

# Metamorphosis of Lily Bart in Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth*

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## Abstract

Lily Bart in the novel, *The House of Mirth* by Edith Wharton undergoes tremendous suffering for her reluctance to strike moral compromise in order to relish material pleasures. Lily, a homeless orphan with no material possessions, stays with her aunt, Mrs. Peniston at her estate. Material allurements and insecure future force Lily to socialize, to elevate herself through matrimonial alliance procured by social gatherings. Unfortunately, her parties for such marriage business lure her to a socially unscrupulous adventure of playing cards. This unwearying temptation exacts an exorbitant price from her. She not only loses conventional suitors but also distances herself from her traditional aunt depriving herself from shelter and succor. Sadly, her efforts to improve her financial standing with helps of her friends air the rumors of flirtation with them. Lily, with a beautiful face, in absence of self-supporting skills, should have married any wealthy but average suitor with intellectual compromise or a worthy suitor with material compromise. Gradually, Lily has no sufficient income and home or guardianship to escape moral compromise; the erstwhile suitors or male friends with her spoilt reputation try to become her customers. Conveniently, she cannot evade even material compromise as she has been raised to abhor dinginess and poverty. Keeping in view the amorous advantage visible in gestures of her male friends, she makes her choice of morality over material comfort accorded to a mistress and protects her chastity but in death.

**Keywords:** Chastity; Material; Moral.

## Introduction

In *The House of Mirth*, Lily Bart is an unwed girl of twenty nine, an embodiment of specialized traits and virtues, well-suited to the taste and the

tenacity of elite society. She is raised to practise pliability; display distinct and discrete dissimulation and also to bang on bachelors with her boundless beauty. *The House of Mirth* registers her growth in materialism maturity and morality. She works upon the ideology of her mother, to trade and negotiate in the marriage market on face value. Her mother imbibes in her heart a kind of conformity to conventional convenience of life by virtue of a wealthy marriage.

Lily religiously follows mother's advice and considers marriage as a portal to social and financial escalation. In dearth of family, facilities and friends, she becomes rudderless. Conversely, her friends and relatives make her marriage prospects minimal by tarnishing her image as a flirt and gambler. Unconventional, liberal Lily who believes in friendship with males and also in risky speculations in share market is lambasted by chauvinistic society for her expansion in male bastion and emancipation from gender-specific roles. Her confusion erupting from gender constraints creates a chaos in her heart leading her to an awful oblivion unspooled in her exit from mortal world.

Lily, in absence of guardianship moves from one household to another and ultimately, to a boarding house. Unluckily, every change of dwelling bestows on her disgrace and dishonor. Amy Kaplan observes that Lily's progression from one home to another is well-guarded by her society. In her constructionist rubric, she claims that *The House of Mirth* deploys "Lily as a scout in a shadowy society in which the connections between the members are binding yet elusive but as a 'possible person'" (Kaplan 89).

Lori Merish asserts that Lily fails to commit to love as emblematic of economically determined specular logic (qtd in Scalan 208). Joan Lidoff finds Lily who "remains locked in the regressive emotional state of primary narcissism" (183). He observes that Lily cannot recuperate from vision of an assured and lavish house earned in matrimony using the currency of her beauty in marriage business. Lily Bart is a construct representing an autonomous and interactive individual who schools herself in lessons of worldly wisdom but instead of availing herself of experience, she entangles herself in a web of conflict between morality and material pursuits. Her uneasy ambivalence and grudging disrespect for monetary gains through immoral channels make her oblivious of her social position where money is the only symbol of elite class. Unfortunately, in absence of even moderate commendation and appreciative advocacy of her friends and relations, she finds no support, solace and even reason or resource for

survival so she embraces death over disgrace of being a concubine of her male friends.

