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.
Perhaps the most obvious difference of George Cukor's The Philadelphia Story (1940) from its companion members in the genre of remarriage is that it has two heroes, two leading men who are honorable and likable enough for their happiness at the end to make us happy. A good reason for this double presence is to allow us, or to force us, to figure that while each of these men seems a fit candidate for the hand of the heroine, while each loves and appreciates her, and she each of them, one of them is chosen by the genre, as it were, as the more perfectly fit. But on what ground? What has Cary Grant got that James Stewart hasn't got? What is the relevant difference between them? One level of answer would be to say that Stewart is of the wrong social class, and that answer is not so much false as obscure, itself in need of explanation. It Happened One Night, as said, is an exception to the apparent rule of the genre that a woman may not marry into a class beneath hers, and it is not clear that Stewart in The Philadelphia Story might not achieve exemption on the same ground as Clark Gable had earlier, that of having performed a remarkable and daring feat on the basis of which the heroine is free to give herself to him. In the present case the feat was to have gotten her drunk and then not to have taken advantage of her condition, which proves to establish the context for a particular transformation of her perception. Moreover, Tracy (Katharine Hepburn) has already seen that she and Mike (James Stewart) are like one another, as she finds on reading his book of stories in the town library, saying to him that she knows quite a lot about hiding an inner vulnerability under a tough exterior. But what C. K. Dexter Haven (Cary Grant) has over Mike Macauley Conner is that he and Tracy Lord, as he puts it in a kind of displaced Prologue to the film, in the offices of Spy magazine,
grew up together. Sidney Kidd (Henry Daniell), the publisher of Spy, is introducing Dexter to Mike and to Mike's steady friend Liz Imbrie (Ruth Hussey), who work, respectively, as writer and photographer for Kidd, though each has better things in mind. Dexter will introduce them, Kidd says, without saying why, into the Lord household for the weekend festivities so that they can get their behind-the-scenes coverage of Tracy's marriage to George Kittredge (John Howard)—"that man of the people," "Presidential timber"—focusing on the difficult and private phenomenon called Tracy Lord, a coverage Spy magazine will feature as—Kidd searches his imagination for a lead—The Philadelphia Story. In this setting Dexter's words about his and Tracy's having grown up together are meant ironically, to refer to their marriage and divorce; but Tracy's mother uses just these words the next day to state what we do not doubt is the literal truth. Having grown up together, or anyway having in some way created a childhood past together, remains a law for the happiness of the pair in the universe of remarriage comedies. Mike's presence confirms this law while at the same time it establishes that what makes George unfit for Tracy is not the sheer fact of his emergence from a lower class.

Stewart/Mike's role goes beyond these defining functions. He is essential to the way this narrative modifies the structure in which the woman is re-won, won back. This comes out in the interview he precipitates with C. K. Dexter Haven, leaving the party at Uncle Willie's the night before the wedding to seek him out at home. After some desultory talk, he comes out with, "Doggone it C. K. Dexter Haven, either I'm going to sock you or you're going to sock me." This creates an intimacy between them which leads to the plan to counter Sidney Kidd's threat of blackmail. But more significantly Mike has uttered a prophecy which is fulfilled two sequences later when Dexter does indeed sock Mike on the jaw. The point of the prophecy is that for all their identifications with Tracy and for all their shared knowledge that George is not the man for her, and for all their lecturing of the woman, one or the other of them is going to have to claim her, to risk declaring himself as her suitor, and specifically to claim her from the other. That Mike must claim her from Dexter seems obvious enough to us, as it does the next day to Tracy when she directs to Dexter her confession of her fears about herself. That Dexter must claim her from Mike is not yet clear at the moment he utters the prophecy (perhaps it is part of the prophecy) but it is manifest as Mike confronts Dexter and George on the terrace carrying the limp Tracy in his arms. He has elicited an old expression of desire from her. Dexter knows, George does not, what that desire is; we witnessed his upholding its importance to her the preceding afternoon when he brought her the model of the True Love, the boat Dexter designed and built for their honeymoon. So Dexter has to claim specifically that that desire of hers is what he desires, and even that it is by rights directed to him. We will come back to this encounter.

Who is this man, C. K. Dexter Haven/Cary Grant? When George, furious and confused at Tracy's refusal, or rather acceptance, of his suggestion to let bygones be bygones, turns on Haven with the accusation, "Somehow I feel you had more to do with this than anyone," and Dexter replies, "Maybe, but you were a great help," we laugh both at the victory of light over darkness and also at the truth, hard to locate, of Dexter's power, apparently some mysterious power to control events. The magic invoked by the genre seems localized in this figure. Surely this has to do with his sheer physical attractiveness; he is, after all, or before all, Cary Grant. But our genre leads us to suspect that it also has to do with something of paternal authority in him.

In speaking earlier of the genre's emphasis on the father-daughter relationship, and adding to this the notable absence of the woman's mother as something that compounds that emphasis, I noted that The Philadelphia Story is an exception which proves this rule of absence. This father dresses down his daughter in a long aria—in lines like none other given a father in our films—beautifully delivered by an actor of stature, which contains words difficult to tolerate (like "A husband's philandering has nothing to do with his wife") but which ends with a couple of blows so telling as to lend to the whole speech a coherent gravity ("...you lack the one thing needful, an understanding heart...What's more, you've been speaking like a jealous woman"). The father, in returning, would require a showdown with Tracy since he has been taking over the position of head of the household (encouraged her mother to turn away from her father; refused to invite him to her wedding; long ago decided that her sister's name should not be Diana). But I take it as essential to his aria that it occurs in the presence of the mother, as a kind of reclaiming of her from Tracy. The mother's acceptance of his
words has two effects: it demonstrates to Tracy that her mother cannot or will not offer her protection or comfort or guidance, and there is next to no further exchange between them in the film (Tracy does say later that night at the party, "Oh Mother. I thought you went home hours ago"); and it seems to deprive the mother of her mental competence, so that while she continues to be present, her mind is absent (she is puzzled the next day about who Mike is, and then after apparently recognizing him asks him if he has a violin string). Something dire has happened to the woman who had had a tender, intimate moment with Dexter the morning before and to whom he had said, "That's the old Quaker spirit, Mother Lord!"

