University Press, 1981), Cavell explores an adjacent genre of melodrama in this challenging but important book. The present chapter reflects on *Vertigo*'s intimate relationship to this genre as Cavell understands it.)

Emerson, R. W. (1979) "History," in J. Slater, A. R. Ferguson and J. F. Carr (eds.) *Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, vol. II, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Marker, C. (1994) "A Free Replay (Notes on *Vertigo*)." Online. Available at http://kit.kein.org/files/kit/Chris%20Marker%20Talks%20About%20Hitchcock's%20Vertigo.pdf (accessed August 1, 2011); originally published in *Positif* 400: 79–84; reprinted in J. Boorman and W. Donohue (eds.) (1995) *Projections 4½*, London: Faber and Faber. (The great filmmaker Chris Marker's brilliant if eccentric take on *Vertigo*, his favorite film.)

Rothman, W. (2004) "*Vertigo*: The Unknown Woman in Hitchcock," in *The "I" of the Camera: Essays in Film Criticism, History and Aesthetics*, New York, NY and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 121–40.

—— (2012) *Hitchcock – The Murderous Gaze*, 2nd edition, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press. (Originally published in 1982, this expanded edition, incorporating over 800 frame enlargements, is a detailed study of six characteristic Hitchcock films. The book introduced the method of close reading the present chapter exemplifies.)

Further reading

Rothman, W. (2004) *The "I" of the Camera: Essays in Film Criticism, History and Aesthetics*, 2nd edition, New York, NY and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (Originally published in 1988. Contains, in addition to the essay on *Vertigo* discussed in some detail in the preceding pages, three other essays that stand in close relationship to the present essay: "*North by Northwest*: Hitchcock's Monument to the Hitchcock Film," "The Villain in Hitchcock: Does He Look Like a Wrong One to You?" and "Thoughts on Hitchcock's Authorship.")

Chapter 4

Noël Carroll

VERTIGO: THE IMPOSSIBLE LOVE

Introduction

VERTIGO IS AN IMMENSELY COMPELLING film, perhaps Hitchcock's greatest achievement. And yet, as I've noted elsewhere (2007), it cannot be the mystery and suspense elements that hold us in thrall. For they are too forced to warrant a second view.

Upon re-viewing, the absurdity of Gavin Elster's plot to kill his wife is hard to ignore. It is far too ingenious to succeed – too many things could have gone awry. What if Scottie hadn't been smitten by the phony Madeleine? What if Scottie had been just a little more probing – wouldn't he have easily discovered the whereabouts of the real Mrs. Elster? How could Elster be so sure that there would be no one else in the church? There was a nun nearby the second time around and that was in the middle of the night! And, of course, how could Elster be certain that Scottie couldn't climb to the top of the bell tower? He almost gets there during the murder and he makes it on his second attempt. Elster's stratagems click together smoothly in a way that is only possible in a fiction. In reality, the probability of Elster's plan working would be close to zero. Reflecting upon it after seeing the film, it can only strike you as remarkably silly.

Nor can much be said on behalf of the mystery element of *Vertigo*. After all, Judy divulges the "secret" in a flashback (followed by the letter

she never sends to Scottie) almost immediately after Scottie finds her. Nor is there much suspense at the end of the film, since we have no idea of what Scottie intends to do to Judy. We have no sense of where the scene might be headed, but that would be necessary for suspense to take hold. Instead there is only surprise when the nun emerges from the dark and Judy plunges to her death.

Perhaps there is some suspense in the second half of the film over the issue of whether Scottie will figure out that Judy and his Madeleine are one and the same. But it hits him in the scene just after Judy's final "transformation." That is, he realizes everything almost as soon as Judy is done up as Madeleine once again. Moreover, on a second viewing this element in the plot – Scottie's initial failure to recognize that Judy is his Madeleine – also seems wildly improbable. How could a man whom we presume made love to Judy-as-Madeleine fail to notice that the body of Judy-as-Judy is the same as Madeleine's in every respect, save for the platinum blonde hair? It strains credulity to the breaking point, especially given the body at issue (Kim Novak's!). The plot of the film, in short, is as stupendously unlikely as Gavin Elster's plot to kill his wife. Sitting through the film a second time would seem to invite a chuckle at its expense.

