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## LEOPARDS IN CONNECTICUT

### Bringing Up Baby



*The principals' actions consist of, or have the quality of, a series of games; the female of the pair likes the games whereas the male plays unwillingly; their behavior is mysterious to everyone around them.*

**S**PEAKING of the relationship of the principal man and woman of our comedies as one, as revealed in *It Happened One Night*, in which what they do together is less important than the fact that they do whatever it is together, I said that Howard Hawks's *Bringing Up Baby* (1938) is the member of the genre that presents the purest example of this quality of the relationship. I called this quality the achievement of purposiveness without purpose (or say directedness without direction). In thus invoking Kant's characterization of the aesthetic experience I am thinking of his idea as providing an access to the connection of the aesthetic experience with the play of childhood, a connection to whose existence many aestheticians have testified. This is not to recommend that we take an aesthetic attitude toward our moral lives; this would not overcome our distance from childhood and its intimacies, but merely cover one distance with a further one. The idea is rather to measure our capacity for perception by the condition of childhood, as for example Wordsworth does, or Freud. I am reminded here of the poignant concluding words of Freud's *Wit and Its Relation to the Unconscious*: "the mood of childhood, when we were ignorant of the comic, when we were incapable of jokes and when we had no need of humor to make us feel happy in our life."

The fact of remarriage between the central pair is even less directly present in *Bringing Up Baby* than in *It Happened One Night*. In the essay to follow I justify its inclusion in the genre of remarriage by emphasizing the pair's efforts to extricate their lives from one another, in which the attempt at flight is forever transforming itself into (hence revealing itself as) a process of pursuit. I should like to add that this transformation can be said to provide the structure of the tale *Gradiva: A Pompeiian*

*Fancy*, by Wilhelm Jensen, the work of fiction to which Freud allotted his most extended consecutive interpretation. It is pertinent for us that Freud's interest in this romance would have been elicited by its being a tale of the therapy of love. It is the woman who provides this therapy by virtue of her knowledge, whatever the man may think, that she is the object of his (repressed) desire, and her ability to bring him back to this knowledge by virtue of her willingness for the time to live out his delusions (call this sharing his fantasies). The therapy of love provided by the woman making an initial marriage possible (as though women can bear up, where men buckle, under the injunction not to look back, as if either they trust the past or else they can look at it without distorting it—as if they do not succumb to skepticism about love) is a condition that will perhaps not fully manifest itself in these chapters until the final one, on *The Awful Truth*. But it is well to leave the idea as a current underlying the repeated emphases on the saving education provided by the man, which makes the remarriage possible.

To include the principal pair in *Bringing Up Baby* among the pairs in remarriage comedies is, put otherwise, to imply that their conversation is such, their capacities for recognition of one another are such, that what they are is revealed by imagining them as candidates for the trials of remarriage—as though we are here in the earliest phases, say the prehistoric phases, of the myth I began sketching in the Introduction, something I claimed represented an inheritance in which we must conceive the members of a genre to share. I conclude these transitional short subjects by remarking that it sweetens my sense of relevance that the title *Bringing Up Baby*, while suggesting something about the etiquette of conversation, is directly that of an education manual, one of those cute ones, written for the millions who find it reassuring to be told that babies are not scary and mysterious, and that a brand new baby and a brand new parent will naturally educate one another, with no difficult decisions ever having to be made. (Or maybe this mode of discourse is now confined to modern sex manuals.) But it is time for the movie.

IT'S THE ONE that opens in a museum of natural history where an absent-minded professor (Cary Grant) is trying to finish his reconstruction of the skeleton of a brontosaurus. Standing as it were before the

curtain, he finds out, or is reminded of, five or six things: that the expedition has just found the crucial bone, the intercostal clavicle, to complete the skeleton; that he is getting married tomorrow to his assistant, Miss Swallow; that after their wedding there will be no honeymoon; that the reconstructed skeleton will be their child; that he has an appointment to play golf with a Mr. Peabody and discuss a donation of a million dollars to the museum; and that he is to remember who and what he is. Call this Prologue the first sequence. There is a natural breakdown into ten further sequences. (2) On a golf course, the professor is drawn from his game and conversation with Mr. Peabody by a young woman (Katharine Hepburn) who first plays his golf ball and then dents and rends his car unparking it, amused at his claim that she has made a mistake and that the car, too, belongs to him, and then drives off with it while he is hanging onto its side as perhaps the bull did with Europa. The sequence ends with his yelling back for the third or fourth time: "I'll be with you in a minute, Mr. Peabody." (3) At night, in the restaurant of some Ritz Hotel, Grant slips on an olive dropped by Hepburn and sits on his hat on the floor. Their argument is resumed concerning who is following whom. After further parapraxes, each rips open part of the other's clothing: she splits the tails of his swallow-tail coat up the back and he rips off the back of the skirt of her evening dress. He walks out behind her, guiding her, to cover what he's done (not, however, what he's doing). As he does so, Mr. Peabody appears again, with whom he again had an appointment, and again he says, "I'll be with you in a minute, Mr. Peabody." (4) In her apartment Hepburn sews Grant's tails, after which they set out to find Mr. Peabody, whom she knows and whom she throws stones at after giving Grant his second drive around. They are on a first name basis by now. David tells Susan that he's getting married tomorrow. (5) The prehistoric bone is delivered to Grant's apartment and he rushes to hers, the bone in a box under his arm, to save her from a leopard, who turns out to be Baby, a tame present from her brother. Susan and Baby arrange that the leopard is not to be Susan's problem alone. (6) Driving Baby to Susan's house in Connecticut, they hit a truck of fowls, buy thirty pounds of raw meat, and Susan steals, this time quite consciously, another car. (7) At the house, Susan does not rip David's clothes off but steals them while he is showering. So David puts on Susan's negligee, and later is discovered in bits of her brother's riding habit, which is ap-

