of those things," he
v and then, allowed
me style, intact. Or
" his lover under-
nrequited. But Kip
rself to die ("when
opportune moment
that she is moving
be sung by anyone
n to sing on Adam's
hen Adam is about
g to silence and his
you dare slam that
off a contraption of
berg machine), an
narrative, the last
of Kip singing his
an't tell Kip's voice
Adam's exit music,
anda together. And
es some versifying
the words "Hello,
e her back, after a
vriting he changes
u're gazing at the
o earth, and while
e, and resent a little
s hers, away to his
It is his final claim
gun and the chil-
ent of gentle geni-
thout contesting it.

me their adventure
ng, sometimes not,

7

THE SAME AND DIFFERENT

The Awful Truth

All she will tell him, or warn him of, visiting him at his apartment, before becoming his sister, is that his ancient poem to her, which she is about to recite, will hand him a laugh.

ON certain screenings I have felt *The Awful Truth* (1937) to be the best, or the deepest, of the comedies of remarriage. This feeling may be found eccentric on any number of grounds. That I expect little initial agreement with it is registered in the qualification "on certain screenings." By the qualification I mean not only that there have been screenings on which I have not felt this way; I mean also to suggest that the experience of this film is more dependent on the quality of the individual session of screening than its companion films are. Specifically, my connection with the film, even my understanding of it, has been especially dependent, it seems to me, on the presence with me of an appreciative audience. This could mean either that my responses are less free than in other cases, requiring infectiousness and a socially inspired willingness to be pleased, to be sociable; or that my responses are more free, participating or not as they require, the film not forcing its attention upon me. Is the latter possibility really credible? It proposes an achievement of this film—that is, an achievement of its director, Leo McCarey—that transcends the comparable achievements of Frank Capra, Howard Hawks, and George Cukor. The transcendence is not, no doubt, by very much, but the surprise is that Leo McCarey should be setting the example at all for his more famous, or more prominent, colleagues. To get past what may be hardly more than prejudice here, it may help to note Jean Renoir's remark that "Leo McCarey understood people better than any other Hollywood director."* There could hardly be, from that source, higher praise.

* Reported by Andrew Sarris in *The American Cinema* (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1968), p. 100.

Nor would McCarey's colleagues in the genre of remarriage themselves have been surprised at his presence. You may not find that Cukor is remembering McCarey when near the beginning of *The Philadelphia Story* Dinah says, "Nothing possibly in the least ever happens around here," three years after Aunt Patsy had said, near the beginning of *The Awful Truth*, "Nothing unusual ever happens around here." Since Dinah's line occurs in the play *The Philadelphia Story*, maybe it was just Philip Barry who was remembering Aunt Patsy a year or two later and Cukor didn't care one way or the other whether the line was retained for the film script. Or maybe the writers and directors in question were all remembering, or each work discovering for itself, a way of warning its audience, taking it by the hand as if to say, that a narrative is about to begin. ("What's happening?" asks Beckett's blind Hamm, trapped between beginning and ending.) But can it be doubted that Howard Hawks is paying homage to McCarey in all but taking over the content of the great restaurant sequence in *His Girl Friday* from the great restaurant or nightclub sequence in *The Awful Truth?* In both sequences, Cary Grant, as a group awkwardly settles itself around a table, opens a conversation with his estranged wife and with Ralph Bellamy by saying, "So you two are going to get married." Grant then quizzes them about where they will live, and elaborately pictures his wife's pleasure in getting away from the big city with its rigors of elegant shops and theaters to the peace and quiet and adventure of the West (Oklahoma City in the present film, Albany in the later). In both the woman tries to protect her new man against the onslaughts of the old and in both the conversation turns, with some relief, to a business proposition. There is also in both a moment (in *The Awful Truth* this comes not within the restaurant sequence but in the sequence that follows it in Bellamy's apartment) at which Grant, breaking up laughing as he begins reciting an intimate memory, has to be signaled off the subject by the woman. And we should note that the last night, at Grant's prospective in-laws' house, as Irene Dunne puts on her sister act, she says, in greeting the father of the family, "I never would have recognized you from his description," thus preparing the way for Walter's initial words to Bruce, "Hildy, you led me to expect a much older man."

If *The Awful Truth* does have a certain specialness, perhaps this is to be attributed less to its director than to some special place it occupies in the genre of remarriage. It is the only member of the genre in which the

topic of divorce and the location in Connecticut are undisplaced, that is, in what one is most likely to take as their natural places; in which the pair's story both opens with the former and closes at the latter. But how do we know that this kind of natural or straight account is so important, more important, say, than the fact that in this film the woman's father is not present but is replaced by someone called the woman's "Aunt"? Besides, if genre itself were decisive, Hitchcock's *Mr. and Mrs. Smith* (1941), which works brilliant variations within the genre, would have more life for us than is to be derived from its somewhat cold comforts. Any answer having to do with the depth of participation in the genre must invoke a director's authority with the genre, his nativeness or subjection to it, the director and the genre knowing how to get the best from one another.

And this must mean, according to our understanding of this genre, knowing how to take a woman most deeply into the forces that constitute the genre, which in turn means finding a woman, and finding those qualities in a woman, in whom and in which those forces can most fully be given play. Here is a place we come unprotectedly upon the limitation of criticism by the fact of something that is called personal taste. About *It Happened One Night* I said that its appreciation depended on a certain acceptance of Claudette Colbert; but my sense of *The Awful Truth* is that if one is not willing to yield to Irene Dunne's temperament, her talents, her reactions, following their detail almost to the loss of one's own identity, one will not know, and will not care, what the film is about. Pauline Kael, for instance, in her Profile of Cary Grant has this to say about Irene Dunne in *The Awful Truth:* "though she is often funny, she overdoes the coy gurgles, and that bright toothy smile of hers—she shows both rows of teeth, prettily held together—can make one want to slug her."* Whatever the causes of this curious response, it disqualifies whatever she has to say as a response to *The Awful Truth*.

It is, I believe, particularly hard to recall the sequence of events that constitute the film; and since I am going to take something like this difficulty to be internal to McCarey's achievement in it, it will help to

* *The New Yorker*, July 14, 1975. Reprinted in *When the Lights Go Down* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1980), p. 7.

summarize its main segments. (1) In a prologue, at the Gotham Athletic Club, Jerry Warriner (Cary Grant) is about to get a sun-lamp treatment sufficient to make it appear that he's spent the last two weeks in Florida, "even if it takes all afternoon." He is speaking to a passing acquaintance with a squash racket: "What wives don't know won't hurt them." And he adds, "And what you don't know won't hurt you." He invites the acquaintance to come home with him later on for protection, I mean for drinks. (2) Entering the house with this, and other acquaintances, Jerry discovers that his wife is not at home. He invents the explanation that she's at her Aunt Patsy's place in Connecticut, an explanation which collapses when Aunt Patsy walks in looking for her. Lucy Warriner (Irene Dunne) enters, in evening dress, followed by Armand Duvall, her singing teacher, it emerges, with a story about chaperoning a dance and then on the road back having the car break down miles from nowhere, and spending the night at a very inconvenient inn. Jerry mockingly pretends to believe the story and is complimented by Armand for having "a continental mind." The guests take the cue to leave, Jerry says his faith is destroyed, Lucy says she knows what he means and tosses him a California orange that he had brought her as from Florida. She says he's returned to catch her in a truth, to which he responds by calling her a philosopher. He gives a speech which includes the lines: "Marriage is based on faith. When that's gone everything's gone." She asks if he really means that and upon his affirming it she telephones for a divorce. (3) Her lawyer, on the phone, repeatedly tells Lucy not to be hasty, that marriage is a beautiful thing; he is repeatedly interrupted by his wife asking him why they have to be interrupted, whom he repeatedly invites, each time covering the phone, to shut her mouth. (4) In divorce court, Mr. Smith (the dog Asta) is tricked by Lucy into choosing to live with her. Jerry asks for visiting rights. (5) Aunt Patsy wants to get out of the apartment she and Lucy have taken and have some fun tonight for a change. Lucy objects that they haven't an escort. Aunt Patsy stalks out and comes back with their neighbor from across the hall, Dan Leeson (Ralph Bellamy). Jerry appears for his visiting time with Mr. Smith, whom he accompanies at the piano. The others leave. (6a) Dan's mother warns him in general about women and in particular about that kind of woman; (6b) Aunt Patsy warns Lucy against acting on the rebound, pointing out to her that her toast is burning; (6c) 6a continued; (6d) 6b continued. (7) In a nightclub Jerry's