This connection between the woman's mother and the woman's first husband, in the light of the mother's eventual alteration (and also thinking of the daughter's consoling her mother's expression of loneliness by saying in one of her early lines, "We just chose the wrong first husbands, that's all") prompts me to cite a passage or two from Freud's 1931 essay entitled "Female Sexuality": "the phase of exclusive attachment to the mother, which may be called the pre-Oedipal phase, possesses a far greater importance in women than it can have in men . . . Long ago . . . we noticed that many women who have chosen their husband on the model of their father, or have put him in their father's place, nevertheless repeat toward him, in their married life, their bad relations with their mother . . . Perhaps the real fact is that attachment to the mother is bound to perish, precisely because it was the first and was so intense; just as one can often see happen in the first marriages of young women which they have entered into when they were most passionately in love. In both situations the attitude of love probably comes to grief from the disappointments that are unavoidable and from the accumulation of occasions for aggression. As a rule, second marriages turn out much better." The idea is that the bad relation with the mother may be shed along with the bad first marriage. I suppose this is not something Freud is recommending as a general solution to a psychological impasse, but his show of worldly wisdom here is, as is characteristic with him, a response to a problem for which he sees no solution and claims to find no fully satisfactory explanation: "When we survey the whole range of motives for turning away from the mother which analysis brings to light . . . all these motives seem nevertheless insufficient to justify the girl's final hostility."* (Astoundingly, to me, Freud does not consider that the girl may be responding to a hostility directed to her by her mother. The unmasking friend of the child's sexuality seems at this moment sentimental about mother love.) The romantic insistence on the woman's mutual happiness with her father might accordingly be seen as a wish for refuge from an earlier, apparently insoluble conflict with her mother. And the moral of the genre of remarriage might be formulated so as to include the observation that even good first marriages have to be shed; in happy circumstances they are able to shed themselves, in their own favor.

Dexter's authoritative, or charisma, may poorly or prejudicially be interpreted as a power to control events. Maybe it is a power not to interfere in them but rather to let them happen. (The association of an explicitly magical person with a power of letting others find their way, where the others are children and the person in question is a teacher, is given one permanent realization in Jean Vigo's Zero for Conduct.)

Dexter's refusal to interfere with events, anyway with people's interpretations of events (as if always aware that a liberating interpretation must be arrived at for oneself) is expressed in his typical response to those who offer interpretations of him, either to toss their words back to them (George: "I suppose you pretend not to believe it?" Dexter: "Yes, I pretend not to"); or to use his characteristic two- or three-syllable invitation to his accusers to think again, asking "Do I?" (have a lot of cheek); "Wasn't I?" (at the party); or "Am I, Red?" (namely, loving the invasion of her privacy). He is a true therapist of some sort.

This magus can readily also be understood as a figure serving as surrogate for the film's director—a function played in Bringing Up Baby and in The Lady Eve, as noted, by the woman of the central pair, and in It Happened One Night and His Girl Friday by the man. Here it is to the point that while Sidney Kidd commissions the story and hires the writer and photographer, serving to speak as a producer, it is Dexter who puts them into the picture. It is this directorial power that George is vaguely responding to when he accuses him of manipulating the ending they have come to; and Dexter openly directs, or casts and costumes and writes, the ensuing wedding ceremony. The most explicit


* Ibid., p. 234.
THE IMPORTANCE OF IMPORTANCE

statement of this function in the dialogue is the exchange that runs from George's pompous "A man wants his wife to . . ." through Tracy's leaping in as if to cover George's vulgarity "... to behave herself. Naturally," to Dexter's comment, "To behave herself naturally." This gratifying re-emphasis is a piece of instruction at once moral and aesthetic—it speaks of a right way to live but at the same time tells how to act in front of a camera, and specifically how to deliver a line.

This climactic, simultaneous advice to character and to actress is something to be expected if I am right that the subject of the genre of remarriage is well described as the creation of the woman, or of the new woman, or the new creation of the human. For this description is meant at once to characterize an emphasis taken by the narrative on the questioning of the heroine's identity and an emphasis taken by the cinematic medium on the physical presence, that is, the photographic presence, of the real actress playing this part, an emphasis that demands, without exception, some occasion for displaying or suggesting the naked body of the woman to the extent the Production Code will allow. Thus does film, in the genre under consideration, declare its participation in the creation of the woman, a declaration that its appetite for presenting a certain kind of woman a certain way on the screen—its power, or its fate, to determine what becomes of these women on film—is what permits the realization of these narrative structures as among the highest achievements in the art of film. This is something I have meant by suggesting that in the genre of remarriage film has found one of its great subjects.

In The Philadelphia Story the narrative emphasis on identity takes the form of the question whether the heroine is a goddess made of stone or of bronze, or whether a woman of flesh and blood; and its cinematic occasions for studying Katharine Hepburn's body take their cue from the presence of water, first watching her trained dive into her swimming pool, and second, in the moment mentioned earlier that leads up to the crisis of the sock on the jaw, sensing her weight and her pliancy as James Stewart enters carrying her in a bathtub falling open at the knees, singing a triumphant "Over the Rainbow," a beautiful song about how dreams come true. Citing the form of Old Comedy as one in which the heroine may undergo something like death and revival, and noting that we can understand this entire narrative as one tracing the death and revival of the woman's capacity to feel, her rebirth as human (or, as D. H. Lawrence more or less put the matter, the dead spirit resurrected as body—and Lawrence scarcely lectured his heroines more relentlessly on this topic than Tracy is lectured by the four men in her life), we will hardly avoid seeing the carrying posture, if only in retrospect, as symbolic of her death as goddess and rebirth as human. But just as significantly, the posture is an inherently ambiguous one. Beginning with the form of rescue from water, it alludes to the posture of a father carrying a sleeping or a hurt child, or the gesture of a husband carrying a bride across a threshold. Dexter has a moment of concern about it: "Is she all right?", at which point Tracy raises her head and mutters darkly, "Not wounded sire, but dead." Each of the characters present in fact interprets the gesture, puts his or her imagination to work on it. George's interpretation, as he will say the next day, didn't take much imagination, to which Tracy will answer, "No. Just an imagination of a particular kind." Dinah has perhaps a similar interpretation; Mike has another, he speaks of the wine hitting her as she hit the water. It is a question whether Dexter has a competing interpretation exactly; it seems essential, rather, that his guiding interest is in waiting to see what Tracy's interpretation will be, which comes to seeing how and whether she will remember the event.

