

## The Unspoken Word:

### Conversational Analysis of Book II, *The House of Mirth*

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(This paper is a continuation of “Flight to Monte Carlo: Conversational Analysis of Book I, *The House of Mirth*,” printed in the 1993 issue of this journal.)

Conversation analysis is a field of study concerned with the examination of the ways in which conversations work. The large interest that scholars of various fields have shown in the study of ordinary conversation is quite natural, considering that conversation is the basic form of communication. David Numan quotes Levinson to emphasize the significance of conversation as a prototype of human language among all other various forms of language uses: “conversation is clearly the prototypical kind of language use — the form in which we are all first exposed to language — the matrix for language acquisition” (Numan 84–85). As ethnomethodologists insist, the significance of conversation analysis lies in its emphasis on the collection of data and samples from natural examples of ordinary everyday communication, rather than from forced, formal situations in which data is “elicited” or “invented.” Such formal experiments have been done prevalantly in many areas of social sciences where elicitation is commonly used in the collection of data and in some areas of linguistics and applied linguistics where researchers commonly invent speech samples. Numan quotes Atkinson and Heritage to point out that in formal experiments researchers’ views have an inevitably strong influence on the selection of

samples, and that they therefore introduce a considerable bias and narrow the range of data, whereas the range of the natural occurrences is far wider than that which can be elicited through such limited viewpoints and particular processes (Numan 85-86). In this light, conversations between characters in novels can be regarded as samples of natural ordinary utterances although they are “invented” by authors, because they are not written, “invented,” or “elicited” in order to be used as data and samples for proving scientific or linguistic theories. Rather they are rich sources for the study of complicated, social and psychological interactions.

In thinking about how conversation works in ordinary natural circumstances, including those portrayed in literary works, it is important to remember that ordinary conversations are full of communication misfires as well as successful communications. Although communicating simple factual matters is far simpler and easier than trying to communicate about elaborate emotional issues, even the telling of a plain fact cannot be free from speakers’ and hearers’ intellectual backgrounds and emotional conditions, and quite often a simple fact cannot be communicated smoothly due to psychological and emotional entanglements. For this reason, despite the cooperative principles and maxims of cooperative conversations that Paul Grice describes in his analysis and study of human communication, in actual conversations it is quite often the case that these cooperative principles and maxims are violated. As Traugott and Pratt mention, obviously, in reality people do not always speak with clear purpose, with reason, or comprehensibly and hearers are not always able to understand what speakers intends to communicate or what they really think. Sometimes communicative breakdowns are not intentional (238). Many times, however, they are intentional, that is, in Traugott and Pratt’s words, sometimes “people genuinely choose not to fulfill the Cooperative Principle.” What this means specifically is that “people lie, for example, or withhold information, or try to confuse the addressee” (238).

As I have previously suggested, conversations between characters in Wharton's major novels are full of the uncooperative breakdowns that are typical of real conversations (Arima 1991, 1992, 1993). *The Age of Innocence*, *Ethan Frome*, and *The House of Mirth* all deal with the theme of emotional and communicative gaps and entanglements between characters. My previous articles on the conversational analysis of the novels observed and examined the nature of evasive, dishonest conversations between their characters, emphasizing the frequency of uncooperative utterances. They observe how Paul Grice's maxims of cooperative conversations are most often violated in conversations between the main characters. As in the discussion on Book I (Arima, 1993) the following summary of Book II focuses on and traces the relationship and the communication gaps between Lily Bart and Lawrence Selden and attempts to observe how their personalities and actions lead to communicative discrepancies, reducing their linguistic competence in "cooperative" conversation.

Book II of *The House of Mirth* begins and ends with the appearance of Lawrence Selden, who also appeared in the very beginning of the novel in the first chapter of Book I. As Linda Wagner-Martin points out in her analysis of the novel, Wharton presents the story of the life of Lily Bart from Lawrence Selden's point of view at the beginning, middle and end of the novel. This structure emphasizes the importance of Selden's role in Lily's life.

Towards the end of Book I, Lawrence Selden received a note from Lily Bart in reply to his request to let him see her. The night before Selden had been taken aback by Lily's beauty, displayed in the performance of a *tableaux vivant*, and had become driven by the desire to see her and to develop the relationship between them. In the late evening of the day he received her answer, however, an incident took place that fatally caused the change of Selden's feeling for Lily: near midnight, he saw Lily coming out of Augustus and Judy Trenor's house. He had previously heard a rumour

that Lily was a mistress of Gus Trenor, but so far had refused to believe the hearsay. But on actually seeing her with his own eyes coming out of Trenor's house very late at night, he concluded on the spot that what people had said about her was true. He believed immediately that Lily was so completely captured by the money-centered value system of upper-class gilded society that she had become a mistress of Trenor. It did not occur to him to confirm whether Lily really was Trenor's mistress or not, by asking her or some other credible person. Nor did it occur to him that she might have been there to see Judy Trenor, Lily's friend and Gus Trenor's wife, which in fact was the case.