appropriate since they soon have to hunt for something rare and precious, the bone which the dog George has taken from the box on the bed. David says to Susan's Aunt (May Robson) that he went gay all of a sudden. He learns that the aunt is the potential donor of the million and that Susan expects to inherit it. He asks Susan most earnestly not to tell her aunt who he is. Susan tells her that he's had a nervous breakdown and that his name is Bone, and that is what the Aunt tells her friend the Major (Charles Ruggles) who appears for dinner. (8) The four are at dinner during which David stalks George. The Major gives the mating cry of the leopard, which is answered. He asks, "Are there leopards in Connecticut?" (9) Baby escapes, George disappears, and David and Susan spend most of the night exploring the woods. Susan enjoys it. They are captured, she by a recurring psychiatrist, he by a recurring sheriff. (10) They are behind bars; eventually most of the household is, from trying to identify them. Susan talks her way out of her cell, then out a window, to get the proof that there really is a leopard in Connecticut. She returns dragging a circus leopard behind her, whom we know to be a killer. David does what he once ran to her apartment to do—saves her from a wild beast. (11) In the Epilogue, back in daylight at the museum, Susan shows up, having recovered the bone and inherited the money. Running up high ladders, they talk across the back of the brontosaurus; he says he thinks he loves her. He rescues her again as she has jumped from her swaying ladder onto the brontosaurus, pulling her by one arm up to his ledge as the skeleton collapses under her weight. They embrace.

AT SOME POINT it becomes obvious that the surface of the dialogue and action of *Bringing Up Baby*, their mode of construction, is a species of more or less blatant and continuous double entendre. The formal signal of its presence in the dialogue is the habitual *repetition* of lines or words, sometimes upon the puzzlement of the character to whom the line is addressed, as though he or she cannot have heard it correctly, sometimes as a kind of verbal tic, as though a character has not heard, or meant, his own words properly. I qualify this presence of doubleness thus heavily (calling it a "species" and claiming that it is "more or less blatant") for two reasons.

(1) While an explicit discussion, anyway an open recognition, of the

film's obsessive sexual references is indispensable to saying what I find the film to be about, I am persistently reluctant to make it very explicit. Apart from more or less interesting risks of embarrassment (for example, of seeming too perverse or being too obvious), there are causes for this reluctance having to do with what I understand the point of this sexual glaze to be. It is part of the force of this work that we shall not know how far to press its references.

At some juncture the concept and the fact of the contended bone will of course threaten to take over. (Its mythical name, the intercostal clavicle, suggests that it belongs to creatures whose heads are beneath their shoulders, or anyway whose shoulders are beneath at least some of their ribs.) This threat will occur well before the long recitative and duet on the subject (beginning with Grant's thunderous discovery of the empty box and the lines "Where's my intercostal clavicle?" "Your what?" "My intercostal clavicle. My bone. It's rare; it's precious," and continuing with Hepburn's appeal to the dog: "George. George. David and Susan need that bone. It's David's bone"; hence well before the quartet on the words "Mr. Bone," a title that both claims Grant as the very personification of the subject at issue (as someone may be called Mr. Boston or Mr. Structuralism) and suggests, pertinently, that he is an end man in a minstrel show.

