



FACULTY OF ARTS
OF CHARLES UNIVERSITY
IN PRAGUE



Department of Anglophone Literatures and Cultures

SUPERVISOR'S REPORT
B.A. THESIS

The Theme of Death of the Female Protagonists in *The Awakening*, "The Yellow Wallpaper," and *The House of Mirth*, and Its Realistic Foundations

Lenka Mervová

The thesis convincingly argues that even though gender relations began to change radically in the second half of the nineteenth century, many issues remained unresolved, and women—increasingly emancipated and critical of patriarchy—often ended up in a vacuum as they abandoned their old social roles but found no acceptable new ones. Thus we encounter such a “remarkable number of dead women” in nineteenth-century Realist novels, as Nancy Bentley put it. Contrary to Bentley and other critics, who argued that these texts depicted suicide as an act of submission rather than as a manifestation of women’s agency, Ms. Mervová insists that suicides of such heroines as Edna Pontellier in *The Awakening* and Lily Bart in *The House of Mirth* should be interpreted along the lines of modern understanding of suicide as self-affirmation.

Certainly, there are critics who made the above point and the argument is defensible, although it is worth emphasizing that suicide is a questionable means of self-affirmation. In fact, I think, the defense could explore the fact that Wharton and Gilman, despite the obstacles they faced, ended up leading differently rich lives: the former became an established writer; the latter a leading feminist. Where do *The House of Mirth* and “The Yellow Wallpaper,” with their metaphorically or literally dead heroines, stand in the context of these women’s oeuvres? And what about Chopin?

Finally, let me note that the thesis is the result of a long and laborious process. The most challenging aspect was prompting Ms. Mervová to express her thoughts—which were often complex and interesting—in a clear manner. She was asked several times to engage with more secondary material, which she eventually did. Still, the thesis could have drawn on further secondary sources, especially in the chapter about Gilman. And there are still passages where Ms. Mervová could have expressed herself more clearly. Yet, given how much her thesis progressed, I think it is acceptable and satisfactory. Depending on the defense, it may be graded as very good.

Pavla Veselá, PhD.
September 3, 2013

Proposed Grade: **velmi dobře** (very good)