

'VERTIGO' – ALFRED HITCHCOCK (US – 1958) – FILM NOTES



"Vertigo seems to me Hitchcock's masterpiece...and one of the four or five most profound and beautiful films the cinema has yet given us." – Robin Wood
(Hitchcock's Films Revisited)

The Themes and Structure of the Film

Vertigo A fear of heights arising from an internal conflict between the desire to fall and a fear of falling; Madeleine: *"I don't want to die - there's someone within me and she says I must die."*

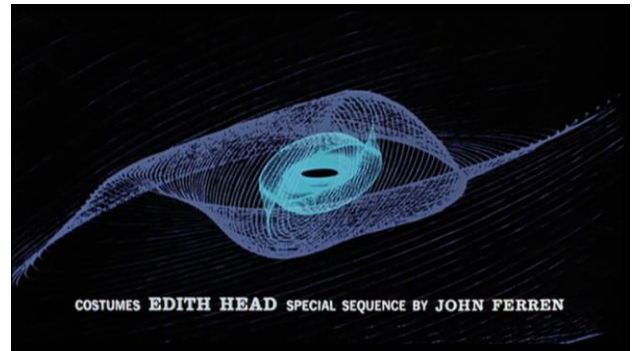
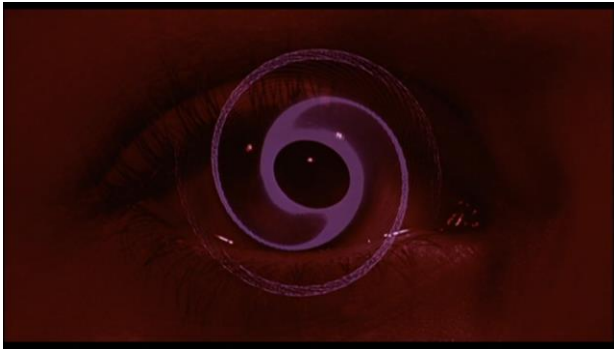
Vertigo is an enormously complex film. Part of this complexity lies in the fact that, like any great work of art, it can be understood in a huge range of different ways. These notes aim to explore how the film can be linked to the following interpretations, which tend to be the most commonly advanced in academic writings:

- It is a film which reflects sexist attitudes to women
- It is a film which questions traditional/sexist attitudes to women
- It is a film about the conflict between the desire to live and the death wish
- It is a film about existential crisis (the need for a sense of purpose and meaning in life and the danger of lacking this)
- It is a film about cinema, looking and the way in which film promotes fantasy and resembles a dream
- It is a film about the clash between the modern and traditional worlds

Wood argues that the films can be broken down into four main sections:

- **The Prologue** – Scottie acquiring his vertigo during the roof-top chase
- **The First Movement** – Scottie agreeing to follow Madeleine and becoming increasingly emotionally involved in her case
- **The Second Movement** – The relationship from the point Scottie saves Madeleine from drowning to his breakdown after her death
- **The Third Movement** – Scottie meets Judy, transforms her and then sees her die.

The Title Sequence



The title sequence moves us through the eye into a conflicted mind of swirling, eye-like forms.

The film's famous opening credits were designed by Saul Bass, a title sequence designer/director who has gained a huge reputation among academics and film-makers for his work over the years.

We are presented with a woman's face as a kind of mask; her expression moving from blankness to the fixed and over-stated facial expressions (mostly suggesting anxiety and disturbance) of the archetypes on masks from Greek drama. Then we move through her eye as a series of dizzying abstract spirals swirl towards us on a black background. The image implies that behind her/our face/mask is a chaotic maelstrom; the source of the vertigo in the film. It is here that the spiral motif of the film is introduced (see also Carlotta's/Madeleine's hair and the spiral staircase in the tower of the mission). The way spiral imagery runs through the film acts as a constant reminder of the titles and what they suggest as well as generally amplifying the vertigo theme.

The focus on eyes also raises issues of looking. This is re-enforced through the graphic similarities between Bass' swirling geometric designs and the eye we pass through at the beginning and end of the sequence. Each rotating design bears some resemblance to the iris and pupil of the human eye and just as we pass through the dark centre of the real eye in the sequence so we also pass through the dark centres of these patterns. At times the shapes even combine to form something akin to a full eye and pupil.

The Opening Sequence



The opening shot is an image of a hand desperately hanging on to a metal bar.

A strong element of looking is established in the opening sequence through the frequent glances off-screen by characters shown in close-up and numerous PoVs. We see particularly through Scottie's eyes, establishing a close relationship between the audience and him. The technique sets up the idea that Scottie will do much of the looking in the film for us as Mulvey points out in justifying her argument that the camera is male. It is certainly true to say that the vast majority of the film comes to us through the filter of Scottie's gaze.



A strongly subjective perspective is established through the use of Scottie's PoV and the "vertigo shot"



The image of people running to the body of the police officer will be echoed when Madeleine dies.

The scene also sets up the key idea that death is both inviting (an end to the agonising effort and fear of holding on) and terrifying (it is death after-all). It is this that triggers Scottie's initial vertigo. As Robin Wood points out; "We do not see, and are never told, how he got down from the gutter: there seems no possible way he *could* have got down. The effect is of having him, throughout the film, metaphorically suspended over a great abyss."

There are also numerous similarities here to the film's conclusion:

- the death of a falling person
- the use of the vertigo shot
- the image of Scottie suspended above a great drop
- the context of a crime being investigated

All this helps set up a circular narrative structure which invites us to compare the two events and see how Scottie has progressed (or regressed?) over the course of the film.

Midge's Apartment

Midge set up in opposition to Madeleine from the outset. As a slim attractive blonde we are invited to compare her to Madeleine only to discover that in fact they are opposites:

- Midge is modern
- She is sexually open in both her job as a bra designer and her banter with Scottie
- She is emancipated and independent
- She seems well balanced and healthy
- There is also a practicality about her

What we will slowly see over the course of the film is how and why Midge is so unacceptable to Scottie as a partner. In short she seems to represent the kind of modern woman who threatens masculinity/male dominance by adopting traditionally male privileges and attitudes. She is not easily fitted into any of the traditional roles for women identified by Rosen and Haskell and so for Scottie/the audience she must be rejected. From a feminist perspective this is clearly one way to understand the character.

It certainly seems the case that Scottie is a man whose masculinity is under threat. The scene establishes this idea in a number of ways:

- he is reliant on a cane
- he is forced to wear women's clothing (a corset)
- he has had to quit his (masculine) job as a policeman
- he suffers from vertigo (later described by the Coroner as a "weakness")

Even Scottie's dialogue draws attention to this sense of emasculation: *"The corset comes off tomorrow. I'll be able to scratch myself like anybody else tomorrow. I'll throw this miserable thing out the window [he brandishes his cane]. I'll be free – a free man."* The emphasis on constraint and the need for freedom in Scottie's dialogue sets up the idea of a man looking for escape and needing to reassert control.



Scottie spots the "doohickey" and Midge helps him come to terms with it.

His confusion over the bra on Midge's desk also establishes Scottie as a man who is out of touch. To him the object is an incomprehensible "doo-hickey" which Midge has to explain. The fact it is designed by a man (with a masculine occupation as an engineer) sets Jeff up as out of touch with the worlds of both modern women and men.

Scottie seems to be a man out of place and time in late 1950s America. This sense of him being lost is developed in a number of other ways in this sequence. We learn that Scottie is "available Ferguson" suggesting that he is in a kind of limbo (suspended) between relationships and jobs. This idea is further developed through his announcement that he plans to do "nothing" and the fact the Midge calls him "Johnny O". The nickname is suggestive of Johnny zero – he lacks identity; is no-one. Indeed Scottie's problem with his sense of identity is

betrayed through the number of names he is called during the narrative: *Johnny, John, Scottie, Ferguson, Mr Detective*. The source of his internal conflict/vertigo seems linked at least in part a kind of existential crisis:

- Scottie does not seem to belong in the modern world
- He feels undermined in terms of his masculinity
- He has no clear sense of purpose now he is out of work

Midge is at once maternal and boyish. Her motherliness is established through the way she helps care for and even train Scottie. She is even referred to as "*motherly*" by him in the sequence. She also tends to reduce him to the level of a child through the way she refers to him; "*you're a big boy*," and the nickname "Johnny O". Her more boyish (and perhaps threatening) qualities are established through her independence, the mess of her studio/apartment, her confident and frequently sexualised banter and the arguably tom-boyish look of Bel Geddes and her costuming/make-up. She seems to be a woman who refuses to conform to traditional female roles; even the feminine focus of her design work could be seen as sexualised and challenging to traditional values regarding women.

