CHAPTER 6

# *Certified Copy*: The Comedy of Remarriage in an Age of Digital Reproducibility

There is an aporia with two aspects at the heart of *Certified Copy*. The first pertains to narrative, and whether the protagonists are married; the second pertains to genre, and whether we can take this film as a genuine instantiation of what Cavell has called a 'comedy of remarriage'. The movie, which opens with a lecture on the importance of reproductions of works of art, will not let us solve either puzzle, but it won't let us give up on them: it repeatedly invites while consistently rebuking attempts at resolving them. This is especially frustrating because the puzzles are intertwined (such that resolving one might mean resolving the other). As it frustrates us, *Certified Copy* forwards the ambiguities of belonging and judgement that haunt concepts of genre, showing their bearing on questions of experience, authority, and scepticism.

In 1981's *Pursuits of Happiness*, Cavell – pre-empting in some ways the subsequent acceptance of popular culture as a field worthy of academic study – performed rich readings of Hollywood romantic comedies made between 1934 and 1949, taking them, if not quite as works of philosophy, then as philosophically serious works demanding philosophy's attention. He identified a subset of romantic comedies – more specifically a subset of screwball comedies – as members of a particular genre (or we might say – though it is notable that Cavell does not – subgenre). He calls it the Hollywood comedy of remarriage, including in it *The Lady Eve* (1941), *It Happened One Night* (1934), *Bringing Up Baby* (1938), *The Philadelphia Story* (1940), *His Girl Friday* (1940), *Adam's Rib* (1949), and *The Awful Truth* (1937). The Hollywood comedy of remarriage, Cavell says, distinguishes itself from a traditional romantic comedy "in casting as its heroine a married woman; and the drive of its plot is not to get the central pair together, but to get them *back* together, together *again*".[1] There are more convergences, some of them surprisingly specific: intense and virtuosic yet sometimes brutal repartee between the main characters, often turning on philosophical discussion regarding "the problem and the concept of identity";[2] concern with education broadly construed, and in particular the education of the woman by the man; a childless heroine; a hero and/or heroine from a sophisticated social milieu, perhaps from what

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people once called 'society'; a sense that the couple speak their own language, appearing unintelligible to the wider world; a certain reflexive tendency to raise the problem of the relation between actor and character, particularly regarding the principal woman; a concern with the idea of the public (often presented via the figure of the newspaper); the father of the female protagonist taking the side of her desire, rather than siding against it as he does in Shakespearian comedy; an ending that takes place in what Cavell calls, using words drawn from Northrop Frye's Shakespeare criticism, 'the green world': a location out of the city that might allow a different future for the couple by granting them a different view on their shared past, "a place of perspective in which the complications of the plot will achieve what resolution they can".[3]

Importantly, the understanding of genre at work here does not rely on the assumption that members of a particular genre must, if they are to be claimed as such, necessarily share a delimitable set of features. As Cavell acknowledges, here he seems quite close to Wittgenstein, who wanted show that our taking something as a certain type of thing – our knowing what a particular thing is – is not always contingent on our knowing the necessary and sufficient conditions of that thing's betokening its type. Famously, Wittgenstein made his case with the metaphor of family resemblance.[4] To be identifiable as a member of a family, a person need not share all the features characteristic of members of that family: you may have your grandfather's nose, your mother's eyes, and your father's gait, etc.; your sister may have your mother's eyes, and your father's nose and sense of humour, etc. – yet you are both recognisable as siblings. But Cavell goes further than Wittgenstein in acknowledging the complexities that now emerge. After all, we might say that people are recognisable as members of particular families not just because of what they share with other members, but also because of the way in which they fail to share distinctive features, or because of how they share them differently (for instance, Lisa Simpson's being recognisable as a Simpson is not just the result of her being yellow and having bizarre hair, but also of the ways in which she demonstrates her *non-belonging*, most obviously through her intelligence: she is, as we might say, 'the smart one'). This brings out something important about Cavell's understanding of genre: it depends not just on a film's sharing features with the other members, but also on the way in which it might *stand out* from the broader set – a standing out that displays more than brute dissimilarity.[5] In *It Happened One Night*,[6] for example, there is no arriving at a 'green world'; instead "what happens takes place 'on the road'". Yet this, Cavell argues, is *made up for* in the film, in particular in its "commitment to adventurousness", in how it shows that "a state of perspective does not

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require representation by a place but may also be understood as a matter of directedness, of being on the road, on the way".[7]

He writes:

> members of a genre share the inheritance of certain conditions, procedures and subjects and goals of composition, and . . . each member of such a genre represents a study of these conditions, something I think of as bearing the responsibility of the inheritance.[8]

This logic of genre may violate our intuitive notion of the logic of belonging (which holds that membership in a set just means possessing the particular feature, or set of features, definitive of it), but this does not make it weak or arbitrary. Genre membership asks not less but more of its members than other forms of belonging, and it asks especially much of those films that eschew certain generic features. Because members of a genre "*are what they are* in view of each other",[9] when a member of a genre eschews a particular feature, it must *compensate* for the eschewal (Lisa Simpson doesn't have the stupidity characteristic of the other members of the family, yet her intelligence is also stupid in its way, leading her as it sometimes does into pedantry and arrogance). This is part of how Cavell accounts for the obvious and important point that a genre should allow *new* members, new members that do not simply repeat the features of previous members – in which case they would fail to be really new – but rather extend them in repeating them. Each genuinely new member of a genre puts that genre to the test: it is not just the realisation but also (and more primarily) the *investigation* of its possibilities, an experiment with its own generic inheritance. The exceptions that emerge within a genre have their own specific way of proving its rules.

