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feminists believe that
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**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Edith Wharton wrote several books between 1900 and 1938. Wharton travelled extensively during the World War I and assisted war victims in Paris. Her novel, *The Age of Innocence* won the Pulitzer price. Critics and readers considered this novel to be the best literary work of Edith Wharton. The novel reflects the desire and betrayal in the old city of New York.

Several works of Wharton show extensive use of dramatic irony. Her works reflect the lives of American upper class through the use of humor and empathy in describing their lives, and changes in New York towards the beginning of the 20th century. This essay shall analyze two short stories (*Roman Fever* and *The Other Two*) of Wharton in terms of themes and stylistic features. Feminist critics have looked at the works of Wharton in relations to prevailing social and political circumstances with regard to acceptance of women. The social aspects focused on marital duties and responsibilities of women, particular in *The Other Two* and *Roman Fever*. Wharton looks at the social prejudice against women at her times. For instance, she discusses issues of sexual gratification men derived from women, marriages for convenience, malicious divorce, and professional working relations. She sees sexual identity of women as suppressed by men, and women submissively accepted and internalized their roles in a patriarchal society as the other sex.

Women believed lies of men in reference to their sexual and responsibilities in society. It is the social hegemony that creates the otherness in women. Feminists believe that men wish to control women because of their efforts for sexual dominance. Wharton addresses social challenges and advantages

women derive from being wives of socially and financially advanced men.

Wharton shows that women value social status rather than love.

In *Roman Fever*, Alida Slade derives her happiness from social advantages she gets from Delphin as a wife. For instance, the author notes that “ It was a big drop from being the wife of Delphin Slade to being his widow. As the wife of the famous corporation lawyer, always with an international case or two on hand, every day brought its exciting and unexpected obligation: the impromptu entertaining of eminent colleagues from abroad, the hurried dashes on legal business to London, Paris or Rome, where the entertaining was so handsomely reciprocated; the amusement of hearing in her wakes: What, that handsome woman with the good clothes and the eyes is Mrs. Slade—the Slade’s wife! Really! Generally the wives of celebrities are such frumps” (Wharton 83). On the other hand, in *The Other Two*, Wharton looks at the role and status of women, challenges of married women, children and parent relationship, divorce issues and the dynamic social society with a critical perspective on love affairs outside marriage.

The author notes that every woman must choose what works for her in social context. For instance, some women decide not to marry, but choose to face the social risk by using a temporary liaisons build on sexual desires and mutual trusts. Conversely, in *Roman Fever*, Mrs. Slade views marriage as a means of achieving social success.

These thoughts create bitter rivals among the women fighting for the same man. Wharton’s *The Other Two* demonstrates how women have used divorce and remarriage to advance themselves in the social ladder. This is what Alice

Waythorn does. Alice has been able to attain and adapt to new marriages and expectations. Alice considers herself to be at the highest point of success when she is Waythorn's wife. After the honeymoon, Mr. Waythorn must face the reality and acknowledge the fact that Alice has changed, but he must accept her the way she is.

Wharton tries to show how men have always defined women. In the eyes of men, women have always been objects of sexual gratification and possessions. At the same time, men have used women to make their social interaction easy and provide a touch of comfort to their ego and competitive instinct. Alice does not change outwardly, but in the eyes of Waythorn she goes through a series of changes. Waythorn likes the girlish traits in Alice. This is also a trait Waythorn likes because he feels that it makes him look young. Waythorn sees Alice as having the right to divorce in both her marriages. He feels that Alice was the wronged party.

During the beginning of the story, Waythorn can only see the positive sides of her lover. However, at the end of the novel, Waythorn also begins to see Alice mistakes. This creates discomfort in Waythorn, but he recognizes the fact that Alice is a mixed being just like himself. The social world has created women into what they are.

These creations and transformation of women are the products men like Waythorn desires and crave to get. Alice knows that her body is her only resource. Therefore, she must use it to her advantage. In this regard, a woman becomes a product who can only be acquired by the highest bidder.

Roman Fever looks at the illicit sexual content in society. Grace shares an illicit and secret love with Delphin Slade. Wharton notes that “ Alida feels a bit remorseful for a moment, but her animosity returns when she considers that Grace harbored secret love for her husband over the years and had been living on that letter” (Wharton 86). Therefore, to Grace, Roman Fever does not only mean catching cold, but also the burning fever of secret love at the Colosseum. Slade influences women with his possessions and wealth. On the other hand, Horace remains sterile and contributes nothing to the story.

Horace also has no sexual fever to sire children. Therefore, Roman Fever becomes a symbolic way of fulfilling sexual desires. Wharton shows that women are capable beings just like men. Women are able to adapt to any situation and progress socially. For instance, Alice is able to adapt to her divorces and move on the social ladder. Alice further fits into different situations by becoming an actress. Wharton purposefully makes men the audience at the show.

Waythorn does not like several sides of his wife, but he must accept her as a performer. Wharton reveals the negative attitude society or men have towards female performers. Men look at actresses as women of loose morals. However, they fail to appreciate the difficult tasks of performing. Men feel that women have abandoned their privacy in order to satisfy public demands for shows. Though men are unappreciative, they must progress towards accepting diverse women's roles in society as Waythorn does.

This point enables readers to see Alice as a capable woman, gifted as an actress and able to overcome the challenges of life. Roman Fever shows that women may reject domestic gestures, and opt for other social context in society. For instance, Grace Ansley prefers to confront others, particularly Alida Slades.