Mulvey's argument is that Midge is presented as a threatening woman who is beyond male control and therefore unacceptable to Scottie/the male audience. She can, however, be read differently. Perhaps *Vertigo* asks us to question Scottie's morality and behaviour rather than simply identify with and support him. In this case Midge can be seen as part of his problem. Scottie is a character who is out of touch with the modern world and clings on to an unattainable past (as symbolised by his "hanging on" at the beginning of the film). This can be seen in his attitude to women; his fascination with Madeleine/Carlotta and need to transform (modern) Judy. Midge is simply too modern for him and as such is a threat. But are the audience (as Mulvey would have us believe) encouraged to feel threatened by her? It is easy to argue that she is actually presented as extremely likeable; that the problem is Scottie's, not her's. Is Hitchcock in fact doing the opposite of what Mulvey suggests and setting up sexist male attitudes in Scottie which are to be criticised rather than reinforced?

Midge's failed attempt to help Scottie overcome his fear seems to confirm her inability to offer resolution for him. The PoV from Scottie in which the vertigo shot seems to virtually take over the apartment emphasises this, as does the immediate cut to Elster's office which marks the beginning of Scottie's movement away from Midge.



The scene ends with a moment of failure for Midge, who clings maternally to Scottie after his collapse.

Elster's Office



Elster's office resembles a Victorian gentlemen's club rather than a modern place of business.

Elster represents the world of the past which Scottie runs to after his disturbing experiences in the modern world of Midge and her apartment. The fact that Elster's office is in the Mission district of San Francisco also links the character to the past by placing him in the oldest part of the city.

It is generally this theme of a lost world of the past (as represented by Elster and ultimately Madeleine) that is developed in the scene:

- Elster's office is set up in opposition to Midge's apartment: It is highly masculine and antique in its aesthetic.
- Elster has connections to Scottie through his nostalgia for the past generally
- He particularly links to ideas of a lost golden time when men had "power" and "freedom". The fact Elster connects these male attributes to the past helps accentuate Scottie's sense of disconnection from masculine freedoms and power in the modern world, while motivating his desires for the past by suggesting it will reconnect him with his lost masculinity. The words are echoed in the bookshop and at the end of the film.
- Madeleine is also clearly connected to the past when Elster describes her sitting in Golden Gate Park looking at pillars known as "*portals of the past*".
- This idea that Scottie in some ways escapes into a comforting past is re-enforced through the symbolism of ships – a modern but also ancient form of transport which offers access to other places/worlds.

Madeleine is also established as rootless like Scottie, which perhaps helps to explain his willingness to become involved in her case. The idea of being suspended/available/wandering links closely to the idea of hanging in a kind of limbo established already in the film and this in turn links to the vertigo theme: Do we cling on to find a purpose or surrender to oblivion? Elster says of Madeleine; "*She wanders – God knows where she wanders.*" The line links to Scottie's description of himself when he is at his apartment with Madeleine for the first time.

Of course Scottie is also drawn to the case because it links to his unconscious fascination with death and the past.



As Elster draws Scottie in with his story he is constantly placed in a privileged position in the frame.

Finally it is worth noting that throughout the scene there is a strong sense of a power relationship between the two men. Elster tends to dominate the frame as he tells the story through which he will control Scottie. Scottie is presented once again as weak; a man who is in a passive/submissive role.

Ernie's/Madeleine's Introduction

This is an important scene in a number of ways:

- It continues to develop Madeleine's associations with psychological conflict – she represents life and death and is connected both to the present and the past.
- It also emphasises our connection to Scottie's perspective on things through PoVs.
- We get a strong initial sense of Madeleine as a character connected to fantasy as much as reality



Like Elster's office, Ernie's is a setting with a period feel rather than a modern one.

The sense of a world which is linked to the past is instantly created through the use of mise en scene. Ernie's, like Elster's office, speaks of the past – an almost Victorian world of gracious living. Its décor and even the clothing of the patrons lend a period feel to the scene. Once again Madeleine is associated with the past.

A highly subjective view of the film world is also established through the constant use of Scottie's PoV. In a scene which is all about Scottie being drawn in by a woman who represents a kind of fantasy figure it is important for us to recognise that everything we see and the way in which we see it reflects Scottie's own state of mind/the way in which he views reality.



Mulvey argues that the constant reinforcement of Scottie's PoV clearly leads to a male camera.

Madeleine's introductory shot is particularly interesting. We approach her slowly through a low tracking shot which moves through the restaurant towards the back of her seated figure. She sings out against the dream-like (and perhaps sexually symbolic) red of the restaurant wallpaper; her pale skin, blonde hair and green dress all offering a strong contrast to the backdrop. The fact she faces away from us adds to the aura of mystery that clings to her. The camera movement itself is unlike any piece of cinematography we have yet seen in the film. The moment is elaborate, drawn out and presents us with a kind of heightened reality; a sense of over-developed significance. We are drifting at this moment, like Scottie, into a dream-state – a fantasy world of psychological symbolism, unconscious urges and wish-fulfilment.

As Madeleine leaves the restaurant this sense of her unreality is even further accentuated through a film form which continues to express an artificial and dream-like reality. As well as simply reflecting Scottie's instant obsession with a woman who seems to connect to his desires and conflicts so directly, this segment also begins to strongly develop messages about the nature of cinema itself. Given we discover later that Madeleine is a construct it is possible to see her as like a character in a film even within the film-world of *Vertigo*. She is designed to satisfy a fantasy of Scottie's/the audience; she offers a kind of wish-fulfilment. The idea of her being like an image on a screen for Scottie/us is accentuated through the way in which she is framed by a doorway as Scottie looks at her leaving Ernie's. She becomes like an image on a screen or a canvas – an artificial composition (as indeed she turns out to be) placed within a frame. The fact that she ultimately walks towards us and through the "screen"/internal framing suggests a fantasy figure made flesh – a movement from the world of unconscious wish-fulfilment/cinematic dreams into the world of reality.



Like an actor on a screen, Madeleine is often shown within a frame

Madeleine's introduction at Ernie's is also highly significant from Mulvey's perspective. We first see Madeleine in a way which arguably establishes both a fetishised *and* voyeuristic mode of presentation which runs through the rest of the film. Male voyeurism is straightforwardly established in the extended PoV from Scottie through which we first view Madeleine's face. His investigative and unacknowledged watching of her will dictate much of the film's content from this point on. A fetishistic quality to Madeleine's representation is also set up through:

- the focus on the spiralling bun in which she holds up her hair
- her clothing
- her constantly being placed in framing devices like doorways
- the bouquet she carries later
- her strong association with the colour green

In addition to this, Madeleine also seems to be presented to us very much as an object of display. As she waits for Elster she pauses in front of Scottie/the audience. Framed in close-up through Scottie's subjective view she poses turning left and right, thus allowing us to see her full face and in both profiles. The shot seems designed to underline her "to-be-looked-at-ness" which tends to support Mulvey's view that women in film become passive objects of the 'male gaze'.



Madeleine poses as for us, as if to accentuate her "to-be-looked-at-ness"

Of course on second viewing this moment is understood as being about Madeleine being self-consciously on display; this is, after all, an occasion designed to draw Scottie in and allow him to see/connect with Madeleine (as played by Judy). This leads to complex questions about the real nature of the looking in the film. If Judy is in fact inviting Scottie's/our gaze, then to what extent can she really be said to be the one who is being controlled? Is it not she who really controls Scottie, however things may at first appear? Potentially this approach can create problems for Mulvey's interpretation of the film.

Interestingly as Scottie watches Madeleine turn through one profile to the other, as if posing for us, we cut back to shots of him watching. We see a close-up of Madeleine's right hand profile then cut a similar view of Scottie's. Scottie begins to turn and we cut to Madeleine turning and presenting her left hand profile. We cut back to Scottie – this time seeing his other profile. It is a moment which strongly suggests the connection that is forged between the characters. They become mirrors of one another here in a way which underlines how they double for one another psychologically (in terms of their death wish).