The moment is in any case a crucial one, shown on its surface by its being the only shot in the film in which all and only these four are framed together, the woman and her three suitors (the right combination for a fairy tale). And in some ways it is the most comic moment in the film, prepared for by Dexter's trying to get George to leave before he sees what's coming; intensified by Mike's stopping singing and then, heroically, starting to sing again, in full consciousness of the situation; and capped by Tracy's threelfold greeting: "Hello, Dexter; Hullo, George; Hallo, Mikey." But this is also one of the two most anxious moments, posing inescapably the question of tomorrow for the woman, of what she is going to do. It isolates the fact that even where there is a festival ahead, it marks the exercise of choice and of change, and the choice and change may be painful, as painful as becoming created, becoming the one you are, and as becoming one in marriage.

It is part of our understanding of our world, and of what constitutes an historical event for this world, that Luther redefined the world in getting married, and Henry the Eighth— one of the last figures Shakespeare was moved to write about—in getting divorced. It has since then
been a more or less open secret in our world that we do not know what legitimizes either divorce or marriage. Our genre emphasizes the mystery of marriage by finding that neither law nor sexuality (nor, by implication, progeny) is sufficient to ensure true marriage and suggesting that what provides legitimacy is the mutual willingness for remarriage, for a sort of continuous reaffirmation, and one in which the couple’s isolation from the rest of society is generally marked; they form as it were a world elsewhere. The spirit of comedy in these films depends on our willingness to entertain the possibility of such a world, one in which good dreams come true.

There are specific precedents in Shakespearean romance for a structure which puts together an inaccessibility to normal society with a peculiar curse, and beauty, of imagination, in which a wife is accused of a particularly vulgar faithlessness (on the basis of the evidence of the senses) and in which she is perceived as made of stone. This is The Winter’s Tale, and it entails its companion piece Othello, which I have interpreted as, so to speak, a failed comedy of remarriage, a narrative in which the reunion is hideously parodied and becomes possible only a moment too late. The three males of The Philadelphia Story may be construed as dividing up Othello’s qualities—Dexter taking up his capacity of authority, Mike his powers of poetry and passion (Hepburn insists that Mike’s stories are poetry and Mike heartily agrees), George his openness to suspicion and jealousy. Such a division simplifies the problem of character and it makes more manageable the obligation of romantic comedy to expel jealousy and envy in preparation for a happy ending. The Winter’s Tale also harps on the idea of dreaming, but it is A Midsummer Night’s Dream that more closely anticipates the conjunction of dreaming and waking, and of apparent fickleness, disgust, jealousy, compacted of imagination, with a collision of social classes and the presence of the whole of society at a concluding wedding ceremony, a presence unique among the members of our genre in The Philadelphia Story.

And Midsummer Night’s Dream is built from the idea that the public world of day cannot resolve its conflicts apart from resolutions in the private forces of night. For us mortals, fools of finitude, this therapy must occur by way of remembering something, awakening to something, and by forgetting something, awakening from something. In the language of The Philadelphia Story this is called getting your eyes opened, and the passage both to the private forces of night and to the public world of consequences may be accomplished by champagne, or some other concoction of liquors and juices. Dexter offers Tracy a stinger, made he says “with the juice of a few flowers.” In Midsummer Night’s Dream the eyes are analogously closed and opened by what it calls the liquor or juice of certain flowers or herbs, used externally. It is upon such application that Titania becomes enamored of an ass. Tracy presumably became enamored of an ass by the more up-to-date agency of what we call “the rebound,” what Dexter calls “a swing”; but she wishes to do with her creature what Titania wishes to do with hers, to “purge [his] mortal grossness so. / That [he shall] like an airy spirit go.” Tracy is shown to try purging, or anyway covering, George’s
lower-class grossness so that he can go like an airy aristocrat on horseback (or rather to cover his failed attempt to cover his grossness) by rubbing dirt into his new riding habit.

With Midsummer Night's Dream as subtext, other moments in The Philadelphia Story find a special comprehensibility. Take, for instance, the exchange between Tracy and Mike as they meet the morning after. Tracy says something about the handsomeness of the day and Mike retorts, "Yeah. What did it set you back?" to which she answers, "Nothing. I got it for being a good girl." (Among Dinah’s first words were that it won’t rain because Tracy won’t stand for it.) That a beautiful midsummer day is something Tracy owns recalls Titania’s proof that she is a spirit of no common rank: “The summer still doth tend upon my state.” Take again the peculiar character of Uncle Willie. I accept his presence as sufficiently justified by his permitting Tracy’s line “What has class to do with it? Mack the night-watchman is a prince among men, Uncle Willie is a . . . pincher.” But how does he get his specific budget of characteristics? If you let yourself be puzzled by the image of Dinah and Uncle Willie riding together through a forest in a pony-cart, as if creatures from another realm, and if you speculate on the fairy realm of Midsummer Night’s Dream, then when Uncle Willie says his head just fell off, you might think of the predicament of Bottom and his temporary head. There is confirmation of this thought in considering that Bottom is the name of what it is of which Uncle Willie is the pincher. (Certainly the pun between Bottom’s name and his temporary ass’s head is no less blatant in Shakespeare.) I am willing to go further than this and see in Tracy’s wafting perfume from her riding kercchief behind the back of her preoccupied uncle, who is spying into Spy magazine, a kind of memory of Titania’s instructions to her elves on how to treat her gentle mortal: “pluck the wings from painted butterflies. / To fan the moonbeams from his sleeping eyes.” Uncle Willie’s last words are “Peace, it’s wonderful,” and the last words of Oberon’s speech which predicts the end of the play are: “all things shall be peace.”

