

Looking for simplicity - *Copie conforme*¹

Movie Reviews

Auhor [Radu Enescu](#)

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Dear Gentlemen, would you like to spend a morning with Juliette Binoche? To find out that you have been invited to her antiques shop somewhere in Tuscany, a car ride and a cup of coffee afterwards? Ladies, would you fulfill your fantasy of falling love at first sight with a mysterious, sophisticated and charismatic person? Kiarostami's movie seems to have it all. But what if everything is just a copy? Faithful to the original, yet just a copy.



Juliette (let us call like that Juliette Binoche's excellently portrayed character) is attracted to James, a British writer who came to Italy to promote a book whose title is precisely *Copie conforme*. A book whose main premise is that a good copy is as valuable as the original. Essentially, our obsession for the original, says the author, is an attempt to regain simplicity. Ultimately, we are the original, the very us, with our ordinary yet unique lives. The model who posed for Mona Lisa is the original, whereas the painting is just a copy of her beauty. Art, representation, our words and fancies have complicated everything. Have altered everything. A bottle of Coke displayed in a museum is a copy that was invested with significance. However, on a hot summer day, when we are thirsty, what shall we prefer, the exhibit in the museum or the bottle in the fridge? To conclude, blessed are the poor in spirit, those who know to appreciate the simple joys of life.

Our protagonists however are not at all simplistic persons. Their conversation about the conflict between the original and the copy, as long as a ride to Lucignano, proves it. Those who are familiar with Kiarostami's style will not be surprised to find again the long ritual car ride, this time among the

¹ *Certified Copy* (n.tr.)



green hills of Tuscany, with its sunny fields and the cypresses along the road. The same undulating scenery, yet sweetened, patinated, archaic, Tuscany-like.

However, what is truly extraordinary about this medieval village at the end of the journey? Well, weddings are being „copied” here. The couples’ incipient happiness and hope, their hesitations before saying „I do”, the stupid and self-confident smile of those unaware of what lies ahead, they are all multiplied and immortalised. And everything because of a wedding tree, a local tradition that brings luck and tourists too.

A picturesque place otherwise, with museums and churches, cafés for tourists and sloping streets. Nothing spectacular, just large and generous spaces so that the characters may grow naturally. Kiarostami’s very art lies in patiently following his characters, in the incantatory rhythm he imparts to the journey of the two.

In the movie change comes almost unexpectedly over a cup of coffee although up to a point everything looked like a conversation without stake. When James gets out of the café to speak on his mobile phone (a ritual move in Kiarostami’s movies) a waitress messes it up and takes them for a married couple.

Juliette agrees to the game and thus James comes back in just to have a cup of coffee that is reheated and as bitter as fifteen years of marriage. It seemed or maybe it was true that he had a wife and a child, that he had mostly been on the road in the past years and had spent way too little time with his family. Besides all that the previous day he had fallen asleep unacceptably early, on the very night of their wedding anniversary.

Fantasy turns into nightmare. The beautiful and mysterious unknown woman unexpectedly becomes the much too familiar wife, reproachful and whimsical. „You don’t see me anymore, you don’t love me anymore”. James will not give in either. He must fight back to avoid being taken for a loser. After fifteen years he must have learned the triggers he should pull to make her cry. And he does, because paradoxically if he can still hurt her it means she still cares for him, it means indifference has not sneaked in between them.



Their performance proves that essentially people have the same needs – basic needs, one must admit – that we are all copies of an original that lies somewhere else, in an ideal simplified world. As James puts it we are all sheer replicas of the originary DNA, or, if we are to continue Plato's concept, copies of the idea of human being. We equally long for freedom and protection, whether we have been in a half day relationship or a fifteen-year long one. We would like to be appreciated and loved for being unique but we are too caged in our own self ego to be receptive to the other's needs. Lack of communication and involvement looks like an essential condition of a couple's life. It's been proved that brief relations bring no dividends whatsoever in this respect.

The copy-couple, the one made up of Juliette and James follows the romantic journey of a couple that we believe is real (Juliette and her husband). In progress, it constantly (re)defines itself, relating both to the fearful couples just setting out and to the more experienced ones. What keeps the two old spouses together, what helped them through the countless trials of a couple's life? Taking care of each other and the attention to change, says James. Such an elderly character suggests at a certain moment that all the wife's problems could be solved by gently touching her hand and protectively holding her shoulders. A simple gesture could erase all dark thoughts, all the anxieties and sharp words they had told each other. But „it's complicated to be simple”.

The romantic trip of the two characters ends in a hotel room where supposedly everything started long time before. If they were more tolerant to each other's mistakes, if they stayed together, maybe they would be happier. Definitely less lonely. Her eyes say it is still possible. His eyes say it is too late. It's eight o'clock already. He's got a train to catch at nine. He's already heading for another unknown woman, another copy. Anyway, the original is somewhere else. Far away.

Translated by *Petronela Iacob*

Proof reader: *Elena Drăghici*

MTTLC, Bucharest University



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