In a series of shots Scottie seems to mirror Madeleine as she turns in front of him.

Following Madeleine

In accepting Madeleine's case Scottie ultimately finds a dual sense of purpose; he has an occupation and relationship to focus on. She becomes linked to ideas of stability for him in this way; she fills his lack. It is also worth noting how much emphasis is placed on Scottie as the male investigator and voyeur in this sequence. We repeatedly watch Madeleine through his PoV – a view which emphasises the secretive nature of his/our looking. This tendency in the film-making again clearly links to Mulvey's ideas about the male camera and the investigative nature of the way in which attractive women are viewed within narrative cinema.

Madeleine leads Scottie into a kind of dream-world which puts him in touch with the past, pulling him into a fantasy of escape from the modern world. This is done in increments. Firstly she leads him through the modern city and then away from this down a mysterious alleyway. Scottie becomes like Alice pursuing the white rabbit into wonderland. From the alleyway we are then taken to the old Spanish quarter and the mission cemetery. Then we go to the gallery and Carlotta's portrait. Finally we see the McKittrick Hotel, where Madeleine disappears altogether. The journey follows a maze-like path, heightening the idea that we are moving into a dream-

reality: The movement into the past/memory; the associations with moving beneath the surface of the modern city to expose an alternate version of it; the gallery image which offers an idealised image of its subject and finally the apparent possibility of supernatural events as Madeleine disappears at the hotel.



Madeleine leads Scottie from the modern world into the past; from life to the landscape of death.

The filming of the sequence, which includes virtually no dialogue until the hotel, feels highly subjective. Hazy soft-focus develops a dream-like feel to the sequence reflecting the highly subjective nature of the film at this point. Scottie is quite literally entering an artificial world of fantasy which is half Elster's creation and half a projection of his own internal desires and unconscious urges. Ultimately by leading Scottie to the graveyard Madeleine acts as a bridge between the worlds of the living and the dead. Indeed, as far as Scottie is concerned she represents both worlds; the living Madeleine and the dead Carlotta who is contained within her. Given his initial vertigo it should come as no surprise that Scottie seems inexorably drawn towards a woman who seems to symbolise his own conflict between the desire to live and die.

Madeleine's bun links clearly to the spiralling vertigo motif established in the title sequence of the film and thus connects Madeleine (and Judy) to Scottie's own condition. These are characters that have a connection that is psychological/existential as much as it is romantic/sexual. The bun and the bouquet Madeleine carries also link to ideas of order. The controlled and structured nature of both objects also offers a kind of reassurance and suggests that for Scottie (who is clearly obsessed with both these details) Madeleine perhaps represents some kind of balance/order/safety.



A fetish object? Madeleine's bouquet mirrors that held by Carlotta in the portrait.



The bun, too, is an object of fetishisation, but it also resembles the swirling vortex of the titles –the state of vertigo

It is worth noting that during this sequence it is not only the bun and the posy which suggest a certain fetishistic aspect to Madeleine's presentation:

- The green car begins to continue a colour coding associated with Madeleine since her introduction at Ernie's where she wears a green dress that stands out conspicuously against the red backdrop.
- She also wears the grey dress-suit that will become a key part of Scottie's later attempts to resurrect Madeleine through Judy.

By the end of this extended sequence Madeleine is presented, as in her introduction, as a mixture of elements drawn from a patriarchal fantasy of the erotic woman – mysterious, traditionally feminine, vulnerable, beautiful and graceful. She is everything Midge is not. However Midge is the more real character. Given this it is quite possible to see *Vertigo* as a film which examines how cinema itself constructs unrealistic images of femininity which lead to impossible expectations of real woman.



Even Madeleine's room at the hotel suggests a Victorian past rather than the modern world of '50s America.

Going with Midge to the Bookshop

It is significant to Midge's role as a mother/modern woman that it is she that Scottie goes to for guidance on where to research Carlotta's history. She has the maternal wisdom/knowledge to guide Scottie, while at the same time being practical and well connected to the modern city.



Midge, the modern women, is connected to the modern city through her placement in the window.

Midge's modernity is further emphasised when Scottie tells her to get her hat before they leave her apartment for the bookshop. She rejects such old-fashioned ideas about women's dress by calling out, *"I don't need a hat!"* as she charges out of the apartment ahead of Scottie. Just as modern bras connect Midge to modern female freedoms so too, it would appear, does her attitude to clothing more generally.

Despite the fact that Midge is the first person Scottie thinks of when he needs help with his investigation (suggesting her practicality), there is a sense of his growing distance from her in this scene. The two are almost never shown in the same shot, despite the apparent smallness of the apartment they occupy. In fact Scottie seems at pains to remain as physically distant from Midge as humanly possible; he spends most of the scene in the kitchenette which opens onto the main room in which she sits and we are made very aware of the physical barrier created between him and Midge by the counter separating the two spaces.



So unacceptable/threatening is Midge to Scottie that he seeks to separate himself from her even when he is with her

The bookshop which develops our understanding of Carlotta is, like so many spaces associated with Madeleine/Carlotta, presented as an old-fashioned place with strong links to the past in terms of both how it looks and what is discussed within it.



The Argosy Bookshop, with its antique books and decor, is another space associated both with Madeleine and the past

With reference to Carlotta being cast out and having her child taken from her by its father the shop-keeper (Pop Liebl) says: *"You know a man could do that in those days. They had the power and the freedom."* Notions of male freedom and power have already been established in the scene in Elster's office, and here they are more specifically developed with regard to male control over Carlotta/women generally. Scottie is drawn to the past at least partially because it promises a return to male empowerment over women rather than the male impotence he feels at the beginning of the film. If we identify with Scottie in the way Mulvey suggests then this can clearly be seen to encourage a similar view in the audience, supporting the suggestion that *Vertigo* embodies a general tendency in Hollywood to encourage a male position of dominance over women. However, if we are being encouraged to be critical of Scottie by the film, then surely we are likely to conclude that his whole set of attitudes to women is dubious as well.

The scene is also one concerned with the growing division between Scottie and Midge. Although Midge is essential to this part of Scottie's investigation, he does his best to exclude her from what he is really up to. At the end of the sequence, when Scottie takes Midge home, she is forced to use her powers of deduction to correctly piece together the story of Carlotta's possession of Madeleine. She laughs at the suggestion prompting Scottie to object that this is what *Elster* thinks, but he is unable to answer when Midge asks him what *he* thinks. She follows this question with, *"Is she pretty?"* Scottie is forced to acknowledge that Madeleine is attractive. The moment is all about establishing the importance of Madeleine's visual allure – her quality of "to-be-looked-at-ness".

After this conversation Scottie sits alone in his car and examines the portrait of Carlotta in the gallery catalogue. As he does so Herrmann's hypnotic score returns and through Scottie's PoV the shot alternates through a series of quick dissolves between Carlotta's portrait and a shot of Madeleine. Here the fantasy of the portrait (itself an idealised/perfected image of its subject) merges with reality. Carlotta and Madeleine are becoming interchangeable in Scottie's mind. In Madeleine there is now life and death, fantasy/dream and reality, the past and the present. This is a key moment in suggesting Scottie slipping further into an altered reality – he seems at this point to be on the very brink of two worlds.



Madeleine's image merges with Carlotta's portrait; in Scottie's mind the two women are already one person.

Scottie Saves Madeleine

Once again the sequence begins with Madeleine leading Scottie down a maze of roads; this time to the Golden Gate Bridge. It is another moment where the idea of being led into a buried/unconscious/dream world is developed.



Scottie is led deeper into Madeleine's dream world and away from the reality of modern San Francisco

Scottie's journey here is a symbolic one; it takes him into a world of the unconscious where suppressed desires are acted upon, symbolism is everywhere and internal conflict governs people's action. Once Madeleine has arrived at her destination Scottie/we find ourselves confronted with one of three key spaces in the film linked to death. Like the opening of the film and the tower where Madeleine dies twice and Judy once, the Golden Gate Bridge is a looming structure which develops a strong sense of dizzying perspective and height. Vertigo always seems in some way linked to death in this film and here it is no different. Throughout the film there is a pattern of high places in the mise en scene. Coyt Tower, the view from Midge's Window and the tower at the San Francisco mission all contribute to a visual language of

vertigo and falling that permeates the film.