What draws Cavell to the remarriage comedy? It is not just its concern with problems of knowledge – as I have argued, that is typical of cinema in general, just part of this medium's inheritance – but the particular manner in which it understands and responds to them. Specifically Cavell reads the narrative drive of these films in terms of the "overcoming of sceptical doubt"[10] – yet this is a very particular sort of overcoming. Unlike in Descartes, doubt is not to be quashed here with certainty, and is not figured in terms of answering sceptical questions, or providing solutions to sceptical problems. The claim, rather, is that remarriage comedy pits epistemic knowledge against acknowledgement, and both of these against problems of love, sex, conversation, ordinariness, diurnality, fantasy, fidelity, and desire. Hence the idea, which runs right through *Pursuits of Happiness*, that these films have a particular flair for charting the vicissitudes of the problem of other minds. "The

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conversation of what I call the comedy of remarriage . . .", Cavell writes, "leads to acknowledgement; to the reconciliation of a genuine forgiveness . . .".[11] The couple in remarriage comedy must move through a certain crisis of knowledge toward a resolution based in acknowledgement. Unlike in more traditional romantic comedy, what brings the couple (back) together is not a change in circumstance or removal of an external obstacle, but the overcoming of internal obstacles. The moral of such comedies is that the satisfaction we seek is inadequate to our real need. It is not quite that we are forever sealed off from one another, can never know one another, but that the problem of other minds is not simply epistemic, that the other claims me differently. As Cavell writes: "the achievement of happiness requires not the . . . satisfaction of our needs . . . but the examination and transformation of those needs".[12]

I should reiterate that I do not necessarily want to claim *Certified Copy* as a comedy of remarriage. Rather I am interested in the particular questions it raises about film in general, this genre in particular. The film is so reflexive, so aware of itself as a film, that it puts Cavell's account into question – and not simply by challenging any particular generic ascription. It does it by forcing its viewers into a heightened state of uncertainty: an uncertainty that refracts the scepticism that Cavell says remarriage comedies work to overcome. Reading this film in terms of Cavell's philosophy of remarriage comedy, then, will reveal part of what is at stake in it – specifically, what is at stake in the possibility (or otherwise) of a contemporary instantiation of the genre. The problem the film poses is whether it is or indeed *can* be a remarriage comedy at all – and so the extent to which the particular mode of sceptical overcoming dramatised by these films still registers with us.

The movie opens with James Miller (played by the English opera baritone William Shimell) arriving late to Tuscany to speak on his new book. Entitled *Certified Copy*, the work presents an argument on the relative value of originals and copies, particularly in relation to art. In Miller's words, the aim of the book is to "try and show that the copy itself has worth in that it leads us to the original and in this way certifies its value". During his talk there is another late arrival: it's Juliette Binoche, who is not directly named in the film, which credits her as 'She' (or rather 'Elle'). Binoche doesn't only arrive late; she also leaves early, apparently deciding that her son – he is about ten years old – is being too disruptive. She hands a note to the book's Italian translator and leaves just as Miller is about to outline his theory of the four criteria of authenticity. Shortly after we watch Binoche and her son talking in a café. She is speaking about the book and her interest in it, trying to explain why she purchased six copies and left her phone number with his translator in the hope of arranging a meeting. The boy teases her for what he claims

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is the ulterior motive: "You like this James and you want to fall in love with him."

When Binoche and Miller meet the following day, it seems the boy was onto something. Miller comes downstairs into Binoche's antique shop, and she immediately seems flustered, if not defensive at his suggestion they leave town for the day. She nevertheless agrees, and so begin some visually spectacular scenes in which the pair make awkward, sometimes surprisingly testy philosophical conversation as they drive through beautiful towns and countryside. She seems keen on impressing Miller, taking him to see a nice church ("Did you get married here?" he asks, but receives no answer as Binoche is interrupted by a phone call), and then to see a famous Tuscan painting, itself a copy of a Roman fresco. Despite its beauty, Binoche points out (with the help of a guide speaking to another group, whose words she translates for Miller), the piece was found some fifty years ago to be an eighteenth-century copy, and not the Roman fragment it had been taken for. The work – still proudly on display despite this fact – doesn't really seem to impress Miller, who walks away as if bored by it (later he has to be prodded into acknowledging that he wished he had known about it before completing his book).

