Abstract

The primary focus of this thesis is the New York fiction by the prolific American writer Edith Wharton. The particular works discussed in this thesis are *The House of Mirth*, *The Custom of the Country*, and *The Age of Innocence*, completed by the collection of four novellas, *Old New York*, and also a selection of Wharton's short stories set in the city of New York. The main argument of the thesis could be encapsulated to say that Wharton's fiction lacks the individuality of the characters, and the main focus of the texts is on society and how society affects the archetypes of the characters created solely for the purposes of this thesis. It is divided into three intersecting chapters, the first topical chapter concentrating on New York as such and how the Gilded Age influenced the Big Apple. Moreover, Wharton and her own relationship with the city is discussed in this chapter as well, pointing at the fact that she was intimately familiar with the custom and the manners of the upper society of New York, which she later implemented in her fiction. Also, the description of naturalism and determinism are provided as those seem to be the genres most utilized by the author.

The next chapter revolves around the notion of archetypes as Claude Lévi-Strauss introduced in his "The Structural Study of Myth," which is described and later implemented on four archetypes found in Wharton's texts, which had been given the names of "The Fated Heroine," "The Cowardly Rebel," "The New Man," and "The Rule Keeper," looking for similarities between the characters belonging to the same category as well as explaining their evolution. The last chapter then closes the discussion by drawing Wharton's work towards the ideas of capitalism, consumerism, and the spectacle, all of which are demonstrated on particular situations in the texts. The thesis tries to broaden the discussion of archetypes with Lévi-Strauss's structural theory as well as to prove that individuality is a myth and is completely redacted from Edith Wharton's fiction.