



EDITH WHARTON
ROMAN FEVER

Instructor: Ann Newman
Course: ENGL 223

Edith Wharton



Genre

Criticism

Essay

Fiction

- Novel
- Poetry
- Short Story

Travelogues

Movement

Realism

Themes

- Rivalry
- Love and passion

Edith Wharton



(1862–1937)

Edith Jones was born into a distinguished New York family. Educated by private tutors and governesses, she published a book of her poems privately but did not begin to write for a public audience until after her marriage to Edward Wharton in 1885. The author of more than 50 volumes of poetry, essays, fiction, travelogues, and criticism, she was the first woman to receive an honorary doctorate from Yale University (1923). Although she emigrated to France in 1907, she continued to write about the New England of her youth in novels such as the popular *Ethan Frome* (1911). Among her many works are *The Valley of Decision* (1902), *The House of Mirth* (1905), *A Son at the Front* (1923), *Twilight Sleep* (1927), the autobiographical *A Backward Glance* (1934), and *The Buccaneers* (1938). She received a Pulitzer Prize for *The Age of Innocence* (1920).

Roman Fever

Directions: As you read the story, look for key elements.

- Setting
- Characters
- Plot
- Point of view
- Conflict
- Foreshadowing
- Theme
- Symbols

Roman Fever

Setting

- Time –
- Place –
- Weather conditions –
- Social conditions – “Roman Fever” was written in the 1930s and is set in the 1920s, but the story's characters and values reflect the attitudes of upper-class society in New York in the last half of the 19th century. Mrs. Slade and Mrs. Ansley are the product of that environment of affluence and relative ease. The author belonged to this circle and was able to make this society come alive in her story. In Wharton's world, families such as the Astors and the Vanderbilts could be found at the height of the social ladder. In addition to this aristocratic class of people who came from old names and old money were the arrivistes. These arrivistes had earned their fortunes more recently and were often richer than the aristocrats. These members of high society entertained themselves by attending the theater and opera, by paying and receiving social calls, by attending lunch and dinner parties and house parties, by traveling abroad, and by summering in such fashionable spots as Newport, Rhode Island.

In this society, women were seen as moral judges. But, despite this important role, most families did not believe that girls needed to be educated. Instead, they felt that education should be acquired only for womanly purposes, for instance, to fulfill her future husband's needs. A woman's role in life was to be a homemaker, and her single-minded purpose was to make a good marriage.

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Setting (cont.)

The roles and accepted forms of behavior of American women in the 1920s and 1930s changed. After decades of struggling, women had won the right to vote when the 19th Amendment was ratified in 1920. Young women, known as "flappers," exerted their greater independence by wearing shorter dresses, wearing makeup, and cutting off their long hair into bobs. They drove cars, played sports, and smoked cigarettes in public. Young women also increasingly worked outside the home, which brought them greater economic and social freedom. When a woman married, however, she was expected to quit her job and function solely as wife and mother. Thus, despite the achievements of women and changes in society, the homemaker still remained the ideal of American womanhood.

- Mood –

Roman Fever

Grace Ansley

1. Characteristics
2. Developing or static?

Roman Fever

Barbara Ansley

1. Characteristics
2. Developing or static?

Roman Fever

Alida Slade

1. Characteristics
2. Developing or static?

Roman Fever

Jenny Slade

1. Characteristics
2. Developing or static?

Roman Fever

Delphin Slade

1. Characteristics
2. Developing or static?

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Plot

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Point of View

- Innocent eye?
- Stream of consciousness?
- First person?
- Omniscient limited?
- Omniscient objective?

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Conflict

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Foreshadowing

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Theme

1. First theme:
2. Second theme:
3. Third theme:

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Symbolism & Imagery

1. The Palatine, Forum, Coliseum –
2. Knitting –
3. “[Grace] began to move ahead of Mrs. Slade toward the stairway.” –

Roman Fever

Reading Questions

1. Both Mrs. Slade and Mrs. Ansley seem very much alike. In what ways are their lives and personalities similar?
2. Why have the two women and their daughters come to Rome?
3. What illness is Roman fever? What else does Roman fever mean?
4. What happened to Aunt Harriet years ago in Rome?
5. Why do Mrs. Slade and Mrs. Ansley hate each other? Why have they never before voiced that dislike? Why are they doing it now?
6. How does the story end? Are you surprised by the ending? How do the last few words "[Mrs. Ansley] began to move ahead of Mrs. Slade toward the stairway" affect your belief in Mrs. Ansley's admission?
7. What are some similarities and differences between "Daisy Miller" and "Roman Fever"?