By the close of the sequence in the restaurant, the concept and the fact of the behind will be unignorable. Neither the bone nor the behind will give us pause, on a first viewing, in Grant's opening line, the second line of the film: gazing fixedly down at a bone in his hand he says: "I think this one belongs in the tail." His assistant, Miss Swallow, corrects or reminds him: "You tried that yesterday." That we are not given pause on a first viewing means both that this film is not made for just one viewing and also that this early line works well enough if it underscores the plain fact that this man is quite lost in thought, and prepares us for amazement when we discover what it is he is lost in thinking about, and for discovering that his preoccupation is the basis of the events to come. This is not asking too much. The broad attitude of this comedy is struck at once, at Miss Swallow's opening line, "Sh-h-h. Professor Huxley is thinking," as the camera rises to discover Cary Grant in the pose of Rodin's *The Thinker*, a statue already the subject of burlesque and caricature. (The rightness in its being Cary Grant who takes this pose is a special discovery of Howard Hawks's about Grant's

filmic presence, his photogenesis, what it is the camera makes of him. What Grant is thinking, and that what he is doing is thinking, is as much the subject of *His Girl Friday* as it is of the time he reverts to playing professor, in *Monkey Business*.)

Then are we to pause over the lines started by Grant to Hepburn when they discover that Baby has escaped?: "Don't lose your head." "My what?" "Your head." "I've got my head; I've lost my leopard." And how much are we to do with Hepburn's line, genuinely alarmed, to Grant as he is trying to cover her from behind in the restaurant? "Hey. Fixation or no fixation . . . Will you stop doing that with your hat?" (What does she think he is doing and what does she think he should be doing it with?) And we are to gasp as Hepburn, in the last scene before the Epilogue, in jail, drops what she calls her "society moniker" and puts on a society woman's version—or a thirties movie version—of a gun moll, drawling out, in close-up: "Lemme outta here and I'll open my puss and shoot the works." I say we do not know how far to press such references, and this is meant to characterize a certain anxiety in our comprehension throughout, an anxiety that our frequent if discontinuous titters may at any moment be found inappropriate. If it is undeniable that we are invited by these events to read them as sexual allegory, it is equally undeniable that what Hepburn says, as she opens the box and looks inside, is true: "It's just an old bone." Clearly George agrees with her. The play between the literal and the allegorical determines the course of this narrative, and provides us with contradicting directions in our experience of it.

(2) The threat of inappropriateness goes with a slightly different cause of my reluctance to be explicit, namely that the characters are themselves wholly unconscious of the doubleness in their meaning. This is a familiar source of comic effect. But so is its opposite. In particular, the effect here contrasts specifically with Shakespearean exchanges in double entendre, where the characters are fully conscious of the other side of their words. The similarity between our characters and comparable ones in Shakespeare is that the women in his plays are typically virgins and the men typically clowns. They are, that is to say, figures who are not yet (or by nature not) incorporated into the normal social world of law and appropriateness and marriage and of consonant limitations in what we call maturity and adulthood.

The critical problem in approaching these characters, or the problem



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in describing them, can then be put this way: If we do not note the other side of their words and actions, then we shall never understand them, we shall not know why the one is in a trance and the other in madcap. But if we do note the other side of their words and actions, we shall lose our experience of them as individuals, we shall not see their exercises of consciousness. We have neither to know them nor to fail to know them, neither to objectivize nor to subjectivize them. It is a way of defining the epistemological problem of other minds.

Let us note some further features of the world of this film that there should be no reluctance or difficulty in making explicit. Not surprisingly, given that the film is some kind of comedy, it ends with a marriage, anyway with a promise of marriage, a young pair having overcome certain obstacles to this conclusion. Apart from these central characters, we have a cast of humors—an exasperated aunt; a pedant (in

the guise, not uncommon in Hollywood films, of a psychiatrist); a sexless zany who talks big game hunting; an omni-incompetent sheriff; a drunken retainer—none of whom can act beyond their humorous repetitions. The exposition of the drama takes place, roughly, in the town, and is both complicated and settled in a shift to the countryside. It carefully alternates between day and night and climaxes around about midnight.

Are we beginning to assemble features whose combination, could we find their laws, would constitute a dramatic genre? And should such a genre be called "a Hollywood comedy"? This seems unpromising. Not all the considerable comedies made in Hollywood will contain even the features so far mentioned; and the label hardly captures our intuition that the mood, to go no further, of this film is quite special. Yet Northrop Frye, in an early statement of his work on comedy, allows himself to say: "The average movie of today [he is writing in 1948] is a rigidly conventionalized New Comedy proceeding toward an act which, like death in Greek tragedy, takes place offstage, and is symbolized by the final embrace." This is a nice example of academic humor, and strikes a conventional note of complacency toward movies in general. But is it true?

I cannot speak of the "average movie" of 1948 or of any other time, but of the Hollywood comedies I remember and at the moment care most about, it is true of almost none of them that they conclude with an embrace, if that means they conclude with a shot of the principal characters kissing. It is, in particular, not the way the other members of our genre conclude.