friend Dixie Belle sings and enacts "My Dreams are Gone with the Wind." On each recurrence of the title line air jets from the floor blow Dixie Belle's flowing skirt up higher and higher—she finally gives up trying to hold it down. On meeting Dixie Belle, Lucy had said, with some surprise (presumably given her view of Jerry's taste in women), that she seems like a nice girl. When Jerry corrects Dan's impression that Lucy dislikes dancing, Dan, from whom we learn that he is a champion dancer, takes her onto the floor. The music changes and Dan is moved to take over the floor with his champion jitterbugging. Jerry so thoroughly enjoys Lucy's taste of country life that he tips the orchestra to repeat the same number. Jerry pulls up a chair to the edge of the dance floor, sits legs crossed, his arms draped before him carelessly, perfectly, fronting the dancers and the camera, looking directly at the world with as handsome a smile as Cary Grant has it in him to give, in as full an emblem of the viewer-viewed, the film turned explicitly to its audience, to ask who is scrutinizing whom, as I know in film. I think of it as a hieratic image of the human, the human transfigured on film. This man, in words of Emerson's, carries the holiday in his eye; he is fit to stand the gaze of millions. Call this the end of Act One. (8a) Lucy and Dan at the piano in his apartment make a duet of "Home on the Range"; (8b) Jerry enters to discuss their business deal about a mine; (8c) Dan's mother comes in with gossip about Lucy; Jerry sort of clears her name with a speech of mock gallantry, exiting on the line, "Our marriage was one of those tragedies you read about in the newspapers," but Maw is still not satisfied, whereupon Lucy retreats to let her and Dan sort the matter out alone. (9) Lucy returns to her apartment to find Jerry there, rewarding himself with a drink for having, he says, given her that swell reference; she haughtily refuses an offer of financial help from him, and laughs heartily as the piano top falls on his hand. As they walk toward the door for Jerry to leave, Dan knocks. She opens the door, concealing Jerry behind it. Dan apologizes for his mother's suspicions and insists on reading Lucy a poem of love he has written for her. As he embarks on it Jerry from behind the door prods Lucy to laughter with surreptitious pencil jabs in her ribs. The phone rings, just the other side of Jerry. Lucy answers; we are shown by an insert that it is Armand; Lucy asks whoever it is to wait and puts down the phone; as she crosses back past Jerry to complete her exchange with Dan, behind her back Jerry picks up the phone and learns who is on the other end.

Lucy gets rid of Dan by giving him a kiss; he departs noisily. Lucy makes an appointment into the waiting phone, handed to her by Jerry, for three o'clock the next afternoon, explaining to Jerry after she hangs up that it was her masseuse. Jerry finally leaves, saying he's just seen a three-ring circus. The situation prepares for the juggling of farce. (10) At three o'clock, evidently the next afternoon, Jerry forces his way into Armand's apartment only to discover Lucy singing for a musicale. (11) The farce erupts as Mr. Smith fetches Armand's hat for Jerry, whom it doesn't fit, try as he will. The two men find themselves in the same bedroom, Armand to avoid Jerry, Jerry to avoid Dan and Maw who have come together this time to apologize again. From the bedroom the two men dash across the living room past the assembled others and out the door. Lucy had written a letter to Dan telling him that she was still in love with Jerry and had asked Aunt Patsy to deliver it. Dan says, a moroser if wiser man, "I've learned a lot about women from you, Lucy; I've learned that a man's best friend is his mother." As he and his best friend start their exit, Aunt Patsy takes Lucy's letter from the mantle and delivers it: "Here's your diploma." Call this the end of Act Two. (12a) Mr. Smith barks at the society page of the newspaper Lucy is reading; it says that Jerry and Barbara Vance are to be married as soon as his divorce is final, which incidentally is today; (12b) The newspaper comes alive in a montage of Jerry and Barbara's whirlwind romance, which mostly consists of their attending or participating in society sports events; a sequence that reads like the society segment of, say, a *Movietone News*. (13) In Jerry's apartment, to say goodbye on the eve of their final decree, Lucy recites a poem written in another time for her by Jerry. She introduces it by saying, "This will hand you a laugh," but neither of them is tickled in the ribs. They sample some champagne that the life has gone out of; evidently they are unable to celebrate either divorce or marriage. To account for Lucy's presence when she answers a phone call from Barbara Vance, Jerry invents the tale that his sister is visiting from Europe, then after a pause explains that she can't come over with him tonight because she's busy and anyway is returning to Europe almost immediately. Lucy says he's slipping. (14) That night, at the Vance house, Lucy interrupts a flagging family occasion with a vulgar display as his low-down sister. She claims to be a nightclub performer and shows them how with Dixie Belle's "Gone with the Wind" ("There's a wind effect right here but you will just have to use

your imagination"). Jerry joins her on her exit from the song and dance, and (15) they drive to their conclusion in Connecticut.

THAT THERE IS NOT a dull scene in the film is less important a fact, or less surprising given its company, than that there is no knock-out scene, nothing you might call a winning scene, until perhaps the end of the two-men-in-a-bedroom farce, which in my outline I figured as the end of Act Two; but possibly the preceding recital sequence can be taken so, or perhaps the sequence preceding the recital, as Jerry pokes Lucy in the ribs to laugh at Dan's poem. Even if you consider what my outline figured as the end of Act One as a winning scene, this night club sequence takes place much later in its film than, say, the restaurant sequence of *His Girl Friday* in its film, which already followed several instances of knock-out business. We have in this absence of a certain kind of scene the beginning of an explanation of the particular achievement of this film—*if*, that is to say, one regards this film as a serious achievement. Speaking of an absence in this regard is putting negatively a virtue that, put positively, empowers the presenting of an unbroken line of comic development, a continuous unfolding of thought and of emotion, over a longer span than is imagined in the companions among the genre of comedy in which we are placing the film. I understand the point of the achievement to be the tracking of the comedic to its roots in the everyday, to show the festival to which its events aspire to be a crossroads to which and from which a normal life, an unended diurnal cycle, may sensibly proceed. I want to spell out this perception a little further now, if more or less abstractly, as a kind of gauge of this film's role in the genre of remarriage.

The diurnal succession of light and dark takes the place in these films of the annual succession of the seasons in locating the experience of classical comedy. The point is to show that the diurnal, the alternation of day and night, and in the city, mostly sheltered from the natural seasons (as in a film studio), is itself nevertheless interesting enough to inspire life, interesting enough to be lived happily; lived without, one may say, outbreaks of the comic, as if there is no longer a credible place from which our world can be broken into; that is, no communal place, no place we have agreed upon ahead of time. An answer is being given to an ancient question concerning whether the comic resides funda-

mentally in events or in an attitude toward events. In claiming these films to enlist on the side of attitude here, I am assuming that sanity requires the recognition of our dependence upon events, or happenstance. The suggestion is that happiness requires us not to suppose that we know ahead of time how far, or where, our dependence on happenstance begins and ends. I have had occasion in speaking of the career of Othello to invoke Montaigne's horrified fascination by the human being's horror of itself, as if to say: life is hard, but then let us not burden it further by choosing tragically to call it tragic where we are free to choose otherwise. I understand Montaigne's alternative to horror to be the achievement of what he calls at the end a gay and sociable wisdom. I take this gaiety as the attitude on which what I am calling diurnal comedy depends, an attitude toward human life that I learn mostly from Thoreau, and partly from Kierkegaard, to call taking an interest in it. Tragedy is the necessity of having your own experience and learning from it; comedy is the possibility of having it in good time.