Lily cracks mortally under ideological whip of conventions, but she survives her conscience. Her homelessness makes her vulnerable as a vagabond, anchor-less; the material entitlements, she was habitual of, now are likely to drag her into abominable pit of domestic prostitution. She suffers a terrible material and moral mess in her heart, great tumult of contrastive emotions in which her moral scruple enjoys an edge over material, impure and unethical pleasures.

Lily undergoes an evolving effect of experience and exposure, she chooses moral death over immoral lavish life funded by illicit relations. Lily strikes no compromise in moral compunctions to be a second woman in her friends' lives but moral compromise has become a necessity for her mortal survival as she is without family, friends and fortune but cannot condescend to low socioeconomic status. Lily, to avoid horrors of poverty and also to evade pangs of conscience saves her soul in her death--- her last and only choice.

## **Discussion**

Edith Wharton uses nostalgia as psychoanalytical tool to fathom the reason for Lily's abhorrence to low middle class life as a worker, and also to divulge her evasion of material compromise by blending her affluent past with the penniless present and recruiting past memories to affect future decisions. Sean Scalan explains "Nostalgia is an imaginative feeling that emerges during the collision between the past sense of self and present sense of self" (209). This nostalgic recollection about comfort, neatness, facilitated by luxury, leisure, panache, artfulness, servants and readiness of every possible convenience and autonomy makes her uncomfortable in her aunt's plain home with no aesthetic embellishments.

Nostalgia reminds Lily of the material world of consumption and the environment, now changed for her. Lily has lived an affluent past and has been raised for an affluent future; physical dislocation of this orphan makes her suffer disruptive experiences through nostalgia revealing her identity and the indifference of dear ones. In this business of marriage market, Lily could flourish by either her father's social status or her own virtuous self. Conventional marriage may recommend Lily for good match if she resists gambling in social gatherings or in share market or liberal indulgence with male friends as a maiden and practise such activ-

ities only after marriage.

A single woman's frank association with married or single men is formidable and prohibited in her culture. Lily's liberty with conventions costs her rejection by Simon Rosedale; Percy is also terrified by her fondness for card-playing in parties; Selden loses interest in her after her show of beauty in *tableux vivante*, her adorable but not adaptable inclination in matrimony. She, fortune-less, homeless loses the opportunity of grabbing comfortable stability by virtue of marriage owing to free-will and unconventional stance.

Nichols brothers reflect on the central tenet of 'family system theory' and observe that people especially, women do not exist "in isolation from other human beings or apart from networks of relationships (1). John V. Knapp also observes that "family becomes the source of the matrix of identity rather than only the individual character... and the causes of mishaps are not generated by person or event but by person's emotional link with events and related people" (15). The novel here, exhibits feminist consideration for orphan Lily who chooses an eternal sleep to evade promiscuity of her male friends who could have support her single status with honor, finance and social credibility. Lily, without family support, is targeted by male chauvinism for her consumptive, exploitative sexuality. She is ill-equipped for self-support in monetary terms and also has no substantial support in terms of parents or husband. Edward S. Casey elaborates on Lily's loss of ambience of her formative years and how she reminisces about them as we all recollect "a world that has effectively vanished from our lives and of which we are painfully reminded by its extant traces" (365). Lily, with family and fortune commanded considerable regards in society which she loses in her journey from riches to rags gatherings .

Wharton showcases how Lily, in discrete snapshots grows and suffers more in her anxiety over changing homes - an insecure future and financial limbo. Lily requires luxury as she is habitual of it, but not at expense of her purity. Wharton documents Lily's moral and material conflict in her psyche and her Metamorphosis into a moral entity resisting material temptation. Lily is lured by enticement of pomp and show, but throughout the novel, she struggles to gain luxury through her own efforts, however ineffectual they are. Gradually, her struggle for financial and social security by either marriage or by speculation at stock exchange with Gus Trenor, complicated by her immoral friends, culminates into her fluid, wavering inclination to shun disgrace in sleeping potion as she feels that she like her friends, cannot be unprincipled to blackmail them.