Like many detective stories of the classic age of mystery fiction by people such as Agatha Christie, the plot of *Vertigo* is very clever and inventive, thereby stoking the audience's curiosity. But once we learn the secret of these stories and see how we have been tricked, we rarely reread such mysteries. However, *Vertigo* is a film that many revisit. Yet if it is not the thriller elements that compel, what does?

Part of the answer, of course, is that the characters in classical detective fictions have next to no depth, whereas the characters in *Vertigo* are psychologically intriguing, especially in terms of their perversely convoluted amorous relationships. But *Vertigo* is not just a thriller. More than that, it is a love story. Indeed, it is the story of an impossible love, and by limning what makes the love between Scottie and Judy impossible, Hitchcock and his collaborators are able to draw from reflective viewers a recognition of some of the essential conditions that make love possible. That is, *Vertigo* provides the philosophical resources that can enable thoughtful spectators to develop insights into the nature of love.

A twice told tale

Vertigo is a twice told tale both in the sense that it tells the same story twice, revealing in the distributed second telling what really happened on the day when Elster's wife died, and also in the sense that it is made up of what appear to be two different, albeit overlapping, love stories. Indeed, the fact that there are two love stories is part of what gives *Vertigo* its philosophical traction, because by encouraging comparison between the two, the creators of *Vertigo* help the viewer pinpoint what is impossible about the relationship between Scottie and Judy/Madeleine.

The film opens with the famous rooftop chase sequence, ending with Scottie dangling from the drainpipe and looking down at the street way below where the body of his police partner is crushed against the pavement, a situation recalled with variation in the last shot of the film, where Scottie stands on the parapet of the campanile, looking down in the direction that Judy has fallen.[1] The next scene opens in his friend Midge's apartment. We see Scottie, played by Jimmy Stewart, on a chair with his leg propped up on a hassock. Presumably he has trouble walking. Perhaps this reminds us of the beginning of *Rear Window*, which also opens by establishing the leading character's injury.

Most of the scene with Midge is devoted to dispensing the information we need to follow what ensues. Scottie has vertigo, which has led him to resign from the police department, but this is not a financial problem because he is independently wealthy (which explains how it is that he can spend all his time wandering around San Francisco). Scottie's vertigo, it is said, cannot be cured, except possibly by another traumatic event (a hint of things to come?). But apart from being brought up to speed with respect to the plot, we also learn something important about Scottie. There is something suspect and maybe unstable about his relationships with women.

He reminds Midge that they were once engaged in college, but that she broke it off. He then tells her that he is still available. Both of his statements are greeted by strangely angled shots of Midge's frozen stare. Her silence speaks volumes. We take it that she sees through Scottie; she doesn't believe him. There is a strong suggestion that he is afraid not only of falling, but also of falling in love. Perhaps this is connected to the allusion to *Rear Window*, since the character played by Stewart there

also resists marriage. But, as gradually becomes apparent, Scottie's slightly veiled, almost boyish skepticism about love is a fragile defense against his own scarcely controllable romantic tendencies.

From the scene with Midge, we go to Gavin Elster's shipping company. Perhaps we should be on the lookout for some trickery here, since Hitchcock himself, the great manipulator, makes his appearance outside Elster's offices. Scottie enters Elster's office; they catch up on what each has done since their college days together. Then Elster attempts to enlist Scottie's help in investigating his wife, who he suggests is either being taken over by, or imagines she is being taken over by, her distant ancestor Carlotta Valdes, a woman who committed suicide and who, Elster insinuates, may be driving his wife to the same end. At first, Scottie turns down the assignment, but then relents, agreeing to start by observing the Elsters at dinner at a restaurant called Ernie's.