(Should someone take the ideas of attitude and of perspective here as being matters of some known element of psychology, say of some particular feeling or matter of will, it may help to say that attitude and perspective enter as well into the constitution of knowledge, the constitution of the world. The difference between taking a statement as true a posteriori or as true a priori can be said to be a difference in the attitude you take toward it. When the hero of *Breathless* says "There is no unhappy love," he is not, as some may be, leaving the matter open to question, to evidence; for him it is knowledge a priori; you may say a definition. One wants to say here: it is a truth not necessary in all imaginable worlds but necessary in *this*—I mean in *my*—world: "When I love thee not, chaos is come again"—at that moment there will be no world, things will have gone back to before there is a world. And attitude and perspective, and I suppose something like the same division of attitude and perspective, are at play in the distinction between the factual and the fictional. The question is again how a matter gets *opened* to experience, and how it is *determined* by language or, let us say, by narration. The truths of arithmetic cannot be more certain than that Hamlet had a doublet and wore it all unbraced. Ophelia's word for it *cannot* be doubted. Some who concern themselves with the problem of fiction may be making too little of the problem of fact.)

"The tracking of the comedic to its roots in the everyday." This is my formulation of the further interpretation of the genre of remarriage worked out in *The Awful Truth.* I intend it to account for several features of the genre that differentiate it from other comic forms.

For example, the stability of the conclusion is not suggested by the formula "they lived happily ever after" but rather requires words to the effect that *this* is the way they lived, where "this" covers of course whatever one is prepared to call the conclusion of the work but covers it as itself a summary or epitome of the work as a whole. (In Chapter 3 I express this density of the conclusion by speaking of its aphoristic quality.) There is no other life for them, and this one suffices. It is a happy thought; it is this comedy's thought of happiness.

Again, I have pointed several times to the absence, or the compromise, of the festival with which classical comedy may be expected to conclude, say a wedding; I have accounted for this compromise or subversion by saying variously that this comedy expects the pair to find happiness alone, unsponsored, in one another, out of their capacities for improvising a world, beyond ceremony. Now I add that this is not to be understood exactly or merely as something true of modern society but as something true about the conversation of marriage that modern society comes to lay bare. The courage, the powers, required for happiness are not something a festival can reward, or perhaps so much as recognize, any longer. Or rather, whatever festival and ceremony can do has already been done. And wasn't this always true? In attacking the magical or mechanical view of the sacraments, Luther says, "All our life should be baptism." I once took this as a motto for romantic poetry.* I might take a variation of it as a motto for the romance of marriage: all our life should be festival. When Lucy acknowledges to Aunt Patsy her love for Jerry after all, what she says is, "We had some grand laughs." Not one laugh at life—that would be a laugh of cynicism. But a run of laughs, within life; finding occasions in the way we are together. He is the one with whom that is possible for me, crazy as he is; that is the awful truth.

"Some grand laughs" is this comedy's lingo for marriage as festive existence. The question, accordingly, is what this comedy means by laughter. Whatever it means it will not be something caused and pre-

* "A Matter of Meaning It," in *Must We Mean What We Say?*, p. 229.

vented by what we mostly call errors. This is a further feature in which the comedy of remarriage differs from other comedy.* The obstacles it poses to happiness are not complications unknown to the characters that a conclusion can sort out. They have something to learn but it cannot come as news from others. (Nor is our position as audience better in this regard than that of the characters. To the extent that the effect of classical comedy depends on a sense of our superiority to comic characters, the comedy of remarriage undermines that effect. We are no more superior to these characters than we are to the heroes and heroines of any adventure.) It is not a matter of the reception of new experience but a matter of a new reception of your own experience, an acceptance of its authority as your own. Kierkegaard wrote a book about our having lost the authority, hence so much as the possibility, of claiming to have received a revelation.** If this means, as Kierkegaard sometimes seems to take it to mean, the end of Christianity, then if what is to succeed Christianity is a redemptive politics or a redemptive psychology, these will require a new burden of faith in the authority of one's everyday experience, one's experience of the everyday, of earth not of heaven (if you get the distinction). I understand this to be the burden undertaken in the writing of Emerson and of Thoreau; doubtless this is a reason it is hard to place them in a given field. One might take the new burden of one's experience to amount to the claim to be one's own apostle, to forerun oneself, to be capable of deliverances of oneself. This would amount to an overcoming of what, in *The Claim of Reason,* I call the fear of inexpressiveness.† Here is a form in which art is asked to do the work of religion. Naturally this situation makes for new possibilities of fraudulence, among both those who give themselves out as apostles and those who think of themselves as skeptics.

It is centrally as a title for these three features of diurnal comedy, the comedy of dailiness—its conclusion not in a future, a beyond, an ever after, but in a present continuity of before and after; its transformation of a festival into a festivity; its correction not of error but of experience, or of a perspective on experience—that I retain the concept of remarriage as the title for the genre of films in question. The title registers, to my mind, the two most impressive affirmations known to me of the task of human experience, the acceptance of human relatedness, as the acceptance of repetition. Kierkegaard's study called *Repetition,* which is a study of the possibility of marriage; and Nietzsche's Eternal Return, the call for which he puts by saying it is high time, a heightening or ascension of time; this is literally *Hochzeit,* German for marriage, with time itself as the ring. As redemption by suffering does not depend on something that has already happened, so redemption by happiness does not depend on something that has yet to happen; both depend on a faith in something that is always happening, day by day.

* I call attention here to Harry Levin's rich Introduction to the Signet edition of *The Comedy of Errors.*

** An essay of mine about that book, "Kierkegaard's *On Authority and Revelation,*" appears in *Must We Mean What We Say?*

† See, for example, pp. 351, 473.

Thus does the fantasy of marriage being traced out in these chapters project a metaphysic, or a vision of the world that succeeds the credibility of metaphysics. It was only a matter of time, because as the fantasy becomes fuller and clearer to itself it poses for itself the following kinds of question. What must marriage be for the value of marriage to retain its eminence, its authority, among human relations? And what must the world be like for such marriage to be possible? Since these are questions about the concept as well as about the fact of marriage, they are questions about marriage as it is and as it may be, and they are meant as questions about weddedness as a mode of human intimacy generally, intimacy in its aspect of *devotedness.*

This recent conjunction of ideas of the diurnal, of weddedness as a mode of intimacy, and of the projection of a metaphysics of repetition, sets me musing on an old suggestion I took away from reading in Gertrude Stein's *The Making of Americans.* She speaks, I seem to recall, to the effect that the knowledge of others depends upon an appreciation of their repeatings (which is what we are, which is what we have to offer). This knowing of others as knowing what they are always saying and believing and doing would, naturally, be Stein's description of, or direction for, how her reader is to know her own most famous manner of writing, the hallmark of which is its repeatings. The application of this thought here is the suggestion that marriage is an emblem of the knowledge of others not solely because of its implication of reciprocity but because it implies a devotion in repetition, to dailiness. "The little life of the everyday" is the wife's description of marriage in *The Children of Paradise,* as she wonders how marriage can be a match for the romantic glamour of distance and drama. A relationship "grown sick with

obligations" is the way Amanda Bonner describes a marriage that cannot maintain reciprocity—what she calls mutuality in everything. (This is a promissory remark to myself to go back to Stein's work. But the gratitude I feel to it now should be expressed now, before looking it up, because it comes from a memory of the work as providing one of those nightsounds or daydrifts of mood whose orientation has more than once prevented a good intuition from getting lost. This is not unlike a characteristic indebtedness one acquires to films. It is just such a precious help that is easiest to take from a writer without saying thanks—and not, perhaps, because one grudges the thanks but because one awaits an occasion for giving it which never quite seems to name itself.)

As the technical, or artistic, problem of the conclusion of the members of the genre of remarriage is that of providing them with epitomizing density, the artistic problem of the beginning of *The Awful Truth* is to preserve its diurnal surface, to present comic events whose dailiness is not interrupted by comic outbreaks but whose drift is toward a massive breakthrough to the comic itself as the redemption of dailiness, a day's creation beyond itself. The risk of such a structure is dullness; it must open an accepting tameness, domesticity, as one pole of the comic (as Mr. Pettibone does). The reward of the structure is scope, the distance it gets in discovering its conclusion. One might picture the narrative structure as preparations followed by surprises (like a chess game); or perhaps as sowing followed by reaping. This would leave out the fact that the sowing is a sequence of reapings (or of surprises too mild individually to be noticed as such), increases of interest, of a willingness to be pleased, say to be civilized; and the reapings a sequence of discoveries whose originality cannot be thought of as sown, unless perhaps as dragon's teeth.