Lily employs her best insight, retrospection and introspection in her natal world which is irretrievably past, but arrays itself to contour the contrast with the present. Lily's habit of constant dwelling on her rich past, her receding beauty, growing age and declining fortune complicate her survival. Her priority of principles over privilege press upon her an aversion to moral condescension; her hardened habit for material possessions and her accustomed aroma of affluence alert and advise her not to compromise on luxury and leisure; moreover, her infantile aversion to dinginess and paucity unhinges her mind when poverty becomes her fate.

Anspach finds Hofer explaining home as a symbol of stability and sustenance. Homesickness torments the sufferer with actual, invented or borrowed images of a place. Lily even in her boarding house, in her imagination, lives in her natal affluent house; rejection of reality complicates her situation further. Selden's flat is also awe-inspiring for Lily as a personal space but she wants it on her own, not in any bondage of matrimony.

Lily wants such autonomous, stable space and individual income for her decent, uncompromising survival but how and where is unknown to her. Her spirit is liberal and free but her gender is not only under constraints but also without a guard and defence. Lily conflates her desire for place with her constraints of gender:

How delicious to have a place like this all to one's self! What a miserable thing it is to be a woman! She leaned back in a luxury of discontent. Even women, he (Selden) said, have been known to enjoy the privileges of a flat. Oh, governesses – or widows. But not girls, not poor, miserable, marriageable girls! (Wharton, *The House of Mirth* 7)

She exclaims that she is without fortune, girl at twenty-nine, and hunts for a husband in elite parties. Lily is so convinced by her mother that marriage is mandatory to her and she deserves not a flat but a mansion where her personal income also along with her husband's opulence, as her mother used to have, must furnish her with all luxuries she is entitled to.

Feminists find Lily under constant surveillance of elite society rules; her reputation, worth and prospects of marriage are on radar of chauvinistic, licentious males, this visual framing is used as a future and further reference to weaken Lily in her social standing by rumours of her affairs. Lily takes her casual friends as most intimate family as she virtually has no family, she has no deliberate intention to enjoy a stroll with Selden, she only needs some rest and a friend – extended, assumed family to provide

her a secure place but at a hefty price.

Michael Nichols states that two people undergo a period of “difficult adjustment before they complete the transition from courtship to functional partnership. They must learn to accommodate to each other’s needs and preferred styles of interactions” (175). Selden soothes Lily’s anxiety with a mask of manners, boundaries and respectable distance in relations, it indisputably makes them strong and autonomous; nonetheless, the penalty of such arrangement is that the relation becomes stressful when mutual support is required. Lily’s elite aloofness is so impenetrable that Selden fails to summon up the optimum confidence and courage to delve into her heart and explore the unspoken but serious.

As a friend, Selden appreciates Lily but he finds her “horribly poor – and very expensive” (Wharton 10). She has no money of her own to manage her expenditure and she is so exquisite in her style that Selden finds her beyond his pocket. *The House of Mirth* observes a dominance of financial gains and manipulations in relations over emotional attachments; facade of faces commences communications but weakens the inherent stability of relations. Lily has no family to look after her interest and friends maintain a facade of affection and sympathy to extract pleasantries from her.

Lily to unnerve and dishearten Selden in his suit, asserts that her style, expensive clothes and accessories are integral part of her persona she states, “If I were shabby no one would have me; a woman is asked out as much for her clothes as for herself...It’s part of the business, the marriage business” (Wharton 12). She is raised by her mother since infancy, in such a way that she has a mindset to trade luxury and leisure in marriage.

Here, her yearning is not for a decent, comfortable home Selden can provide, but for a mansion furnished with leisure and luxury. Her dilemma is that she is in the midst of the marriage business (business involves no emotions, neither good nor bad) and craves too, for a cozy family; the rules and codes of the elite family inhibit and hinder sharing or even a transition to accommodation. Lily has been accustomed to a home, since her infancy, full of decorations, serving as a platform for fabrication of social relations. Unfortunately, her rapidly changing home and diminishing social status unsettle her by increasing her uneasiness and insecurity. Her failure of adaptation to new situation accentuates the very necessity for reactionary resistance to her integration and assimilation into a new, humble bond.