So let us not speak hastily and loosely of final embraces and happy endings. There are few festivals here. The concluding moments I have cited are as carefully prepared and dramatically conclusive (if, or because, fictionally inconclusive) as the closing of an aphorism, and it may be essential to a certain genre of film comedy that this should be so.

*Bringing Up Baby*, it happens, does conclude with an embrace, anyway with some kind of clinch. It is notably awkward; one cannot determine whether the pair's lips are touching. And it takes place on the platform of a work scaffold, where the film began, and in the aftermath of a collapsing reconstructed skeleton of a brontosaurus. What act does *all* of this symbolize? The collapsing of the skeleton poses the obvious dis-

comfort in this conclusion, or shadow on its happiness. One is likely to ask whether it is necessary, or positively to assert that it is not. Is it meant to register the perimeter of human happiness, or the happenstance of it—like the breaking of the glass at the end of a Jewish wedding? Both surely comment upon the demise of virginity, but in this film it is the woman who directly causes it. Perhaps, then, our question should be, not whether it is necessary, but how it is that this man, afterwards, can still want to embrace. Are we to imagine that his admission of love requires that he no longer care about his work? Or can we see that he finally feels equal to its disruption and capable of picking up the pieces?

It should help us to recognize that the pose of the final clinch—something that to me accounts for its specific awkwardness—is a reenactment of a second popular statue of Rodin's, *The Kiss*; a concluding *tableau vivant* to match the opening one.—So what? Are we accordingly to conclude that the opening man of stone after all retreats into stone? But surely the intervening events have produced some human progress, or some progress toward the human? At least he now has company. The isolation of the scaffold has emphatically become the isolation of a pedestal. It looms so large and shadowy in the final shot as to mock the tiny figures mounted on it. Surely they will make it down to earth?—How did they get up there? It started as Hepburn entered the museum holding the recovered bone, upon which Grant instinctively ran up the scaffold—perhaps *in order* to be followed up. In any case he does at least acknowledge, over the skeleton, that he ran because he is afraid of her, which prepares his declaration of love. So he, or his prehistoric instinct, was as much the cause of the collapse of science as she was; as much the cause of its collapse as of its construction.

The issue of who is following whom presides over their relationship from its inception. At the end of the first scene, on the golf course, he responds to her accusation by denying that he is following her, and in the conventional sense he is not; but it cannot be denied that literally he is. Whereupon she gallops off with him. (She does this again later, and again in a stolen chariot, after their stop in Connecticut to buy food for Baby.) At the close of the restaurant sequence, their walk-off—the man leading the woman yet following her pace, as in some dream tango, dog fashion—identifies the issue of who is following whom with the matter of who is behind whom, which remains thematic in subsequent scenes.

Notably, as the two are hunting through the night woods for Baby, Grant with a rope and a croquet mallet, Hepburn with a butterfly net, he turns around to discover her on all fours (she is trying to avoid his wake of branches swinging in her face) and he says, "This is no time to be playing squát tag"; she replies that she is not playing and, upon asking whether she shouldn't go first, is told, "Oh no. You might get hurt." The question of who belongs where reaches its climax inside the jailhouse in the last scene before the Epilogue. We will get to that.

I have suggested that the work of the romance of remarriage is designed to avoid the distinction between Old and New Comedy and that this means to me that it poses a structure in which we are permanently in doubt who the hero is, that is, whether it is the male or the female, who is the active partner, which of them is in quest, who is following whom. A working title for this structure might be "the comedy of equality," evoking laughter equally at the idea that men and women are different *and* at the idea that they are not. The most explicit conclusion of this theme among the films I can recognize as of this genre is arrived at in *Adam's Rib*. Once more we are in the expensive Connecticut countryside; once more the pair is alone. And we are given what sounds like a twice-told, worn-out joke. Tracy says: Vive la différence. Hepburn asks: What does that mean? Tracy replies: It means, Hooray for that little difference. Then they climb behind the curtains of a fourposter bed and the film concludes. If what I have claimed about the conclusions of such films is correct, then a film so resourceful and convincing as *Adam's Rib* cannot vanish on the sounding of a stale joke. And it does not. It vanishes with a joke on this joke. It is not conceivable that this woman—to whom Tracy had cracked earlier, when she was turning on a superior note, "Oh. Giving me the old Bryn Mawr business, eh?"—it is not conceivable that this woman does not know what the French words mean. She is asking solemnly, what difference is meant by that little difference. So it is upon the repetition of a question, not upon the provision of an answer, that they climb together out of sight into bed, with, surrealistically, their hats on. (How their hats get put on makes a nice story. Her putting hers on is a reacceptance of an important and intimate present from him. His putting his on acknowledges that hers is on. He puts his on without thinking, as another man would take his off in the presence of a lady. This pair is inventing gallantry between one another.)

