

Egocentrism inhibits
camaraderie in
"roman fever"



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Throughout Edith Wharton's "Roman Fever," Mrs. Alida Slade experiences the consequences of an inflated ego as she fails to fully understand her companion, Mrs. Grace Ansley. She is consumed with egocentric priorities, like superiority, deception, and jealousy. While Slade's egocentrism can be interpreted as purely superficial vanity, this story proves it to be a deterrent to true friendship in "Roman Fever" in its entirety, by making honesty, equality, and selflessness nonexistent qualities in her relationship with Ansley. One core aspect of any friendship is a sense of equality and shared experience with the other individual. Despite the fact that they live parallel lives, Slade's egocentrism pushes her to believe that she is in fact superior to Ansley. The two "...had been intimate since childhood..." and "...lived opposite each other - actually as well as figuratively- for years". These two women have both known a privileged New York lifestyle, love and loss of a husband, and motherhood. Slade recognizes these similarities, but fails to attribute the likeness to equality. Instead, she constantly places herself on a high pedestal. She reflects that "she felt her unemployment [the death of her husband] more than poor Grace ever would". Here, it is evident that Ansley has more self-pity than empathy for the suffering of others. She casts the Ansley's possible pain aside, under the assumption that the change was much more detrimental for her. Also, in her reflection she describes her companion as "poor Grace". In context, this phrase does not indicate sympathy or compassion, but rather it takes on a patronizing tone. Slade describes her as "poor" in a way that belittles Ansley and suggests that the circumstances of death cannot come as a shock to one that already lives a life of disappointment. Furthermore, the assumption that Ansley leads a life that is dull or disappointing is one that stems from Slade's egocentric

attitude of superiority. According to her, a life of fullness and happiness is one that constantly dabbles in high society affairs. Slade and her husband are an " exceptional couple" that frequently traveled " on legal business to London, Paris or Rome...". She views her relationship with her husband as something far better than the average marriage. Using the elite phrase " exceptional" to describe it, she highlights the idea that she truly believes that she is superior to most people, including Ansley. Also, she often refers to the busy and expansive life she lives as the wife of a successful lawyer. Unlike Ansley, she travels the world, mingles with people of high authority, and is even complimented by the high society folks. These aspects of her life give her reason to believe that Ansley's life can just not compare to the excitement that she knows and loves. In her thought process, Slade takes the similarities between herself and Ansley and completely disregards them, because she is under the delusion that her lifestyle is far more superior to any other. As this holds true, at least in her mind, she cannot find true common ground with Ansley in order to form a deeper bond with her. Another deterrent to true friendship that Slade's egocentric attitude invokes is selfishness. A key principle to having a friend or true companion is a sense of selflessness and ability to think of others before oneself. Slade cannot grasp this concept in the story, but rather, embraces her selfishness and fails to disband her envy for Ansley. The root of her envy lies in the realization that Slade was in love with Ansley's fiancé. She claims that " I found out - and I hated you, hated you. I knew you were in love with Delphin...I wanted you out of the way..." (785). This envy, or even hatred, is a major factor as the lives of these two women unfold. Slade, never able to truly forget the jealousy and hatred she held for Ansley upon this realization, fosters