WHAT I CALLED the abstractness of these claims has its own interest, but it is useful here to the extent that the claims alert us to points of the film's concreteness that we might otherwise slip past. This should become assessible as we now go on to follow certain lines of force through the film.

The Awful Truth is the only principal member of the genre of remarriage in which we see the central pair literally take their own marriage to court (sequence 4). The point of the sequence is to dramatize the

dog's role as the child of the marriage (though really he is its muse, since a squabble over who was to buy him was the thing that, according to Lucy's sworn testimony, precipitated their marriage). How funny is it when the dog is asked to choose which of the pair he wants to live with, and when Lucy tricks him with Jerry's home-coming present of a rubber mouse into "choosing" her? About as funny as the idea that these people do not know what it means that they happened to get married as if to make a home for a dog, and that a court of law is no more capable of telling them whether their marriage has taken, or is worth the taking, or else the leaving, than it is of determining reasonably the custody of a dog.

You learn to look, in a McCarey scene, for the disturbing current under an agreeable surface. He has the power to walk a scene right to that verge at which the comic is no longer comic, without either losing the humor or letting the humor deny the humanity of its victims. (Not for nothing is he the director of the Marx brothers as well as of *Love Affair*, 1939, also with Irene Dunne.) Chaplin and Keaton cross the verge into pathos or anxiety, as if dissecting the animal who laughs, demonstrating the condition of laughter. Hawks crosses the verge without letting you stop laughing; as he does in his adventures. What do people imagine when they call certain film comedies "madcap"? Do they imagine that a virgin's burning brain is in itself wildly comic, or particularly so if she is free enough, that is, if her father is rich enough, that no magic can stop her from laughing, that is, from thinking and trying not to think? Aunt Patsy will call Barbara Vance a "madcap heiress." This seems a tip from McCarey that calling his comedy "madcap" would be about as useful as taking the humorless, conventional, all but nonexistent Barbara Vance to be the heroine of his film. (A tip reinforced the next year by Hawks, or one of his sources, in naming the heroine of *Bringing Up Baby* Susan Vance.) This is, in any case, not exactly our problem since the women we are following are on the whole to be understood as married. Now for the last time: What is comic about that?

(Before proceeding, I note a further point about the occurrence of the epithet "madcap heiress" in this film. It is what sets off the thing I called in my outline of the film's sequences, at sequence 12b, the transformation of the newspaper photo into an installment of *Movietone News*. The implication is that the invention of stories about madcap heiresses is the work of scandalmongers, of gossip columnists or of movie review-

ers, not the business of serious comic films. Accordingly when Jerry describes, for the benefit of Dan's mother, his and Lucy's marriage as "one of those tragedies you read about in the newspapers," he may be taken to mean that something newspapers call a tragedy is as likely as not to be what newspapers would make of it, unless perhaps they made of it a madcap comedy. These are further moments in the vicissitudes of the image of the newspaper that constitutes a feature of the genre of remarriage. While I have noted major occurrences of this feature, or its equivalent, in all but one of the films of our genre [I have not looked for an explanation of its absence in *Bringing Up Baby*], I have not given the attention it deserves to formulating the significance of their interrelations.)

In the opening sequence, what does Jerry mean by "what wives don't know" and by "and what you don't know"? It is definite that he has been away from home for two weeks and that he has told his wife he was to be in Florida. But nothing else is definite. For all we know what doesn't hurt his acquaintance because he doesn't know it is that there is nothing to know, of the kind the acquaintance suspects. Maybe for some reason Jerry is less interested in the fact of philandering than in the possibility of it, that what is important to him is not the cultivating of dalliances but the cultivating of a reputation for them. It seems only mildly awkward for him when his wife shows him, in the following sequence, that she knows he hasn't been in Florida. Anyway why was Florida safer than New York? His being caught in a lie is less relevant to their ensuing agreement to divorce than her being, as she puts it, caught in a truth. Why? What is so awful about the truth that nothing happened? And why would a married man find it more important to seem unfaithful than to be so? Perhaps it is his way of dramatizing his repeated philosophy that "Marriage is based on faith. If you've lost that you've lost everything"; his way of testing her faith, a test he himself seems miserably to fail. Is he projecting his guilt upon her? Is he withholding his innocence from her? What we know is that he is hiding something and that he is blaming her for something.

I have noted that divorce is asked for by asking to be free. If what Jerry is trying to establish is what we might call the freedom of marriage, then his complex wish for reputation is logical. All that freedom requires is, so to speak, its own possibility. As long as he *can* choose he

is free—free for example to choose faithfulness. This would be creating a logical space within marriage in which to choose to be married, a way in which not to feel trapped in it. But it turns out that this space will have to be explored by Jerry in the way our genre dictates, by his choosing to remarry, to begin again.

An effort at freedom is mocked in the ensuing scene (sequence 2) when continental Armand repeatedly praises Jerry for having a continental mind. That he hasn't any such thing where his wife is concerned is evident enough; but it is a way of describing the reputation we have surmised him to want to establish for himself. Lucy picks up on this theme when she says to Armand, who offers to stay to protect her from Jerry's accusations, "It's all right. American women are not accustomed to gallantry." The film is announcing itself to be both in and out of a tradition that includes French farce and Restoration comedy, which means declaring its territory to be America and to be cinema. Freedom in marriage is not to be discovered in the possibility of adultery, which thus becomes unusable for comedy; it becomes either irrelevant or else the stuff of melodrama. But Jerry could not be imagined to be, however obscurely, declaring his freedom in marriage apart from imagining him to be responding to some sexual contention between himself and Lucy. That sexuality is under contention means both that sexual satisfaction is a reasonable aspiration between them, and that divorce is a reasonable, civilized alternative. (It is, for example, made explicitly clear that divorce is economically feasible for the woman.) But what this contention covers, what this dragon's tooth will produce, only time can tell.

McCarey is in a position to declare a distance from French farce because he shows himself, in what Jerry calls "that two-men-in-a-bedroom farce," expert, where required, in putting farce on the stage—or rather, in staging it for the screen. That McCarey's farce is made not for the stage but for film is in effect stated by giving the dog a pivotal, independent role in its choreography, with trickier and more irreversible business (for example, a mirror worked by the dog away from a wall to crash at a farcically timed moment) than you could count on for each performance of a play. Mr. Smith, the muse of the marriage, seems here to be preventing its putting itself back together. But he is really saying only what the film is saying, that the marriage will not go back together until it goes further, until, that is to say, the pair's conversation stops

putting an innocent bystander into the woman's bedroom. There are always bystanders, one as innocent as the next. Here farce is the name of that condition of a life whose day and night must be kept from touching, which apprehends the approach of truth as awful. Not being tragic, irreversible, it is here a condition of which the right laugh would be the right cure.

In comparison with the brilliance of the farce sequence (sequence 11), the little sequence of Lucy and Dan singing "Home on the Range" (7a), with which Act Two opens (according to my figures), can seem so tame, or thin, as to give no support to thought at all, or for that current of disturbance that I have said McCarey keeps in circulation. But I find the little sequence equal to the farce—not equal in the virtuosity of its business, which is next to nothing, but in its compression of concepts.

The woman accompanies herself and her suitor as together they sing a colossally familiar tune, one no American could fail to know, not something folk but something folksy, a favorite butt of sophisticated society. Dan Lesson has virtually stepped out of its shell. It is on this note that these Americans can meet, that any American can meet any other; they cannot therefore merely despise it. The woman does not despise it, the man might just mean it, as it stands; this would be for a woman of her gallantry sufficient reason not to despise it. She even perceives the genuine longing, a moment of originality, in the song's variation of its opening five note pattern at the words "Home, home on the range"; the itensity in this variation, both in the words and in the music, is the occasion for her departure into harmonizing—a departure Dan cannot bear up under. (To check the rightness of her departure, say the words without the tune. To gauge the song's originality, or passion, compare it with "The Man on the Flying Trapeze," the song of *It Happened One Night*, which opens with the identical configuration of five notes, which then repeat on each recurrence without variation.) When she compliments them on their performance he replies, "Never had a lesson in muh life. Have you?" These sentences pretty well seal the man's fate, whatever she and Jerry will be able to work out. This man does not know who this woman is, he does not appreciate her; these things follow from his not appreciating her voice and her attitude toward her voice. That exchange about lessons is a gag based on the knowledge that Irene Dunne is a singer, a piece of knowledge no one

who knew anything about her could have failed to know. The initial point of the gag is its satisfaction of the demand of the genre that each member of it declare the identity of the flesh and blood actress who plays its central female character. The consequent point of the gag is to establish that in the fiction of this film as well the identity of the character played by this woman, the one called Lucy Warriner, is also of someone identified with and by her voice. This becomes increasingly pertinent.

