

Professor Sherry Li

Nineteenth-Century American Literature

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Final Project:

A Visual Novel of Roman Fever

Designed by:

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Introduction of the Project

Literature has long been valued for its ability to stimulate imagination and construct immersive new worlds for readers. But what if we don't need to imagine, and can instead be a part of the literary work ourselves? To create this experience, we decided to turn one of our favorite texts this semester, *Roman Fever* (1934) by Edith Wharton, into a visual novel.

A visual novel is an interactive storytelling format that combines text with simple visual image, and often allows readers to go through the story by making choices as if they are playing a certain character. Compared to other forms of role-playing games, visual novels emphasize character development, atmosphere, and reader immersion rather than fast-paced or complicated game mechanics. Edith Wharton's *Roman Fever* is particularly ideal for adaptation into a visual novel due to its confined setting, dialogue-driven tension and grand revelation, which are all common elements of visual novels.

In this project, we will adapt *Roman Fever* by reconstructing its narrative through self-written branching plot and dialogue, while keeping its iconic character design, atmosphere and setting. The final presentation will be supported by AI-generated visual images, and assembled and presented using Canva, where we can integrate text, visuals and the interactive progression.

Final Project

The final project can be accessed interactively through the provided Canva public view link. Link: <https://canva.link/cszwen4ekimy0y9> .

Design Concept and Reflection for Scene 1

(written by Fiona)

The function of scene 1 is to set the tone of the game by introducing the time and place setting, the four characters in Rome, and their relationship and personalities. Therefore, it had to be the most consistent with the original literary work. Even though we tried to adapt to a more modern tone in general, in part 1 I still used a lot of direct quotes from the story to give players a glimpse of Wharton's writing style. Lines like "Sitting in the spring effulgence of the Roman skies," "This is still the most beautiful view in the world" and "we have always lived opposite of each other in one way or another, right?" are all iconic descriptions which I especially selected to integrate into my adaptation.

The game mechanics of scene 1 are rather simple. Players experience the story through Alida's point of view, and get to choose to talk to the three characters present in Rome. The plot does not branch out yet at this point of the game, as players have to talk to all three characters to get to know their personalities and relationships before they can move on to scene 2 of the game. However, other than Grace, the other two characters, Barbara and Jenny, will leave soon after a short conversation with Alida due to prior commitments (with Italian aviators), and thus no matter in which order players choose to talk with the characters, they will end up talking with Grace eventually. As for the visual design, only Grace has a clear image with a similar style to how Alida is presented, while Barbara and Jenny are merely represented by shades. This shows that Grace is the only character who has equal importance with Alida in the story.

The hardest challenge for designing scene 1 is to show Grace's thoughts, as they also play a huge part in the original literary work. As players experience the story in Alida's point of view, I don't really have a way to show Grace's inner thoughts (such as the important line "Sometimes Mrs. Ansley thought Alida Slade was disappointed; on the whole she had had a sad life. Full of failures and mistakes; Mrs. Ansley had always been rather sorry for her. So these two ladies visualized each other, each through the wrong end of her little telescope.") Though as a reader I really enjoyed the imagery of the "judging telescope", to directly shift the game's perspective to put Grace's thought into the game will greatly harm the immersing experience, which is a very important element. Hence, in the end I decided to take away Grace's point of view. But to compensate for this, I added a little branch in which players can choose to notice Grace's expression, which seems to show pity. I hope this short branch, which won't affect the general story at all, can lead to players to think about Grace's side of the story by themselves, and solve the issue of not being able to include Grace's perspective.

Design Concept and Reflection for Scene 2

(written by Joyce)

When designing the dialogues and storylines for scene two, I want to imitate the style of Chinese dramas, where the first wife tries hard to fool or even harm the other "wives" to secure her own position. Although *Roman Fever* is a bit different, the fact that the original story is written like a soap opera inspired me to design the visual novel this way. The entire scene two focuses on Alida's mental state and it is the change of her emotions that will lead to different outcomes. I really hope that through this scene, players can understand that Alida is not the villain in this story, but just a woman in love with a man who does not love her

back as much. Since the short story barely provides any details about that specific night, it offers a great opportunity to create a new storyline and make Alida's character more vivid. With this in mind, I portrayed Delphin as someone who views Grace as an elegant woman whom he "adores platonically." Alida simply cannot understand why Grace is so popular among men, or why Delphin is attracted to her. From this perspective, Alida might feel jealous of Grace for getting Delphin's attention, or she might view Grace with suspicion, thinking she might steal Delphin's heart or she could choose to believe in Delphin's loyalty. Also, at this stage, Alida may not have developed her aggressive personality yet, so it is important to distinguish the young Alida from the old Alida.