The Golden Gate Bridge is one of many vertiginous (dizzying) backdrops in the film.

Ideas of vertigo and linked ideas of death and psychological conflict are further developed in the moments before Madeleine throws herself in the bay. We see her tearing her bouquet apart and scattering it in the water. It is, once again, a symbolic moment and helps to develop our understanding of the bouquet's meaning in a way that will help us to interpret Scottie's dream later in the film. There are two perfectly complimentary ways to understand the significance of the act:

- It is an image of order being turned into chaos suggesting the psychological states of both Madeleine (as recreated by Elster) and Scottie
- It is an image of destruction and, given it is linked to a suicide attempt, there is a natural inclination to link the imagery to death

In both cases it is linked to ideas of falling and vertigo and its underlying psychological causes.



Madeleine brings chaos to order.

Of course the manner of Madeleine's suicide attempt is also linked to ideas of falling. Drowning may be the intended cause of death, but first Madeleine must throw herself from the sea-wall; it is a death she must plunge to.

Of course the fact that the "suicide attempt" involves a fall is also significant because of what it forces Scottie to do. When he throws himself in the water it is literally and metaphorically a moment of falling (the thing he is so frightened of in other contexts). At this point Scottie makes a commitment to fully believe in Madeleine's/Elster's story. His immersion in water is an almost baptismal moment through which he is reborn fully into the fantasy world that has been created

for him. It also suggests him "falling" for Madeleine in a romantic sense – something we have already come to suspect by this point in the narrative. This idea is particularly developed in the moment when Scottie tries to revive Madeleine. His face is held just centimetres from hers in an intimate close-up, his breathing heavy, as he repeatedly calls her name in desperation. It seems as if, at any second, he is going to kiss her.



Scottie takes the plunge both literally and metaphorically.

Madeleine at Scottie's Apartment

Scottie's apartment is an expression of his desire for the past. Though in some ways it expresses modernity, the furniture and décor are generally traditional/old-fashioned. As ever, he is a man in limbo; caught here, apparently, between the present and the past.

Madeleine's appearance in the sequence is significant in a number of ways:

- Scottie has placed her in his bed and been forced (!) to remove her wet clothes before doing so. These facts instantly add a sexual undertone to the scene – something which Madeleine and Scottie seem to recognise themselves at one awkward moment in the scene.
- She is forced to wear Scottie's robe suggesting she is already something Scottie possesses, or wants to possess.
- She is also shown walking into the sitting room through the bedroom doorway. The use of the door as an internal framing device echoes a similar moment in *Ernie's*. Madeleine emerges from the dream-world on the other side of the frame (screen) into reality. This idea is particularly accentuated here through the easy associations between bedrooms and ideas of dreaming.



Once again Madeleine moves through the frame from a fantasy world of cinema and dreams into reality

When Scottie asks Madeleine what she was doing before she went to the Golden Gate Bridge, she replies; *"wandering about."* Scottie explains his presence at the bridge by explaining that he was, *"just wandering about."* The theme of wandering/rootlessness/a lack of purpose that runs through the film is developed here as a reason for Scottie's sense of connection to Madeleine. Just as he is suspended between life and death at the beginning of the film and ever since, so too is she. She is two people (it would seem); Madeleine clinging on to life and the already dead Carlotta obsessed with suicide.

At the end of the sequence we see Midge arriving outside Scottie's in her car and watching at a distance as Madeleine drives away. Her wry humour and grounded presence reminds us of the unreality of the scene that has just played out in the intimacy of Scottie's flat. This is the only time we ever see Midge and Madeleine on the screen together suggesting the separation that exists between them as versions of femininity. Even here Midge is a distant observer of her rival for Scottie's affections and the two women never feature in the same shot.



"Was she a ghost? Was it fun?" – Even Midge seems to sense that (sexual) fulfilment and death are connected for Scottie.

In the Red Wood Forest/The Kiss

The introduction to this sequence also leads us down twisting roads and paths into a world linked to the past and fantasy; the liminal space of the forest itself. To add to the growing feeling of unreality in the narrative the film form used in the sequence has a dream-like quality. The use of exaggerated colour; the hazy soft focus of the camera; the surging and hypnotic music; the generally dream-like imagery of the forest and coastal settings all help to strongly develop the sense of Scottie living in a dream-world.



The Redwood Forest provides another looming setting connected both to death and vertigo.

Death is quickly raised as an issue fairly straightforwardly in the sequence:

- Generally the discussion of the trees (the Latin name of which means *"ever-green – ever-living"*) amplifies our sense of them as ancient entities whose very presence accentuates our own mortality.
- The past and the passage of time are raised through the growth rings of the trees.
- Madeleine expresses verbally her fear of death and her distaste for a place which reminds her of her own mortality.
- Her white long-coat and the way in which she seems to disappear completely among the trees reinforce the sense that she is a ghost - able to appear and vanish at will. Her vanishing among the huge trees also links to her comments about their continuation through the lives and deaths of individuals they are not even aware of.

All this death symbolism and talk inevitably leads Scottie to dig into his own conflict/death wish. When he finally starts to ask Madeleine about jumping into the bay his questions come in a desperate flood: *"Why did you jump? Why did you jump? Why did you jump? What was there inside you that told you to jump? What? What?"* It seems more than possible to understand the emotional and insistent nature of this interrogation as a signal that Madeleine's answers hold significance for Scottie personally; that in some way her answers may help him. Given the subject of the conversation (falling/jumping and suicide) links directly to Scottie's own internal conflict and vertigo, it is perhaps unsurprising that he is so insistent: He recognises that he and Madeleine share this conflict and she holds meaning for him not just as a lover, but also as a possible key to his own problems. It is no coincidence that Madeleine's initials are M.E. She is, after all, a projection of Scottie (and the audience) to some extent and so in this sense she is him/me/us. Her identity is clearly bound up with his; something already suggested earlier by the way in which Scottie follows her only to find that she has led him back to his own home.



Scottie badgers Madeleine for answers. He is no longer driven by serving Elster – he is motivated by personal needs.

The moment on the beach which leads to the kiss that seals Scottie's entry into the dream-world of Madeleine begins with an important statement from Scottie. When Madeleine asks him why he has followed her he replies; *"I'm responsible for you now. You know, the Chinese say that once you save a person's life you're responsible for it forever; so I'm committed."* If the kiss is the final moment of emotional commitment to the fantasy of Madeleine, this is where Scottie's movement into her world is clearly stated. He is no longer "available"; he is "committed", now is "responsible", rather than having "nothing" to do. A kind of oath to Madeleine is spoken here by Scottie – the scene almost becomes a marriage with the kiss

sealing the contract as it does in a wedding and the crashing waves hinting at the sexual act.



The Kiss. A clichéd moment in cinema or a comment on cinematic cliché?

It is also possible to see the clichéd image of lovers kissing against crashing waves as a self-conscious reference to the way cinema calls on a predictable (and melodramatic) language and symbolism to represent sexual fantasy. Is this moment, like Madeleine herself, a projection of Scottie's own unconscious fantasy/wish fulfilment akin to what cinema itself provides?

Before moving on it is worth noting that it is during this scene that Madeleine establishes the meaning of the corridor imagery that will be used throughout the rest of the film to symbolise some form of death. Once by the coast she explains her experiences as Carlotta as like being in a long corridor leading eventually to the blackness of death.

Midge Paints a Portrait

This scene is all about the final rupture between Midge's world (of reality/normality) and Scottie's dream world. He has finally committed to this alternate reality in the previous scene and even as he enters Midge's apartment there is a sense of him being distant from it. He walks slowly into the scene, made almost spectral as he does so by the screen through which we half see him and which initially creates a barrier between him and Midge's world. His manner is distant as well. In fact throughout the scene Scottie and Midge are rarely shown in shot together, Midge spending much of her time behind the kitchen counter (itself a barrier between them) while Scottie sits on the other side of the room. Even when they are included in the shot together the easel with Midge's painting creates a line of separation between the characters; a fitting use of it given the ultimate effect it seems to have on their relationship.



Scottie makes the transition into Midge's reality gradually and remains visually separated from her throughout the scene.