I am not interested to try to provide solider evidence for the relation of The Philadelphia Story and A Midsummer Night’s Dream. I might rather describe my interest as one of discovering, given the thought of this relation, what the consequences of it might be. This is a matter not so much of assigning significance to certain events of the drama as it is of isolating and relating the events for which significance needs to be assigned. It would not satisfy my curiosity to reduce the problems of Philadelphia Story to those of Midsummer Night’s Dream, because my curiosity is exactly as strong to understand why the concerns of Midsummer Night’s Dream have worked themselves out in their particular shapes. This will first require learning what these “concerns” are and how to think about those “shapes.”

But granted some more or less specific relation to Shakespeare’s romantic comedy, does it help to think of C. K. Dexter Haven as Oberon? The bare possibility of the question brings out the fact of Dexter’s quality of authority, unmistakable if intangible, as something to which criticism must assign significance. I mention in passing that Oberon is invisible to mortals, as is the figure of the film director for whom, as I have claimed, Dexter, among other things, is a surrogate. I have also acknowledged that Dexter is more literally the magical Cary Grant. But who is Cary Grant? I mean, what becomes of this mortal on film?

It seems to me that George Cukor is calling upon the quality of Grant’s photogenesis discovered, as I suggested earlier, in the comedies Grant made with Howard Hawks—I mean the air he can convey of mental preoccupation, of a continuous thoughtfulness that makes him spiritually inaccessible to those around him. This quality of the sage gives to his privacy, his aliveness to himself, a certainty and a depth. We know about Dexter that his wife divorced him because of his drinking, which she claims made him so unattractive (a phrase that serves to focus attention on how attractive this man is). He calls this problem of his “my gorgeous thirst.” What is this thirst, which Tracy could not tolerate, a thirst for? And in curing himself of his thirst for alcohol, has he, are we to understand, cured himself of his gorgeous thirst? If it was for the same thing Clark Gable was hungry for in It Happened One Night, we might call this thing love, understood as imagining someone hungry for the same things you are yourself hungry for. (It is my claim that hunger in that film is equated with imagination.) Since Dexter’s praise of alcohol lies in its capacity to open your eyes to yourself, we might think of his thirst as for truth, or for self-knowledge, as well as for her desire, since his implied rebuke to her (that her eyes are closed to her own desire) is that what she could not bear was his thirst for whatever it is the alcohol represented, call this their marriage. He seems pretty clearly, and unapologetically, to be thinking about it still,
still thirsting. (His curing himself of his substitute addiction, and moreover curing himself by reading, by an absorption in art, is understandable as the act of self-mastery that has lent him his special powers.)

Then how does he conceive the cause of the end of the marriage whose thread he wishes to pick up again? When Tracy points out to him that drinking was his problem he replies, “Granted. But you took on that problem when you married me. You were no helpmeet there, Red. You were a scold.” This, however, is once more exactly a brief for his divorce from her, based on Milton’s understanding of God’s decision to “make him [Adam] an help meet for him” as the perception that “a meet and happy conversation is the chiefest and noblest end of marriage.” The conjunction of being a helpmeet with being willing to converse, a contrary of being a scold, comes out again in a late exchange between Tracy and Dexter as she refuses an offer of a drink from him, warns him never to sell the True Loot, tells him she’ll never forget that he tried to put her back on her feet today, and then collapses on the remark, “Oh Dext, I’m such an unholy mess of a girl,” to which he responds, “Why that’s no good, that’s not even conversation.”

In adducing Milton’s view of the matter of conducting a meet and happy conversation, I have emphasized that while Milton has in view an entire mode of association, a form of life, he also means a capacity, say a thirst, for talk. And I do not know any words on film that seem to satisfy better the thirst for conversation than those exhibited by these Hollywood talkies of the thirties and forties. Talking together is for us the pair’s essential way of being together, a pair for whom, to repeat, being together is more important than whatever it is they do together.

Because I am working with a notion of a genre that demands that a feature found in one of its members must be found in all, or some equivalent or compensation found in each, I am bound to ask what happens to the fact that The Philadelphia Story is the only film among the members of our genre in which the pair’s happiness is refound, apparently, in the larger world in which they divorced, literally in the place they grew up together, not in removing themselves to a world apart from the public world, a world of their own making, of adventure. This odd feature would reach a satisfactory equivalence in The Philadelphia Story if its pair could be understood to regard their own larger so-

ctivity as itself world enough elsewhere, itself the scene of adventure. What could that mean?

It could mean, for example, that they understand their marriage as exemplifying or symbolizing their society at large, quite as if they are its royalty; and their society as itself embarked on some adventure. George is confusedly thinking something more or less like this when he declares toward the end that his and Tracy’s marriage will be of “national importance.” And Tracy had toward the beginning defended George to Dexter by claiming that he is already of national importance, in response to which Dexter winces and says she sounds like Spy magazine. Yet George and Tracy may be wrong not in the concept of importance but in their application of the concept. What George had said was that Sidney Kidd’s presence gives their wedding national importance, and this leads George to put aside his doubts about the woman he is involved with and go ahead with the ceremony. It is to this that Tracy finally says, “And goodbye, George.”

George lives his life outside in, so he is never free from the idea that something extraneous to his life can give it importance. His twin assumption is that Sidney Kidd makes the news rather than has a nose for it, as if the public’s news and publicity were one and the same thing, which really amounts to saying that nothing is news any longer, an idea that we have in recent decades become increasingly tempted by. Mike’s and Dexter’s happier thought is that when Sidney Kidd makes news this is a scandal. George’s view, from outside in, is not exactly what Tracy most despises; it is doubtful whether she can so much as conceive of it. What primarily motivates her is rather the fear of living inside out, of being exposed. This is why her despising of publicity is rather too strong for one of normal democratic tolerances.