In the subsequent story, although choosing what to write in the letter will not affect the later plot, I think that allowing players to compose the letter themselves can make the game feel more interactive. Furthermore, I believe Alida must do something after sending the letter, so sending the letter should not be the end of the scene. Since I described sending the letter like committing a "crime," Alida should either be panicking and angry at herself, or incredibly eager to know what actually happened that night. Therefore, I designed two paths based on the choices players make at the beginning, and imagined what I would do if I were Alida. I realized I might send a second letter to Grace (like sending a cancellation message to a friend) if I felt guilty and wanted to prevent the situation from getting out of control. Alternatively, if I really wanted to fool Grace but keep Delphin from finding out my "crime", I would send a servant to the Colosseum to tell her that the date had been canceled. On the other hand, to align with the original story, where I believe Alida sends the letter out of jealousy and anxiety, I designed an ending where the maid lies about what happened at the Colosseum, leading Alida to the result that she believes Grace went there alone.

I think the hardest part of designing this scene is that I know nothing about what actually happened back then, so I had to create an entirely new backstory to explain the incident while still branching into different storylines that lead to multiple endings. Another challenge is to determine how interactive the game should be and how much dialogue to include in a single scene. Apparently, scene two is where the plot develops the most, so it should include lots of dialogue and stories to make the game more engaging. However, since I do not live in their era and have not read enough literature works to fully learn how people spoke at that time, I asked Gemini and ChatGPT for assistance with these concerns. I asked for advice regarding the dialogue style and the number of options I should include. They

offered great suggestions, so I adopted them to design scene two. I did not ask the AI to generate any actual dialogue, but only asked for structural advice so that I could have a clearer perspective on how to construct the scene.

Design Concept and Reflection for Scene 3

(Written by Bella)

Throughout the process of designing scene three, I get to analyze more about the inner world of the two ladies. Scene three mainly focuses on how Alida and Grace confronted each other for the Colosseum incident. The original plot in *Roman Fever* piles up Alida's question to Grace, and ends with Grace revealing the stunning truth that Barbabra is actually one of Delphin's children. Though Grace's personality is depicted as humble and maybe even a little insecure in comparison to Alida, I feel that she doesn't want to be so cowardly anymore when she decides to reveal Babara's parentage. In my point of view, Grace's reveal means that she wants to show Alida that she's not weaker than her. Therefore, I give the players two choices of Grace's personality, the self-abased one and the mean one.

Players have three choices to open the confrontation scene, the first one is to reveal the truth directly, the second one is to ask whether Grace had a love affair with Delphin, and the last one is to ask whether Grace had a secret lover. The first choice aims to emphasize the strong personality of Alida. The second and the third one intend to make a possibility for Grace's denial since it makes more sense that one would make a denial when they are questioned. If the players choose the first one, they have the chance to decide what Alida is going to do next. She could scold Grace, revealing the truth snugly, or emotionally blackmail her. The three choices would lead to a different reaction from Grace. Apart from the same ending with the original work, Grace may also walk away directly or apologize to Alida. And if the players choose to ask Grace whether she had a love affair with Delphin or not, they will trigger the following story that Grace admits that with or without an apology randomly. As mentioned, I think Grace intends to turn evil in the end of the story, so I think she could have the possibility not to apologize to Alida. And randomness fits how humans think, because we cannot always guess what others are thinking about.

I designed three final endings in total. The first one is the same as the original work where Alida finally tells Grace the truth and Grace reveals that Barbara is Delphine's daughter. The second one is that Grace left furiously after knowing that Alida makes her almost die from Roman Fever. And the last one is that Grace sincerely apologize to Alida and

they reconcile in the end. Though I try to come up with as many endings as possible, I still think it's the hardest part for me. The reason is that the characters' personalities have been shaped in the former part of the story. The readers get to know how Alida looks down on Grace through her inner monologue while Grace knows nothing. However, the readers also know about what Grace had done when she met Delphin in the Colosseum. The amazing part of *Roman Fever* is that the author makes the readers have a clear understanding of the inferior and superior positions between Alida and Grace, then she switches that backwards. I think it's really hard to imitate the surprising ending with the original work.

