Vertigo As Orphic Tragedy

> . . . the continuous development of art is bound up with the *Apollonian* and *Dionysian* duality—just as procreation depends on the duality of the sexes, involving perpetual strife with only periodically intervening reconciliations.
>
> Friedrich Nietzsche

> I aim to provide the public with beneficial shocks. Civilization has become so protective that we're no longer able to get our goose bumps instinctively. The only way to remove the numbness and revive our moral equilibrium is to use artificial means to bring about the shock. The best way to achieve that, it seems to me, is through a movie.
>
> Alfred Hitchcock

Of all the Greek myths, the story of Orpheus, the musician/poet of Thrace, remains one of the most pervasive in western society. One reason for this would seem to be that the myth and the religion that developed from it embrace the two extremes of Greek religion—the Dionysian and the Apollonian, extremes that still provide vital symbolism relevant to contemporary mythic behavior and, if one can believe Nietzsche, artistic creation. The Dionysian side of the Orphic tale is manifest in the hero's quest for his dead wife, Eurydice, in the underworld, and it is in this part of the myth that we see the fascination with death, as embodied in a female figure, that characterizes many recent versions of the story. The Apollonian side of the myth is inherent in a) Orpheus' loss of Eurydice by *looking* at her before he has brought her back to the surface from Hades, and b) his anti-female despondency and his preaching of the Apollonian religion (to all-male audiences) following the second loss of Eurydice. The continued singing by Orpheus' head once the poet/musician has been torn limb from limb by the female followers of Dionysus symbolically extends to both extremes. In these events, we see the Orphic desire to escape from the archetypal world of the female—and from the mortality implicit in the necessity of sexual reproduction—towards a more spiritually oriented immortality that in many ways foreshadows elements of Christian mythology. Because of its artist hero, and because of its mid-point symbolisms, the Orpheus myth has dimensions that the more linearly conceived myths lack. As one author has put it, ". . . in this particular story, mythology is considering, in the person of the poet, the power and fate of poetry or thinking or myth. In the Orpheus story, myth is looking at itself. This is the reflection of myth in its own mirror."[1]

In none of his films does Alfred Hitchcock reflect not only the artist but the mythology of artistic creation more strongly than in his 1958 *Vertigo*. Coincidentally, the film is based on a French novel, *D'Entre les morts*,[2] in which the authors specifically allude not only to the Orpheus myth (by having the hero, Roger Flavières, call the heroine "my little Eurydice" on several occasions) but also to the story of Christ and to Kipling's Orphic and quite misogynistic novel, *The Light That Failed* (1890). Although *Vertigo*'s ending differs somewhat from that of *D'Entre les morts*, most of the principal elements of the novel's narrative structure remain in the screenplay, which immediately reveals its Orphic themes: the hero, John "Scottie" Ferguson (James Stewart), a former San Francisco police detective, is asked by an old college friend, Gavin Elster (Tom Helmore), to investigate the strange behavior of his wife, Madeleine, who, he says, is possessed by the spirit of her great-grandmother, Carlotta Valdez, a Spanish woman driven to suicide after being abandoned by her rich and powerful lover. Scottie follows the woman he believes to be Madeleine (Kim Novak) and at one point saves her after she has jumped into the San Francisco Bay. Having fallen in love with her, and trying to discover the key to her obsessions and suicidal impulses, Scottie takes "Madeleine" to an old Spanish mission, San Juan Batista, she has "seen" only in a dream. There, "Madeleine" breaks away and runs up the stairs of a bell tower. Unable to follow her because of an arcophobia that had led him to resign from the police force, Scottie hears a scream and sees a body fall past the tower window.