hardened feelings for her long-time companion. The initial jealousy motivated Slade to become selfish and do all in her power to be rid of the competition. Slade does not consider the outcome or consequences that Ansley may have to suffer through due to her selfishness. She falsifies a letter to Ansley, hoping that she will go to the Colloseum at night and become humiliated when Delphin does not meet her there as promised in the letter. She hopes that this humiliation and failure would trigger Ansley to give up on Delphin and longer be an obstacle for Slade. Selfishly she considers these benefits to herself, but does not think twice about the pain she causes Ansley. She even claims " I remember laughing to myself all that evening at the idea that you were waiting around there in the dark...". She shows no remorse or regret for her childish and self-centered actions in the past, but reflects carelessly without sparing the feelings of Ansley. The lack of shame attributed with this statement further proves that the selfishness that Slade emits prohibits any relationship to form between her and Ansley. Slade's selfishness is not mutually exclusive to this situation. This attribute of her egocentrism is also manifested in her opinion of Barbara and Jenny, the daughters of Grace and Alida. She does not appreciate her own daughter Jenny, because in her opinion, Barbara, is a far more interesting individual. Slade, under the belief that she is superior to Ansley, also admits that she would rather be Barbara's mother. She speaks of her daughter as if she has been cheated something. She states " I always wanted a brilliant daughter... never quite understood why I got an angel instead". Here, she selfishly covets the kind of daughter that she does not have, but Ansley does. Though she does refer to her own daughter as " an angel," it is clear that Jenny simply does not qualify as good enough in her mother's eyes (782). Slade

wants what she cannot and does not have. Her own life is not satisfactory unless every aspect of it is comparatively superior to Ansley's. Barbara is exciting, fresh, and vivacious, while Jenny is dedicated, simple, and boring. She figures that with the loss of her husband and son, she deserves a daughter that will keep her on her toes and give her a reason to flaunt and brag about her life. Jenny's perfection and simplicity cannot possibly measure up to the vivacity of her former high society life, while Barbara could introduce a new round of adventures to Slade. This is all she considers when voicing her inappropriate feelings to Ansley. The only person that Slade considers in this thought process is herself and her own source of pride. Selfishness, as another facet of egocentrism, blinds the carrier from the feelings and opinion of others. One cannot truly develop a healthy relationship without taking on selflessness in an attempt to put the success and happiness of others before one's own. Another aspect of egotistical thinking is lies and deception in an attempt to get ahead. Honesty is a basic core value that all friends share, but the egotistical individual overlooks honesty and replaces it with deceit. Slade's dishonest behavior from her youth is clear and vivid. She admits to falsifying the letter to Ansley from Delphin, but she is still not redeemed in the truth. First off, she went through a lot of trouble in order to trick a supposed friend into believing that her affection for a man was reciprocated and that he wanted more from the relationship than what was already established. These ideas, presented in the letter, were nothing but dishonestly from Slade. This act of deceit is not one that is simply forgiven or brushed away, for it was life changing for all the parties involved. Her deception resulted in an affair, illegitimate daughter, and unnecessary friction between the two women. True friends are

<https://assignbuster.com/egocentrism-inhibits-camaraderie-in-roman-fever/>

not as vindictively manipulative and spiteful, even if they are not always completely honest with each other. Secondly, even in her admittance to the truth, Slade fails to admit her mistake. Instead of apologizing for the deceit, she admits to it, and then continues to pity herself and defend her actions. Slade says " well, girls are ferocious sometimes, you know. Girls in love especially" (786). This comment is made in an attempt to prove that her actions are in fact justifiable. She cannot comprehend that she should feel ashamed for her lies, but instead continues to believe that her dishonesty was well-deserved and acceptable behavior under the circumstances. Her inability to understand that she was in-fact in the wrong, even though she admits the truth now, proves that the idea of dishonesty as a destructive force to relationships is not something that her egocentrism can comprehend. Honesty and the guilt of deception are not truly present in Slade; therefore she cannot and will not connect with Ansley on the emotional level necessary to qualify them as true friends. In " Roman Fever" many aspects of egocentrism are manifested within one of the characters, Alida Slade. Egotistical attitudes are a common thread in the human psyche that constantly tears apart relationships and inhibits deep understanding. One cannot truly attain friendship if egocentrism has taken residence in his or her being. Slade exemplifies this idea through her inability to truly connect with Grace Ansley. The character's egocentric traits of deception, superiority, and selfishness prove to be deterrents to true a true emotional connection or sense of camaraderie between her and Ansley. Following the examination on Ansley and Slade's personal reactions to the effects of the rhetorical issue at hand and subsequently, my personal reaction to the

rhetoric, one is prompted by Royster to consider the cultural lessons extrapolated by the text.