The equality of laughter at the idea of difference is enough to ensure that, unlike the case of classical comedies, there can in general be no new social reconciliation at these conclusions, for society does not regard the difference between men and women as the topic of a metaphysical argument; it takes itself to know what the difference means. So the principal pair in this structure will normally draw the conclusion on their own, isolated within society, not backed by it. The comedy of equality is a comedy of privacy, evoking equal laughter at the fact that they are, and are not, alone. In particular, the older generation will not be present. Where this rule seems to be infringed, say in *The Philadelphia Story*, the moment is radically undercut; we are ripped from our supposed presence at this wedding festival by being shown that we are looking at a gossip shot—one way of looking at a movie—giving us the sort of inside knowledge that merely underlines our position as members of an outside public. Contrariwise, the pull of the private conclusion can mislead a director into supposing that his picture has earned it. I am thinking of Cukor's *Holiday*, which he concludes with a kiss. This conclusion feels wrong, feels like violation, every way you look at it—from Grant's point of view, from Hepburn's, but especially from the point of view of their older friends, a couple who in this case, themselves being shown out of sympathy with the conventional world, have provided an alternative social world for this young pair and who therefore deserve to be present, whose presence therefore feels required. I mention this in passing partly to enlist another item of evidence for investigating the idea of the final embrace, but also to suggest that the wrongness of this conclusion cannot be accounted for by appealing to a lack in the psychological development of the characters (their development is complete), nor excused by appealing to a general movie convention of the final embrace, first of all because there is no such general convention, and second, and more important, because the wrongness in question consists in breaking the structure of this narrative.

Is there present a definite structure of the kind I have named the comedy of equality? And if there is, what has it to do with the thematic or systematic allegory in *Bringing Up Baby*? How does it help us to understand who or what Baby is, and where a Baby belongs, and where a Baby comes from?

I might bypass my intuition of a definite structure in force here and directly seek an interpretation of the mode of sexuality in play, in par-



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ticular, of the ambivalence or instability in it: the situation between this pair cannot remain as it is. Here I would wish to put together the following facts: first, the texture of certain speeches and actions that I have noted as a play between their literal and their allegorical potentialities; second, the sense that the principals' actions consist of, or have the quality of, a series of games (from actual golfing, to rock-throwing at the windows of the rich, to various species of follow-the-leader and hide-and-seek, to playing dress-up and playing house, to finding the hidden object, all framed by pinning the tail on the brontosaurus); third, the fact that the female of the pair likes the games whereas the male plays unwillingly and is continuously humiliated by their progress; fourth, the mystery of their behavior to everyone around them (to Mr. Peabody, from before whose eyes Grant is continually

disappearing; to the man's fiancée and to the woman's aunt and to the aunt's major and her cook's husband; to the psychiatrist and the sheriff; and even to the butcher from whom Grant orders thirty pounds of meat for Baby to eat raw).

Such facts add up to a representation of a particular childhood world, to that stage of childhood preceding puberty, the period Freud calls latency, in which childish sexual curiosity has been repressed until the onset of new physiological demands, or instincts, reawakens it. In this film we are attempting to cross the limit of this stage, one whose successful and healthy negotiation demands a satisfaction of this reawakened curiosity, a stage at which the fate of one's intelligence, or ability and freedom to think, will be settled. This stage is confirmed by the air of innocence and secrecy between the two; by the obviousness of the sexuality implied, or rather by the puzzles of sexuality seeming to concern merely its most basic mechanics; and by the perception we are given of the humorous collection of figures surrounding them, a perception of these figures as, one might simply say, grown-ups—not exactly mysterious, yet foreign, asexual, grotesque in their unvarying routines, the source primarily of unearned money and of unmerited prohibitions.

This representation of this period implies two obstacles in the way of this pair's achieving some satisfactory conclusion in relation to one another and to the world, a conclusion both refer to as "marriage." Or, two questions stand in the way of the man's awakening from his enchantment ("I can't seem to move") and of the woman's doffing her madcap ("I just did whatever came into my head"). One question is: If adulthood is the price of sexual happiness, is the price fair? If the grown-ups we see around us represent the future in store for us, why should we ever leave childhood? A second question is: If virginity at some point becomes humiliating and laughable, then why must departing from it be humiliating and laughable? Why are the vaunted pleasures of sexuality so ludicrous and threatening? In the middle of their chase through the woods, they come upon Baby and George growling and rolling in one another's arms on a clear, moonlit patch of ground. Thus seeing themselves, the female is relieved ("Oh look. They like one another"—but she had earlier said that she doesn't know whether, having been told that Baby likes dogs, that means that he is fond of them or eats them); the male is not happy ("In another minute