In the scene preceding the duet, in the nightclub, Dan's hesitation in recognizing Dixie Belle's self-evidently southern accent as a southern accent need not be taken to show his unrelieved stupidity. He is intelligent enough to have made and preserved a lot of money and intelligent enough to have fallen in love with this particular woman and to have asked her, as they and Aunt Patsy leave Jerry and Mr. Smith alone in her apartment that first night, whether she still cares for that fellow, applying a parable from his experience with perfect accuracy: "Down on my ranch I've got a red rooster and a little brown hen. They fight a lot too. But every once in a while they stop fighting and then they can get right friendly." His hesitation over Dixie Belle's accent is directly a proof solely that he has no ear. His reaction after his duet with Lucy just goes to show that in the world of these films this lack of ear is fatal.

And what is that terrible American pride in never having had a lesson? Is it different from taking pride in any other handicap? I suppose it is no worse than taking pride in having had a lot of lessons, or in being free of handicaps. Dan has an American mind. His ideology of naturalness with respect to human or artistic gifts is to be assessed against a continental ideology of cultivation (call it pride in lessons), attitudes made for one another; and assessed along with his ideology of exploitation of the gifts of nature (expressed in the next scene by his declared experience and hence training in making the mineral contents of his land holdings pay off). His pride in his empty mediocrity with art serves to underscore his deafness to the fact that the woman is accomplished and, moreover, that her attitude toward her accomplishments has a particular humor about it, not making too much of her natural extension of a capacity most people have, secure in the knowledge that it can—for many a normal person, ones without handicaps of the ear—provide pleasures. Her attitude, the pleasure she takes in her gifts, is as

internal to the pleasures they give as Fred Astaire's acceptance of his own virtuosity is to the pleasure it gives, not making too little of his supernatural extension of a capacity most people have. Dunne and Astaire share this signal mark—making neither too much nor too little of something—of sophistication.

"Home on the Range" is, finally, and not altogether surprisingly, about home, or rather about a yearning to have a home. One might have doubted whether this is pertinent to its presence in a genre which is so centrally about the finding, or refinding, of a home; but I assume this doubt is allayed in recognizing that the other featured song in *The Awful Truth*, "My Dreams are Gone With the Wind," is also about this yearning, or dream: "I used to dream about a cottage small, a cottage small by a waterfall. But now I have no home at all; my dreams are gone with the wind." (Not surprisingly the man's idea of home invokes open spaces, the woman's invokes closed. But it really is a home on the range Dan Leeson has made for himself, not sheerly taken the range itself as home, however much the American male's inheritance of Huck Finn may fantasize this possibility, this way of taking the song.) As said, the singing of the male song, or rather the man's responses to the singing of it, places irrecoverable distance between the two who sing it; the singing of the female song has the opposite effect.

BEFORE CONSIDERING that effect let us loop back and collect the instances of singing throughout the films of remarriage we have been reading. It seems a firm commitment of the genre to make room for singing, for something to sing about and a world to sing in.

His Girl Friday is the only exception to this rule; it is part of its blackness to lack music almost entirely. I recall only a few bars of Hollywood up-sweep during its last seconds, startlingly breaking the musical silence, as if to help measure the abnormality of this depicted world one last time before helping to clear the theater. Most recently, concerning *Adam's Rib*, we spoke of a man using a song as his capping claim upon a woman. In *Bringing Up Baby* the pair sing "I Can't Give You Anything but Love, Baby" to soothe the savage breast of a leopard (whatever that is). In *The Lady Eve* it is the man's father who sings and whose song helps lend him the authority he will require to affect the conclusion. It

happens, however, that his son, our hero, is whistling his father's tune about filling the bowl until it doth run over as he awaits his heroine on the deck the morning after the night of their first encounter. Since the father's song occurs in the film much later than the son's whistling it is virtually impossible to note the coincidence on a single viewing.

"The Man on the Flying Trapeze" is variously a good song for *It Happened One Night*. Its folk song alternation of verse and refrain allows Capra to get from it not only a general occasion for an expression of social solidarity, but a specification of this solidarity as one in which individual (taking the verse) and society (giving the refrain) exchange celebratory words with one another in harmony and with pleasure. It is also to the point that the song is about the spoiling of innocence and domesticity by male glamour and villainy. It is further to the point that Shapely's seedy, unsocial villainy is expressed as his leaving himself out of the song. It is while the society of the bus is cheerfully affirming its solidarity that Shapely discovers Ellie's photograph in a newspaper and looks back knowingly over his seat at her and Peter singing. (That the value of singing, for Capra, lies in its moral or social power and not in its isolated aesthetic power, that is to say, in what Capra understands as isolated, is emphasized by the figure of the road thief, who will sing more or less incessantly and whose singing is not without a certain aesthetic standing. But his is a narcissistic kind of vocalizing, not a way of casting his lot with others; it is a form of emotional theft.) Then why is it just when the bus driver is himself drawn into the song and lifts his hands from the wheel momentarily to begin the "Oh-h-h" of the refrain, that the bus of state skids off the road (into a depression)? What happens next is that the mother is discovered to have fainted from hunger. Is the idea that society has skidded *because* it, or its leadership, was blindly drawn away from attending to business? (The great binge of the twenties followed by the morning after of the thirties—a view of the Depression presented, perhaps itself mocked, in a New Yorker cartoon of the period which shows a society party in full swing on an airplane which is about to crash, into a mountain.) Or is it that the solidarity is compromised by those who are left outside the song of society—ones too poor to sing, whom private good will must pause to succor, and ones too cowardly and self-centered to join in song, spectators of society, not participants in it, who will have to be scared off? (Peter gives

the child of the mother who has fainted his last ten bucks, or rather Ellie gives it, assuming that there is more where that came from; still she gives it. And Peter scares off Shapely with another yarn.)

One might speak of this singing as over-determined. A reason not to speak so may seem to be that Freud's concept of over-determination describes the formation of mental phenomena, for example of symptoms or of images in a dream, where the point is that just *this* symptom or image has occurred and not something else. Whereas what? The song in this film might have been different and differently sung and differently placed? But the fact that just *it* is here, where and as it is here, is what I wish to account for. Over-determination seems a good name for the formation of its appearance since the concept does not prejudge how much in the appearance is the result of intention and how much of the genre, how much is the result of specific function and how much of general structure.

Still, among the determinants of singing throughout our genre, I emphasize singing's special relation to the man, as though the man's willingness to sing, or readiness to subject himself to song, is a criterion of his fitness for the woman. And I emphasize the characteristic sound shared by "The Man on the Flying Trapeze" and "Home on the Range" with other songs in three-quarter time that invoke the social pleasures of the out-of-doors or of popular entertainments, songs such as "Bicycle Built for Two" and "Take Me Out to the Ball Game." In coming from an era essentially earlier than the time of these films, in constituting perhaps the first sound of the universally and persistently popular American song, these songs establish what Americans are apt to think of as the popular in song: the ground, I was saying, on which any American can meet any other. This force is most surprisingly confirmed when in *The Philadelphia Story* Dexter is finally moved to sing. That he must sing, enter his claim that way, is explicitly and locally established by his having to claim Tracy at the hands of Mike, who has already established his claim by singing. Dexter is moved to song by the ecstasy of seeing George depart. He rushes to a decorated wedding table and lifts its candles out of their arrangement one by one to shake them as if ringing tuned bells. Thus accompanying himself, invoking peals of bells, he sings the opening phrase and a half of "The Loveliest Night of the Year," another three-quarter time tune in the major mode associated with the circus. That it is this sound of the popular and the

association with a popular form of entertainment that is what is pertinent is registered in Dexter's singing not with words but with universal dah-dah-dah's. Whether his ecstasy is that of a child going to the circus or of a man getting rid of a clown, it is unimportant to decide; and surely it heralds some tightrope walking. The imaginary ringing of bells seems to be what then sets off the wedding music to begin the closing festival. That Dexter's tune is popular where Mike's ("Over the Rainbow") had been sophisticated plays into the hands of the American or national aspirations I was pressing toward the end of the discussion of *The Philadelphia Story*, both by having the heroes from different classes equal in song, even possibly reversed in their allegiances to sophistication, and by suggesting that film is the mode of modern entertainment in which the distinction between the popular and the learned or the serious breaks down, incorporating both.