Having misunderstood Lily's visit to the Trenor's house, Selden told himself that he would not visit Lily the next day despite her willing answer, but he did not send Lily a note to tell her that he had changed his plan and the reason for the change. Meanwhile Lily was waiting, either for Selden himself, or for some note if anything deterred him from coming. Needing commiseration and support after her narrow escape from Trenor's attempt to rape her the previous night, she longed to see Selden. She wanted to tell him what had happened and to ask him what she should do next, to save herself from further misfortunes. She wanted Selden to know that she was not completely engrossed with the moneyed society. After waiting for him for a whole day, however, Lily found out that he had left New York for Havana and the West Indies without telling her. She found out about his new plan from the evening paper. Disgusted with what he had seen the previous night, he had decided to separate himself completely from both Lily and the upper-class gilded society, abandoning his wish to "rescue" Lily from that ugly social world. If he had truly intended to help her, this was his opportunity to do so, because she badly needed support. But he refused to help, not knowing that Lily was less guilty than he thought. If Selden had been a "cooperative" correspondent, to put it in linguistic terminology, he might at least have sent her a note to tell her that he was not

coming, possibly with the explanation of his change of plan. But he simply did not respond while she waited for him. In Grice's terms, Selden violated the maxims of quantity in not making his response as informative as was required: he "flouted" the maxims of a cooperative communication. He so thoroughly refused to have any communication with Lily that he escaped from her and from New York. If he had told her the reason for his not wanting to see her instead of completely shutting the communication channel between them, he might have found out that she had refused to yield to Trenor's lecherous advances. Then he might have been freed from disillusion and able to renew the understanding between them, instead of making the misunderstanding between them unbridgeable. The possibility of renewing their relationship was denied when Selden violated the maxims of communication, and chose to separate himself by making himself geographically inaccessible.

In the first three chapters of the novel, Selden and Lily do not talk much, so there is not much material for a conversational analysis of actual conversations. But the close examination of Selden's actions, attitude and thoughts shows the instability of his feelings toward Lily, and also shows how he constantly backs off from personally assisting her whenever the pendulum of his feeling swings towards sympathy and intimacy and she needs help. The way he immediately and always pushes back to doubt and detachment is comparable to a constant violation of the maxims of cooperative conversation.

In the beginning of Book II, standing on the Casino steps in Monte Carlo, Lawrence Selden feels that the festive tropical atmosphere of the city is soothing to his nerves. Looking back on his working life and his association with the upper class rich in New York, including Lily Bart, he feels that New York winters had been cold, ugly and rasping on his nerves. The southern Mediterranean sky and festivities "spread a roof of oblivion" (191) between him and his fixed routines and associations in New York.

Not long after Selden has arrived in Monte Carlo and started to feel refreshed, however, he runs into a group of people from his previous New York life. Much to his puzzlement, he soon finds Lily among the group. While Lily Bart had been waiting for Selden or a message from him at the end of Book I, she had received an invitation from Bertha Dorset asking her to join a cruise in the Mediterranean. Although Lily was quite disappointed that the message was not from Selden, needing solace and diversion and lacking any idea of what else to do in New York, she had accepted the invitation.

Although Selden vaguely knew that Lily has gone sailing with the Dorsets, he had not thought that he might run into her on the Riviera because the season was almost over. He soon realizes that the sight of her still causes him much pain. In the Riviera, he feels that "after all he had not come off unhurt" (194). Lily's figure still makes him admire her immensely and long to be near her. His admiration and longing is now coupled with his equally keen disappointment that she is smeared by the values of moneyed society. If he could have remained completely unaffected by her beauty, his disappointment in her would not have been so painful. To remove the pain, he could attempt a reconciliation, he could learn to be unaffected by the sight of her, or he could escape from her again. He chooses the last alternative, and decides to leave Monte Carlo for Nice. Once he is sitting in the corner of a carriage of the train heading for Nice, however, he begins to feel self-contempt. He asks himself, "What the deuce am I running away from?" (197) It seems "ridiculous to be flying like an emotional coward from an infatuation his reason [has] conquered" (197). He asks himself for a moment if he should rearrange his plan so as to remain in Monte Carlo, even if Lily is there. After all, he might as well choose the second option and learn to make himself unmoved even when he sees Lily. Then another thought occurs to him, justifying his departure from Monte Carlo: it will appear inconsistent if he now decides to remain