my intercostal clavicle will be gone forever"). I think it would be reasonable, along such lines, to regard the cause of this comedy as the need, and the achievement, of laughter at the physical requirements of wedded love, or, at the romance of marriage; laughter at the realization that after more than two millennia of masterpieces on the subject, we still are not clear why, or to what extent, marriage is thought to justify sexual satisfaction. (That such comedies are no longer made perhaps means that we have given up on this problem, or publicized it to death.) Accordingly, we should regard the midsummer's eve in the Connecticut forest not as the preparation for a wedding ceremony but as an allegory of the wedding night, or a dream of that night. Grant, sensing his enchantment, at one point almost declares himself asleep: "What I've been doing today I could have done with my eyes shut." (At the beginning of the end of the Ritz sequence, he had said: "Let's play a game. I'll close my eyes and count to ten and you go away.") And just before they discover Baby's escape and leave for the woods, he behaves as if he is walking in his sleep, rising stiffly from the dinner table and following George out of the house, his soup spoon still in his hand, stopped in midair on the way to his mouth.

But while I find such considerations pertinent, they seem to me to leave out too much, in particular they do not account for the beginning and the ending of this narrative, for why just this couple finds just these obstacles on their road to marriage. More particularly, they do not account for the overall drive of the plot, which appears to be a story not of a man seeking marriage but of a man seeking extrication, divorce. One might say that according to this plot he is seeking extrication from Hepburn in order to meet his engagement with Miss Swallow. But that hardly matches our experience of these events, which could just as well be described, attending to the introductory sequence, as his attempt to extricate himself from Miss Swallow, who promises him, or threatens him with, a marriage that, as she puts it, must "entail [that word again] no domestic entanglements of any kind." Upon which promise, or threat, he leaves to seek his fortune.

The film, in short, poses a question concerning the validation of marriage, the reality of its bonding, as that question is posed in the genre of remarriage comedy. Its answer participates in, or contributes its particular temperament to, the answer of that structure—that the validity of marriage takes a willingness for repetition, the willingness for

remarriage. The task of the conclusion is to get the pair back into a particular moment of their past lives together. No new vow is required, merely the picking up of an action which has been, as it were, interrupted; not starting over, but starting again, finding and picking up the thread. Put a bit more metaphysically: only those can genuinely marry who are already married. It is as though you know you are married when you come to see that you cannot divorce, that is, when you find that your lives simply will not disentangle. If your love is lucky, this knowledge will be greeted with laughter.

*Bringing Up Baby* shares, or exaggerates, two of the features of this structure. First, it plots love-making in the form of aborted leave-taking. It adds to this, more particularly, the comic convention according to which the awakening of love causes the male to lapse into trances and to lose control of his body, in particular to be everywhere in danger of falling down or of breaking things. *The Lady Eve* contains, as we saw, another virtuoso treatment of this convention. And even Spencer Tracy, whom it is hard to humiliate, is asked by the genre to suffer these indignities. Second, it harps upon repetition. Beyond the texture of verbal repetitions and the beginning and ending *tableaux vivants*, and beyond the two "I'll be with you in a minute, Mr. Peabody" exits, and the two kidnappings in stolen cars, and the two scenes of serenade under the second-story windows of respectable houses, and two golf balls and two convertible coupés and two purses and two bones and two bent hats, there is the capping discovery that there are two leopards in Connecticut. My idea, then, is that this structure is to be understood as an interpretation of the genre of remarriage in the following way: the principals accept the underlying perception that marriage requires its own proof, that nothing can show its validity from outside; and its comedy consists in their attempts to understand, perhaps to subvert, to extricate themselves from, the necessity of the initial leap, to move directly into a state of reaffirmation. It is as though their summer night were spent not in falling in love at first or second sight, but in becoming childhood sweethearts, inventing for themselves a shared, lost past, to which they can wish to remain faithful. (Among the other, nonexclusive, perceptions of their final setting, it can be read as a tree house or a crib.) It is a kind of prehistoric reconstruction. That this must fail is not exactly funny. Grant, in particular, never smiles.

The concluding tableau is a repetition, or interpretation, not alone of



the opening shot of Grant, but of the image upon which the final scene (preceding the Epilogue) had closed. There Grant faces the second leopard, the wild one, the killer, using correctly this time an appropriate implement, a tamer's tool before him, and coaxes the beast into a cage, or rather a cell; it is, as it happens, the particular cell in which Hepburn had been locked. In this final game (playing tamer and rescuer), the woman is now standing behind the man, and, after their victory, he turns to face her, tries to say something, and then loses consciousness, collapsing full-length into her arms for their initial embrace. Somewhat to our surprise, she easily bears his whole weight. Nature, as in comedies it must, has taken its course.