One thing that is striking about the meeting with Elster is the décor. It is very brown in a wood-paneled, manly sort of way. This color scheme reappears on other occasions, such as the men's club where Scottie reports to Elster. It also dominates the lobby of the McKittrick hotel which, in retrospect, we should probably regard as Elster's territory. But apart from its cinematic function as a narrative marker for Elster, it is one of the panoply of recurring elements that imbue *Vertigo* with a sense of highly obsessional unity that encompasses every dimension of the film: narrative, visual, and musical; costumes and characters; and so forth.

When Scottie scans the dining room at Ernie's, the faux Mrs. Elster pops out of the visual array, since she is virtually the only person in the room wearing something colored, which is an arresting, loud green dress.[2] It is important that when Scottie first sees her she is in green, since when he initially spots Judy in the second part of the film, she is also in green. And when Scottie awakens the supposed Mrs. Elster – who drives a green Jaguar – in his apartment, he has on a green sweater.

Moreover, green is, of course, the color that floods Judy's apartment in the Empire Hotel from the neon sign outside; after their famous prolonged kiss, when the camera makes the room spin, they end up hugging against what is an effectively abstract field of green. This repeating color motif has a unifying function. One wonders whether the production designers also knew that green is the color of Advent, since each of these occurrences signals a new beginning.

As the phony Mrs. Elster leaves Ernie's, she is the object of Scottie's point of view. She stops, almost frozen, on her way out, her stasis indicating Scottie's instant fixation. She is shot in profile, her nose pointed screen right. Later when Scottie first glimpses Judy, she too is in profile, her nose pointed screen-right. In fact, throughout the film, there are a number of very studied profile and silhouette shots of Judy/Madeleine and Judy, such as the shot of Judy sitting on her bed, swathed in green light. These rhyming profile shots visually underline one of the most important themes of the film in terms of the philosophy of love – namely, the question of whether one lover can be replaced by another lover who has (or is made to have) the same properties as the original.

Throughout *Vertigo*, events and images from the first love story are echoed in the second story. Sometimes these repetitions may be quite subtle. Scottie seats "Madeleine" in front of the fire at his apartment, after her supposed suicide attempt; later, he has Judy sit in front of the same fireplace as once again he ministers to her. Scottie sees the fake Madeleine in the upstairs window of the McKittrick Hotel; he spies Judy at her window in the Empire Hotel. In addition to these visual rhymes, there are the very overt narrative repetitions. Scottie follows the imitation Madeleine Elster in his car; subsequently, he stalks Judy on foot.[3] Judy/Madeleine goes to Podesta Baldocchi's, the florist where Scottie's infatuation literally blossoms in a burst of color as he opens the backdoor of the shop; later he buys Judy flowers. He first sees the woman he thinks is Mrs. Elster at Ernie's; Ernie's is the restaurant where Scottie and Judy first dine.

These repetitions are given a special significance by a short segment of the film between the two love stories. After Scottie has been released from the sanitarium, he roams San Francisco, haunting the various places that figured in his relationship with the alleged Mrs. Elster. First he goes to her apartment building, the Brocklebank, where he began tracking her. He sees her green Jaguar and, for a moment, we think that he thinks he sees his Madeleine walking toward it, because from afar the blonde woman who now owns the car is wearing a white coat just like one that Scottie's beloved wore. Next he goes to Ernie's, where he is taken aback by a couple who, for a split second, look as the "Elsters" did on the first evening Scottie saw his Madeleine.

These false Madeleines are what we might call *cinematic revenants*. They are very carefully designed by Hitchcock to look like Judy/Madeleine

from a distance. They are blonde and wear outfits reminiscent of Judy as Madeleine, and they are often not in sharp focus. They constantly conjure up the idea of Scottie's Madeleine by echoing her visual properties and emphasize his obsession with finding her again. But as they come into focus, the illusion dissolves and Scottie must continue his search.

In short order, he arrives at the art gallery of the Palace of the Legion of Honor, where he observed "Madeleine" studying the portrait of Carlotta Valdes. There is a young woman, a student perhaps, examining the painting, seated in exactly the same posture in which Judy/Madeleine "composed herself" and dressed in gray (which by that time was "Madeleine's" signature color). Scottie stares at the young woman; one feels that he wishes it were his Madeleine, but then realizes she is not and breaks away. Clearly Scottie is searching for his beloved. It seems impossible that he will find her.