in Monte Carlo and gets off the train. He feels that it would hurt his pride to appear so inconsistent. How can he best keep his self-esteem, by not running away, or by not appearing inconsistent? Neither action seems agreeable, and each would only save his pride half-way. "In his inmost heart, he was not sorry to put himself beyond the probability of meeting Miss Bart" (197). To leave Monte Carlo for Nice, after all, would be to follow his "inmost" desire for emotional self-protection ensuring that he would not run across Lily again. However, since he is not willing to admit to himself that this is his real desire, he tells himself that he should leave so as to carry out the planned itinerary and be consistent. In fact, he has already been inconsistent in having changed his original plan to stay in Monte Carlo for another week.

After much indecisive speculation, Selden finally admits that after all he cannot completely detach his mind from Lily if he sees her or hears about her at all. Selden's speculation here on his own action very much shows his indecisive nature, as well as his New Yorker's tendency to value pride and the opinion of others more than personal emotion. This nature and way of thinking has by now become a habit for Selden, and is a large part of the cause of the "uncooperative" conversations he has with Lily, in which they both evade the core of their emotions and avoid direct answers to the other's pleas and questions. From the linguistic perspective, their behavior can be interpreted as constant violation of maxims of cooperative conversations. The cause of such an uncooperative behavior is their almost inherent reserved and calculating nature in their interactions with others and in emotional matters. As is typically seen here Selden is not able to be clear about his own feelings and actions. When Selden finally reaches his decision, however, a group of people appear on the station platform, and Selden is surprised to see Lily among them. They too have changed their plans and decided to go to Nice. Lily is as radiant as ever and seems to be totally unmoved by her unexpected encounter with him. Her complete composure

makes him feel sick. Deep inside he would be glad if she still had some feeling for him. Selden regards Lily's liking for him as an impulsive momentary deviation from the values of a corrupt money-centered society, that is, a momentary detour from her fixed plan to marry a rich member of the corrupt upper-class moneyed society, and thus as purer than her original plan. The seeming loss of her feeling for him makes him both sad and critical of her seemingly complete return to the mercenary society. In the next instant, however, he tells himself that, like her he also can be completely free from any emotional disturbance concerning their relationship: "now he [will] really get well, [will] eject the last drop of poison from his blood" (198). As he repeats this determination in his mind, he observes with exasperation that Lily's ways of making appropriate social maneuvers among the rich vacationers has become skillful and complete now: "She is 'perfect' to everyone." She adapts her behavior to fit each member of the group's particular personality and needs, being "subservient" with dominant Mrs. Dorset, for example, and "good naturedly watchful" of Mr. Dorset's unstable moods. With Selden, she shows no sign of any emotional weakness caused by her brief intimate moments with him in Book I, and manages to smile radiantly upon him, too.

At first, Selden feels sickened by the perfect way she fits herself to the upper-class moneyed society, but suddenly it occurs to him that she has grown more adroit in social maneuvering because she badly needs to do so. He realizes that her situation must be so desperate that she is being forced to make every possible effort to keep up her position. To him she seems to be "on the edge of something" and "poised on the brink of a chasm." Selden might have felt sorry for Lily at that moment. A moment later, however, he talks with Silverton, a young aristocrat among the group and begins to feel ambiguous about Lily again, while Silverton leaves him to a "meditative cigar." Silverton complains to Selden that the group had to leave Sicily and come to the Riviera because of the unsophisticated taste of

some ladies in the group, including Lily Bart. They have come back from Sicily partly because of “Miss Bart’s desire to get back to bridge and smartness. Dead as a stone to art and poetry — the light never *was* on sea or land for her!” (200). Silverton mentions that Miss Bart had also persuaded George Dorset that the Italian food was bad for him: “Oh, she could make him believe anything — anything!” He insists that Mrs. Dorset is perfectly aware of Miss Bart’s influence on her husband, but that she will say nothing about it even though it hurts her pride that Lily is working to charm her own husband. Hearing all this from Silverton, Selden is left in “the dusk of a doubting mind.” He wonders if Lily has been totally corrupted by mercenary motives and immorality of upper-class New York society. Is she George Dorset’s mistress, too? Selden has mixed feelings: if she is really corrupt, it will make it easier for him to completely forget her, but if she is not as corrupted as rumors hint, he may wish to develop his relationship with her, although he will still not want to commit himself. His feelings for Lily have grown more ambiguous than ever, because the more he sees her the more difficult he finds it not to think about her: the more he is attracted to her, the stronger this hope is, and the stronger is his hope that she is pure, the stronger also is his doubt that she may be corrupt. He lets “faint corroborative hints” about Lily “generate a light of their own in the dusk of [his] doubting mind” (200). Later in the evening he draws a “fortified” conclusion that she is not pure. That his conclusion needs to be fortified, however, is another indication that his “inmost” feeling cannot stay firm either way about Lily. Meanwhile, rumors about her frivolity continue (190-202).