Psychoanalytical gaze observes Lily's fear and anguish during her marriage communications provide her two selves: one the pseudo- self and the other is the solid self; she covers up her inner anxiety and turmoil and assumes pretensions to secure her future in the elite system. Her pseudo- self makes her a cynosure among her friends but for a short while and gradually, she senses her fading impression on them and also their cold response to her.

Her solid self notices that she will have to make some moral compromises to maintain herself in her coterie by embracing an illicit relationship with an affluent person like Gus Trenor or Rosedale. Here, she listens to her conscience and maintains her self- respect avoiding moral compromise for material comfort. Lily possesses full cognizance of sham and shallow demeanor of her friends but in absence of relatives, she counts on her friends to arrange a minted marriage for her.

Lily intellectually evolves, and shunning a materialistic mindset. metamorphoses into a moral being under educative and enlightening effect of Selden and prefers morality to materialistic pleasures. To evaluate Lily's lust for luxury, Wharton makes the readers navigate through the mansion of Gus Trenor with her. Wharton asserts, "Such scenes (clumps of flowering plants etc.) delighted Lily when they gratified her sense of beauty and her craving for the external finish of life ... her whole being dilated in an atmosphere of luxury ... background she required, the only climate she could breath in" (25). This idea of luxury lulls her senses to reinforce her classic epistemology. This is not her home but luxury has fascinated her so much that she finds her entitlement to it as she was once at ease in the backdrop of luxury in natal home.

This enticing pseudo- self, she checks and rebukes with her solid self because she wants luxury lawfully in marriage or through her own earnings, she regales "the luxury of others was not what she wanted ... Now she was beginning to chafe at the obligation (luxury) imposed" (Wharton 25). Luxury by becoming the concubine of Gus Trenor, her friend's husband, or of Rosedale or the wife of George Dorset divorcing him from her hostile friend, Bertha is distasteful to her.

Selden can be a choice but with no promise of fortune and fabulous fiesta, he is not an option against opulence of her friends, moreover she constantly reminds herself of her mother's advice, "(When they lost money) but you will get it all back-you will get it all back, with your face ... the remembrance aroused a whole train of association" (Wharton 28). She recalls cy-

elic and broken, fragmented memories of her home like a business hub:

A house in which no one ever dined at home unless there was 'company' a doorbell perpetually ringing, hall table showered with square envelopes opened in haste ... trips to Europe returns with gorged trunks days of interminable unpacking ... where summer should be spent ... brilliant reactions of expense .... (Wharton 28)

Lily never forgets this animated presence of people, affluent home and what comes constantly in clash with her critical poverty of the present. Ironically, Lily had in her home abundance of maids and servants but no relatives, parents or symbols for her family; she enjoyed luxury but no warmth, privacy of family so she misunderstands her friends like Bertha Dorset as her family. In absence of money, her mother relied on Lily's beauty. Wharton unveils the mind-set of the mother of Lily: "Only one thought consoled her, and that was the contemplation of Lily's beauty. She studied it as some weapon, she had slowly fashioned for her vengeance. It was last asset in their fortunes..." (Wharton 38). Lily was trained by her mother to earn financial security through marriage. Her mother considered marriage as a business to invest in with the currency of beauty and manners and to receive rich dividends of luxury and leisure. Lily too, understands marriage as a business until she is enlightened by experience and exposure of Selden and fascinated with his idea that "success is personal freedom" (Wharton 78).