But . . .

Standing outside Podesta Baldocchi, and looking at a bouquet just like the one that his Madeleine favored, Scottie turns only to see Judy – dressed in green and in profile – and her friends walking up the street. He is immediately drawn to her and follows her to her hotel. He has found his beloved or, at least, a simulacrum thereof. He goes to her apartment, and, strangely enough, is able to convince her to go out to dinner with him. Judy is very different from Scottie's Madeleine. Her hair and her complexion are far darker than those of the platinum-haired, pale "Mrs. Elster." She looks as though she might be part Latina, whereas the faux Madeleine Elster was *echt* WASP.

Judy speaks very straightforwardly and colloquially; Scottie's Madeleine spoke in something like the standard American stage accent popular in films of the 1930s.[4] Judy's glance is very direct and her facial expressions are animated. As Madeleine, her face was often frozen, affectless, as if she had daily Botox treatments; often she looked away when she spoke, her words drifting off; her eyes were frequently blank and popped wide open – as if she were elsewhere or in a trance, as if possessed, perhaps by the ghost of Carlotta. There is something a bit vulgar about Judy, whereas the Madeleine Scottie fell for was decidedly upper class. Yet Scottie says he sees something "in her" that attracts him. What he doesn't say is that what that is consists of the properties of his putatively dearly departed, which he discerns in Judy.

At first, the budding romance between Scottie and Judy proceeds normally. They stroll together past the Palace of Fine Arts, where they observe young lovers on the lawn; they go dancing at the Fairmont Hotel. Standing at the main entrance of Gump's, Scottie buys a bouquet for Judy from a streetside vendor. But at that very moment, the love story takes a scary turn. Scottie wants to buy Judy clothes at Ransohoffs. She is apprehensive, and rightly so. She senses that he is going to attempt to recreate his Madeleine using Judy as a platform. Scottie sees something of his Madeleine already in Judy and imagines that by further investing Judy with Madeleine's properties, he can reanimate her. Nowadays we might say that Scottie wants to clone his Madeleine using Judy's body to do so. Putatively, he thinks of the Madeleine he loved as a cluster of properties that can be transferred to Judy.

The scene at Ransohoff's is emotionally harrowing. There is an angry, intemperate tone in Scottie's voice. He barks at the salespeople. Judy is very upset. She realizes that he is attempting to dress her up as Madeleine. He keeps sending back gray suits until the shopkeeper locates the model that his Madeleine wore. Judy pleads with him to stop. They argue in front of a mirror, interestingly, where two Judys are visible.[5] She wants him to love her as she is, but she apparently realizes that she can only have him on his terms, so she surrenders.

She'll wear the clothes if he wants her to, she tells him, but, she adds inconsistently, only if he will love *her* (meaning Judy). Judy is so compliant, one surmises, because on their first date at Ernie's she saw Scottie looking yearningly at a blonde, the last cinematic revenant in the film, who, from a distance, looked fleetingly like a doppelgänger for Scottie's Madeleine. Judy appears to conclude that she must give in to Scottie's desire to reconstruct her if she is to hold on to his affection. What she does not quite realize is that it is not she, in the way she hopes, whom he will be loving.

After the debacle over the gray suit, Judy caves in on the evening dress and then the shoes he wants to buy for her. Had Scottie not learned of Judy's complicity in Gavin Elster's scheme, he would probably have gone on to sign her up for voice coaching and deportment lessons (and maybe some Botox injections too).[6]

The last battleground is Judy's hair. He wants it dyed platinum blonde. Via a montage, we see Judy transformed at the beauty parlor,

Elizabeth Arden's, which at first looks more like a hospital. Indeed, the transformation scene itself reminds one of an experiment from a horror film. Judy is being remade; Scottie's Madeleine is being reanimated.