In chapter II, Lily is on the steamer *Sabrina* with Mr. and Mrs. Dorset and other upper-class people. The dominant upper-class families of New York join the cruise with the Dorsets. One of the main purposes for them joining a cruise on a luxurious steamer in the Mediterranean is to associate with European aristocrats. Lily’s beauty, grace and affability are assets in

making their association with these European aristocrats pleasant and successful. It seems to Lily that she has been invited to join them because of her social assets. After having spent almost two months on the yacht, Lily feels that she can now forget all about her financial difficulties and the unpleasant advances of lecherous rich men. She enjoys the mildness of the Mediterranean climate and the pleasant feeling of being much liked by the European aristocrats she meets. She even feels that maybe she can afford to be proud of herself. After all, will she not always emerge triumphant from her financial difficulties, no matter how much she spends on dresses and card games, being so gifted with beauty, grace and social adroitness? She is satisfied with her ability to take advantage of the opportunity to provide for herself in such a luxurious way. Deep inside, however, she is still aware that such a way of earning a living can only be temporary and that she still cannot pay back her huge debt to Gus Trenor. Yet she refuses to think about her troubles. And while she is also vaguely aware of new difficulties ahead, she is confident that she will surely be able to manage them if they arise. She knows of Mrs. Dorset's flirtation with Ned Silverton, and is aware of the awkward feeling among the company on board the *Sabrina* about their affair, and especially of Mr. Dorset's growing irritation. There seems to be even some sense of foreboding in her mind. But Lily feels that she can forget it when she goes on shore to dine with European aristocrats.

Eventually, however, a new trouble begins to emerge. One night, the group leaves the yacht and goes into town to watch a show. In the middle of the show, Mrs Dorset leaves early, saying that she finds the show boring. She tells the group that she will meet them at the station, but does not turn up at the appointed time. Unable to meet her at the station, Mr. Dorset, Dabham and Lily go back to the yacht, after midnight, by themselves. The next day, Mrs. Fisher, one of Lily's New York friends, warns Lily that Dabham is telling everybody that Lily and Mr. Dorset came back alone after midnight the previous evening. Mrs. Fisher further warns Lily that

Mrs. Dorset may be plotting against Lily. Lily does not take Mrs. Fisher's warning seriously, seeing nothing wrong with her present course and still feeling confident about her own social "knack." Nevertheless, she now starts to feel slightly uneasy and wonders if this uneasiness has been caused by her unexpected encounter with Lawrence Selden. But she tells herself that he cannot be the cause of her foreboding because a proper distance has been established between them by then. Lily has taken his departure for Nice as a clear message that they are not to meet again.

As Lily reflects on her situation and on Mrs. Fisher's warning, her apprehension suddenly grows acute when she sees Mr. Dorset coming toward her, looking extremely nervous and upset. He starts to tell Lily that his wife did not come back to the yacht until seven o'clock in the morning. Mrs. Dorset and Ned Silverton missed all the trains. Mr. Dorset is agitated by his wife's affair with Silverton. In his present emotional crisis, he clings to Lily for comfort. His reliance on her intensifies her sense that she is now dangerously involved in the crisis in the Dorset's marriage. Mr. Dorset is now resolved to call on a lawyer to settle the case, and refers to Lawrence Selden. At first, Lily is very alarmed by the allusion to Selden, but after a moment's consideration, consents to Mr. Dorset's suggestion to ask for Selden's assistance. Lily thinks that Selden would be the best lawyer to help Mrs. Dorset out of this complex case. Although she is slightly aware of Mrs. Dorset's animosity towards her, she feels sorry for Mrs. Dorset as well as for Mr. Dorset and Ned Silverton. She wonders sympathetically how Mrs. Dorset is coping with her situation, and fears that she may be suffering a great deal of anxiety over the outcome of her scandalous affair with Ned Silverton. When she goes back to *Sabrina*, to her astonishment, she finds Mrs. Dorset calmly and elegantly serving tea. To Lily's further astonishment, Mrs. Dorset reproaches her for coming back alone with Mr. Dorset the previous night, without waiting for Mrs. Dorset and Silverton. Even at this point, Lily has not become fully aware

of Mrs. Dorset's animosity against her and of the danger she is facing, partly because she is too surprised at this unexpected turn. Lily takes Mrs. Dorset's reproach as nothing more than a desperate attempt to cover up her affair with Silverton (203-216).