This sub-conclusion is built upon a kind of cinematic, or grammatical, joke. The cutting in this passage back and forth between the leopards emphasizes that we are never shown the leopards within the same frame. It thus acknowledges that while in this narrative fiction there are two leopards, in cinematic fact there is only one; one Baby with two natures; call them tame and wild, or call them latent and aroused. It is this knowledge, and acknowledgment, that brings a man in a trance of innocence to show his acquisition of consciousness by summoning the courage to let it collapse.

COMMON TO SOME who like and some who dislike *Bringing Up Baby* is an idea that the film is some kind of farce. (It would be hard to deny that some concept of the farcical will be called upon in dealing with the humor in marriage.) But if the home of this concept of farce lies, say, in certain achievements of nineteenth-century French theater, then, as in other cases, this concept is undefined for film. I do not deny that such achievements are a source of such films, but this merely asks us to think what a source is and why and how and by what it is tapped. Nor would I put it past Howard Hawks, or those whose work he directed, to be alluding in their title to, even providing a Feydeauian translation of, Feydeau's *On purge Bébé*. This would solve nothing, but it might suggest the following line of questioning: Why, and how, and by what, is such a source tapped in this film since neither the treatment of dialogue nor of character nor of space nor of the themes of sexuality and marriage in *Bringing Up Baby* are what they are in Feydeau?

One line of response might undertake to show that this question en-

codes its own answer, that *Bringing Up Baby* is what it is precisely in negating Feydeauian treatments. This would presumably imply a negation or redemption of (this species of) farce itself, that is, an incorporation, or sublation, of the bondage in marriage into a new romanticizing of marriage.—Would an implied criticism of society be smaller in the latter than in the former case? Not if one lodges one's criticisms of society irreducibly, if not exclusively, from within a demand for open happiness. Feydeauian comedy cedes this demand on behalf of its characters; Hawksian comedy, through its characters' struggles for consciousness, remembers that a society is crazy which cedes it, that the open pursuit of happiness is a standing test, or threat, to every social order. (Feydeau and Hawks are as distant conceptually as the Catholic and the Protestant interpretations of the institution of marriage, hence of the function of adultery.)

What is it about film that could allow the "negation" of theatrical "treatments"? Take the treatment of character, and film's natural tendency to give precedence to the actor over his or her character. This precedence is acknowledged in the capping repetition of the line—the curtain-line for each of the first two scenes—"I'll be with you in a minute, Mr. Peabody." It scans and repeats like the refrain of a risqué London music hall ballad, of course to be sung by a woman. This contributes to an environment for our response to the *expertness* of the pair's walk-off through the revolving door of the restaurant. (That they are as on a stage is confirmed by the inset cut, in mid-walk, to a tracking shot past the astonished Mr. Peabody, who takes the place of an audience.) The authority of this exit, which calls for a bent hat held high in salute in the hand upstage, is manageable only by a human being with Cary Grant's experience and expertise in vaudeville.

As well as in its allusions to, and sources in, farce and vaudeville, this film insists upon the autonomy of its existence as film in its allusions to movies. When I took in Grant's line, in the jail-house scene, "She's making all this up out of old motion pictures," I asked myself, Which ones? (There is a similar jailhouse scene in John Ford's earlier *The Whole Town's Talking*.)<sup>\*</sup> But of course one is invited further to ask oneself why, in so self-conscious a film, Hawks places this allusion as he does. It is a

<sup>\*</sup> Andrew Sarris provided this answer at the New York conference at which a version of this reading was presented. I have not seen the Ford film.

line that immediately confesses the nature of movies, or of a certain kind of movie making: the director of the movie is the one who is making all this up out of old motion pictures. (As Hitchcock will incorporate the conclusion of *Bringing Up Baby* into the conclusion of *North by Northwest*, where Grant's powerful hand and wrist save another woman from falling, and we see that the ledge he hauls her onto is his cave-bed.) Or: a director makes a certain *kind* of movie; or: a director works within, or works to discover, a maze of kinships. Anyway *this* director does, demanding his inheritance. So Hepburn is characterized by Grant as having or standing for some directorial function. The implication is that the spectator is to work out his or her relation to (the director of) this film in terms of Grant's relation to Hepburn.—So, after all, criticism comes down to a matter of personal attachment! This is why we must adopt some theoretical position toward film!—But I rather imagined that Grant's relation to Hepburn itself might provide a study in personal attachment. At any rate, a theory of criticism will be part of a theory of personal attachment (including a theory of one's attachment to theory, a certain trance in thinking).