After the museum sequence, the couple order coffee in a café. As their drinks are prepared Binoche, having missed this part of Miller's talk, asks him to tell her about the event in Florence that gave him the idea for the book. Miller says it came after he witnessed a conversation between a mother and her young son as they stood beneath a copy of Michelangelo's *David* in the Piazza della Signoria. Miller was watching the pair because he recognised them, having seen them walk past his hotel on numerous occasions over the duration of his stay. He remembered the pair for the peculiar way in which they proceeded through the streets: the mother always walking one block ahead of the boy, yet repeatedly turning back to confirm his presence behind her. "She always had her arms crossed just like you," says Miller. The occasion in the piazza was the first time he had seen the pair side by side. Binoche, who has been looking surprisingly wistful or even hurt throughout the story, now says that it "sounds very familiar", and cries. Miller apologises awkwardly, and asks if Binoche knew them. "I wasn't very well in those days," she says. Miller goes on: "The mother was telling her son something about the statue. You know it's only a copy – the original's in the Academia – but the mother hadn't told the boy that. I'm sure. Am I right?" Binoche doesn't answer. "The boy was looking up at the statue as though it was a genuine, original, authentic work of art," Miller finally says, before being interrupted by a call, heading outside to take it. Now the waitress takes the chance to come up and speak with Binoche. "He's a good husband," she says. Binoche does not

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correct her, instead appearing to play along. She asks how the waitress knows that; the waitress says she can just tell. Thus develops a striking exchange, as Binoche complains of her husband's self-centredness, his obsession with his work, and how she barely sees him, while the waitress keeps trying to convince her to be happy with him. When Miller comes back inside Binoche informs him the woman has mistaken him for her husband. Miller seems to play along too, trying to explain and justify himself to the older woman.

The film has changed: for (most of) the remainder of the movie, Binoche and Miller seem to *keep on* playing along. Now they speak to each as though they really have been married for fifteen years, bickering about Miller's laziness on their anniversary, Binoche's sentimental fixation on romance, Miller's inability to simply enjoy his wine, and so on. When they visit another church they come across a young couple who've just been married, and argue over whether or not to pose with them for a photo: the couple want a picture with a happy older couple for good luck; Miller, apparently characteristically, seems not to want to indulge the perception – or perhaps Binoche's fantasy – that they are happy. As these scenes play out, the question naturally arises: is this is a story of two sophisticated strangers who, after being mistaken for a married couple, decide to act as one just for the intellectual and/or erotic thrill of it? Or are they a married couple who were pretending not to know each other, meeting and travelling through the Tuscan countryside as strangers as part of some elaborate intellectual and/or erotic game?

There is significant evidence to support the former reading. In the first part of the film, the pair really do speak like strangers, and the awkwardness between them seems unmistakably that of two middle-aged people who do not know each other wanting to get to know each other.[13] If Binoche's son is also Miller's, why does the boy appear not to know him? It can't just be that he doesn't know who his father is, because Binoche repeatedly attacks Miller for failing to spend *enough* time with his son. Also, we might ask, why does Binoche have to give Miller so much background information when describing his disappointing behaviour on the previous night? When she mentions it he appears at first not to know what she is talking about, so she has to explain: "You came back after a fortnight away . . . when I came out of the bathroom you were fast asleep, snoring." She is speaking to him just like they are acting here, giving him the kind of expository information that, in bad novels, plays, and films, gets relayed between characters as a pretext for filling in the audience.

Yet there is at least as much evidence for the second reading of the film. There is the exchange about Florence, in which the two appear to be skirting

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around something they will not say. There is the fact that Binoche breaks off her conversation with her son and storms out of the café right when he asks her why she didn't want Miller to sign a copy of the book using the boy's surname. There are the moments toward the start of the film when the boy comes up in conversation and Binoche becomes furious, seeming to break out of the character she seems to be pretending to be. This is to say that neither interpretation is satisfying: neither will make this film cohere.

The interpretive crisis created by the viewer's oscillation between these two mutually exclusive, necessary impossibilities comes to a head in the film's final scenes. Miller follows Binoche out of a church – they pass an elderly couple on the way – and they talk at the base of some stairs. Miller says Binoche has changed: she never used to go to church. Was she praying? Binoche says she wasn't: she just wanted to be on her own to remove her bra, which was sitting uncomfortably. He apologises, rather solemnly. She accuses him of having failed to notice earlier when she had put on lipstick and earrings; she says he never sees her. She then asks if he remembers the hotel in which they spent their wedding night. "Was it near here?" he asks, and she confirms it was. He points at one nearby. "Keep looking," she says, then as he looks around goes inside the building directly behind them, where she asks for the key to room nine – the room, she explains, in which she and her husband stayed on their wedding night. She goes upstairs. Miller follows her. When he arrives an off-screen Binoche – after insisting he keep the light off – instructs him to look out the window. As he does so, there is a cut to Binoche. "Remember?" she asks him. "No," he says. Binoche: "You don't remember? Don't you remember anything? I can't believe you've forgotten." She tells him to look out the other window, again asking if he sees and remembers. "You know I have a bad memory," he says. "It's not fair to test me like this." Binoche, now lying on the bed, says she can remember everything. She goes on to say that Miller hasn't changed at all: he is just as gentle, just as attractive, just as cold. Miller says Binoche is more beautiful than ever. "If we were a bit more tolerant of each other's weaknesses, we'd be less alone," she says. Soon she's asking him to stay. "I told you," says Miller to a hurt Binoche, "I have to be at the station by nine." He then enters the bathroom and stares into the mirror (and the camera), repeating the set-up of an earlier scene in which we watched Binoche applying lipstick. Bells ring out from the church we half see through the window behind him as he takes stock of his reflection (sometimes meeting his own gaze, sometimes avoiding it). Eventually he switches off the light and exits the room, leaving us looking out the window. Now the credits roll: not from the bottom to the top of the screen, but from the bottom to the top of the oblong of light created by its frame.