In the beginning of chapter III, Lawrence Selden receives a telegram from Lily asking for his assistance in settling the friction between Mr. and Mrs. Dorset. He decides to respond to her request and to guide Mr. and Mrs. Dorset to a solution. The readers are told that his response comes from "a purely professional zeal," and that he does not feel any particular personal obligation or wish to help either Mrs. Dorset or Lily. He wants to avert a scandal, in a general sense, as a lawyer. It is noted, however, that "his desire to avert it was increased by his fear of involving Miss Bart" (217), although, at this point, he is not aware of Lily's danger specifically. Still, the general idea of helping the Dorsets at the request of Miss Bart is not altogether unpleasant to him. Selden's attitude towards Lily Bart in chapter III continues to be ambiguous. At one point in the chapter, he appears willing to help Lily. At other times, he shows restraint. And even when he shows some willingness to respond, he does not step beyond a certain line, and basically ends up not helping Lily.

After counseling Mr. Dorset, Selden runs into Lily in a square near the Casino. Lily asks him anxiously how the case stands. Selden tries to assure her that it will not grow any worse in the future. He thinks that in answering her he has "stretched [his words] a shade to meet the anxiety in her eyes." Before Selden runs into her, he has become impatient of listening to Mr. Dorset, and has made up his mind to clear his hands of the case. He feels that he has done enough for them by counseling the husband. On running into Lily and seeing Lily's anxious eyes, however, he senses his feeling about the case change. His intention to remain purely objective, professional, impersonal and "mechanic" in the case is now shaken by Lily's troubled look. The fear in her eyes puzzles him and disturbs his

determination not to become involved emotionally in the case. He is somewhat tempted to help Lily personally. But this is the last temptation he wants to be drawn to, at this point.

Another significant reason why he is so bewildered is that he still cannot be sure of what Lily is and what she thinks. He wonders, "If the girl was afraid, was she afraid for herself or for her friends?" He half suspects that Lily is so worried about Mrs. Dorset's affair with Silverton and the resulting friction between Mr. and Mrs. Dorset because she is afraid of the exposure of her own affair with Mr. Dorset. Selden is aware that in many matrimonial troubles, if one partner is guilty of unfaithfulness, then the other is also often counter-charged. As he ponders over what share Lily has had in the whole affair, it occurs to him that Mrs. Dorset might be exaggerating her husband's interest in Lily in order to make her affair with Silverton look less grave. The pendulum of Selden's feeling swings back to feeling sympathetic to Lily. He believes that he has always tried not to judge her by her surroundings, although in reality his view of her has often swung towards a harsh judgement. At this moment he decides to warn her to leave the yacht before anything happens.

When Lily tells him that she is concerned about Mrs. Dorset, he tells her earnestly that she should think of herself. At a dinner party on board the *Sabrina* that evening, he feels that Lily's grace surpasses that of the other women. Her beauty seems "matchless." Just as he is admiring her for her aloof difference from other rich people of the class, however, he feels that he has finally lost his personal interest in her, because to him, her choosing to join the costly social dinner after all and to sit as such a perfectly beautiful figure at the table seems to "deny the very differences he felt in her" (224). She looks content to remain in the moneyed society. Seeing how radiantly she adorns the occasion, he wonders derisively how he could have thought she needed his help. It is when Selden is in this state of mind, that a crucial incident occurs in Lily's life. After the dinner, the party breaks

up. As the members of the *Sabrina* party are heading for the yacht, Mrs. Dorset suddenly announces in front of the whole group that Lily Bart is not to come back to the yacht. The dismissal is immediately taken by everybody to be the result of Lily's affair with Mr. Dorset, and as Mrs. Dorset's completely justifiable reaction to the affair. We are told that Lawrence Selden, in his astonishment, feels angry with Dabham, who is a gossip and a society journalist, and this reaction may indicate that he is refusing to see Lily in the same way as the other members of the group at the moment. While everybody stares at her, Lily eventually turns to Selden with an easy gesture and a brave smile saying; "Dear Mr. Selden, you promised to see me to my cab" (226).

Once Lily and Selden are outside, the fiction about the cab is dropped by silent consent. As they sit together, Selden does not speak and waits for her words. He is afraid that any word from him might hurt her. His restraint comes from his sympathy for her. Yet at the same time, he starts to wonder whether there might have been something wrong in her actions that has caused her to be in this plight. After a moment, he suddenly realizes that his silence has been as accusing as the other people's stares. On seeing her mocking reaction to his silence and her determination not to explain or defend herself, he realizes that he has missed the chance to help. He feels that his realization came too late (217-228). Once again, Selden fails to utter any word that might have opened a communication channel between them. Again his emotional indecisiveness makes him linguistically incompetent to say anything, even to make any inquiry.