Only in *The Awful Truth* among the members of our genre does the woman sing for the man, for his pleasure and for his commitment. (Marlene Dietrich and Mae West have sung for these reasons, but then the singing was not for former husbands, and probably not for prospective ones either. This is part of the point of Irene Dunne's song to her man, as will emerge. In "More of *The World Viewed*" I speak of Dietrich and West, along with Garbo, as "courtesan figures" who seem "to triangulate the classical possibilities outside of marriage"; p. 206.) Hence only here can the man show his inhabitation with the woman of the realm of music not by himself singing but by listening, by appreciating what is sung to him, for him.

What the woman sings for him is that other featured song of the film, Dixie Belle's "My Dreams are Gone With the Wind." In Chapter 1 I described her performance here, posing as his sister, as her claiming to have known him intimately forever, which is her way of constructing their past together, a generic obligation. Her song and dance are meant one way for Barbara Vance and her family and another way, a private way, for Jerry. It is essential to her plot not merely that Jerry come to be forced to leave this house but that he rejoice in his having a way out, or anyway that he want to leave with her more than he wants anything else. Her solution is to create her identity so that the very thing that repels the proper Vances is what attracts Jerry, that he has a hidden, im-

proper sister.* He is of course impressed by the sheer daring of Lucy's performance, by the fact of it as well as by its content. His intimate, lucid smiles of appreciation acknowledge her emotional virtuosity, and they redeem, that is, incorporate, his earlier, hieratic, exalted smile at her discomfiture dancing with Dan in the nightclub.

But she wants and gets more than a spiritual victory, or more than revenge. The suggestion of sexual depth between them, and so also of sexual problems, is registered in her displaying the incestuous basis of their past. But her therapeutic move, let me say, is to demonstrate that what is his sister in her is not her ladylike accomplishments, as for example her trained voice and her ability to dance; his sister in her is what she shares with Dixie Belle, her willingness to lend her talents and her training to the expression of what Dixie Belle expresses, her recognition of their capacity to incorporate those improprieties. Her incorporation of familiarity and eroticism redeems both. And I would like to say further that she thereby redeems the fact of incorporation itself, that we live off one another, that we are cannibals. Thus she uses her sophistication, her civilization, to break through civilization to its conditions.

So it is not, to my mind, too much to say that on the way Irene Dunne plays this song and dance the recognition of her and her fictive husband's mystery, hence of the mystery of the film, depends. It requires the perfect deployment of her self-containment, her amused but accepting attitude toward the necessity for complication, for the pleasures of civilization; one could say it requires her respect for the doubleness (at the least) of human consciousness, for the comedy of being human, neither angel nor beast, awkward as between heaven and earth. For it is essential to its effect that her performance remain outside the song and its routine but at the same time show her awareness of its inner worth, to show both her difference from and her solidarity with Dixie Belle

* In another Leo McCarey film, *Once upon a Honeymoon* (1942), another woman's (Ginger Rogers's) identity is established for Cary Grant by the fact that she is revealed as someone surprisingly (given our introduction to her) capable of burlesque dancing. Here I recommend Robin Wood's valuable essay, "Democracy and Shpontanuity: Leo McCarey and the Hollywood Tradition," *Film Comment*, Volume 12 Number 1, January–February 1976. In *Together Again* (Charles Vidor, 1944), a fascinating, sometimes brilliant, but unsuccessful member of the genre of remarriage, an eminently honorable Irene Dunne, mayor of a New England town (in Vermont, not Connecticut), is briefly, scandalously, mistaken for a stripper.

and Dixie Belle's performance. You might call this the redemption of vulgarity by commonness.

I have been putting these responses to the song and dance of incorporation as from its sister's side. Put from its Dixie Belle side Lucy is declaring herself, to Jerry alone of course, as the woman he strays from the house to keep company with. She proposes herself as a field on which he may weave passion and tenderness, so that he might desire where he loves; or she reminds him of this possibility by reminding him who she is. Her proposal of herself as this kind of object is at once an offer and a challenge. It is not certain that either of them is really up to it. But her daring proposal is irreversible, and his exit with her means that he is taking her up on it.

THIS CALLS FOR CONNECTICUT, a chance for perspective and reconciliation, emotional and intellectual, say poetic or say philosophical. And again there is a problem about getting there. In *Adam's Rib* (as in *The Lady Eve*) you don't see the pair traveling there; it seems a place that exists mostly through the ambiguously projected extensions of a home movie, that is, it exists for movies. In *Bringing Up Baby* the road to Connecticut is paved with accidents, feathers, a sheriff directly descended from Dogberry, and a stolen car. In *The Awful Truth* the road also requires the infringement of the law and the abandoning of the everyday car in which you began the journey. Evidently the world elsewhere has its own laws and its entry demands a new mode, or new vehicle, of transport.

On the road to Aunt Patsy's place in Connecticut, Jerry asks Lucy if he can use her car to drive himself back to town after he drops her off. They are stopped either for speeding or for playing the car radio too loud, anyway for some species of joyriding. During the ensuing discussion Lucy sees to it (by releasing the brakes of her car and letting it roll into a ditch) that her car is not fit for further use that night—for example, not for a return trip. She is thus recreating a version of the scene she described for Jerry (and us) as she returned home with Armand that first afternoon. They are miles from nowhere but, unlike that earlier night when Armand's car broke down a million miles from nowhere and they had to find an inn, she and Jerry attract the help of two motorcycle policemen. When each of the pair is then shown being given a

Having invited him to Connecticut to think again, she prompts him to think by her all but open sexual arousal, under the bedsheet, over the threshold, as the minutes edge away.

ride the rest of the way to Aunt Patsy's on the handlebars of a motorcycle, one realizes that these vehicles are no less mythological than, say, the motorcycles in Cocteau's *Orphée*. Continuing their ride through the Connecticut countryside Lucy continues her drunk act. Bouncing up and down on the handlebars she sets off an exciting siren. She encourages Jerry to have fun too but his bounce produces only a choric raspberry. They are being driven back into the land of childhood, in this moment through the region in which little boys are disdainful of little girls. If Jerry does not know, on internal grounds, that this is different from anything that *could* have happened between Lucy and Armand, then he doesn't deserve to be here. The awful truth is that the truth of such matters can only be known on internal grounds.

(Again, for the last time, you can take the presence of these policemen not as messengers who transport those brave enough to demand

happiness across the border from dailiness to comic enchantment, but as lackeys of the rich who make themselves available for the private purposes of those who are irresponsible because they own the law. My question is whether one of these views is less mythological than the other. Each is a total view, hence each is capable of accounting for the other. My conviction is that our lives depend on neither of them, as they stand, winning out completely over the other.)

They arrive at their destination less than an hour before midnight is to end their marriage, as a cuckoo clock will show that has not one door but a pair of doors and a pair of skipping persons appearing out of them every quarter hour, instead of a cuckoo or two or in place of gargoyles and virgins and knights and a scythed figure of time as death. It is another mythological object, a cinematic object, producible only on film. As Aunt Patsy has provided the locale for their conclusion she will provide Lucy's costume for it, a silk nightgown that Lucy is shown to tuck and tie up somehow so that it fits her. Evidently she needs not only encouragement and authority but instruction and preparation of a kind that a woman is fitter than a man to give. This would be why her "Aunt" appears instead of her father—or rather why, when it is this woman, at her phase of the story we are unearthing, whose Aunt appears, it is Aunt Patsy (Cecil Cunningham) and not the woman's aunt of *Bringing Up Baby* (May Robson), who when her friend Major Applegate suggests she might be capable of emitting erotic signals resembling a leopard's, responds "Now don't be rude, Horace." Aunt Patsy would have accepted the compliment.