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Let me run the film through the criteria for remarriage comedy I drew out of *Pursuits of Happiness*. First, *Certified Copy* turns on dialogue: it is basically one long conversation between the protagonists. This talk is also often philosophical, and sometimes explicitly – indeed often heavy-handedly – concerns problems of identity (and when it doesn't, it concerns them implicitly). Second, the film is concerned with education, although it must be said that it's not clear if anyone is really educated (Miller's annoying lecturing seems mostly ignored by Binoche; at the end of the film, the onus is on his learning, but – as I will argue – it's unclear if any has taken place). Third, the couple may not be from high society, but they are cultured and sophisticated (much more so than members of today's ruling class tend to be, themselves now in the disingenuous habit of dismissing educated and cultured people as 'elites'). Fourth, they often appear incomprehensible to the wider world (and to the viewer), as the people the couple encounter misunderstand them repeatedly (and as they use languages unshared by most of those around them). Fifth, the film basically turns on the problem of actor and character, indeed in a far more heightened and reflexive way than do Cavell's remarriage comedies (it is worth mentioning Kiarostami's choice to cast the inexperienced Shimell as the leading man: unsurprisingly he struggles to keep pace with Binoche, and her prodigiousness comes through more obviously as a result of the asymmetry). Sixth, and here is our exception, the heroine is *not* childless, and indeed the burden she bears because of her son is a crucial part of her character and the couple's apparent relationship (and its problems). Seventh, there is a concern with the public and publicity, not figured through the newspaper, but through the publication of an academic book. Eighth, there is the encounter between Binoche and Miller and the older couple in a square, where the man – certainly readable as a kind of father figure, or indeed father-in-law figure – gives Miller relationship advice ("When you walk together, just put your hand on her shoulder"): advice Miller follows, leading Binoche to rest her head on his – just like the woman in the statue at the centre of the square, about which they had just been arguing.

The ninth point is perhaps the most ambiguous: does the film end in a green world that provides a place of perspective? They are certainly out of the city, having fulfilled the desire voiced by Miller when the characters first met, and which flustered Binoche. But is this green world a place of perspective? What does the couple see here, and does it allow them to forgive by acknowledging, by achieving a new view of the problem of knowing the other? This is the question whose irresolvability makes the film so fascinating and infuriating. In the final shot, we watch Miller's face watching Miller's face from a camera that doubles as a mirror. Like Miller, we keep looking but

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keep failing to see; like Miller, we aren't sure who or what we are looking at, and the attempts and failures of looking and seeing that structure the image involve the viewer too. We might say it is a perspective doubled back on itself: a perspective struggling to keep itself in perspective.

We should bring this back to the exception of the child. "The absence of children in these films", Cavell wrote, "is a universal feature of them."[14] He puts this partly down to a question of narrative purification: for the remarriage comedy to have teeth, its characters must be facing the threat or reality of divorce; children would serve to make such a threat or reality less likely; so "the absence of children further purifies the discussion of marriage".[15] Yet of course, this is one of the more significant changes the institution of marriage has undergone since Hollywood's golden age: children can no longer purify the discussion, because they are often not enough to hold a marriage together (though the presence of children might make it more difficult, they do not nix the question of ending one). It is notable that Cavell calls this feature 'universal' – a claim that may seem to sit uneasily with his logically complex account of generic membership. But one can see why it is so crucial for him: for Cavell, it is not for nothing that remarriage comedy emerges right when the question of the whole point of marriage had been renewed, thanks to changes in American society, and the increasing currency given to the idea that marriage is not (or not primarily) about economic necessity. This is part of why I do not want simply to claim this film as a member of the remarriage genre. As it should lead us to wonder, what if its conditions of possibility no longer obtain in the same way, or at all?

In 2004's *Cities of Words*, Cavell makes a series of remarks about the contemporary "absence of full-blown remarriage comedy".[16] Naturally he does not deny that films continue to be made with "remarriage elements in them"; in this context, he cites 1987's *Moonstruck*, 1989's *Say Anything*, 1993's *Groundhog Day*, 1994's *Four Weddings and a Funeral*, and 1985's *The Sure Thing*, which he reads as making a number of references to *It Happened One Night*. But Cavell says the genre is "no longer what it was", and speaks of recent remarriage comedies as "fragments"[17] rather than instantiations of the genre (of course, this could also be framed in terms of copies versus real articles). He ventures a problematic two-sided explanation for this. The first pertains to a shift in "the role, or idea of, or faith in, education . . .".[18] If in classical remarriage comedy "an essential goal of the narrative is the education of the woman" – a goal that, moreover, requires "the man's lecturing"[19] the woman – then in contemporary fragments of the genre – where "the young woman may be presented as explicitly better educated in society's eyes than the man"[20] – this has been partially

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foreclosed. The second pertains to a related shift, which Cavell thinks has weakened the possibility of men being "given authority by their experience"[21] (presumably the very authority that would allow them to educate the female protagonists of the films).