Having been used and betrayed by Bertha Dorset, Lily falls one significant step out from the center of New York upper-class society. From chapter IV to IX, she falls further and further. In chapter IV, the chapter after Bertha Dorset's treachery, Lily is disinherited. Her aunt, Mrs. Peniston, thinks that she has failed to keep up minimum moral standards and decides not to leave her any legacy. In chapter V, Mrs. Carry Fisher invites Lily to

join the Gormers and to travel to Alaska with them. Again the journey will certainly save Lily temporarily from her financial constriction. But the Gormers' ancestors are not proper upper-class families, and they are not respected in the center of the present New York society, despite their wealth. From a social perspective, joining them will be a conspicuous indication of another step out from the center of the upper-class society, but Lily decides to join them to temporarily ease her financial problems and to cling for as long as possible to social luxury. In the end of chapter V, Mrs. Fisher suggests to Lily that she accept the proposal of Sim Rosedale, the Jewish financier. Lily does not accept this suggestion, but the fact that she even has to consider such a choice is another clear indication of Lily's social decline. Rosedale is not accepted as a proper member of the New York upper-class society. In chapter VII, to aggravate Lily's humiliation, Rosedale tells Lily that he is unwilling to marry her, because she has dropped out of the center of the upper-class society after Bertha Dorset's open rejection of her. He strongly suggests to Lily that she somehow recover her social standing, saying that he would then want to marry her. He suggests to Lily to threaten Bertha Dorset with disclosure of her love letters to Selden, that Lily had bought. Selden's charwoman had retrieved the letters from his waste basket and, mistaking Lily for the writer, had sold them to Lily in Book I. Lily had purchased them with no definite purpose in mind at the time. The audacity of Rosedale's suggestion astonishes her, and she feels hardly able of taking such action (229-281).

In chapter IX, Lily becomes a personal attendant to Mrs. Hatch, another wealthy figure not accepted by upper-class New York society. Just like Rosedale, Mrs. Hatch is trying to become socially accepted, and employs Lily for advice. Again Lily accepts the offer so as to cling to wealth, although again she is aware that to be closely connected to Mrs. Hatch, a divorcée, is a further step in her social decline. It is in this chapter that Lily sees Selden again for the first time since Mrs. Dorset's betrayal, in Mrs.

Hatch's hotel room. Selden has come to warn Lily that she should leave Mrs. Hatch's circle if she wants to prevent further loss of her social standing. The conversation between Lily and Selden in chapter IX shows the resistance they both have to being intimate and personal with each other. There is an emotional barrier between them although the narration implies that they are still attracted to each other: "The situation between them was one which could have been cleared up" (287). The barrier, however, could be removed "only by a sudden explosion of feeling" (287). And the point is that "their whole training and habit of mind were against the chances of such an explosion" (287), just as, in *The Age of Innocence*, the conventional rigorous adherence of New Yorkers to "taste and form" train them not to have honest and open conversations with each other and to habitually violate maxims of cooperative conversations.

Lily definitely feels still attracted to Selden, but his seeming lack of personal interest in her life causes her to build up an impenetrable wall of defence against him. The emotional barrier between the two causes many violations of a cooperative conversation in this chapter although their suppressed emotion can occasionally be seen through. When Selden unexpectedly appears in Mrs. Hatch's residence, the bitterness Lily has felt against him grows keen. She feels that he completely deserted her when she most needed solace from friends. She inquires why he has so suddenly now come and how he has traced her to such an unlikely place. Selden senses Lily's bitterness and says, "Why should I have come, unless I thought I could be of use to you? It is my only excuse for imagining you could want me" (287). We are told that the statement strikes Lily as "a clumsy evasion" (287). Seen from a linguistic perspective, Selden violates the maxims of cooperative conversation in such an artless way that the other person cannot help but notice that he is being evasive. According to his statement, he has come because he thought he could be of some use to her, but not because of any personal emotional inclination. He has needed

some legitimate "excuse" for coming because, according to him, he has not been driven by any personal wish.