Conclusion

Across the three scenes designed by our group, we preserve the original story's confined Roman setting and dialogue-driven tension while expanding it through branching narrative choices. Fiona's scene 1 establishes atmosphere and character relationships, Joyce's scene 2 deepens Alida's emotional motivations through alternative plotlines, and Bella's scene 3 reconstructs the confrontation with multiple possible outcomes. Our final project demonstrates the great potential of modern technological formats, as they can help us reimagine literature in different, expanded ways. However, it also points to some limitations, as there are definitely literary imageries, devices and feelings which are lost in our adaptation. Nonetheless, this project gave us the opportunity to fall in love with the story of *Roman Fever* once again, and demonstrated how classic literature can be transformed into an immersive and interpretive digital experience.

Appendix: Workload Distribution

Concept Development	All members
Design Scene 1 (slide 2-50)	顏子甯 Fiona Yen (B12102050)
Design Scene 2 (slide 51-111)	吳宜臻 Joyce Wu (B12102032)
Design Scene 3 (slide 112-187)	黃淳琳 Bella Huang (B12102020)

AI citation

“請根據以下描述，並以韓國條漫中的西方宮廷畫風，生成一位穿著19世紀末服裝的女子。small and pale, looks quiet” Prompt. Gemini, Gemini 3, Google, 4 June 2026, [Google Gemini](#)

“請根據以下描述，並以韓國條漫中的西方宮廷畫風，生成一位穿著19世紀末服裝的女子。fuller, and higher in color, with a small determined nose supported by vigorous black eyebrows ” Prompt. Gemini, Gemini 3, Google, 4 June 2026, [Google Gemini](#)

“請生成一個穿著西裝的正面男性剪影，且髮型須符合19世紀末的風格” Prompt. Gemini, Gemini 3, Google, 4 June 2026, [Google Gemini](#)

“maid A: A new maid who is a good friend of the old maid, maid B: A maid with five years of working experience, she used to serve Delphin for 1 year. 請根據上面的描述分別以韓國條漫中的西方宮廷畫風生成兩張獨立的女僕照片” Prompt. Gemini, Gemini 3, Google, 4 June 2026, [Google Gemini](#)

“請使用韓國漫畫中西方宮廷畫風生成一個老練的，已經工作超過二十年，看起來很忠心耿耿的女僕” Prompt. Gemini, Gemini 3, Google, 4 June 2026, [Google Gemini](#)

“請用韓國條漫中的西方宮廷畫風生成一張書桌，上面放著一支鋼筆、一瓶墨水及一張空白的信紙 ” Prompt. Gemini, Gemini 3, Google, 4 June 2026, [Google Gemini](#)

“請用韓國條漫中的西方宮廷畫風生成一個坐在書桌前往窗外看的視角的圖片” Prompt. Gemini, Gemini 3, Google, 4 June 2026, [Google Gemini](#)

“請以韓國漫畫的西方宮廷畫風生成一個19世紀末風格的家中餐廳的背景” Prompt. Gemini, Gemini 3, Google, 4 June 2026, [Google Gemini](#)

“請以韓國漫畫的西方宮廷畫風生成一個沒有人的羅馬競技場” Prompt. Gemini, Gemini 3, Google, 4 June 2026, [Google Gemini](#)

“請以韓國漫畫的西方宮廷畫風生成一個19世紀末風格的女性的房間背景圖” Prompt. Gemini, Gemini 3, Google, 4 June 2026, [Google Gemini](#)

“生成一個城堡的女兒牆，要符合十九世紀的美國風格” Prompt. ChatGPT, ChatGPT (GPT-5.5), OpenAI. 6 June 2026. [ChatGPT](#)

“我要比較動畫一點，我要用在視覺小說的創作用” Prompt. ChatGPT, ChatGPT (GPT-5.5), OpenAI. 6 June 2026. [ChatGPT](#)