But then why is Sidney Kidd present?—present, I mean, at the wedding. He had come to the Lord house because Dexter had sent for him to read the counter-blackmail story he composed from Mike’s facts. Reading the threatened revelations about himself, Kidd gives up the idea of using the threatened revelations about Tracy’s father to gain coverage of Tracy’s wedding. This much we know from a brief message Tracy’s mother delivers, distractedly, to Dexter: “A Mr. Kidd says to tell you that he’s licked, whatever that means.” My question is why Kidd then hangs around for the wedding. Of course we are invited to
think, seeing him suddenly snapping pictures at the end, that while his plan to insert his lackeys failed, he, never missing an opportunity, gets the story himself. But why should we care about that? This way of accounting for Kidd’s presence at the wedding leaves out the two interesting facts about it: that it is not the same wedding as the one Kidd had elaborately arranged blackmail to get at; and that he assumes, correctly it turns out, that he is going to be allowed to walk away with his pictures of this wedding. These are facts that show Kidd to be who he is not because he has merely the power to get the news but because he has a nose for it. I think we must understand Kidd’s presence, accordingly, to be a signal that it is after all this wedding, this remarriage, that is of national importance. (No doubt the bridegroom seems out of costume for it. But then, as Thoreau put it, "Beware of enterprises that require a change of clothes.")

"Importance" is an important word for Dexter, and throughout the film. In his main lecture to Tracy, the one in which he accuses her of having been a scold, he recurs to a sore point between them, her failure to remember the night she got drunk and stood naked on the roof wailing like a banshee, a failure he links to her inability to tolerate human weakness, imperfection. And when she counters with, "You made such a fuss about that silly incident," he takes the point as far home as it is going to get in the words of this film: "It’s enormously important ... You’ll never be a first-class person or a first-class woman until you ..." do something like accept human imperfection, frailty, in others and hence in yourself. For us, bearing in mind the images of the woman at night that we are given to glimpse, this imperfection, this lack of something, this want of something, is desire. Dexter is saying that her condemnation to being divine, worshiped instead of loved, is her ignorance of her sexuality, her demand to remain a goddess "intact." He calls her chaste, virginal, upon which she furiously returns, "Stop using those foul words."

I have said before that the idea of innocence, indispensable to classical romance as a preoccupation with virginity, remains at issue in the genre of remarriage, where the status of literal or physical virginity is presumably no longer a question. The blatant preoccupation in The Philadelphia Story with literal virginity, anyway with purity as chastity, is unique among the comedies of remarriage. It extends from Dexter’s painful accusations of Tracy to the effect that she is hanging on to her virginity, through the associated imagery of her as a goddess, and concludes with one of the concluding lines of the film, as she invites Liz to be her maid of honor and Liz replies, "Matron. Remember Joe Smith." Liz’s easy clarity about her condition underscores Tracy’s perplexity in discovering how to shed her virginity.

Freud had also been moved in "The Taboo of Virginity," a dozen years earlier than "Female Sexuality," to voice his impression that "second marriages so often turn out better than first." Earlier in the essay on virginity he had said, "The husband is almost always so to speak only a substitute, never the right man," thus invoking the principle that the finding of an object is in fact the refunding of an object. But is the second marriage better because the second husband is mysteriously spared the status of substitute, of being the wrong one? In this earlier essay, Freud relates the superiority of the second marriage to "the paradoxical reaction of women to defloration," namely that it both binds them lastingly to the man who first acquaints them with the sexual act, but also "unleashes an archaic reaction of hostility toward him." Of all the strategies Freud cites for avoiding the consequences of what he calls this paradoxical reaction, none seems to me as neat or as satisfactory as the idea of remarriage, according to which you are enabled to remain with the one to whom you have been bound, by discharging your hostility on a past life with that one, or with a past version of that one. Two cautionary remarks about this idea. First, we are by now clearly speaking in a psychological mode, so that I am not talking about physical intactness but rather I am supposing that there is such a thing as psychological or spiritual virginity, something for which physical virginity is a trope; and that there is such a thing as psychological or spiritual defloration which may be imagined to have the paradoxical consequences of binding and hostility that Freud perceived. Second, I mean to commit myself to the attempt to think through the consequences of the Blakean concept of spiritual virginity in place of, or as an interpretation of, the notion Freud uses to describe the woman’s unhappiness in her first marriage, namely frigidity, in any case a notion to be suspicious of, and not, it seems to me, exactly what Dexter is accusing Tracy of. (While I have no intention of attempting to describe a sexual life for Tracy that we are given insufficient evidence to get very far with, I would not have us overlook certain facts we do have and which must go into what we think this woman is. What do we
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make of her wafting the perfume at her problematic uncle, "playing with fire" as he calls it. It is a childish trick, entered into, it appears, as a sort of bond with Dinah, as it were on a dare. It strikes me as a sexual prank performed as if within safely narcissistic or still innocently incestuous precincts. And what do we think of her having changed her sister's name from Diana to Dinah? Was this because she felt the name of the goddess of chastity belonged to her? Or that her sister was hers to name? "No doubt this sounds quite absurd, but perhaps that is only because it sounds so unfamiliar."* And what do we imagine she makes of the fact that she does not remember whether she did or did not have a sexual encounter the night before? Since she has the revelation that men are wonderful on learning that a man did not take advantage of her, she has apparently harbored the idea that (male) sexuality is inherently a matter of taking advantage, an idea Dexter's gorgeous thirst did not succeed in refuting for her.

Dexter's demand to determine for himself what is truly important and what is not is a claim to the status of a philosopher. George's acceptance of the status of importance is the mark of one antithetical to the work of philosophy, the mark of the unexamined life. But is what Dexter claims to be enormously important, a matter of one's most personal existence, to be understood as of national importance? How is the acceptance of individual desire, of this form of self-knowledge, of importance to the nation?