These recollections of the past, as a defence mechanism of fantasy, turn her attention from privileged past to poor present; antagonistic choices of material comforts and moral compunctions. Unrealistic appraisal of her position before power of those whom she antagonizes by her virgin virtue, by refusal to their erotic pleasure puts her in a tight spot. Lily tries to wriggle out of her circumstances but choice in career, matrimony and social position or repute are prerogative of either males or married women, not of a single independent woman. Lily is reprimanded by a chauvinistic society for her choice in life as she is neither a married woman nor a male; moreover she is now understood as a woman of questionable credentials for her pronounced assumed flirtation with several male friends.

Lily's infantile training by her mother compels her to choose a life of luxury over understanding in matrimony; her own moral sense and inner self is hell-bent on life of values and morality; she fails to choose this way, Percy Gryce, Rosedale for the second reason and Selden for the first. Her



lack of personal talent and standing exclude her from her elite society. She rationalizes her resentment, "She had never been able to understand the laws of a universe which was so ready to leave her out of its calculations" (Wharton 27). Despite all compliance and comfortable harmony, Lily cannot judge the growing aversion and apathy of her friends to her. She counts on them as a family but they can befriend her only when she is on the same scale and social pedestal either with them or subservient to their imperious whims.

She is swept by a conventional gush of prejudice against women. Her mother gave her the conviction "that a girl must, a man may marry according to rules" (Wharton 12). She is governed by rules and her nostalgic reflections during her exile from elite society. She tries eternal sleep after being "stranded in a great waste of dis-occupation" (Wharton 297). Her unconscious self further stimulates her dis-occupied and stranded situation. Here, Damasio states, "Feelings are part of the body's way of surviving, but they may be notoriously bad advisors that lead to prejudicial reactionary thinking" (40).

Lily herself feels that constant dwelling on recollection of her comfortable past, poses problems for her future. She senses "the recollection loosened a throng of benumbed sensations, longings, regrets, imaginings the throbbing brood of the only spring her heart had ever known" (Wharton 299). Lily burns the letters of Bertha Dorset to Selden to save his reputation; she gains her consciousness in continuity of her experiences. She leaves her older self in Selden's flat and assumes a new self where reflections in her interior are congruent with realities in exterior.

Her discord and disturbance are not abated and she is "being swept like a stray uprooted growth down the heedless current of the years" (Wharton 313). The hostile social milieu and apathy of relations destabilize her sense of self; her old memories of comfortable past further catalyze her ideas and memories towards a destructive direction. Wharton rakes up the innermost feelings of Lily to show to what dangerous extent she has suffered "that was the feeling of being something rootless and ephemeral, mere spin drift on the whirling surface of existence" (Wharton 314). Lily further reflects on her life and lack of support of society and family:

In whatever form a slowly accumulated past lives in the blood-whatever in the concrete images of the old house stored with visual memories or in the conception of the house not built with hands but made up of inherited passions and loyalties it has

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the same power of broadening and deepening the individual existence. (Wharton 314)

Lily is torn between imposition of cultured conformity to convention (a preaching of mother to cash in on her beauty in marriage) and her own choice to have her individual niche of her own making with exercise of choice in career and matrimony. She tries her solid self when pseudo self melts by the scorching touch of alienation from ruthless friends. She is not strong enough to assert her solid self as her only ability is to be an arm candy in elite parties. She bitterly performs a menial job of hat-making which leads her to self-rejection and exit from the world.

Lily remains indecisive in her life Cynthia, in this context, remarks, *The House of Mirth* went by the title "A moment's ornament' pernicious form of femininity ..." (Wolff 109). Frances also suggests that "Wharton's novel conveys the feminist social message that the women bred to be frilly decorations run the risks of various sorts of death" (Restuccia 224).

Judith also comments on the ineffectual concept of beauty in *The House of Mirth*, "The temptation to be a beautiful object is destroyed by the consequences of that temptation ..." (Fetterley 200). Selden is sometimes accused of leaving Lily in a tight spot, here, Blake comes to Selden's defence, reflecting on Lily, "her vacillation between the claims of the spirit represented by Selden and the prospects of a wealthy marriage is never quite convincing" (Nevius 57).