It is not simply that the male protagonists in classical remarriage comedy were knowing and authoritative, or that education in these films was just a matter of the man imparting wisdom to the woman; rather, Cavell's point is that these men start out from a position of experience from which they preside over the education and so recreation of the woman, but through that find themselves educated and so recreated too.[22] The narrative arc of *It Happened One Night*, for example, is shaped in part by the piecemeal revelation of what lies beneath Gable's façade of gruff worldliness, which emerges through the holes Claudette Colbert pokes in that façade. Part of Gable's charm consists in his willingness to let her reveal him in this way, but also in how he maintains the façade despite her (how in poking holes in it, Colbert reveals the façade as part of him). Think of the famous hitchhiking scene, where Gable tries to instruct Colbert in the proper methods of flagging down a car, only to find himself being taught a lesson (the drivers all ignore his poor thumb; she hails a car in seconds by showing some leg). In this context, it is important that the scene would lose its humour if Gable did not start out in it by making a claim to be authoritative. That, in turn, is part of what gives the next scene its more unnerving sense of humour, as Gable reasserts himself by chasing down the bag thief who gave them a lift, beating and tying him up, and stealing his car.

Perhaps now we can see what Cavell means in *Cities of Words* when he asks us to compare Gable with John Cusack. He writes:

> It would be a contribution to understanding why the remarriage genre is no longer what it was, to understand the difference of texture in a comedy that features as its leading man Clark Gable in comparison with one that features John Cusack . . . Cusack's charm and wit are formidable, but they depend upon his conveying an air of actual youth, of innocence untried, to make him a candidate for the young woman's attention. The difference from classical remarriage comedy, with such men as Gable, Cary Grant, James Stewart, and Spencer Tracy, may be put starting with the fact that these men are given authority by their experience, by their having staked their innocence against the need of "taking place in society," so that their capacity for inventiveness, improvisation, allowing themselves to behave with their marriage partner in ways incomprehensible to the rest of society, are entered upon knowing that they are risking a certain standing in the world . . .[23]

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In *The Sure Thing*, it is important that Cusack is clueless and awkward, and that the woman he pursues (played by Daphne Zuniga) is responsible and studious. The narrative arc of the film is shaped by their mutual education: through her he learns to take responsibility for his actions and feelings, coming to see women as something more than potential sexual conquests; through his example and demonstrations (he shows her, for example, how to shotgun a beer) she discovers a sense of adventure that sees her shirk the life of safety and conventionality she had prepared for herself. But the façade in which Zuniga pokes holes is all bravado, and it masks less gentleness than sexual anxiousness; she reveals it not as part of Cusack but as a flimsy fiction. If Gable is disarming because we know (as he does) he is both dangerous and gentle, then the Cusack of *The Sure Thing* is disarming because we know (as he eventually learns) he is disarmed. Consider how mannered it would seem if Cusack tried in earnest to inhabit the swagger of a Gable; how he repels the creep who stops for them not through an act of violence but through inhabiting a cliché in highly exaggerated fashion (and to hilarious effect). Cusack's charm comes not from his authority and willingness to forgo it but from his assured way of inhabiting his lack of it.[24]

Let me return to the final scene of *Certified Copy*. As Miller stands peering out (and reflected in) the hotel room windows, Binoche keeps asking him to look, but it is unclear if he succeeds in seeing ("Come, come and see this side. Look. Do you remember now? Right there, look. See?" "You know that I have no recollection"). When Miller looks in the mirror, the image figures not the accomplishment of self-knowledge through experience but an ambiguity of it; it is an image of refraction, dissipation, and loss as much as of reflection and attainment. What is in question here, as Miller peers with an expression that seems both resigned and puzzled, is whether he has been able to come to a new view of himself, his situation, and his relationship with Binoche. When we see the church through the mirror's reflection and hear the bells ring out, this could either be the sign of their remarriage, or a kind of mockery of the pair, a sign of what they've failed to renew (or begin). What is unclear, in other words, is whether this counts as "the achievement of a new perspective on existence; a perspective that presents itself as a place, one removed from the city of confusion and divorce".[25]

Now let me return to what it means, on Cavell's picture, to claim a film as belonging to a particular genre. As we saw, his is a logically nuanced account of generic membership, where a film can qualify as belonging to a genre not only in spite but also because of how it fails to share relevant features with other members of the set. This allows him to develop some remarkable critical insights, as his discussions of exceptions and their resultant

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compensations are among the most rewarding in *Pursuits of Happiness*. But to some ears, the notion of genre at work here will sound just impossibly lax, as though it renders generic membership arbitrary, and the act of claiming a film as belonging to a genre decisionistic.[26] Surely, we would say while in this mood, counting the eschewal of generic features as evidence *in favour* of a particular generic ascription is to undermine any rational foundations the act might have; surely it is to render such ascriptions unfalsifiable. As Carroll writes: "The difficulty here is in knowing how liberal we can be in postulating 'compensations'."[27]

Of course, there is a Cavellian response to this line of criticism. It is to concede (like Immanuel Kant) that the "determining ground" of judgements of this nature "can be no other than subjective";[28] but to insist (also like Kant) that this does not weaken their claims on us. On the contrary: it is what gives them their special sort of purchase, what makes them bear on us in ways that natural scientific statements do not. The subjectivity of such judgements is crucial to them because it puts the judge at stake in them: it is what makes them revelatory of the judge, and so what renders the act of judging a risky one. Convincingly claiming a film as a member of a particular genre, then, requires nothing more or less than persuasively articulating one's experience of the film and the genre in which one places it. If there is authority in this act, it cannot be the kind of authority we grant to statements in the context of natural science; critical practice, for Cavell, is about accounting for subjective experiences, and is grounded in them. Thus there is no determinate answer to the question of how liberal one can be in (say) identifying exceptions that prove generic rules, because there is no way of determining in advance what will persuade, no fail-safe procedure for sorting the convincing from the unconvincing. Cavell goes further:

> consulting one's experience and . . . subjecting it to examination, and beyond these . . . momentarily *stopping*, turning yourself away from whatever your preoccupation and turning your experience away from its expected, habitual track, to find itself, its own track: coming to attention. The moral of this practice is to educate your experience sufficiently so that it is worthy of trust.[29]

So criticism requires not only attention to one's experience and the hard work of giving voice to it;[30] it also requires the checking of that experience, a checking Cavell describes as education. Experience is not figured here as a dumb, purely 'biological', or causally determined substrate which it is the task of the critic to interpret and somehow articulate; it should itself be subject to the demands of education, trained to respond with sensitivity and honesty.

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This is to say that criticism requires exactly what is put in question by *Certified Copy*, and particularly in its final scene: self-knowledge achieved through the education of experience.

Attacks on the rationality of aesthetic judgement like the one I outlined above exploit the fact that such judgements are based in feeling. They turn on the idea that a judgement based in feeling forgoes the claim to be binding on others, because it tells us not about objective reality but about the subjectivity of the judge. So the attack is underwritten by the sceptical picture of the relation between self and world that has arisen repeatedly in this book, in which the self is figured as standing outside the world, as something that views it from sideways on. Crary breaks this down into two related assumptions: "the *ontological* assumption that no genuine feature of the world can be subjective . . ." and "the *epistemological* assumption that we approach a view of objective reality by abstracting from any local or subjective perspectives".[31] On this notion of self and world, aesthetic judgements – such as Cavell's claim that *It Happened One Night* is a remarriage comedy despite/because of the fact that it does not end in a 'green world', or despite/because of the fact that it "diverge[s] from the formula of a woman remarrying her divorced husband"[32] – are not in the business of making rational claims on us, because they simply express a subjective feeling or experience. So to challenge this we need a different thought of experiential authority: one unbeholden to the fantasy of authority underlying sceptical selfhood, and the repudiation of feeling at work in it. To claim experiential authority in this way is not to claim objectivity in the sense given to it in the sceptical picture, but nor is it to throw in one's lot with a decisionism that denies all objectivity: it is to lean upon the idea that judgements based in feeling can reveal the world and how things stand in it.[33] In McDowell's terms, it amounts to a rejection of "the doctrine that the world is fully describable in terms of properties that can be understood without essential reference to their effects on sentient beings".[34] It suggests that coming to know the world is sometimes partly a function of coming to know oneself.

It is worth noting that, in some second-wave feminist philosophies, there is something characteristically masculine about the sceptical picture of selfhood I have been tracing and the notion of objectivity it supports. Such arguments proceed on the grounds that the picture has historically reinforced the notion that men have authoritative insight into how things stand, because they have been taken to be more adept at separating themselves from their feelings. Catharine MacKinnon, for instance, writes of feminism as a "critique of the objective standpoint as male";[35] in a discussion of Francis Bacon, Genevieve Lloyd writes of the "male content to what it is to be a good knower",[36] in a

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classic contribution to Marxist feminism, Nancy Hartsock writes of "abstract masculinity",[37] and "the male sense of self as separate, distinct, and even disconnected".[38] On these accounts, there is a deep connection between the idea that insight into how things objectively stand must be attained through the sloughing off of subjective elements and the idea that men are better equipped to separate themselves from their subjective biases.[39] If they are right, they may give us a way of understanding why, when this notion of objectivity starts to be revealed as the fantasy it is, it can seem to generate a crisis of male authority. The disconnected standpoint looks less and less inhabitable, but there appears to be no authority in the model of subjectivity against which it defined itself: if I can't know from a position of certainty and security, the sceptic says, I cannot know at all.[40]

Perhaps these accounts could also give us a way of understanding the crisis of knowledge portrayed in *Certified Copy*. During the Hollywood golden age, we might say, the notion that men have a particular authority stemming from their insight into objective reality had greater currency (the point could be put more strongly, of course: on the feminist accounts I have drawn on, it is figured as something like a structuring principle of patriarchal society). Hence the narratives of classical remarriage comedies could turn on how male protagonists are brought through conversation with their leading ladies to overcome the disconnection constitutive of sceptical selfhood, achieving a marriage of minds that draws them out of their position of isolation[41] – a process that, as we have seen, Cavell understands as contingent on the male protagonist's starting out from a position of experience and authority (a position that, despite himself, he will be educated into forgoing).[42] On Cavell's understanding of contemporary fragments of remarriage comedy, by contrast, something has begun to shift in the conditions of this set-up, such that male protagonists can no longer sincerely or convincingly inhabit that position of authority, and so do not start out experienced; hence his claim that the "absence of appropriate men" is the "more telling fact"[43] than the absence of appropriate women when accounting for the difference between classical remarriage comedies and their contemporary fragments.