These questions take me back to Milton's tract on divorce. Even before knowing what specific ground there may be for divorce we know that there must be such a ground, because

He who marries, intends as little to conspire his own ruin as he that swears allegiance; and as a whole people is in proportion to an ill government, so is one man to an ill marriage. If they, against any authority, covenant, or statute, may by the sovereign edict of charity save not only their lives but honest liberties from unworthy bondage, as well may he against any private covenant, which he never entered to his mischief, redeem himself from unsupportable disturbances to honest peace and just contentment. And much the rather ... For no effect of tyranny can sit more heavy on the commonwealth than this household unhappiness on the family. And farewell all hope of true reformation in the state, while such

an evil as this lies undesired and unregarded in the house: on the redress whereof depends not only the spiritual and orderly life of our grown men, but the willing and careful education of our children.

Since nothing can be of greater moment to the state than combating the effect of tyranny, nor in general than reformation, nothing can be of greater moment to it than freedom from an unhappy marriage. It follows that the state at large has no solace or interest sufficient to revive one in bondage to that unhappiness. It seems to follow more specifically from Milton's descriptions that one who suffers its effects makes the commonwealth suffer in terms very like those in which he himself suffers. The unhappiness in marriage, remember, is bondage to "a mute and spiritless mate"; now we are told that its effect on the commonwealth is a "heaviness," and that without redress from it the life of its members cannot be "spiritful and orderly," that is, life in the commonwealth is dispirited and disorderly, or anarchic. It is as if the commonwealth were entitled to a divorce from such a member, but since from a commonwealth divorce would mean exile, and since mere unhappiness is hardly grounds for exiling someone, the commonwealth is entitled to grant the individual divorce, hoping thereby at any rate to divorce itself from this individual's unhappiness. It seems to me accordingly to be implied that a certain happiness, anyway a certain spirited and orderly participation, is owed to the commonwealth by those who have sworn allegiance to it—that if the covenant of marriage is a miniature of the covenant of the commonwealth, then one may be said to owe the commonwealth participation that takes the form of a meet and cheerful conversation.

I understand these film comedies to be participating in such a conversation with their culture. The general issue of the conversation might be formulated this way: granted that we accept the legitimacy of divorce, what is it that constitutes the legitimacy of marriage? If we do not know that a marriage has been effected, how can we know whether there has been a successful divorce, especially when the couple are evidently unable to feel themselves divorced, when the conversation between the divorced pair is continuous with the conversation that constituted their marriage? Now the bondage in question is not in these cases to an isolating unhappiness but to an isolating happiness, or to a

* "Female Sexuality," p. 239.
shared imagination of happiness which nevertheless produces insufficient actual satisfaction. More specifically, I claim for It Happened One Night that the conversation invokes the fantasy of the perfected human community, proposes marriage as our best emblem of this eventual community—not marriage as it is but as it may be—while at the same time it grants, on what may be seen as Kantian and Freudian and Levi-Straussian grounds, that we cannot know that we are humanly capable of achieving that eventuality, or of so much as achieving a marriage that emblematizes it, since that may itself be achievable only as part of the eventual community. For The Philadelphia Story, I am about to claim that its conversation more narrowly focuses such questions on the question of America, on whether America has achieved its new human being, its more perfect union and its domestic tranquility, its new birth of free-

dom, whether it has been successful in securing the pursuit of happiness, whether it is earning the conversation it demands.

To enter my claim about the conversation in which The Philadelphia Story participates, I propose to follow Dexter’s advice to Dinah the final morning and to understand what I have seen as a dream—not, as I take his advice, in order to doubt the reality of what I have seen (that aspect of its reality, or unreality, is clear enough to me) but in order to look in a certain way for the meaning of those events; and not, as I take him to be advising her, just those of the night before, but of the whole story. This might take me beyond the threat to perceive as Spy magazine would have me perceive, as a spectator of obvious scandal, and permit me to acknowledge my participation in these events, or say my implication in them.

The dream I weave—it is more like a daydream—works on a small residue of events and phrases from the film, most of which I have already cited: on the recurrent idea of people coming from different classes, and the repeated notion of being a first-class human being; on the setting of leisure, of luxury, of what Mike calls the privileged class enjoying their privileges; on Tracy’s fear of exposure and her responsiveness to Mike; on Dexter’s gorgeous thirst and George’s expulsion; on a man’s wanting his wife to behave herself naturally; on the demand of the genre that the pair are recommitting themselves to an adventure; on Sidney Kidd’s being drawn to them as to news of national importance; and on the name Philadelphia.

My dream of the story about Philadelphia is a story about people convening for a covenant in or near Philadelphia and debating the nature and the relation of the classes from which they come. It is not certain who will end up as signatories of the covenant, a principal issue being whether the upper class, call it the aristocracy, is to survive and if so what role it may play in a constitution committed to liberty. The significance of the relation of The Philadelphia Story to A Midsummer Night’s Dream would on this point be the interpretation of aristocrats living in woods on the outskirts of a capital city, as beings inhabiting another realm, a medium of magic, or call it money, which has some mysterious connection with our ordinary lives: we cannot be at peace and clear if they are in conflict and confusion, but it is hard to say whether their
turmoil causes ours or ours theirs. And it is very much to the point that Shakespeare's faery realm is the realm of the erotic. (In an essay entitled "The Fate of Pleasure"* that bears variously on our subject, Lionel Trilling remarks that Werner Sombart, in his *Luxury and Capitalism,* "represents luxury as being essentially an expression of eroticism," a representation surely confirmed in the appetite of film, though we might accordingly have to consider further what constitutes luxury on film.) But the idea of what happened in Philadelphia during the making of our Declaration of Independence and our Constitution is not the whole daydream. It projects further a conversation between the film's preoccupations and some three or four texts or moments in the working out of those covenants in their subsequent two centuries.