Blake also decodes that "she (Lily) was evidently the victim of the civilization which had produced her" (Nevius 55). Wharton's Lily is intelligent enough to feel and comprehend gender bias. When Gerty Farish, governed by altruistic intentions, wants to squeeze the fact about Bertha's rumours of Lily's flirtation with her husband, Lily's visceral response is that credibility of any gossip or rumour hangs on power and money; acknowledging her impoverished status she pathetically, tells Gerty Farish:

Where a woman is concerned, it is the story that's easiest to believe. In this case it's a great deal easier to believe Bertha Dorset's story than mine, because she has a big house and an opera box and it is convenient to be on good terms with her. (Wharton 226)

Here, Lily clarifies that truth has dawned on her. The prestige and position, she earlier enjoyed in social terms because of Bertha, now she has lost completely because of her. Here, one thing is also worth-noticing that

Lily has an elusive tendency which makes her more prone to alienation or suicide. Wharton makes her heroine not a helpless victim but a contender against imposed circumstances, "She (Lily) was beginning to have fits of angry rebellion against fate when she longed to drop out of the race and make an independent life for herself" (Wharton 39).

Lily's dilemma between morality and materialistic outlook in matrimony adumbrated her life in a zigzag, a labyrinth without destination; her fortuitous encounters with incorrigible sentimentalist Selden deviate her from marriage business with face value currency--- an only option for her in dearth of autonomy in finance, fortune, family and finesse. Dazzled so much by scholarly and honest charm of Selden's morality, she declines the suit of Percy Gryce, his material comforts to avoid him "boring her for life" (Wharton 25).

Lily favours mutual understanding and mental compatibility in the couple, absent in Percy, abundant in Selden; she equally craves for financial stability and security abundant in Percy but absent in Selden. Constitutive ambiguity of Lily, here, forces her to stave off the virtuous self of Selden which makes her allusiveness of dubious distinction.

Wharton registers paronomastically, from the dresses of Lily, the folds of her glamorous and convenient past. She regales, "an association lurked in every fold,... gleam of embroidery was like a letter in the record of her past" (Wharton 317). Nancy Miller here guides us, "we must live out a practical politics within the institution" (53). So, Lily's death is a kind of triumph of male hegemony and propagation of patriarchal practices.

Erik Erikson also notices, "full development of identity of a person is a process located in the core of an individual and yet also in the core of his communal culture" (22). Lily's complication erupts more spontaneously as she allows her friends, her suitors to offer her a vision of potential self to tell her behaviour.

She joins the party of Bertha ending in casting slur on her repute; she joins tableaux vivante under counsel of her friends and loses her image of homely, adaptable girl, even her suitors offer her no sustained supple succor to survive. In her tableau vivante, she crosses the boundary between fact and fancy as she poses herself in a fanciful way as a commodity for display forgetting the fact that such erotic exhibition will entice obnoxious person like Gus Trenor not sensitive suitors like Selden.

After that event, Selden captures in him the image of Lily as a decorative, expensive item for show on the shelf and not as an understanding companion. Elaborating on Edith Wharton's heroine, Jules mentions, "analysis of the heroines failure reveals a final, missing step to self hood" (Chametzky 200). Nancy Bentley also reveals:

Lily is desperately homeless and wants the company of Bertha, however, enigmatic it is ... she knows Bertha's social world is ignoble, it is the only world in which Lily can imagine finding security and pleasure, yet at the moment she believes herself most secure, Lily is headed for a fall. (151)

Elizabeth Ammons explains about Wharton, "Women in her (Wharton's) view-no matter how privileged, non conformist or assertive were not free to control their own lives ..." (3). Sarah, B. Pomeroy also states, "Heroines who act outside the stereotype are sometimes said to be 'masculine'" (218). Lily is a misfit in social design as she is masculine to reject conventionality, she wants her own income, own dwelling, personal space and choice like men. Cynthia Wolff also observes, "*The House of Mirth* is about the disintegration of Lily Bart, about the psychological disfigurement of any woman who chooses to accept society's definition of her as a beautiful object and nothing more" (10).