In *Certified Copy* this is figured in a starker way. The film reveals Miller as so deeply out of touch with himself, with Binoche, and with the world that he is mystified by his own experience.[44] Further, the crisis facing him – and the failures of self-knowledge it engenders – are refracted in the viewer's own experience of the film. As it withholds the evidence we feel we need to ground our claims regarding the status of the pair, or whether it can be read as a genuine instantiation of the remarriage genre, it leaves us as well as Miller stranded in ambiguity. Are the couple married? Are they getting back

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together? Will Miller leave to catch his train, or will he stay and make love to Binoche? Is this a remarriage comedy? Is remarriage comedy still viable or even possible as a genre? Or have its conditions been negated by the historical and experiential changes wrought during and since the 1940s – changes pertaining to the roles of men and women, as well as a wider shift in our culture's exposure to images, and the infection of originals by copies? *Certified Copy* offers no answers to these questions. In forcing the demands of self-knowledge and overcoming back onto us, however, it opens another, perhaps more useful one: how might we rethink (or renew) the relationship between the cinema and us, its viewers?

**Notes**

1. Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness*, 1–2.
2. Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness*, 55.
3. Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness*, 29.
4. See Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §67; 27–8e.
5. Though it directly evokes Cavell, this should differentiate his account of genre from D. N. Rodowick's in *Elegy for Theory*, which reduces it to a family resemblance concept in the Wittgensteinian sense (see 74–5).
6. Rex Butler makes an intriguing connection between this film (to which I will shortly return) and *Certified Copy*:

> We are reminded in some ways of that celebrated moment in *It Happened One Night*, in which Clarke Gable and Claudette Colbert suddenly pretend to be married to throw off the authorities looking for them, and from that point actually do fall in love. ('Abbas Kiarostami', 65)

7. Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness*, 29.
8. Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness*, 28.
9. Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness*, 29 (original emphasis). The full passage shows how Cavell wants to distinguish his own account of the logic of genre from the Wittgensteinian concept of family resemblance. Cavell writes of those readers of Wittgenstein's *Investigations* who will

> sense a connection here, in the denial that what constitutes the members of a genre is their having features in common, with Wittgenstein's caution not to say of things called by the same name that they must have something in common [hence share some essence or so-called universal] but instead to consider that they bear to one another a family resemblance. But if I said of

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> games, using Wittgenstein's famous example in this connection, that they form a genre of human activity, I would mean not merely that they look like one another or that one gets similar impressions from them; I would mean they *are what they are* in view of one another. I find that the idea of "family resemblance" does not capture this significance, if indeed it is really there. (29)

10. Cavell, *Contesting Tears*, 90.
11. Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness*, 19.
12. Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness*, 4–5.
13. Butler writes: "their conversation is stiff and awkward, full of the small misunderstandings and takings of offence that two single middle-aged people, attracted to each other but carrying the burden of failed relationships in the past, are perhaps prone to" ('Abbas Kiarostami', 61).
14. Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness*, 58.
15. Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness*, 58.
16. Cavell, *Cities of Words*, 154.
17. Cavell, *Cities of Words*, 155.
18. Cavell, *Cities of Words*, 155.
19. Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness*, 84.
20. Cavell, *Cities of Words*, 155.
21. Cavell, *Cities of Words*, 154. In his hyperbolic but compelling way, Agamben outlines a similar thought in *Infancy and History* (see 15–17).
22. Thus it would be unfair simply to attack the Cavell of *Pursuits of Happiness* for assuming that it must be men who have the authority to educate women, and not the other way around. There is a deeper problem with Cavell's account, pertaining not simply to the sexist assumption that men are authoritative, but to his naïve deployment of the idea of male redemption through the love of the right woman.
23. Cavell, *Cities of Words*, 154. While I want no truck with its nostalgic tone, I find this passage illuminating. I will not say the same about the sentence that follows it:

> The absence of full-blown remarriage comedies accordingly suggests that men have become unable, or less able, with good spirits, to let their social station, so far as it is established, become jeopardized by acting on unexpected, awkward desires, as if the awkward were as such illicit—less able, we might say, to maintain their sense of identity without its ratification by social role. (154)

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I find the idea that the difference between men now and men then pertains to the unwillingness of the former to jeopardise their social stations by acting on unexpected or awkward desires highly implausible. If anything, I want to say, we are now less convinced than ever by those who try to inhabit their roles too earnestly, for example by the young academic who invests in tweed and a pipe. For a brilliant account of contemporary awkwardness figured not as a function of the forsaking of social roles but as emerging from a crisis of sociality as such, see the discussion of "radical awkwardness" in Kotsko, *Awkwardness* (67–89).

24. Though the film's deployment of young protagonists is important in itself, this is more than a function of Cusack's youth in *The Sure Thing*. Consider the more recent *High Fidelity* (2000), where the narrative turns on a nearly middle-aged Cusack's resistance to commitment, figured as a refusal to grow up.
25. Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness*, 17.
26. See Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 5–15.
27. Carroll, review of *Pursuits of Happiness*, 105.
28. Kant, quoted in Cavell, 'Aesthetic Problems of Modern Philosophy', 88 (emphasis removed).
29. Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness*, 12 (original emphasis). He goes on: "The philosophical catch would then be that the education cannot be achieved in advance of the trusting." The 'philosophical catch' Cavell invokes here turns on how experience requires an education to be trustworthy, while education cannot proceed without a trust in one's experience. This apparent paradox must be part of why there is no way of fully grounding the authority of an act of aesthetic judgement.
30. In an interview with Conant collected in *The Senses of Stanley Cavell*, Cavell says:

> If you give up something like formal argumentation as the route to conviction in philosophy, and you give up the idea that either scientific evidence or poetic persuasion is the way to philosophical conviction, then the question of what achieves philosophical conviction must at all times be on your mind. The obvious answer for me is that it must lie in the writing itself. But in *what* about the writing? It isn't that there is a rhetorical form, any more than there is an emotional form, in which I can expect conviction to happen. But the sense that nothing other than this prose here, as it's passing before our eyes, can carry conviction, is one of the thoughts that drives the shape of what I do. (59)

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31. Crary, *Beyond Moral Judgment*, 180 (original emphasis).
32. Carroll, review of *Pursuits of Happiness*, 104. Of course, we should also add to this list Cavell's overarching goal in *Pursuits of Happiness*: establishing remarriage comedy as an independent genre in the first place.
33. This chimes with Crary's account of making room for an alternative conception of rationality on which its exercise "necessarily presupposes the possession of certain sensitivities" (*Beyond Moral Judgment*, 119). It may also support one of the ideas developed in Sandra Harding's feminist epistemology: coming to an objective account of how things stand may actually require such judgements. As she writes:

    > in a society structured by gender hierarchy, 'starting thought from women's lives' increases the objectivity of the results of research by bringing scientific observation and the perception of the need for explanation to bear on assumptions and practices that appear natural or unremarkable from the perspective of dominant groups. ("'Strong Objectivity" and Socially Situated Knowledge', 150)

34. McDowell, 'Aesthetic Value, Objectivity, and the Fabric of the World', 114.
35. MacKinnon, *Feminism Unmodified*, 54.
36. Lloyd, *The Man of Reason*, 17. As Lloyd argues in the closing pages of her book, this is a critique of a certain model of reason, not a rejection of reason *tout court* (see 109–10).
37. Hartsock, 'The Feminist Standpoint', 297.
38. Hartsock, 'The Feminist Standpoint', 295.
39. Naomi Scheman makes a similar link between Cavell's account of the sceptical condition of cinema spectatorship and the male conceit of disconnected knowledge:

    > Cavell's account of the pleasure of movies similarly takes as definitive the wish . . . to be an unviewed viewer of the world. Cavell's account of this wish seems, however, more innocent and less political . . . For Cavell, what cinema grants us is not meant to be the power of the pornographer but respite from our complicity in the structuring of the world, "not a wish for power over creation . . ., but a wish not to need power, not to have to bear its burdens." The wish is granted by the total presentness to us of the world on the screen without our being present to it, neither implicated in it nor limited in our view of it by our particular placement in it.

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> The innocence of this wish is, I think, misleading. The wish to be an unseen seer may be a wish for a less troubled relationship to reality, but that relation has been troubled in large measure by the cultural placement of epistemic authority precisely in the eyes of an unseen seer: movies grant us the opportunity not to notice the extent to which we are supposed to work at pushing the world away in order to view it truly. The world of the scientist doesn't contain the scientist, but his absence from it is neither innocent nor effortless . . . Kant may have tried to tell us that the world is always our world, but we haven't really learned it, and we go on trying to spy on it: no wonder we are lured by the promise of a world we don't have to hide behind a curtain to see. (We see it, in fact, when the curtain is pulled aside.) ('Missing Mothers/ Desiring Daughters', 86)

Though this could be read as a critique of Cavell, I hope my accounts in this chapter and the previous indicate how it might be taken as a critical deepening of his philosophy of cinema.

40. As in previous chapters, we find at the heart of scepticism not simply a rejection of knowledge, but a kind of *oscillation* between certainty and defeat. For an extended discussion of the role of gender in Cavell's account of scepticism, see Viefhughes-Bailey, *Beyond the Philosopher's Fear* (particularly 83–124).
41. Cavell describes the situation facing Gable's character in *It Happened One Night* as follows:

> What is the matter? Why can he not allow the woman of his dreams to enter his dream? But just that must be the answer. What surprises him is her reality. To acknowledge her as this woman would be to acknowledge that she is "somebody that's real, somebody that's alive," flesh and blood, someone separate from his dream who therefore has, if she is to be in it, to enter it; and this feels to him to be a threat to the dream, and hence a threat to him. (*Pursuits of Happiness*, 100)

42. If this interpretation and extension of Cavell's account holds good, it will trouble at least one aspect of it: the idea, which I elided with ellipses in the long passage from *Cities of Words* quoted above, that the "standing in the world" forgone by the male protagonists of classical remarriage comedy has been "costly for them" to establish. On my reading, the standing of these men was precisely the opposite of costly for them to establish: it was handed to them merely in virtue of their being born with the right genitals at the right time (which is not to imply that forgoing it will cost them nothing).

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43. Cavell, *Cities of Words*, 154.
44. This is why I want to resist Butler's reading of the film as a celebration of the "contingency or unmooredness of roleplay, of being free of all responsibility" ('Abbas Kiarostami', 73). Indeed with its emphasis on freedom from responsibility, this strikes me as an apt description of the disconnection from the world and others characteristic of the sceptical condition. That said, one would be hard pressed to find a better description of Kiarostami's project as a whole than the one with which Butler concludes his essay: "Kiarostami is a great spiritual director, but the spirit is only reality and is only to be accessed through reality. There is only reality and nothing more" (75).

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