I have thus, encouraged by this film, declared my willingness, or commitment, to go back over my reading of it, construed as my expressions of attachment to it. Reconsideration of attachments, and of disaffections, ought to be something meant by education, anyway by adult education, by bringing oneself up. Since for this film I am to proceed in terms proposed by Grant/David's relation to Hepburn/Susan, then before or beyond testing any given form in which I have so far expressed myself about the film, for its accuracy at once to what is there and to what I feel in what is there, I am to ask what I know and do not know about this relation, and what Grant knows and does not know about it. The principal form this question takes for him is, in essence: What am I doing here, that is, how have I got into this relation and why do I stay in it? It is a question all but continually on his mind. So I, as his spectator, am to learn to ask this question about my relation to this film. It will not be enough to say, for example, that I like it, for however necessary this confession may be, that feeling is not apt to sustain the amount of trouble the relation may require, or justify its taking me away from other interests and commitments in order to attend to it. Nor will it be enough to say that I do not like it, should that be required of me, for perhaps I am not very familiar with my likes and dislikes,

having over-come them both too often.—If this is a good film, it ought to, if I let it, help teach me how to think about my relation to it.

Earlier, in registering the pace of this narrative as one in which a complete exposition is comically compressed into a stilted prologue, I described the hero as leaving to seek his fortune. His first name for this fortune is, conventionally enough, "a million dollars"; but the first thing he finds on his quest, the first of the nonaccidental accidents which punctuate quests, is a mix-up with an oddly isolated, athletic woman, suddenly appearing from the woods, who looks like a million dollars. (The camera's attraction to Katharine Hepburn's body—its interpretation of her physical sureness as intelligence self-possessed—is satisfied as fully in Cukor's comedies with her as in this of Hawks.) This hero's entanglements with this Artemis from the beginning, and throughout, threaten the award of his imagined fortune, both because she compromises him in the eyes of those who are to award it and because she herself seeks the same million. Yet when at the conclusion she confers it upon him, together with all other treasures, he seems unsatisfied. He gets the money, the lost bone, and the girl, yet he is not happy. What can he, do we think, be thinking of? Why is he still rigid; why is his monstrous erection still false? Do we think: He cannot accept these powers from her, as if these things are her dowry, for in accepting her right to confer them he must accept her authority, her fatherhood of herself? Or do we think: He still cannot think about money any more than he can (or because he cannot) think about sexuality? Or is it: The fate of sexuality and the fate of money are bound together; we will not be free for the one until we are free from the other? Perhaps we shall think, for Luther's reasons, or for Marx's, or Freud's, that money is excrement. I find that I think again, and I claim that such comedies invite us to think again, what it is Nietzsche sees when he speaks of our coming to doubt our right to happiness, to the pursuits of happiness. In the *Genealogy of Morals*, he draws a consequence of this repressed right as the construction of the ascetic ideal, our form of the thinker. He calls for us to have the courage of our sensuality, emblemized for him by Luther's wedding. For this priest to marry, the idea of marriage, as much as that of ordination, is brought into question. I do not say that the genre of remarriage thinks as deeply about the idea of marriage as does, say, the *Pagan Servitude of the Church*. Doubtless our public discourse is not as deep on these matters as it once was. I do say that a

structure depicting people looking to remarry inevitably depicts people thinking about the idea of marriage. This is declared by a passage in each of these films in which one or both of the principals try a hand at an abstract theoretical formulation of their predicament. (Among the central members of our genre, *The Awful Truth* contains the most elaborated instance of this, with its concluding philosophical dialogue on sameness and difference, answering to its opening pronouncement about the necessity for faith in marriage.) It is why their conclusions have that special form of inconclusiveness I characterized as aphoristic. Nothing about our lives is more comic than the distance at which we think about them. As to unfinished business, the right to happiness, pictured as the legitimacy of marriage, is a topic that our nation wished to turn to as Hollywood learned to speak—as though our publicly declared right to pursue happiness was not self-evident after all.

About halfway through *Bringing Up Baby*, Grant/David provides himself with an explicit, if provisional, answer to the question how he got and why he stays in his relation with the woman, declaring to her that he will accept no more of her "suggestions" unless she holds a bright object in front of his eyes and twirls it. He is projecting upon her, blaming her for, his sense of entrancement. The conclusion of the film—Howard Hawks's twirling bright object—provides its hero with no better answer, but rather with a position from which to let the question go: in moving toward the closing embrace, he mumbles something like, "Oh my; oh dear; oh well," in other words, I am here, the relation is mine, what I make of it is now part of what I make of my life, I embrace it. But the conclusion of Hawks's object provides me, its spectator and subject, with a little something more, and less: with a declaration that if I am hypnotized by (his) film, rather than awakened, then I am the fool of an unfunny world, which is, and is not, a laughing and fascinating matter; and that the responsibility, either way, is mine.—I embrace it.

## 4

THE  
IMPORTANCE  
OF  
IMPORTANCE

## The Philadelphia Story



*And is there not some lingering suspicion that the picture of the trio was already a kind of wedding photo?—that somehow, as Edmund madly says in the final moments of King Lear, "I was contracted to them both. Now all three marry in an instant."*