Perhaps to force a comparison between the two women, in some ways the scene also seems to mirror the one between Madeleine and Scottie at his home after her suicide attempt. A similar language is used – especially by Scottie who in response to Midge's questions about his recent activities repeatedly refers to his "*wandering*." Here, however, the similarities end. The echo of the earlier scene shows how different Scottie's relationship with the two women is. While wandering was a source of connection for Scottie and Madeleine and a way for them to begin to reveal their true natures, here it is simply a way to shut Midge out. The use of the word "wandering" here is evasively vague rather than psychologically/existentially revealing. Midge is clearly no Madeleine.

Midge's portrait is an attempt to mock and undermine Scottie's growing obsession with Madeleine. Through parody she is trying to help him see the unreal and troubling nature of his fixation.



Midge's picture may amuse her and us,, but to Scottie it is a disturbing challenge to the his new dream reality

Of course she is also trying to divert Scottie's attention towards herself. She too becomes Carlotta, but she cannot take the fantasy seriously - her down to earth nature forces her to mock it. It is a failed attempt simply to make Scottie see her. She seems to recognise that his vision has become restricted to one object - Madeleine.

The result of all this is to anger and repel Scottie rather than push him away from Madeleine. Scottie, as we saw in the previous scene, has committed to the dream world of wish-fulfilment and rejected the real world of Midge. Her attempt to puncture this dream-reality is simply too disturbing for Scottie to cope with; too much of a challenge to the fantasy world into which he has chosen to retreat. This can be seen as the final straw in terms of their relationship and Midge will be seen only once again with Scottie - in the sanatorium - when she is apparently literally invisible to a Scottie who barely acknowledges her presence. The scene ends with Midge distraught at her miscalculation; in trying to destroy the dream she has in fact simply encouraged Scottie to move further away from her and the grounded reality she represents.

Madeleine's Death at the Mission

Madeleine's death is an unusual moment in cinema narratives because of the way in which it so completely derails the story we have been watching. As an audience member we are likely to be aware that there is considerably more of the film to run at this point, but at the same time the central focus of the narrative has been destroyed. Given this it now becomes impossible for us to see how things can continue. So brutal is this rupture in the narrative that the audience

suddenly find themselves in a kind of narrative vertigo of their own. Suddenly we too are in free-fall with no sense of where the narrative will go from here or even how it can continue at all. It creates a powerful moment of identification with Scottie and the central theme of the film. Being so thoroughly identified with Scottie at this point means the audience shares in his sense that the bottom has fallen out of reality. The dream/film narrative has collapsed.

This identification and feeling of loss and confusion is vital for the audience to understand Scottie's mental collapse. We ourselves feel a sense of vertigo; a spiralling chaos descends at this point and the narrative suddenly seems to have no-where to go.



The Vertigo shot is used repeatedly in the scene to accentuate our identification with Scottie and own sense of instability.

Strong use of expressionistic techniques during this sequence (both on the staircase and from the top of the tower looking down) mirror those we see at the beginning of the film. Especially the image of the nuns running towards the body of Madeleine which echoes the aerial shot of the figures running towards the corpse of the fallen policeman at the beginning of the film. All this helps to develop the sense of Scottie's ongoing psychological disturbance and makes clear that this event is linked to (the source of) his Vertigo just as the opening sequence is.



The nuns running to the fallen body echoes the figures running toward the dead policemen in the opening.

To add to the sense of loss at this stage in the narrative an image which connects explicitly to Madeleine's description of death as a long corridor is used. We see Scottie from the top of the tower's interior, its spiral staircase spinning away into the distance below as Scottie walks away from us into the depths of the vortex. The moment suggests both death (of Madeleine and the dream she represented) and also Scottie's imminent descent into psychological chaos.



A key image linked to death is the corridor down which figures disappear into the distance.

The Coroner's Inquest

Elster is exonerated of any blame for his wife's death by the coroner, who points out that he could have had no way of knowing that, *"Mr Ferguson's weakness, his fear of heights, would make him powerless when he was most needed."* The moment is a brutal one in which all blame is heaped on Scottie's shoulders. The way this is done is doubly cruel because the coroner's language seems to hint, in part at least, at Scottie's underlying psychological disturbance; his sense of impotence as a man (*"weakness", "powerless", "fear", "helpless", "he did nothing"*).

The scene clearly gives Scottie the final push over the edge into mental breakdown. This is hinted at not only by the cruel comments of the coroner, but also through the highly oppressive film form which is used throughout the sequence. Scottie is a lonely and isolated figure at the front of the court-room and we are made very aware of the assembled crowd who watch him. Hitchcock also makes much use of the ceiling of the setting which, by the end of the sequence, comes to dominate the room creating a sense of weight and pressure on Scottie.



Oppressive imagery is used extensively in this scene.

The scene ends with an image of Scottie standing over the grave of Madeleine. It is a clear echo of the moment where she visits Carlotta's grave at the mission and suggests both his sense of loss and also his continuing sense of identification with Madeleine.

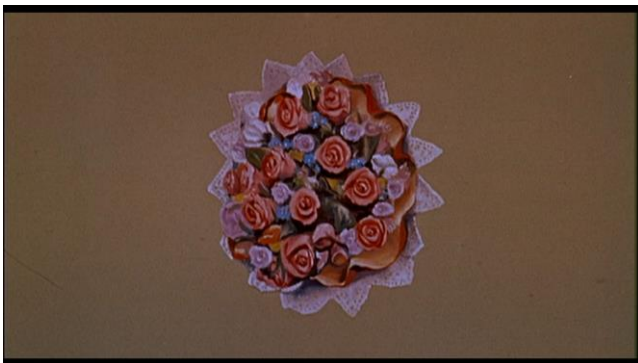


Gone but not forgotten – Madeleine continues to be a focus for Scottie even in death.

Scottie's Nightmare

The dream sequence is carefully constructed by Hitchcock to offer us a psychological insight into Scottie's breakdown. Significantly the vast majority of images in it in some way link to Madeleine.

The first image we are confronted with is Madeleine's posy; or rather Carlotta's as the picture seems to be drawn from the dead woman's portrait. Quickly this relatively realistic portrayal of the bouquet is transformed into crude animation which shows the arrangement fragmenting and becoming a swirling mass of petals. The collapse of the posy (a symbol of order) suggests the collapse of mental order experienced by Scottie. It also links that collapse directly to the disintegration of a dream; forced by the death of Madeleine. The use of crude animation serves to further reinforce the sense that the posy (natural objects artificially ordered) represents an unnatural order - its artificiality is accentuated through film form. This artificiality can also be seen as suggesting Scottie's unconscious recognition that in fact this whole set of circumstances may be a fraud.



Order becomes chaos after the death of Madeleine.

After this we see the image of Scottie and Elster divided by Carlotta Valdes. The shot also suggests the unnatural situation. Madeleine now seems to have been obliterated by Carlotta (in fact Madeleine does not feature directly in the dream at all); the dream has been fully realised, and yet again there is the suggestion that there is something wrong with what we are

seeing. Of course the moment also hints at what Madeleine (according to Scottie's understanding) has become. She *is* Carlotta because the dead woman in the end won the battle for possession of Madeleine. She has also become like Carlotta in the sense that the two characters have become united in death.



Carlotta now replaces Madeleine entirely. In death the two women become one.

The next thing we see in the dream is scenes of Scottie wandering in a void with no clear direction. This seems to link to his status as a wanderer and his heightened sense of rootlessness and a lack of connection to the real world. The darkness around him reflects an unknown world which he cannot understand. The loss of Madeleine has disconnected him from reality altogether. This last idea is heightened by the fact that his journey ends at the grave of Carlotta - an open grave. Scottie's falling into the grave and through a vertiginous abyss is an expression of his unconscious desire to follow Madeleine - to join her in death. It can also be seen as a recognition of their connection. The grave does, after all, contain ME. The idea that Madeleine's grave in fact contains Scottie too clearly suggests how strongly entwined their identities have become in his unconscious.



Scottie's "wandering" ultimately leads him to Madeleine, the grave and death.