Although Judy agrees for the most part to the make-over, she essays a final attempt at resisting; she leaves her hair down, rather than pinned up in a French twist. Scottie protests. He wants to replicate all his Madeleine's properties on Judy. Judy finally capitulates. She goes into the bathroom. When she returns, she first appears in an overexposed area within the shot; she appears illusory, ghostlike, recalling the previous cinematic revenants. Then she steps forward and becomes solid, concrete. Those ethereal properties have become incarnated cinematically. Whereas Madeleine's earlier doppelgängers never quite come into focus as the alleged Mrs. Elster, as Scottie's beloved, Judy does.

Judy has metamorphosed, at least visually, into Scottie's Madeleine. The fake Madeleine's properties and Judy's are now the same, at least as far as the eye can see. She and Scottie embrace and the room turns around them like a gyre. Scottie has replicated his Madeleine to his own satisfaction, by investing Judy with her properties.

In the next scene, there is another repetition. Judy puts on the necklace she wore as Madeleine, which, in turn, is identical to the one worn by Carlotta in her portrait. Scottie recognizes it. Interestingly, he seems to make the connection while looking at Judy's mirror image. This prepares us for the last and most fateful repetition in the film – the return to the Mission at San Juan Bautista. Once again they ascend the stairway of the bell tower, this time with Scottie, seething in rage and sarcasm, narrating the true story of what happened that day when Gavin Elster's wife supposedly committed suicide. The tale told once more – their love has died; and this is then deftly symbolized by Judy's literally dying. They could never have gone on from there. Their love was impossible.

Impossible love, part I: Scottie's project

Vertigo is philosophical not because it recounts the impossibility of the love between Scottie and Judy, but because it supplies reflective viewers with the resources to discover for themselves why that relationship *necessarily* – given the nature of couple-love – never had a chance of success. Underlying Scottie's behavior, it would appear, is a very commonplace view

about love – namely, that what we love by way of amorous romance are the properties of the beloved. Asked why we love our significant other, we say things like "because of her intelligence" or "because of his laugh," or maybe "because of her generosity." That is, we offer a list of properties in order to account for our love. Upon what else could our love be based? It cannot be that we love some bare particular.

This view of love – which is sometimes attributed to Plato by way of Socrates's rehearsal of Diotima's theory of the *scala amoris* in the *Symposium* – has, it would appear, several curious consequences.[7] One is that since properties are general and can be instantiated by different particulars, the cluster of properties we prize in our beloved could obtain in someone or something numerically distinct from our significant other, *and*, were that the case, we would have just as much reason to love the double as we do to love our partner of many years. In fact, if it is really a certain cluster of properties that grounds our love for the other, then if someone were to possess those admired properties to a greater degree than the one we are with, it would make perfect sense for us to trade up.

In short, if it is the beloved's properties that are the object of our love, then were a clone of, say, our spouse contrived, and our spouse incinerated, we should have no cause for distress, since we would still have access to the cluster of properties we so value. In *Vertigo*, Scottie's behavior indicates that he believes something like this. He has lost his Madeleine. However, he hopes to recuperate that loss by transferring her properties to Judy. That is why he is obsessed with remaking Judy in the image of his beloved. He is like those people who have their pet dog cloned in the hopes of literally replacing it in their affections.[8] The difference is that Scottie is attempting to do this with a human being.

The idea of a transfer of one person's properties to another is introduced in *Vertigo* in terms of ghosts, not clones.[9] Specifically, Gavin Elster plants the idea that Carlotta Valdes's properties – not only her looks, but her suicidal tendencies – are being transferred by supernatural means to his wife Madeleine. Whether or not Scottie accepts this account of the alleged Mrs. Elster's behavior is unclear; nevertheless, he attempts a parallel operation in his effort to remake Judy in the image of his beloved. Judy, of course, protests. She wants Scottie to love her for herself and not for some cluster of properties that she shares or can be made to share with the counterfeit Mrs. Elster.