Here is what happens in Connecticut. Lucy feigns first surprise that Aunt Patsy is not at the cabin and then a vast fatigue that sends her bounding light-heartedly upstairs to bed. Jerry is quite aware that her expressions of surprise and of fatigue are put on. Is his apparent resignation a sign merely that since he can't leave anyway (there won't be a car until tomorrow) he might as well see where this will all lead, putting himself in her hands, even if somewhat skeptically? Does he by now realize that she was not drunk during her act at the Vances'? And does he realize that this would have no bearing at all on whether she meant her incorporation of the familial and the erotic by one another, though it would have a bearing on how clear her memory of it is? His resigning himself, skeptically, into her hands is a continuation or confimation of his taking her up on her exit from the Vances'. He does not see how the

thing is to be managed, what the road is that will lead back to their life together, but after her recent performance who knows what she is capable of?

Mr. Smith is not present, but after adjusting Aunt Patsy's nightgown to herself Lucy notices a black cat on the bed. Apparently their remarriage is to be dogged by a different muse, or totem, from that of their original marriage, or an additional one. Lucy shoos it off. I take it for granted that the black cat is a traditional symbol for female sexuality. Then does Lucy shoo the cat away because of what it stands for or because it merely stands for it?—as if to say: no more symbols of marriage, the real thing is about to take over. A rattling door comes open and in the adjoining room we see, through the open doorway, Jerry dressed in a nightshirt lent him by the caretaker. (This is, as far as I know, the original time that Cary Grant's sophistication and the kind of attractiveness he exhibits are tested by the mild indignity of a quasi-feminine get-up. A year later, in *Bringing Up Baby*, Howard Hawks will take this possibility to one of its extremes.) The cuckoo clock strikes for the first time in our presence, in close-up, to show 11:15—the marriage has forty-five minutes left to run, that is, the divorce has forty-five minutes in which to be headed off. The two childlike figurines, somewhere between live figurines and automatons, perhaps like animated figures of celluloid, appear from adjacent doorways in the clock and in parallel skip mechanically a few steps out, then turn and skip back in, the two doors closing with the last chimes. The house clock seems to be modeled on a Swiss chalet, and for all we know it is a replica of the country house our pair are now in.

In their respective beds, in adjacent rooms, as if their lives were parallel, not touching, and the skipping they had done together now seems mechanical, each looks at his and at her side of the same rattling door, silently urging it to open again. It does, upon which the pair mumble things about this oddity to one another. Jerry gets out of bed to, it turns out, examine and close the door, Lucy stays in her bed. He is still not able to see how to carry himself across the threshold. The clock strikes 11:30 and the figurines duly appear to celebrate the fact. Back in bed, Jerry notices that the source of the current that is causing the door to rattle and to open is coming from his partly raised window. He thereupon throws caution to the winds and raises the window all the way. For some reason, though the door rattles mightily it does not open. Can

it be that their hopes are really gone with the wind—that unlike Dixie Belle's wind ex nightclub machina, Jerry's wind ex studio machina is going to fail, like just so much air? Lucy has to help some more. We are shown that it is the black cat that is stopping the door from opening, at first by lying in front of it, then when Jerry turns up the wind, by pushing desperately against the door with an outstretched paw, in a human gesture of, I find, unending hilarity. That cat knows that its hopes for an undisturbed life are due any second to be gone with the wind. After another moment Lucy notices the cat and shoos it out of the way again, as she had shooed it off the bed. With cooperation now from both Jerry and Lucy the door opens once again, this time discovering Jerry down on all fours, presumably from having been looking through the keyhole, presumably to discover what the barrier is to his dreams' opening up. That this discovers him to want the door open, while Lucy is left hidden in bed, is only fair: the invitation, the possibility of renewal, has been fully extended in her song and dance. But how can renewal come about?—the perennial question of reformers and revolutionaries, of anyone who wants to start over, who wants another chance. Even in America, the land of the second chance, and of transcendentalist redeemers, the paradox inevitably arises: you cannot change the world (for example, a state of marriage) until the people in it change, and the people cannot change until the world changes. The way back to their marriage is the way forward, as if to a honeymoon even more mysterious than their first. Taking a leaf from Plato's *Parmenides* they discuss their human plight in some metaphysical dialogue, the longest stretch of philosophical dialogue among the films of remarriage, the amplest obedience to the demand of the genre for philosophical speculation, for the perception that remarriage, hence marriage, is, whatever else it is, an intellectual undertaking, in the present instance, an undertaking that concerns, whatever else it concerns, change.

The relevant dialogue of this final sequence I find impossible to remember accurately, and it deserves preserving:

(The door opens for the second time.)

JERRY: In half an hour we'll no longer be Mr. and Mrs.—Funny, isn't it?

LUCY: Yes, it's funny that everything's the way it is on account of the way you feel.

JERRY: Huh?

LUCY: Well, I mean if you didn't feel the way you feel, things wouldn't be the way they are, would they?

JERRY: But things are the way you made them.

LUCY: Oh no. They're the way you think I made them. I didn't make them that way at all. Things are just the same as they always were, only you're just the same, too, so I guess things will never be the same again. Ah-h. Good night.

. . .

(The door has opened for the third and last time.)

LUCY: You're all confused, aren't you?

JERRY: Uh-huh. Aren't you?

LUCY: No.

JERRY: Well you should be, because you're wrong about things being different because they're not the same. Things are different, except in a different way. You're still the same, only I've been a fool. Well, I'm not now. So, as long as I'm different, don't you think things could be the same again? Only a little different.

LUCY: You mean that, Jerry? No more doubts?

(Jerry doesn't answer her in so many words but says he's worried about the darn lock, the one on the door. Taking a cue from her glance he props a chair under the knob of the door but then seems surprised to find that he's locked them together in the same room. She lies back laughing.)

What I had in mind in referring to Plato's *Parmenides* was such a passage as this:

PARMENIDES: Then, that which becomes older than itself, also becomes at the same time younger than itself, if it is to have something to become older than.

ARISTOTLES: What do you mean?

PARMENIDES: I mean this.—A thing does not need to become different from another thing which is already different; it *is* different, and if its different has become, it has become different; if its different will be, it will be different; but of that which is becoming different, there cannot have been, or be about to be, or yet be, a different—the only different possible is one which is becoming.

ARISTOTLES: That is inevitable.

Philosophy, which may begin in wonder (thus showing its relation to tragedy), may continue in argument (thus showing its kinship with

comedy). Human thinking, falling upon itself in time, is not required of beings exempt from tragedy and comedy.

Having invited Jerry to Connecticut to think again, Lucy prompts him to think by her all but open sexual arousal, under the bedsheet, over the threshold, as the minutes edge away. ("All but": he's still got to make a move.) The beginnings of philosophy in sexual attraction is how Plato sees the matter in *The Symposium.* Having once mentioned this vision in connection with Godard's films,* I am moved to mention here that the image in *Breathless* in which the couple climb together under a bedsheet, which then moves in patterns too abstract to read but unmistakable in erotic significance, has a precedent in the quite fantastic line of abstract impressions Irene Dunne invests her covering bedsheet with to signal Lucy's mounting arousal accompanying the tides of philosophy.

These signals of desire, and I suppose anxiety, are picked up from the opening mysteries of Jerry's absence from both home and Florida. If his cause was genuinely unrequited desire, or some dissatisfaction that adventures can make good, Lucy's new creation of herself is giving him a chance to right the balance. The price he will have to pay is, in his turn, that of change as well; he requires a move that will leave him different and, therefore, not different (because otherwise what would he be different *from?*). He must come to stand to himself in, say, the relation that remarriage stands to marriage, succeeding himself. (Can human beings change? The humor, and the sadness, of remarriage comedies can be said to result from the fact that we have no good answer to that question.) I spoke of Jerry's having to change as a price he must pay to right the balance of his marriage. I think of it as the price I ended up with in calculating Jerry's motive for his absences as the establishing of the possibility of freedom in marriage: he is going to have to find this freedom through remarriage. What this turns out to mean, at the conclusion of *The Awful Truth,* is that he can no longer regard a sexual imbalance in the marriage as the woman's fault.