No work of serious social criticism was more on the minds of thinking Americans in the period preceding and during the thirties than Veblen's *Theory of the Leisure Class.* One can take *The Philadelphia Story* as a head-on attempt to discredit Veblen's assessment of aristocratic culture as characterized by its conspicuousness and emulation of leisure, of consumption, of waste, which is to say, by an avoidance of productive labor and hence an ignorance of or indifference to the genuine quality of the things in our lives. To the demonstration that Tracy Lord has a horror of the conspicuous, and that one cannot imagine her wishing to emulate anyone, certainly not in what they consume, one might reply on Veblen's behalf in either of two ways: that Tracy's horror of the conspicuous is really a further proof of his point, or that if you are one of the vanishing few who have as much money as the Lords of Philadelphia, and your money is as old, then this theory of leisure may not perfectly apply to you. When Tracy, alone with George for the single time in the film, at poolside after Dexter has departed, having explained to George what "yare" means, cries out, "Oh, to be useful in the world," George responds by saying that he's going to build her an ivory tower and worship her from a distance. This is an especially chilling response exactly because it understands, by denying, both sources of her heartfelt cry, that it is a wish for freedom from her condition of, let me say, enforced or virginal leisure, which she understands as a condition simultaneously of incompetence or immaturity both in sex and in work. She finds a virginal or narcissistic leisure no longer supportable; but empirical leisure, the kind that has to be chosen for oneself, and that alternates with real work, still maddeningly beyond reach. But however we come to understand how best to join work and love in a satisfying human existence, it seems clear enough to me that Veblen's book is quite deaf to the rights of the sensuous or erotic side of human nature and that it draws too simple, or angry, a picture of the line between the necessary and the luxurious, or the join between the utilitarian and the beautiful.

Tracy's temperament seems better appreciated in the opposite sense of aristocracy appealed to in Tocqueville and in John Stuart Mill. Dreading the tendency in democracy to a despotism of the majority, a tyranny over the mind—another emulation, now of one's neighbor—they looked upon the aristocrat's capacity for independence in thought and conduct, a capacity if need be for eccentricity, as a precious virtue, an aristocratic virtue by which the success of the democratic virtues is to be assessed, to determine whether in its search for individual equality democracy will abandon the task of creating the genuine individual.

This is the sort of thought that enters the third of the texts or moments of conversation concerning our constitution that I find *The Philadelphia Story* to enter. I mean the conversation or fantasy about whether America will produce and recognize in human beings something to call natural aristocracy. Such an idea was classically debated in the correspondence between John Adams and Thomas Jefferson as, late in their illustrious careers, in the second decade of the nineteenth century, they had the leisure to look at their creation and speculate on the conditions necessary for the Union to survive and flourish.* Agreeing on the importance of producing an unprecedented aristocracy, which is just to say, a "rule by the best," they were understandably unable to characterize very satisfactorily what this best is to consist in. The idea seems to affirm that one human being may be better than another and yet to deny (on pain of espousing some repudiated mode of aristocracy) that there is any particular way in which one is better, anything one is better at. Whatever its unclarity, the idea of natural aristocracy is hard to forget once you have found yourself using it in thinking about America's

aspirations and progress (like the thought of there being a time and place at which the frontier came to an end). I think in fact something like that idea, however dated, even dangerous, it may sound to us, is bound to haunt a society whose idea of itself requires that it repudiate
the hierarchies and enforcements of the European past and make a new beginning, to make in effect a reformation of the human condition.

I suggest that this is the idea expressed in Dexter’s insistence on what he calls a “first-class human being,” an otherwise dark notion. I am prepared to credit his denial that this has to do with a hierarchy of social classes, or with some idea that there are different kinds of human beings, the sort of idea that takes certain others to be primitives or natural inferiors, made for subservience. In the concluding part, Part Four, of The Claim of Reason, certain occasions present themselves to me for denying that there are kinds of human beings, and others for allowing that there might be degrees of humanity. Is this evasive? The difference I see in these intuitions may be expressed this way: the natural aristocrat, better in degree but not in kind than his fellows, is not inherently superior to others, possessing qualities inaccessible to others, but, one might say, is more advanced than others, further along a spiritual path anyone might take and everyone can appreciate. (If a talent is something inaccessible to those who do not have it, who are not “gifted” with it, then it would follow that the possession of some talent is not part of the concept of the natural aristocrat.) This is dangerous moral territory. In The Philadelphia Story it is in surveillance most explicitly in George’s defeat and departure, which we know Dexter has had something to do with. This danger must be run in romance, which wishes the promise of union and renewal, not of expulsion. The drama is lost if this feels merely like a group of snobs ridding themselves of an upstart from a lower class, an inferior. The expulsion is meant, I take it, as a gesture of a promise to be rid of classes as such, and so to be rid of George as one wedded to the thoughts of class division, to the crossing rather than the overcoming of class. A matter of delicate judgment. George’s mood fits the thing that has been named resentment. This is an interpretation of the mood romance names “melancholy” and adopts as its natural foe. At the opening of A Midsummer Night’s Dream, Theseus’ order to his Master of the Revels is: “Awake the pert and nimble spirit of mirth, / Turn melancholy forth to funerals; / The pale companion is not for our pomp.”

Given what I just referred to as the moral danger of confusion in this territory, say confusing the cry for justice with a complaint from envy, I take Dexter at the conclusion of The Philadelphia Story, when he says to Tracy “I’ll risk it. Will you?” to be saying that he’ll both risk their falling again to find their happiness together, and also finally risk his concept of that happiness, to find out whether he actually has anything in mind.

The fullest description of what I take him to have in mind is given in, of all things, Matthew Arnold’s Culture and Anarchy, in which Mill’s praise of liberty is contested and from which, I suppose, Veblen got his characterization of the leisure class as the Barbarians (distinguishing these from the middle and lower classes, which Arnold calls the Philistines and the Populace). Arnold also wishes to reconceive the idea of the aristocracy. He wishes to work out the rule of the best to mean the rule of the best self, something he understands as existing in each of us. It is of course common not to know of this possibility, but more natures are curious about their best self than one might imagine, and this curiosity Arnold calls the pursuit of perfection. “Natures with this bent,” Arnold says, “emerge in all classes . . . and this bent tends to take them out of their class, and to make their distinguishing characteristic not their Barbarianism or their Philistinism, but their humanity.”