Although Scottie's view of love appears based in common sense and has, in fact, an ancient pedigree, the way in which it is represented in *Vertigo* strongly indicates that it is flawed. This is especially apparent in the conflict over the new clothes in Ransohoffs. It is difficult to miss the suggestion that there is something very wrong with what Scottie is attempting to do. His very demeanor seems cruel, out of control, and at times tyrannical. And when he pleads for Judy's compliance, one senses that he is asking for something that no one should ask of his/her beloved. He is asking her to abnegate her haecceity, her status as a unique or individual being. Judy herself articulates this when she beseeches Scottie in these words: "Couldn't you like me, *just me*, the way I am?" (emphasis added).

In this way, *Vertigo* illuminates what is questionable in the properties-view of romantic love that Scottie seems to embrace. Previously, we noted some of the stranger consequences of the properties-view. On that conception of love, we should be willing to trade up at the prospect of obtaining more of the properties we covet by allying ourselves with a more richly endowed object than our present lover. But, I suspect, most of us think that a "love" so fickle is hardly worth the name. It rubs the wrong way our intuitions about what counts as love.

Similarly, few of us would feel loved if we were convinced that our lover would be just as happy with a clone as he or she is with us – that if I died, for example, I would not be missed, so long as my partner had a replicant available. I, that is, would not feel loved. I might even say that my partner just doesn't understand what love truly and essentially is if he or she would be as satisfied with my doppelgänger as with me, because I would not feel that my lover loved *me* – me just as I am, as Judy says, or, better yet, as who I am.

Judy's protests capture these intuitions, which the audience may interpret as the basis for objecting to the philosophy of love that Scottie presupposes. Indeed, by riling our intuitions in this way, *Vertigo* induces the conscientious viewer to probe even more deeply the issue of that which is dubious in the philosophy of love that Scottie exemplifies.

One essential element of genuine romantic love that Scottie's relationship to Judy lacks is a desire to benefit Judy for her own sake (Brown 1987: 27–8). Judy sounds this alarm by constantly asking Scottie

to love her, to attend to her. Instead, he is attending to himself and his own needs. In fact, he makes this clear by asking her more than once to transform herself for him. He does not treat her as an autonomous agent who is valuable for her own sake and whose needs and desires merit respect. Rather, he treats her as an instrument for satisfying his desires. He is obsessed with recreating his Madeleine by *using* Judy as his basic building material. His attitude toward Judy is not one of disinterested care. It is self-interested. Scottie is using Judy to salve his own spiritual wounds.

At least with respect to Scottie's portion of it, the first love story in the film – the one between Scottie and his Madeleine – initially offers us a foil to the second love story with Judy, a contrast that clarifies what is amiss with what Scottie is doing to Judy. For, the first time around, Scottie's concern for his Madeleine is authentically disinterested. He has become her self-elected champion or guardian; he will protect her and attempt to free her from inner torment *because he loves her*. But he does not love Judy as such ("just as I am," as she puts it); he loves the properties of his Madeleine as they are instantiated in Judy Barton. And that is what makes his bullying and pleading so very reprehensible.

However, *Vertigo* does not only reveal that Scottie's conception of love is flawed because of the insufficient extent to which he treats Judy as an autonomous individual – with her own needs and desires – who should be valued for her own sake and not merely as a means. In addition, something else that is essential to loving is also missing from their relationship. Love is a historically constituted bond – a bond between this person and that person that evolves with unique specificity over time. Evidence that love is a historical relation between individuals – rather than a matter of valuing a certain cluster of properties that just happen to cohere in one's lover – is the fact that we continue to love even when the properties we cherish in the beloved begin to wane, when they lose their looks, their cheery disposition, their wit, their intelligence, and so on. This is because love is a historically developing relationship with a particular person. That is why there is something peculiar about attempting to replace one's beloved with a clone. We do not share a historic bond with the clone. We cannot, because the clone was born yesterday. The presupposition that love is a historical relationship, moreover, underwrites the distress we feel at the preceding thought-experiments involving our replacement by a replicant.

Impossible love, part II: What about Judy?