Nicole Loraux elaborates on women's suicide as a "tragic death chosen under the weight of necessity by those on whom felt the intolerable pain of a misfortune from which there is no way out" (235). Here, the suicidal streaks are observed in Lily's hopelessness, "immense weariness once more possessed her... a vivid wakeful fatigue, a wan lucidity of mind... appalled by the intense clearness of the vision" (Wharton 298).

Homeless, principled Lily runs from one home to other, she is so full of fatigue that an eternal sleep only can procure her possible peace and protection preserving her purity in her death. Loraux further adds, "They (Women) are free enough to kill themselves, but they are not free enough to escape from the space to which they belong... a life that finds its meaning outside the self and is fulfilled only in the institution of marriage and maternity, which ties women to the world and lives of men" (24).

Lily is no doubt, exceptionally beautiful; Wharton presents her as, "a figure to arrest even the suburban traveler rushing to his last train" (Wharton 2). Selden finds Lily as an intellectual person of high substance as "she stood apart from the crowd ... wearing an air of irresolution... be the mask of a very definite purpose" (Wharton 3). Wharton praises Lily, mincing no

words, at full throat ease, "... It was characteristic of her that she always aroused speculation, that her simplest acts seemed the result of reaching intentions" (Wharton 3).

Lily is no ordinary person, her fall is also worth-mentioning. Bernard also finds, "Lily's power to draw attention merely as an anonymous spectacle which is made more attractive by virtue of its differences from the hurrying crowd" (Yeazell 713). The critic, Moddelmog feels, "Lily views herself as a kind of artist whose ability to manipulate conventions and appearances pre-supposes a certain distance from them...Lily loses control over the terms of her self-exposure and thereby, faces the possibility of being rather than owning it" (345).

### **Conclusion**

This paper concludes that Lily is a study in contrast but exceptional in virtues. Lily is tempted by material allurements, a little governed by them too. Selden's modern ideas about individual status of women energizes her and strengthens her moral resolve prioritizing a graceful demise over a morally compromised life. Meticulously, she strives for self-worth but lack of accomplishment drags her to an impoverished state. She emboldens herself to live with moral integrity as she seeks no vengeance on Bertha Dorset to regain her material possessions by marrying Bertha's husband after her divorce. Lily leaves the world owing no debt to anyone neither material as she pays Gus Trenor through cheque nor moral as she makes no one guilty of her misfortunes. Materialistic Lily becomes morally upright and radiates with righteousness.

Lelekis finds, "she attempts to act for herself, but habitually submits to the standards of her society" (10). Wharton also relates pain and plight of Lily:

What debt did she owe to a social order which had condemned and banished her without trial? She had never been heard in her own defense; she was innocent of the charge on which she had been found guilty and the irregularity of her conviction might seem to justify the use of methods as irregular in recovering her lost rights. (318)

Frances Resutccia concludes, "her demise is the result of her being born into a male world in which a woman is pinned down, transmogrified into a static art object if she is beautiful and has to be married... Lily cannot survive, far less flourish in this world of frozen identities" (236).

The society of *The House of Mirth* either forces women into its limited slots or rejects them. "Lily's suppleness, her definiteness protects her from being forced in, so she is tossed out" (Resutccia 236). A bitter truth is tapped out that Lily in absence of family, home and socio-financial stability is victimized, sullied, falsely implicated, but she upholds her moral ethics; she prefers death over disgrace. Lily is homeless, roofless, exposed to all calamities of nature or man; an unresolved clash between her need and habit for material comfort of body and her choice for moral integrity of soul render her an out caste and decree her exit from social portals.

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