I have elsewhere more than once insisted on the photogenic power of the camera as giving a natural ascendency to the flesh and blood actor over the character he or she plays in a film, something I take to reverse the relation between actor and character in the theater. I have also spoken of the camera’s tendency to create types from individuals, which I go on to characterize as individualities.* Here I recall that long list of actors whose mannerisms or eccentricities so satisfied the appetite of the movie camera during the classical period of film, figures whose distinctness was the staple of impersonators; no self-respecting impersonator could fail to have a Gable and a Grant and a Stewart and a Hepburn routine. This distinctness seems to me a visual equivalent of what Tocqueville and Mill mean by the distinction in aristocracy, by the freedom it projects for itself. It seems to me, further, that there is a visual equivalent or analogue of what Arnold means by distinguishing the best self from the ordinary self and by saying that in the best self

class yields to humanity. He is witnessing a possibility or potential in the human self not normally open to view, or not open to the normal view. Call this one's invisible self; it is what the movie camera would make visible. Perhaps it may discover more than one such self, and not all of them good ones. (It may be making visible what Blake calls our Emanations and our Specters.) I am trying to sketch out a stratum of explanation for the fact, which I cannot doubt, that in these comedies film has found one of its great subjects. I do not say that film is inherently democratic, only that the distinctions enforced by clothes, airs, and reputations in ordinary contexts are quite irrelevant to the distinctions it draws for itself. It is this property of film that allows, say, Fellini to discover in the face of a contemporary Roman butcher the visage of an ancient Emperor.

The originality inspired by the love of the best self Arnold calls genius. So much he might have been confirmed in by Emerson, whom he admired, and by Thoreau, if he read him. But when he goes on to call the best self "right reason" he parts company with American transcendentalism. The rule of the best self is the source of the new authority for which Arnold is seeking, the authority of what he calls culture, of what another might call religion, the answer to our narcissism and anarchy. It was his perception of society's loss of authority over itself, its impotence to authorize the use of force to protect itself from disorder, perhaps from dissolution, that prompted Arnold to write Culture and Anarchy. In it he distinguishes two forms of culture or authority, the two historical forces still compelling us on the quest for perfection or salvation; he names them Hebraism and Hellenism. "The governing idea of Hellenism is spontaneity of consciousness; that of Hebraism, strictness of conscience." The world "ought to be, though it never is, evenly and happily balanced between them." Arnold finds that his moment of history requires a righting of the balance in the direction of spontaneity of consciousness more than it needs further strictness of conscience. The more one ponders what Arnold it driving at, the more one will be willing to say, I claim, that Dexter Hellenizes (as, in their various ways, do Shakespeare and Tocqueville and Mill) while Tracy Hebraizes (as Arnold says all America does, and certainly as Veblen does). Now here is what the marriage in The Philadelphia Story comes to, I mean what it fantasizes. It is a proposed marriage or balance between Western culture's two forces of authority, so that American mankind can find its object, its dedication to a more perfect union, toward the perfected human community, its right to the pursuit of happiness.

It would not surprise me if someone found me, or rather found my daydream, Utopian. But I have not yet said what my waking relation to this daydream is, nor what my implication is in the events of the film.

Our relation to the events of film can only be determined in working through the details of the events of significant films themselves. And specifically, as I never tire of saying, each of the films in the genre of remarriage essentially contains considerations of what it is to view them, to know them. Let me now conclude this reading of The Philadelphia Story by calling attention to the events of the ending of the film, which have a peculiar bearing on the issue of viewing.

What you may call its narrative concludes, of course, with the wedding. Or perhaps it really concludes with Sidney Kidd's sudden appearance to photograph this conclusion. But the film goes a step further, ending by showing us the photographs Kidd has taken. His pair of photographs throw into question the status, of form and substance, of everything we have seen. The first photograph is of the trio, Dexter, Tracy, and Mike, startled by, and looking in the direction of, the camera (which camera? Kidd's or Cukor's?). This proves to be a page which turns and gives place to a second photograph, of Dexter and Tracy alone, embracing. We have to understand in this succession of photographs Dexter's at the last moment claiming Tracy from Mike. 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." But further, if they were so determined not to let Sidney Kidd cover the wedding, why, having been startled by the first of the pictures he takes, do the pair allow him to continue, deliberately turn their attention away from the camera and go about their business, quite as if they wanted the record made, and quite as if having their picture taken is their business—as if the photograph were the document, or official testimony, that a certain public event has taken place, and that the event is essentially bound up with
the achievement of a certain form of public comprehension, of the culture's comprehension of itself, of meet conversation with itself, the achievement, in short, of a form of film comedy.

And how do we understand the provenance of this record, that is, how does it get into our hands? Are these pictures part of the coverage as it appears in Spy magazine? Conceivably they are from a wedding photo album. We might take them as production stills. But in any of these cases we are seeing something after the fact, whereas didn’t we just now take ourselves to be, as it were, present at the wedding? And what does it mean to say that these final two shots are pictures or photographs? How is the rest of what we have seen different? The rest was every bit as much a function of the photographic. Of course the rest was in motion whereas these are still. But that is the question. What is the difference? This question directs us to think about the ontological status of what we have seen and hence about the mode of our perception. Frye observes that at the conclusion of Shakespearean romance in the theater, we find ourselves subjected to a process in which we somehow move from the position of observer to the position of participant. At the end of The Philadelphia Story this process appears to be reversed and we find ourselves awakened from the position of illusory participant to that of observer. But this may itself be illusory. For suppose we find that what has happened to us is that we have substituted for the idea of Tracy as a statue the idea of her and her suitors as photographs, or say traded the goddess for a movie star. Then we are threatened with the very position toward her that George found himself in. Is there a way for us as viewers to escape this position?

In any case, the ambiguous status of these figures and hence of our perceptual state will have the effect of compromising or undermining our efforts to arrive at a conclusion about the narrative. For example, shall we say that the film ends with an embrace, betokening happiness? I would rather say that it ends with a picture of an embrace, something at a remove from what has gone before, hence betokening uncertainty.

Will someone still find that my daydream is not sufficiently undermined by this uncertainty, and still accuse me of Utopianism? Then I might invoke Dexter’s reply to George’s objection to his, and all of his kind’s, sophisticated ideas: “Ain’t it awful!”