Judy Barton's relationship to Scottie is, of course, very different from Scottie's relationship to her. She knows from the get-go that she has had a past with Scottie. However, the nature of that relationship does not constitute the kind of historical bond that is essential to couple love. There are at least two initial ways of comprehending Judy Barton's history with respect to Scottie. On the one hand, she is related to him as the ersatz Mrs. Elster. On the other hand, she was related to him as the actress playing Scottie's Madeleine. There can be no historic bond between Scottie and the counterfeit Mrs. Elster, since the latter is a fictional being. Whatever relationship Scottie imagined to have been evolving between him and his Madeleine was a false one, a mirage. Theirs was not a relationship between two actual persons, because the relationship was one person shy; Scottie's Madeleine was really a cluster of properties, invented by Gavin Elster. Scottie could no more have a historic bond with her than I could make love to Moll Flanders. Moreover, *Vertigo* makes this abundantly clear by underscoring the futility, not to mention the injustice, of Scottie's attempt to transfer the properties of his Madeleine to Judy Barton.

Of course, the actual (in the world of the fiction) Judy Barton has had a relationship with Scottie, but that relationship is also problematic in at least two ways. In the first relationship, she is basically an actress playing a part. But in that role, Judy Barton could not establish a historic bond with Scottie because she was ostensibly Madeleine.

But what of the actual Judy Barton? She has had a relationship with Scottie since the time she was the phony Madeleine Elster. Yet that was not the right kind of historical bond, because it was based on a lie. Scottie and Judy were not embarked upon a mutually shared project. Hers was an agenda altogether different from his; her agenda was basically Gavin Elster's. Any sense of self that Scottie derived from the relationship that he believed he was in sundered when he became aware of the true nature of his association with Madeleine/Judy. Undoubtedly, that is why he is so furious in the bell tower at the end of the film. He behaves like an injured animal in pain. He feels as though a part of himself has been torn out of him.

Vertigo also encourages reflection on infidelity. Whereas in most relationships betrayals occur after they are up and running, the narrative

of *Vertigo* places Judy's before Scottie follows her home and their "second" romance commences. I think that this inversion of the usual order of things functions to guide us by defamiliarizing a familiar situation. It emphatically draws our attention to the harm faithlessness inflicts upon the *historical* nature of a romantic relationship.

Scottie realizes that Judy tricked him by pretending to be Mrs. Elster, but he also surmises that she was romantically unfaithful to him as well (referring to Elster, he snaps, "You were his girl, huh?!"). The historic bond that is essential to genuine love depends upon a converging history's being shared by both members of the couple. Sexual infidelity – betrayal – implies that one half of the couple is operating on a misconception concerning the ongoing nature of the relationship. And insofar as one's sense of who one is is at least partially based on a self-narrative, to discover that an integral component of that narrative is false presents a deep and often literally felt wound to one's ego.

Infidelity is not wrong simply because it is based on lying; it constitutes a harm that is wrong because it shatters one's conception of who one is by destroying the historical foundation of that conviction. That is why Scottie is so hysterical in the last moments of *Vertigo*. He hasn't just lost his Madeleine. He's lost a piece of his own self-image, the piece that was based on what he supposed was his shared history with her. That is, infidelity constitutes a harm, beyond lying, insofar as it forces the former lover to give up parts of his/her identity. Phenomenologically, it feels as though a part of oneself has been ripped out of one's body.

Scottie's love for Judy is impossible, *Vertigo* suggests, because it is rooted in the notion that the object of love is a set of properties transferrable from one vessel to another rather than a unique particular with whom one has forged a historical bond. But Judy's love for Scottie is also impossible because Judy does not realize that the historical bond that love requires must be a true one. It cannot be fictional or false or deceptive, if love is to survive.

