentioned. It was a beautiful summer morning, and in whatever fashion the young American looked at things, they must have seemed to him charming. He had come from Geneva the day before by the little steamer, to see his aunt, who was staying at the hotel-Geneva having been for a long time his place of residence. But his aunt had a headache- his aunt had almost always a headache-and now she was shut up in her room, smelling camphor, so that he was at liberty to wander about. He was some seven-and-twenty years of age; when his friends spoke of him, they usually said that he was at Geneva studying. When his enemies spoke of him, they said-but, after all, he had no enemies; he was an extremely amiable fellow, and universally liked.

roman fever edith wharton analysis: The Lady's Maid's Bell Edith Wharton, 2013-01-24 IT was the autumn after I had the typhoid. I'd been three months in hospital, and when I came out I looked so weak and tottery that the two or three ladies I applied to were afraid to engage me. Most of my money was gone, and after I'd boarded for two months, hanging about the employment-agencies, and answering any advertisement that looked any way respectable, I pretty nearly lost heart, for fretting hadn't made me fatter, and I didn't see why my luck should ever turn. It did though—or I thought so at the time. A Mrs. Railton, a friend of the lady that first brought me out to the States, met me one day and stopped to speak to me: she was one that had always a friendly way with her. She asked me what ailed me to look so white, and when I told her, Why, Hartley, says she, I believe I've got the very place for you. Come in to-morrow and we'll talk about it.

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