This desire for death is then linked to the internal conflict represented by Scottie's vertigo through the shots of his falling figure; images that connect to the falling man at the beginning of the film and the shots of Madeleine as she falls from the tower. The image of Scottie falling through the place on the roof of the mission, where Madeleine herself died also has clear implications for Scottie's unconscious (?) desire to die himself and connects the desire explicitly to Madeleine's death. This sense of the obliteration of the self (identity/life) is particularly heightened through the way in which ultimately Scottie is shown falling through a blank screen – he enters the realms of nothingness and death.



Scottie's desire to follow Madeleine is emphasised when we see him falling to the same death as her in his dream.

The sequence can be linked to the titles which suggest that beneath the human exterior lies a maelstrom of emotions/conflicting impulses. Certainly that is what seems to lie within Scottie, and we are encouraged to experience and understand it through the use of a subjective view which once again identifies us with him.

The Mental Institute

Midge's last scene in the film shows how far Scottie has drifted from her - he does not really acknowledge her presence at all. The reality she occupies (one starkly contrasted with the (un)reality of Madeleine) seems to be one which Scottie can no longer accommodate.

At one point Midge says, pleadingly, to Scottie; *"You're not lost. Mother's here."* The line carries a double significance. Firstly it actually acknowledges (through denial) the very problem we have suspected about Scottie from the outset; how lost he is in terms of his identity, his masculinity, his general purpose in life and ultimately how lost he has become in terms of his grip on the reality personified by Midge herself. From a feminist perspective it is also a reminder of how unacceptable Midge actually is as a potential partner. Once again she is connected to the de-sexualised mother rather than one of the more obviously eroticised female stereotypes like the sex-kitten or virgin.

The shot of Midge walking down the corridor to the exit is described by Robin Wood as *"a unifying image of great importance."* It links particularly strongly to three moments in the film.

- The image of Scottie descending into a similar tunnel-like space and disappearing as he descends the stairs in the tower after Madeleine's death. The moments are connected; both show characters having failed to connect to their loved-one and failing to save them/their relationship with them.
- The dream described by Madeleine by the sea has her walking down a long corridor at the end of which she finds her own grave waiting for her where she says, *"there is nothing but darkness."* Midge's apparent obliteration by the fade-out at the end of the shot links her passage down the tunnel to those of Scottie and Madeleine. All end in darkness and metaphorical, if not literal, death; here it is the death of a relationship/human connection which is signified. Interestingly all three characters are also linked by the way in which these images suggest the isolation/loneliness of the human condition.
- The image is reversed in the final/main connecting image of Judy walking down the corridor from the elevator to the apartment after the finishing touch to her transformation (the bleaching of her hair). She walks from darkness into light; she walks not away from us but towards us. This reversal of the previous coding (which suggests death) clearly intensifies the perception of both Scottie and the audience that Madeleine has been resurrected; has emerged from death into life.



The final image of Midge is one which uses corridor symbolism to accentuate the idea of a relationship's death.

Scottie Searches for Madeleine

The first time we see Scottie after his "cure" he stands outside Madeleine's apartment building gazing at it and the her green Bentley which is still strangely parked outside. We respond as Scottie does for a moment: Is Madeleine still alive? Whatever the answer it appears that Scottie remains in her world even after treatment. The nature of his obsession with Madeleine is pointedly suggested by the prominent inclusion of a "One Way" sign in the foreground of the shot of Madeleine's building. It's suggests there is only one path for Scottie to follow – that he has no option but to pursue his fixation with his reflection/dream woman.



There is apparently only one path for the obsessed Scottie to follow by this point in the film.

The second scene in the sequence takes us back to Ernie's, where Scottie sits in exactly the same position as when he/we first saw Madeleine. It is another moment which develops his need to reconnect to Madeleine; to re-enter the dream reality she represents and perhaps rediscover the woman who offered a key to his own internal conflicts.

Both at Ernie's and in the next scene in the gallery (another "haunt" of Madeleine's) Scottie sees apparent doubles of Madeleine. He seems to occupy a kind of twilight world between reality and fantasy at this point. Madeleine is apparently present and then is shown to be patently absent as these women approach the camera and their differences from Kim Novak become clear.



Madeleine moves through the doorway at Ernie's only to turn into someone else. The dream can no longer punch its way into reality.

Seeing and Meeting Judy



Before we meet Judy we are confronted with an image which suggests the presence of Madeleine.

It is worth noting that when Scottie first sees Judy, it is by a flower shop in the window of which posies like those associated with Madeleine are displayed. The symbolism of order associated with the arranged flowers perhaps hints at the promise of a more general restoration of order in Scottie's life which is just about to be introduced in the form of Judy – a Madeleine returned from the grave.

This is not the only way in which Judy is connected with Madeleine in this introduction:

- She is dressed in green – a colour so strongly identified with Madeleine that it is instantly apparent that she is connected to the dead woman/fantasy.
- Judy is also introduced in a similar way to Madeleine. Although we are now on the modern street rather than in the antique world of Ernie's the film form is remarkably similar in both scenes. Judy walks towards us/Scottie through the depth of the frame apparently unaware of being watched. She stops in front of us/Scottie so that we can view her in profile.



Judy is introduced through a series of moments which echo Madeleine's introduction.

As Scottie follows Judy she is largely featured through his PoV. She becomes a subject of male investigation and voyeurism just as Madeleine did. In this way she is (according to Mulvey's theory) being conditioned to be sexually acceptable to the male camera/audience; her threat is being removed.

Although Madeleine was in fact Judy's creation in the first place, Judy is very different to the character she played for Scottie. She is associated with a modern world in a number of ways; we first meet her on a modern city street surrounded by the hustle and bustle of mid-Twentieth Century life; she is not isolated, like Madeleine, but socially connected to other female friends whom we see her with in her introduction; she carries a modern cynicism in her attitudes and language; she is working and lives a modern and independent existence. She is even sexually active – *"I've been on blind dates before. As a matter of fact I've been picked up before,"* she admits to Scottie before agreeing to have a meal with him. She not only opposes Madeleine in terms of her connections to modern femininity; she is also unsophisticated (she is from Kansas and there is a coarseness in her language and accent), brunette, working class and cynical rather than romantic. In all these ways she needs to be transformed if she is to become acceptable to Scottie who seeks the past, tradition, male dominance ("freedom and power") and a woman whose sexual threat has been removed. She must be turned into Madeleine who embodied all these things and the rest of the film traces the way in which Scottie does precisely this.

Once we are in Judy's apartment, mirrors are used extensively in the scene and it is Judy who features most prominently within them. This becomes especially true when the dead Madeleine is first mentioned. At this point we have an extended shot where Judy stands with her back to the camera and Scottie as she faces a mirror in which we see her clearly reflected. It is in this position that she first starts to soften towards Scottie, who stares at her reflection as if in a trance. She is a reflection of Madeleine herself, but interestingly here it seems that it is her own reflection (an artificial version of her) that first seems to forge a connection with Scottie. The moment strongly suggests that it is the reflection/the unreal and dream like version of this woman that Scottie wants and also hints at the dual nature of Judy's identity.



Judy becomes a reflection at just the moment when she begins to warm to Scottie.

The Revelation

The revelation that Judy was Madeleine has a strong impact; Madeleine is not dead, she never existed in the first place. The effect is to destabilise the reality which has been constructed so far in the film. The bubble is burst and (for the second time in the film) the audience is almost as lost within the narrative as Scottie is within his life. The revelation serves as a dramatic turning point in the film in terms of our reasons for watching. Up to this point our involvement has been based on mystery - the discovery of the unknown. Now all has been revealed we find ourselves involved on the level of suspense. We know more than Scottie for the first time and our interest is dependent on our curiosity about whether he too will expose the truth. This new knowledge also allows us to stand back from the film to a greater extent in its last third and think more broadly about the implications of what we are seeing.



Judy suddenly shifts the perspective away from Scottie through her flashback and her letter/voice-over.

The flashback (which reveals the truth to us) seen through Judy's eyes is a rare moment in the film when Scottie is absent and we see things from another character's perspective. This serves to disconnect us from Scottie's view for the first time, distancing us from him. We will now be able to watch him from a privileged position, having knowledge unavailable to him.

This shift in our identification in the film (our changed perspective on things) is accentuated by Judy's letter-writing. It affords her a narrative position never granted to Scottie – she gives a non-diegetic voice-over. It is a doubly significant moment as it allows her to voice her thoughts as she writes. At this point we forge an intimate connection with Judy who, at least momentarily, takes over the narration of the film. Moments like this could be seen as creating some real challenges to Mulvey's ideas about the film and its male perspective.