Selden's "clumsy evasion" causes Lily's bitterness to grow and she asks him, "Then, you have come now because you think you can be of use to me?" (287) To this question, he answers, "Yes." This part of his answer looks perfectly direct and cooperative. But he does not give this answer without hesitation, and after saying "Yes," immediately adds: "in the modest capacity of a person to talk things over with" (287). Here he does not exactly violate any of conversational maxims suggested by Paul Grice, but the addition considerably restricts the "Yes." He thinks that he can be useful to her, but only "modestly," meaning that he has no particular personal feeling in being useful and that he will assist her only in a general sense. Lily feels chilled in seeing his restraint from developing anything personal between them and asks, "It's very good of you to present yourself in that capacity, but what makes you think I have anything particular to talk about?" (287) Selden explains that Gerty Farish has told him that Lily has been employed by Mrs. Hatch as a secretary, and that Gerty has been anxious to know how Lily is. Again Selden avoids telling Lily what he thinks and this time, instead, he brings up Gerty Farish's concern for Lily. Lily asks him, "Why didn't she look me up herself, then?" (288) He answers that Gerty was afraid of being importunate while he was not restrained by any such fear. But again he adds: "but then I haven't as much to risk if I incur your displeasure" (288). After a short while, when Lily asks him what she is to do with him, he answers determinedly, "You are to let me take you away from here" (288). Lily is astonished by such a direct statement, but immediately asks him coldly, "And may I ask where you mean me to go?" "Back to Gerty in the first place, if you will; the essential thing is that it should be away from here" (288). The first half of his answer only tells Lily where to go temporarily. The latter half does not really tell Lily anything. It is taken by Lily as a refusal to suggest directly any other

place for her to go. The latter half of his answer violates the maxim of quantity in that his answer is not informative enough about where Lily should go if she leaves Mrs. Hatch. It also violates maxim of manner because his answer is not clear but obscure.

During the following argument between them about whether it is sensible and respectable for Lily to stay employed by Mrs. Hatch, Selden shows some eagerness. He feels too disgusted by the gaudiness and unrefined taste of Mrs. Hatch's room to maintain restraint in remaining calm and detached in advising Lily to leave. He closes the conversation, however, by concluding that his right to have made any suggestion to her is "simply the universal right of a man to enlighten a woman when he sees her unconsciously placed in a false position" (290). His impersonal attitude finally makes Lily think that she "would rather persist in darkness than owe her enlightenment to Selden" (290). She herself has doubted the respectability of being employed by Mrs. Hatch, but she does not want to listen to Selden, who tries only to pluck her out of her present employment without suggesting anything to her as to her next course.

In chapter X, Lily starts to work at a hat shop, having left Mrs. Hatch after all. But she finds herself badly lacking in any practical training, except in dressing beautifully and acting gracefully as an ornament of upper-class society. Her nerves are badly affected, and she starts to suffer from sleepless nights and to take sleeping pills.

In chapter XI, Rosedale visits Lily again and offers to help her by lending her some money. He tells her that he cannot bear seeing her being reduced to a position as a workwoman living in a cheap boarding room. He feels that Lily is above such a mode of living. Before Lily fell into her present condition, she resented Rosedale, but her loneliness and dire financial difficulty make her dislike him much less than before, and he seems much kinder than all her other friends, who have deserted her, believing Bertha Dorset. She feels that she might as well rely on Rosedale for finan-

cial assistance. She sees that he would marry her immediately, provided that she retrieves her social standing through reconciliation with Bertha Dorset. Lily's present difficulty reminds her of Rosedale's suggestion that they should blackmail Bertha, using her love letters to Lawrence Selden. In this chapter it seems to her that even using the letters to blackmail Bertha might be necessary if the betrayal would secure marriage to Rosedale. Although she might not be particularly attracted by Rosedale, marrying him now seems like the only possible way to save herself from poverty and her huge remaining debt to Gus Trenor. She gets ready, with the packet of Bertha's love letters to Selden, and goes out to the rainy street. However, when she passes the street where Selden lives, suddenly she becomes much less determined about using the letters. She is seized by a surge of all "sensations, longings, regrets, imaginings, the throbbing brood of the only spring her heart had ever known" (314) and by an overwhelming desire to see Selden.

Lily and Selden have one last conversation in his library. As she enters his room, he is surprised. He does not say anything for a moment and waits for her to speak. He does not exactly have any obligation to speak first, so his silence here cannot be taken as uncooperative. Rather, Lily, the unexpected visitor, might well have started to speak first. Selden's silence, however, is another instance of his general reserve in his interaction with her, although it does not exactly violate maxims of a cooperative conversation. In the beginning Lily is not checked by decorum and fails to keep a proper distance; she starts to pour out her thoughts by apologizing to him for how she reacted to his advice at Mrs. Hatch's. The tone of his responses, however, is light and full of forced humour, covering up his embarrassment. Emotionally charged, Lily wonders how he can "linger in the conventional outskirts of word-play and evasion" (317), an area characterized by intentional violation of maxims of cooperative conversation which is very much a part of the daily life of upper-class New Yorkers, when she has started to go down to the heart of

the matter. We learn that “on Selden’s side the determining impulse was still lacking” though the awkwardness could “be saved only by an immediate outrush of feeling” (318).