It is now Scottie's turn to become obsessed with "someone dead." In spite of time spent in a sanatorium to be cured, he continues to be haunted by "Madeleine" and reminders of her in San Francisco. Around a year after "Madeleine's" death, Scottie discovers a woman, Judy Barton (again Kim Novak), who strongly reminds him of "Madeleine."[3] Shortly after Scottie has won Judy's confidence, the audience is shown, via a flashback and letter/voice-over sequence, that Judy had been hired by Elster to impersonate his wife. This charade had allowed Elster to kill his wife and throw her body from the top of the bell tower at San Juan Batista, while forcing the acrophobic Scottie below to be a helpless witness to this "suicide." Unaware of what the audience now knows, Scottie proceeds, with the appropriate clothing and hair-do, to transform Judy back into "Madeleine." No sooner has this restoration taken place, however, than Scottie stumbles onto Judy's secret by discovering the Carlotta Valdez necklace she had worn as Madeleine. Taking Judy/Madeleine back to the scene of the crime at San Juan Batista, Scottie finally overcomes his vertigo by forcing Judy/Madeleine to accompany him to the top of the bell tower. There, frightened by the sudden apparition of a nun, Judy/Madeleine slips from the edge and falls to her death.

The Orphic story in the film is in fact doubled: Scottie saves "Madeleine" from death by pulling her out of San Francisco (it is immediately after the parallel incident in the novel that the hero calls the heroine "Eurydice" for the first time), only to lose her at San Juan Batista for having too zealously pursued her secret. Unlike the original Orpheus, Scottie Ferguson is given a second chance when he is able to reconstruct "Madeleine" out of Judy. His beloved is taken from him again, however, and for much the same reason as the first time—not content to love Judy or even Judy/Madeleine on a sexual, human level, Scottie is compelled to "look" at her, i.e. to discover her secret and lay it bare, and in so doing loses her forever.

From this, or from a casual experiencing of the film, one might conclude that Hitchcock, in line with many modern adaptors of the Orpheus myth, intended the film as a romantic tragedy. Indeed, composer Bernard Herrmann, who did *Vertigo*'s musical score, maintained in an interview, that Charles Boyer would have been a better choice for the male lead than James Stewart![4] But part of *Vertigo*'s richness resides, as it does in most of the director's best work, in the existence of various structures that move parallel to the narrative structure while at the same time contradicting it. One thinks, for instance, of the sequence in Hitchcock's 1935 *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, where Richard Hannay (Robert Donat) has brought "Annabella Smith" (Lucie Mannheim) back to his apartment, where he prepares a meal for her. The narrative sets up Hannay as the classic "wrong man" when Miss "Smith" is knifed to death. But two elements in the visual structure set up, at the very least, the relationship between Hannay and the killing as a murder/rape fantasy on the part of the "hero." These are a) the shot of Hannay holding the knife that will kill the woman, and b) the ambiguous editing, which establishes only the most tenuous cause-and-effect between two men seen in the street, an open window, and the murder.

Vertigo's hero is just as ambivalent. As a man obsessed with a mysterious woman whom he will twice lose to death, Scottie arouses audience involvement and sympathy. But Scottie also stands as an artist-hero who, on a first level, sucks the life, à la the

husband in Poe's "The Oval Portrait," from the human being he has transformed into an artistic creation; he also, on a second level, acquires a knowledge of the mysteries of death with the light of a killing, Orphic gaze cast into the darkness of the eternal feminine. As a French critic notes, "Scottie is a light-bearer (Lucifer). Overestimating his abilities, he attempts to seize the fleeting shadow, to pierce and dissipate the Darkness (the night) once and for all, a night into which he boldly plunges and whose dangers he willingly ignores."[5] *Vertigo*'s final shot, with Scottie standing on the ledge outside the tower from which Judy/Madeleine has just fallen, does not simply show a tragic figure defeated by the death of a woman he has loved; it also shows a man who has defeated death through the quais-ritualistic sacrifice of another human being.

The battles in *Vertigo,* then, are waged on two vastly different grounds, that of the tragic hero and that of the artist-hero. As a tragic hero, Scottie is guilty of a form of hubris that leads him to reject ordinary, life-affirming love and to seek an ideal love that is connected from the outset with "someone dead." Put another way, Scottie rejects existential reality in order to live within mythic non-reality. The contrast between these two domains can often be read, in *Vertigo,* in the oppositional way that certain sequences, or blocks of sequences, are set against each other, particularly the first nine,[6] which can be described as follows:

mythic	I. TITLES (2'58")	
	II. ROOFTOP (1'38")	PRELUDE
non-mythic	III. MIDGE'S APARTMENT I (6'20")	
	IV. MEETING WITH GAVIN ELSTER I (5'33")	EXPOSITION I
mythic	V. ERNIE's I (1'39")	
	VI. FOLLOWING "MADELEINE" I (13'52")	INITIATION I
non-mythic	VII. HISTORY OF CARLOTT'A VALDEZ (5'57")	
	A. Midge's Apartment II	
	B. Argosy Bookshop[7]	EXPOSITION II
	C. Return in Car to Midge's	
	VIII. MEETING WITH GAVIN ELSTER II (2:00)	
mythic	IX. FOLLOWING "MADELEINE" II (3'36")	INITIATION II
		FIRST HEROIC/ORPHIC EXPLOIT