During this narration Judy reveals that Elster chose her because of her resemblance to Madeleine; *"He chose me to play the part because I looked like her; dressed me up like her."* It is a behaviour Scottie will come to repeat precisely in the last third of the film. There is certainly considerable potential to read this fact more as a criticism of male attitudes to and relationships with women than a reinforcement of them - Elster is, after all, a murderous villain and Scottie seems to want to imitate him in many ways.

The Transformation

Initially Judy can be seen as taking over Midge's role as the individual who attempts to give Scottie a greater connection to the real world. Like Midge's attempts to make Scottie see her (particularly through the portrait) and reject Madeleine, so Judy insists that Scottie see her for who she is - not simply as a recreation of a "dead" woman. Of course the issue is made still more important for her because she understands that the Madeleine that Scottie knew never actually existed.

Scottie takes Judy to places he connects with Madeleine - Ernie's Restaurant, the lake which Elster said Madeleine spent hours beside, gazing at the pillar structure called, appropriately,

“the portals of the Past”.



Judy, too, is haunted by Madeleine. Will she ever measure up to the impossible standards of Scottie's dream-woman?

After their first evening out Scottie escorts Judy back to her hotel-room. The scene is a significantly dream-like one. Judy's identity seems to disappear even as she enters her own home. She becomes a silhouette backlit by an otherworldly green light (from the neon sign outside) which we instantly associate with Madeleine, as does Scottie. Her face becomes little more than a profile. Judy's dark hair and her make-up (the superficial things that make her unlike Madeleine) disappear. Suddenly we can see who we choose to see; is this Madeleine or Judy? The green light in the background seems to suggest it is the former who sits before us.

It is a powerful moment in which Scottie's fantasy seems to become real for an instant. For him it is a promise of things to come; a spur for him to continue with his mission to resurrect his dead lover and realise his dream once again. Hitchcock's use of highly artificial film form reinforces this sense of entering a kind of dream-world as it so often does in this film.



The erasure of Judy's identity appears to begin very early on. She becomes just a silhouette (Madeleine's) against a green backdrop.

Before the scene in the women's outfitters, Scottie is shown buying Judy a flower to wear from a street vendor. It is the first in a series of moments of male domination and control in this segment of the film. Judy points at the flower she wants and Scottie ignores her and selects a different bloom, which he then buys for her as she gazes adoringly at him. It is possible to simply read this moment as one which underlines the essentially sexist nature of the film (the more feminist reading); our hero Scottie, with whom the audience is in so much sympathy, is uncritically shown changing a woman into what he wants and in the process destroying her true identity. It is, under this reading, a moment that unproblematically reinforces the oppression of

women by men. However it is possible to see the way in which Scottie dominates Judy's wishes and identity quite differently. If our single connection to Scottie has been disrupted by Judy's flashback and we now identify with her as much as anyone, then surely we see everything Scottie does from this point on with a very critical eye. Is it not possible that in fact we are being asked to understand how cruel and destructive Scottie's/male behaviour is, rather than unquestioningly accepting and approving of it?



Judy's choice of flower is apparently not good enough.

Whoever the audience sympathises with in the film, once we get into the fitting rooms it is hard to miss the way in which Judy struggles with what Scottie wants her to do. He constantly overrides her choices; even the assistant comments that, *"The gentleman certainly seems to know what he wants."* Of course Judy knows equally well what she does *not* want, but there is no acknowledgement of her desires by any of the characters in the scene. It is as if she has already ceased to exist.

Scottie's explanations for what he is doing are also interesting. He places constant emphasis on the visual experience of Judy (*"I just want you to look nice," "I know the kind of dress that would look well on you," "I just want to see what you look like"*). It is as if this woman exists purely for her "to-be-looked-at-ness". It is also clear that for her to be acceptable to Scottie/men/the audience her image needs to be controlled in some way. Clearly there is much in the film that could be seen to support the ideas of Mulvey in terms of male voyeurism of women, but moments like the clothing store scene could also be seen to support Mulvey's argument about the fetishisation of women in cinema.

Back at Scottie's apartment we are presented with yet another scene which could be seen to undermine the idea that we approve of Scottie's treatment of Judy. Her emphasis is on the need to be recognised for who she is; to have her real identity validated. When she accuses Scottie of wanting her because she reminds him of Madeleine he responds: *"It's you too - there's something in you."* His line echoes Madeleine's (*"there's someone inside me"*) and tells the audience, and presumably Judy who provided the line in the first place, that it is indeed what is hidden in Judy (Madeleine) that he desires. Given the complex symbolism of Madeleine the line carries a double edge. Not only does Scottie want Madeleine because she represents his idealised fantasy of a woman, but also because she shares and symbolises his own vertigo-inducing conflict between the desires for life and death. Indeed, when Madeleine originally spoke the words that inspire Scottie here it is explicitly that internal conflict that she was referring to.

When Judy begs Scottie to like her for herself she uses the word "me" repeatedly as if to

emphasise the need to have her identity recognised. However Scottie simply begins to point to the need to change her hair so it is more like Madeleine's. At this moment it is as if Judy disappears entirely. Scottie has not heard her at all; he has been lost in thoughts about Madeleine and how to resurrect her. The discussion ends with Judy saying, *"If I let you change me will that do it? If I do what you say will that make you love me?"* It is clearly a moment of female defeat – a signal that a real female identity has been over-ridden almost violently by male desires and needs. The question is whether the scene encourages us to adopt Scottie's attitudes ourselves or in fact exposes them for us to criticise and reject.



In a way that is reminiscent of Elster earlier, Scottie begins to dominate the frame (and Judy).

Once Judy has agreed to be more like Madeleine Scottie instantly begins to re-enact a moment with Madeleine through her. After Madeleine has fallen in the bay, Scottie places cushions on the floor in front of the fire in his apartment for her and he sits over her as they talk, drinking in her face with his eyes. Now exactly the same is done for Judy with Hitchcock accentuating the way the scenes mirror each other by using precisely the same methods to shoot them both.

Having established connections between the two (?) women Madeleine is finally reborn and Judy destroyed. As she walks up the corridor towards Scottie after having had her hair bleached, Judy reverses the images of walking down corridors to oblivion shared by Scottie and Madeleine in dreams and by Midge in reality. She walks from darkness to light, towards us not away.



Madeleine is reborn in a shot that reverses the corridor/death imagery of earlier in the film.

In the apartment green light is used to draw our attention to the ever greater replication of Madeleine. At first it dominates only part of the frame - Judy's hair is not right. But once she has moved into the other room to put her hair up the transformation is complete. She walks from behind a door bathed in green light and seems to emerge from a glowing green fog. Her bearing, facial expression and eroticism are all suddenly those of Madeleine, Judy is eradicated completely in this moment - although the illusion of Madeleine will never be so fully realised again in the film.



Pools of green light are used to underline the sense that Madeleine has been brought back from the dead.

As if to emphasise the idea that Scottie never had the slightest interest in Judy, now she is Madeleine he kisses her in the most passionate moment in the film. To underline the impact of the kiss a 360° tracking shot around the couple moves us from the flat to the stable block at the mission where Madeleine died. Scottie stops kissing the oblivious Judy and looks around in bewilderment before continuing the kiss. The moment works on a number of levels. It can be seen as both a confirmation of Madeleine's resurrection (Judy has taken him back to a moment when he passionately embraced and loved Madeleine), and as a suggestion that in realising his fantasy Scottie has instantly come to question it. This can be seen as being the first moment in which his suspicions about the fraudulent situation (unconsciously expressed in his dream) find a conscious expression, however brief. On yet another level Scottie's return to the kiss, despite his apparent confusion about where he finds himself, seems to suggest a choice on his part. His moment of recognition is dismissed so that he can return to his fantasy. So strong is his desire for Madeleine that Scottie chooses the dream-world of wish-fulfilment over reality.



The kiss transports Scottie into the past and then into the dream-world of Madeleine.

We cut from the kiss to a shot of Scottie waiting outside the bathroom as Judy/Madeleine gets ready to go out. There are obvious implications that what we have missed in the edit is the sex act itself. From Mulvey's perspective this is arguably a very useful detail as it does seem to suggest that it is only when the woman has been completely controlled (through voyeurism and especially fetishisation) that she becomes sexually acceptable; a central idea of Mulvey's.