Lily sees that she is “forever shut out from Selden’s inmost self” (318). She declares that she must go and starts to confess to him how much his words have meant to her in her life. Then Selden suddenly starts to perceive the seriousness of her tone and to wonder what she means to do and what will come of her. He even starts to feel that their rare illumined moments of feeling united are kindled again. But Lily does not tell him specifically about having desperately thought of marrying Rosedale after blackmailing Bertha Dorset with her love letters to Selden, and her later decision, just a few moments before, outside the flat-house not to use the letters after all. Instead she asks him to start a fire on the hearth and throws the packet of letters into the fire. Selden does not notice this action at the time, but Lily’s tragic and determined look, and her softness towards him, make him wonder wildly what she is doing and what is to happen to her. His mind is benumbed. In a trance, he still fumbles for “the word to break the spell.” Since this is the final hour of Lily’s last encounter with Selden, the author places a key emphasis on “the word” that might fill the emotional gap between the two. Lily says, “Good-bye” and leaves the room (316-322).

In chapter XII, Lily goes out to the street and returns home. Back in her room, she is seized by a more intense anxiety about her own future and a keener loneliness than ever. She realizes that she will probably keep on putting off paying the money back to Gus Trenor. In a flash, she is suddenly revolted by the immoral possibility presented to her. She sees how Selden will view any delay in paying Gus Trenor, if he learns of it. Immediately she writes a check for a thousand dollars to Gus Trenor. Then she goes to bed and takes an overdose of sleeping pills. As she lies in bed, she recalls:

. . . there was something she must tell Selden, some word she had found that should make life clear between them. She tried to repeat the word, which lingered vague and luminous on the far edge of thought; she was afraid of not remembering it when she woke, and if she could only remember it and say it to him, she felt that everything would be well (335).

Chapter XIV, the last chapter of the novel, starts with the narration from Selden's point of view. The morning after Lily's visit to his library, he wakes up afresh and exhilarated. He has finally decided to confess his personal emotion for her, being ready at last to rid himself of all of his doubts and reserves:

[H]e had found the word he meant to say to her, and it could not wait another moment to be said. It was strange that it had not come to his lips sooner, that he had let her pass from him the evening before without being able to speak it. But what did that matter now that a new day had come? It was not a word for twilight, but for the morning (337).

When he reaches Lily's room, he is told by Gerty Farish of Lily's death. Given the right to search her room, Selden finds the check written to Augustus Trenor. He realizes painfully that Lily never intended to be Trenor's mistress as he has suspected all the while. As soon as she received the limited legacy from Mrs. Peniston, she wrote checks to pay back all her debts, including the biggest one to Trenor. With a pang of regret, Selden realizes that he has failed to love Lily uncritically. But he consoles himself by deciding that at least he has loved her, while all the outer conditions of life have caused them to remain apart to the end. He feels penitent and reconciled at the thought. The last three lines of the

novel refers to “the word” again.

He knelt by the bed and bent over her, draining their last moment to its lees; and in the silence there passed between them the word which made all clear (342).

The narration in the last chapter, however, is given only from Selden’s viewpoint. That the word passes “between” them is merely his illusion now that Lily is dead. At best, it is only an ironic metaphor that it does. As we have seen, there have been many times when Selden did not say a word when he had an opportunity to do so if he had meant to be a “cooperative” friend of Lily. If he wanted to say “the word which made all clear” between them, he might as well have said it to her the previous night when she came to his library. Earlier, he had not said a word after Lily was shunned from the society through Bertha Dorset’s plot. Selden’s failure to speak a word at crucial moments in Lily’s life, whenever they could have developed an understanding can be interpreted as the ultimate violation of all cooperative maxims of communication. Especially towards the end, repeated references to the missing key “word” emphasizes the fact that the communication between the two fails because of their inability to come up with and to actually say an appropriate “word” at appropriate moments. In Grice’s term, they lack the linguistic capacity to adhere to cooperative maxims and to exchange words that fulfill those maxims, and thereby to respond to the other person’s emotional need through apt replies at needed moments. This is what keeps leading them further and further from each other. Even towards the end, when finally the possibility of honest, direct communication, symbolized as “the word which will make all clear between them,” begins to flicker and to seem almost to come true and be said, it misfires and ends as an illusion, while both they and the reader are kept in suspense about whether the bridge of communication will be finally

extended by “the word.” It remains unspoken.

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