

B. A. THESIS
FRUSTRATED SENSIBILITIES IN THE CONTEXT OF THE CONVENTIONS OF THE
NEW YORK ELITE OF WHARTON'S FICTION
by MARKÉTA KŘENKOVÁ

This is a solid well-written thesis that displays an excellent knowledge of the works of Edith Wharton and their historical context. There is nothing particularly original about the thesis, but at B. A. level, that is not an obstacle to proposing the mark of **excellent (výborně)**. The student's prose is nuanced, fluent and a pleasure to read. She makes judicious use of secondary sources for elucidating some of Wharton's central themes.

I have only a minor objection. In the first paragraph of the thesis, the Ms Křenková remarks how 'conventions work to frustrate the natural development of the individual life-narrative'. Leaving aside the superfluous 'work to' and the awkward final adjective and noun (the expression in general tends towards the periphrastic), I would like to draw attention to the assumption behind this idea. The implication here is that the lives of individuals can be conducted in some kind of 'natural' way if they can only escape the conventions of their times. This is an old American ideology, of course; what surprises me is that Ms Křenková does not question it. No-one will argue that the conventions of Wharton's New York were stifling and pretentious, fashioned to simulate the courts of Europe, but there is no 'natural' life beyond the conventions of our time. To an extent this is the fault of Wharton's own fiction also. What separates her depiction of New York from, say, Tolstoy's depiction of St Petersburg is that the latter can imagine a social order, or way of life, beyond the metropolis which challenges the city's morality, whereas Wharton is left wandering around the corridors of a large Stanford White house in the Hamptons, with only fleeting glimpses of the peasantry and working-class.



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