Scottie caught in a post-coital moment?

Judy's Death

Judy's death is essentially an accident, however there are clear elements of both murder and suicide in its presentation. Scottie's behaviour is violent and we are never sure that he does not intend to kill her once they reach the top of the stairs. At the top he actually takes her by the throat at one point (a typical Hitchcock image of male violence towards women).

Judy's sense of self seems to go through a complete collapse at this point. She speaks ambiguously once the truth is revealed to Scottie - sometimes as Madeleine and sometimes as herself. Her destruction seems only natural at this point in the film. She is neither one thing or the other - not real and not fantasy, not Judy and not Madeleine. There is no longer a place for her in any reality; death is her only option. Here we have the suggestion of suicide; what other choice does she have?

Murder is contained as an idea in the same moment. Scottie has manifested the desire to kill Judy through his treatment of her in the scene; the whole thing is a recreation of Madeleine's death suggesting at least his partial desire to re-enact the death itself. However Judy's collapse of personality is a sign of a more metaphorical murder. Scottie's intervention has murdered her on a psychological level as well. Perhaps how she dies is irrelevant; in all the ways that are most important Scottie has killed Judy (and Madeleine with her) even before she falls from the tower.



The suggestion of murder is everywhere in this scene in the tower. Judy, like Madeleine's corpse, is dragged to the top.

The image of the nun rising as a shadow in the darkness is clearly taken to be a ghost by Judy and leads to her fall. It also marks a movement from darkness to light for Scottie as he finally exposes the whole truth and in so doing cures his vertigo.

The final image of Scottie at the top of the tower looking down to where Judy has fallen is a complex one. It emphasises his lack of vertigo - a resolution of sorts - while drawing attention to his desperation at this final moment. With the vertigo gone will he throw himself to his death? Certainly it mirrors the images of him hanging suspended over an abyss at the beginning of the film: In many ways he finishes as he began. The resolution we are offered is incomplete, for in curing his vertigo and learning the truth it would appear that Scottie has a whole new set of demons to face.

If, once again, we consider things from a feminist perspective then the ending of the film could be seen to support the argument that the film works against the interests of women. On one level it could be argued that Judy is a kind of femme fatale who must traditionally be punished. She has deceived the hero, used her sexuality to manipulate him and has been involved in a murder. Rosen and Haskell's work on female roles in cinema points to an apparent need for such women to be condemned through punishment and clearly Judy's death could be seen to reflect this tendency.

Such is the complexity of Hitchcock's film, however, that it is difficult to be quite so one sided about the meaning of the ending. If we have been identified with Judy as some have suggested, then clearly her death is likely to seem more like a tragedy than justice. As has already been discussed, there is much in Scottie's behaviour in this final scene which suggests a violent and almost murderous quality in him. If we think about the whole narrative at this point then in fact his murderous nature tends to be even more accentuated. In many ways Scottie seems to have become Elster: He has transformed Judy into Madeleine and he has created a woman possessed by a ghost (Madeleine/Carlotta; Judy/Madeleine). Now he completes the transformation by mirroring the murder of Elster's wife by effectively causing Judy's death (by leading her to the tower). Is the film in fact drawing attention to the violence inherent in the way men view and treat women? Perhaps the ultimate suggestion is not that Judy is a femme fatale that needs punishing, but that she is an innocent victim of male manipulation and cruelty.



Hardly your typical Hollywood happy ending. Scottie ends the film as he began – a man suspended over the void.

A Few Final Ideas from the Academics

Madeleine/Judy - Who's Who?

"The pretence was that Carlotta was taking possession of Madeleine; in reality, Madeleine has taken possession of Judy." - Wood

It can be difficult to decide how to interpret the lines Madeleine delivers once we know that in fact Madeleine is just a construct played by Judy. When Madeleine speaks her final lines to Scottie before running into the tower they carry a very different meaning for the audience depending upon who we attribute the words to - Madeleine or Judy. In fact everything Madeleine does becomes ambiguous on a second viewing - just who is in control of the character?

Wood argues that in fact Madeleine is a more real character than Judy:

- The audience has been encouraged to see her as real (within the context of an admittedly distorted and dreamlike reality which permeates the whole film) for the first half of the film so it is our inclination to continue to do so.
- Madeleine is a far more interesting character than Judy, who seems very limited. Her first conversation reflects coarseness, and she seems to lack intelligence or any real character to speak of.
- While in character as Madeleine Judy realises potentials which remain completely hidden when she is herself. She becomes imbued with a mystery, intelligence, sensitivity and depth which Judy simply does not have.

Woods argument seems a persuasive one, especially when we also consider that Judy submits to Scottie's desire to recreate Madeleine and becomes her so fully that she slips happily back into character - to such an extent that she "forgets herself" and wears Carlotta's necklace. The very fact that she has kept the necklace at all suggests her intimate relationship with Madeleine. One might have expected Judy, who is clearly not wealthy, to have sold the expensive jewellery, but she has not. Instead it appears to be a treasured possession which she wears on special occasions. Here, ironically, it is to go to the restaurant where we first encounter her in the guise of Madeleine.

Issues of Audience Identification

Although we are clearly identified with Scottie from the beginning of the film, this becomes a more complex issue once we have met Judy.

During the first two thirds of the film we only get two shots from the point of view of anyone other than Scottie:

- Midge's as she watches Madeleine leave Scottie's apartment.
- Madeleine's as she looks at the flowers she has thrown in the Bay.

Obviously this means that we are closely associated with Scottie and his perceptions from the outset. As he watches Madeleine so too do we. His lingering and obsessive examination of her face - intimate and passionate - is conveyed to us through Hitchcock's use of camera and we too feel the depth of his fixation with her.

However identification becomes more problematical once the truth has been revealed through use of a subjective flashback in which Judy remembers the previous events of the film as they

really occurred. At this point in the film Judy is alone - we are attached to her in this scene - not Scottie. Also for the first time we are distanced from him because we have more information that he does - the aspect of the film which shifts emphasis from mystery to suspense.

From this point onwards we get many more shots from another character's point of view and far more of the film seems to be shot objectively rather than subjectively. In distancing us from Scottie Hitchcock allows us to watch the final section of the film more analytically - giving us the opportunity to respond more critically (morally and emotionally) to what we are seeing. We are suddenly placed outside the dream and become more closely associated with reality.

We are also encouraged to engage more fully with Judy/Madeleine. We can understand her more fully, and the implications of her transformation.

Questioning Mulvey

- How do we feel about Scottie's treatment of Judy – especially given that it comes after a moment in the film where our single connection to Scottie has arguably been severed (through Judy's flashback and voice-over)?
- Does the fact that Scottie simply mirrors Elster's own (undeniably) wicked behaviour not suggest that there is a generally male problem with allowing women to have their own identity? It's worth bearing in mind that Scottie also effectively kills Judy (just as Elster does with his wife)
- Judy's death is ultimately a direct result of Scottie's insistence on dragging her to the mission for his own selfish reasons.
- Generally the film could be seen to suggest that men tend to expect women to conform to impossible standards based more on sexual fantasy than any reality and that this process is deeply damaging for the women themselves.

Some Possible Over-all Messages

If Scottie represents an extreme case (we classify him by now, certainly, as a sick man), this rejection of life for an unattainable idea is something fundamental in human nature, his sickness still, potentially, our sickness. The tendency in relationships to form an idealized image of the other person and substitute it for the reality is relevant here. - Wood

- When we fall in love we tend to focus on a false image - even to mould an individual to fit the image we desire. This is a destructive impulse which leads to unhappiness.
- Beneath the surface of us all lies a set of chaotic and conflicting impulses.
- Reality is subjective, not objective. We constantly distort the world in which we live in order to control it and fulfil our fantasies.
- Our identities are compromised and re-modulated by those around us and how they perceive us. *The theme of unstable identity is reflected in Scottie, the "wanderer" who is going to "do nothing": he is "Johnny" or "Johnny O" to Midge, "John" to Madeleine, "Scottie" to Judy: the identity is created in part by the relationship. - Wood*
- Human pre-occupations with love and death are closely connected. Similarly connected are sexual attraction and violence.