I get there this way. I assume to begin with that there is a sexual brief each is holding against the other at the opening of what we know of their story. Jerry's "what wives don't know" mystery suggests this right off; it is confirmed by their never touching one another, after their

* *The World Viewed,* p. 100.

homecoming embrace is interrupted (except, as mentioned, at the end of the sister routine, and then as a brief theatrical walkaway); then their shared difficulties at the end with the door fit in with this line of thought. I assume further that Lucy's sister routine is not only triggered by Jerry's having made up the explanation or excuse for Barbara Vance's benefit that the woman in his apartment is his sister, but that the routine constitutes an answer to that explanation or excuse, a prophetic realization of it. These assumptions add up for me as follows.

Lucy's routine takes up Jerry's casting her as his sister as if it had been an explanation or excuse for *her* benefit, a statement of the cause of their loss of faith, of their faith in faithfulness, a loss in their sexual conversation. Then her song and dance for him that puts together kinship and desire is her reply to this excuse. I might translate her reply in something like these terms: Very well, I see the point. We do have this problem of having known one another forever, from the first, of being the first to show one another what equality and reciprocity might be. If this means being brother and sister, that cannot, to that extent, be bad. What is necessary now is not to estrange ourselves but to recognize, without denying our natural intimacy, that we are also strangers, separate, different; to keep our incestuousness symbolic, tropic, so that it joins us, not letting it lapse into literality, which will enjoin us. I'll show you that to be your sister, thus understood, will be to be stranger to you than you have yet known me to be. I am changed before your eyes, different so to speak from myself, hence not different. To see this you will have correspondingly to suffer metamorphosis. There is a wind effect here but you will just have to use your imagination.

So she gives rise to herself, recreates herself; and, it can be said, creates herself in his image, though it is an image he did not know he had or know was possible in this form. "The trouble with most marriages," Jerry announces in the second sequence of the film, preparing his sentences about faith, "is that people are always imagining things." It turns out that what is wrong is not with imagination as such but with the way most people use their imaginations, running it mechanically along ruts of suspicion. This causes, at best, farce, the negation of faith.

"You're all confused, aren't you?" she asks him, inviting him to work through the philosophy for himself. "Uh-huh. Aren't you?" His honesty deserves one further invitation, one last chance. "No," she offers him. It is the explicitness he needed. He was confused because he felt

she was confused and he felt impotent to provide clarity for them. But if after all she is clear, that is another story. He casts his confusion about changing, becoming different, into words, thus making himself vulnerable to the therapy of love.

It is midnight. The figurine children skip out in their parallel paths to celebrate this hour of comedy. After they turn to skip back the boy is drawn to an escapement from the mechanism of time and accompanies the girl into her side of the habitation. The wind, an action of nature, that effects the closing of the door of marriage, is the work of no machine. We will have to imagine it for ourselves.

We are asked by this ending to imagine specifically how what we are shown adds up to the state of forgiveness the pair have achieved. In Connecticut the road back is to be found from what Jerry had called the road to Reno, which he characterizes as paved with suspicions. In *The Lady Eve* and in *Bringing Up Baby* and in *Adam's Rib*, as said, the discovery of the road back from divorce is explicitly entitled forgiveness; in *His Girl Friday* the place of forgiveness is taken by what the film calls a reprieve. Tracy's way of accepting George's suggestion in *The Philadelphia Story* that they "let bygones be bygones" is an acceptance of an interpretation of forgiveness as putting the past into the past and clearing the future for a new start, from the same or from a different starting place. I have at various junctures characterized this forgiving, the condition of remarriage, as the forgoing of revenge. When Tracy forgoes revenge toward George she finds nothing left for him. In Chapter 1 I took the experience of the end of a romantic comedy as a matter of a kind of forgetting, one that requires the passage, as it were, from one world (of imagination) to another, as from dreaming to waking, something that suggests itself as a natural way to describe the recovery from the viewing of a film as such. My adducing of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in thinking about *The Philadelphia Story* offers an example of what this forgetting can look like. Emerson and Thoreau call the passage to this experience, I take it, dawn. The winning of a new beginning, a new creation, an innocence, by changes that effect or constitute the overcoming of revenge, extends a concatenation of ideas from Nietzsche's *Zarathustra*. In a related moment in "On Makavejev On Bergman" I quote the following from the section "Three Metamorphoses": "I name you three metamorphoses of the spirit: how the spirit shall become a camel, and the camel a lion, and the lion at last a child. There are many

heavy things for the spirit, for the strong weight-bearing spirit in which dwells respect and awe: its strength longs for the heavy, for the heaviest . . . To create freedom for itself and a sacred No even to duty: the lion is needed for that, my brother . . . Why must the preying lion still become a child? The child is innocence and forgetfulness, a new beginning, a sport, a self-propelling wheel, a first motion, a sacred Yes." Camels of heavy marriages we know; and lions who can disdain them. A comic No to marriage is farce. I am taking our films to be proposing a comic Yes.

Nietzsche's vision of becoming a child and overcoming revenge is tied up with the achievement of a new vision of time, or a new stance toward it, an acceptance of Eternal Recurrence. And here we are, at the concluding image of *The Awful Truth,* watching two childlike figures returning, and meant to return as long as they exist, into a clock-house, a home of time, to inhabit time anew. How can my linking of Friedrich Nietzsche and Leo McCarey not be chance? How *can* it be chance?

All you need to accept in order to accept the connection are two propositions: that Nietzsche and McCarey are each originals, or anyway that each works on native ground, within which each knows and can mean what he does; and that there are certain truths to these matters which discover where the concepts come together of time and of childhood and of forgiveness and of overcoming revenge and of an acceptance of the repetitive needs of the body and the soul—of one's motions and one's motives, one's ecstacies and routines, one's sexuality and one's loves—as the truths of oneself. They will, whatever we discover, be awful truths, since otherwise why do truths about ourselves take such pains to find and to say?

On the way to these closed doors of marriage we have been given a moment that I recur to in my experience as to an epitome of the life of marriage that the films of our genre ask us to imagine, an image I take as epitomizing their aspiration to what I called a while ago life as festival, not something at the conclusion of a comedy but something of its character from beginning to end. I have in mind the conclusion of the sequence of the musicale (sequence 10), in which Jerry goes to interfere with an assignation and finds himself in the midst of a decorous recital. We know enough by this time of the practice of this kind of film to consider the sudden discovery of Lucy in front of the piano as the door flings open not as the surprising revelation that she is not after all engaged in an erotic form of life but that after all she is. Then it is her singing (whatever that is) that has been primarily felt by Jerry to be something beyond him, out of his control; not her singing teacher, who (whatever he is) is patently a secondary fiddle. Jerry, at any rate, is knocked to the ground by her performance here. His aplomb everywhere else is perfect. Lucy's strategy in her sister routine will require that he make the connection between her publicly singing a proper recital piece in a ladylike manner and her privately singing an improper piece in its appropriate manner. The epitome I say we are given of the life of marriage behind doors, for us to imagine, of marriage as romance, as adventure—of the dailiness of life, its diurnal repetitiveness, as its own possibility of festivity—is the moment of Lucy's response to Jerry's discomfiture as he tries to make himself inconspicuous at the unanticipated recital and winds up on the floor in a tableau with chair, table, and lamp. The spectacle he makes of himself starts a laugh in her which she cannot hold back until after she finishes her song but which pushes into her song to finish with it, its closing cadence turning to laughter. The moment of laughter and song becoming one another is the voice in which I imagine the conversation of marriage aspired to in these comedies to be conducted. We heard Lucy speaking to Aunt Patsy of the grand laughs she and Jerry have had. (All she will tell him, or warn him of, visiting him at his apartment, before becoming his sister, is that his ancient poem to her, which she is about to recite, will hand him a laugh.) At the musicale we are privileged to witness one of the grand laughs. This princess is evidently neither unwilling nor unable to laugh, indeed she generally seems on the brink of laughing. The truth is that only this man can bring her laughter on, even if he is sometimes reduced to poking her ribs with a pencil. This may not be worth half a father's kingdom, but she finds it, since he asks, worth giving herself for.