Alida demonstrates the resistances to male dominance that has affected women as a fever. Grace rejects the social notions of paternity and leaves her daughter for any suitor and even hints that the two daughters (Barbara and Jenny) shall be rivals for the same love. This is a character that puts the whole idea of paternity and patriarchal in America at stake. These have been the conventional reference point for women during times of Wharton. Social lives are full of deconstructive passions. There are passions Wharton portrays as love, vengeance, enmity, jealousy and fear.

These strong passions permeate the relationship between Grace Ansley and Alida Slade. There is a strong passion growing between Grace and Delphin (Alida's fiance). Consequently, fear of losing her fiance and desire for revenge consumes Alida. She then hatches a plot to expose Grace to a chill that will make Grace sick and remain isolated from Delphin. The next twenty-five years contain growing hatred Alida has for Grace. Alida also does not like Barbara (Grace's daughter) because she is superior to her own (Jenny).

Grace must also live with a sterile Horace while Delphin, the father of her daughter, lives with Alida in the neighborhood. Wharton is a writer gifted with the use of language in expressing the social context of Americans changing society. She uses language artistically to attack social and sexual

prejudices against women. Wharton uses symbols in Roman Fever to refer to several aspects of the story.

For instance, the title of the story Roman Fever shows Grace's sexual attraction towards Delphin. This leads to siring of a love child, Barbara. This also creates hatred between Alida Slade and Grace Ansley. The knitting symbolizes the challenges joining the social and marriage lives of Grace and Alida. Crimson silk represents the passionate love Alida, and Grace probably have for Delphin. As Grace drops her knitting, a destroyed relationship comes to display between the two characters.

Evening darkness shows the discovery of dark secrets between Alida and Grace. On the other hand, The Other Two shows use of symbolism through both male and female characters. Waythorn represents male figures under the influence of patriarchal and economically depended society. Male figures in the changing society have their eyes focused on advancing their social status in society at the expense of their marriages.

Waythorn is unable to understand his wife, Alice. Wharton shows the destructive effects on wives and marriages of a society too depend on material wealth. Just like material wealth, society also sees a woman as a possession of a man. Through the troubled and divorced marriages of Alice, Wharton shows the readers the consequences of such acts on both the wife and subsequent husbands, who fail to see any other adorable features in their wives, and concentrate on their wives past experiences with their former husbands. We must understand the psychological and social implications of divorce. Wharton offers readers various perspectives to

analyze the consequences of divorce and marriages. Wharton also presents her works through the use of irony. For instance, Alida Slade tell Grace that “ I was wondering, ever so respectfully, you understand... wondering how two such exemplary characters as you and Horace had managed to produce anything quite so dynamic” (Lewis 120).

Alida refers to Barbara. Horace is sterile and incapable of fathering children. This irony confirms doubts Alida has been having regarding the paternity of Barbara. The setting of the story is a Colosseum. This is damp and cold place. Colosseum served as a fighting place for gladiators.

Unknowingly, Grace and Alida have used all the tools in their lives to fight as gladiators. They have used their husbands, bodies, daughters and lives to settle twenty-five years old rivalry. They also have explored both literal and figurative means of killing each other (Killoran 98). Conversely, *The Other Two* reflects instance of irony in the manner Alice relates with her daughter. The relationship between mother and daughter shows no paternity connections. Alice shows lack of concern for her sick child. Instead, she is more worried about the impending visit of her ex-husband than her daughter’s well-being.

Once the Waythorns have settled the issue, Alice relaxes, but the health condition of her daughter has not changed. During periods of Wharton, typhoid was a serious illness, which mothers could not ignore to concentrate on a visit of an ex-husband. Wharton shows that not all women can rise to the motherly roles society expected of them. This reveals a low opinion of her character, Alice as a mother. The two stories, *The Other Two* and *Roman*

Fewer show that being self is weak and marriage affects everyone to the very core. When we look at the two stories together, we see that marriage is a slippery and even dangerous involvement.

This is because individual characters change. This makes married couples find their lives changing beyond their control. For instance, Waythorn wonders how Alice could adapt to three different men after divorce as Alice Haskett, Alice Varick and now Alice Waythorn.

This leads him to conclude that Alice is as easy as an old shoe. She had left her a little emotion, privacy, personality and unknown self in every marriage. Divorce exposes the manners and stern attitudes that couples choose to conceal or express about the nature of their sexual affairs, both social and psychological torture, and prejudice couples endure after divorce (Haytock 133). *The Other Two* gives Wharton an opportunity to present her central female character, Alice through the eyes of a man, Waythorn. She lets the readers see the mistakes of Waythorn judgment regarding her wife.

Readers wonder whether Waythorn could have been able to adapt with different women as her wife did. By choosing female characters to be the protagonists of the two stories, Wharton highlights that women are equally superior to men as their roles demand. Wharton also portrays the issues of moral standards society expects from both men and women in order to rise above the social ladder and avoid tendencies of savagery. Wharton lets readers see a different Alice from the one Waythorn knows. Wharton shows readers the strength in women and struggle they experience in order to

perform the ever-changing and difficult tasks of pleasing men. *The Other Two* and *Roman Fever* have their secret aspects.

For example, characters are in dismaying situations, particular the rivalry, marriage and divorce issues, but we must see the humorous sides of the story. These stories present no comical or tragic ending but Wharton allows the stories to social challenges in marriage and modern society.

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