Concluding remarks

Vertigo tells the story of love haunted by and finally destroyed by the past, and in doing so it reminds thoughtful viewers of the importance of history to the marriage of true minds. On the one hand, it suggests that the object of love cannot be – as Scottie seems to think – a cluster of

properties; those properties have to be anchored in a concrete individual with whom the lover builds a life and, in the process, a self. Love without that historical tether is impossible. If the past is not properly acknowledged, love will be destroyed, as Scottie risks destroying his relation with Judy. On the other hand, that history must be a true one, for if it is faithless, if it is rent with betrayal, love, along with part of the beloved, will dissolve. *Vertigo* is an opportunity to contemplate philosophically the nature of the historical bond that is essential to love. If we return to it again and again, it is not because we find the mystery elements so compelling, but because we are fascinated by the nature of love.

Notes

1 Interestingly, this is not the last shot in the script as it was revised on 9/12/57. (That draft of the screenplay by Alec Coppel and Samuel Taylor was converted to a PDF by www.screentalk.org.) In that version, the movie ends in Midge's apartment with Scottie staring out at the city. It seems especially fitting that the film now concludes by echoing the shot at the end of the first scene. For the film is made of repeating motifs, not only of places, events, costumes, and musical leitmotifs, but also of colors and compositions. The film is highly unified by all of this multidimensional repetition. Indeed, the film is a virtual repetition-machine. Call this unity obsessional, a mirror, perhaps, of Scottie's mentality.

2 Green is Judy/Madeleine's color, at least in the opening phases of both love stories. Green also figures in a number of compositions in Judy's apartment, including not only the scene in which she pins her hair up, but also the scene in which she argues with Scottie while sitting in profile on her bed by the window. The color composition in *Vertigo* is very, very carefully designed.

3 Trailing someone is, of course, a wonderful objective correlative for obsessional behavior.

4 Perhaps the fact that Judy/Madeleine was speaking in an affected accent (along with the patently dyed hair) should have alerted the astute, first-time viewer to the fact that she was a phony.

5 Scottie also first recognizes that Judy is wearing Carlotta's necklace by looking at her image in a mirror. Once again we see two Judys, reinforcing the film's doubling imagery. In the mirror we see Judy reflecting, in a manner of speaking, the image of "Madeleine."

6 It bears noticing that the properties Scottie wants to transfer to Judy are fairly superficial – clothes, makeup, and hairdo. But this I think is less a comment upon the depth of his desire to recreate his Madeleine than a function of the way in which these can serve as efficient, visual markers for his intention to secure a total transfer of properties. That is, these are just the most effective ways to cinematically signal Scottie's intentions.

7 See Plato's *Symposium* (1991) and, for commentary, Nussbaum (1991).

8 An anecdote of such an attempt is summarized by Grau (2004: 111–13).

9 There is a theme of ghosts that runs throughout *Vertigo* in several dimensions. In addition to Carlotta, there are what I have called the cinematic revenants of the counterfeit Madeleine. Also, as I seem to recall from my first viewing of *Vertigo* eons ago, at least initially I took the nun at the end of the film to be the ghost of the real Mrs. Elster – that is, until she stepped into the light. Moreover, this way of handling the scene visually recalls the strategy whereby the cinematic revenants step from perceptual obscurity – owing to the camera-to-subject distance, the focus, the lighting, etc. – to clarity. Call this cinematic device in this context *ghosting*; it is a recurring technique in the film, and it is meant to underscore the ways in which properties can be shared by different individuals.

10 Further authors, among others, who defend the view that love essentially involves a historical bond include Rorty (1986), Kraut (1986), Brown (1997), Grau (2004), and Kolodny (2003).

11 See Nozick (1991).

12 There is the lingering question of what we are to make of Scottie's initial love of his Madeleine in the first part of the film. In retrospect, my suspicion is that in one sense Scottie did not truly love even *his* Madeleine, in all her uniqueness, for the simple reason that there is no Madeleine to love, but only the cluster of properties invented by Gavin Elster. Further evidence that Scottie loved a cluster of properties rather than a historical person is Scottie's campaign to transfer those properties, most notably the most apparent ones, to Judy. Lastly, there is the way in which Scottie's Madeleine is treated as an artwork, specifically as an *idealization*, rather than a real person. For a discussion of Madeleine-as-an-artwork, see Carroll (2007).

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