On the basis of action/non-action, one can see that the expository stasis of sequences III/IV and VII/VIII sets them apart from the exploration and/or action of sequences I/II, V/VI, and IX. The basic cinematic style likewise provides a point of strong contrast: sequences I/II, V/VI, and IX contain no or minimal dialogue and are almost continually supported by Bernard Herrmann's non-diegetic score. Sequences III/IV and V/VI contain extensive dialogue and either have no music or, in III, diegetic music (two brief exceptions to this are the sixteen-second, non-diegetic cue that accompanies Scottie's attack of vertigo at the end of III and the brief combination of themes that forms a non-diegetic, musical segue from VII to VIII).

Scottie's rejection of the ordinary also forms an important part of *Vertigo*'s narrative/thematic structure. This becomes immediately apparent in sequence III. Sequences I and II, with their absence of dialogue, their non-stop music, and their lack of *logical* continuity with the rest of the film, have created a kind of mythic time and space (or non-time and non-space) that stand in strong opposition to the extended verbal exposition, the ordinary setting (a San Francisco apartment) and the interrupted "classical" music of sequence III, which from the start evokes the kind of *static* mid-point the hero cannot abide: the Orpheus myth resides in the dynamics of the hero's moving from one pole to the other, and not in his stopping halfway between. It is in this sequence that Hitchcock and his scriptwriter made perhaps their most radical departure from the novel by introducing a third major character into the story, that of Margaret "Midge" Wood, Scottie's ex-fiancée, who fully embodies the ordinary and imprisonment within the world of the mother. This point has been stressed by several writers, most strongly perhaps by Robin Wood in an article entitled "Fear of Spying."[8] In the role of Midge, the bespectacled Barbara Geddes is certainly attractive enough, both physically and as a personality, to more than satisfy most men, and it is only against the physical presence of a Kim Novak that her attractiveness, at least in *Vertigo,*[9] pales. As an actress as well, Bel Geddes, while always a highly respected talent, never reached the stardom enjoyed by Kim Novak, whose rare, sensual, physical beauty and star status made her a perfect complement to the Scottie/James Stewart persona. Midge is even an artist, but one who limits herself to the practical goals of a protective culture by designing brassieres. (In sequence VII, Midge is first seen polishing shoes, while, in sequence XII, her one attempt to rise, by painting her own head onto the body of Carlotta Valdez in a copy of the latter's portrait, to the level of the artist-hero falls tragically flat.) Even in the humorous and mildly risqué (for the time) bra symbolism, Hitchcock avoids the gratuitous. For the bra as a kind of restraint is reinforced by Scottie's discomfort at having to wear a corset, apparently the result of his rooftop accident (just how he was saved is never explained). Looking forward to the removal of it the next day, Scottie exclaims, "I'll be a free man." While Midge artistically plans containment, thereby supporting, in her motherly way, the superego, Scottie thinks only of breaking away. (In his book-length interview with Hitchcock, Francois Truffaut notes, and receives the director's agreement, that Kim Novak, when first seen as Judy Barton, is not wearing a bra, which was fairly unusual at this time.[10] A close examination of the film does not seem to support this.)

The breast symbolism implied by the bra helps establish, along with several lines of dialogue and the very personality created for Midge, the character as a kind of mother/life figure who from most perspectives would be seen as positive but who becomes negative seen in the light of Scottie's hubris. The latter characteristic quickly shows up in the dialogue when Midge reminds Scottie, "You were the bright young lawyer that decided he was going to become chief of police someday." In leading Scottie away from the ordinary, this hubris will cause him to seek a woman who embodies death. Scottie's problems with Midge can also be seen from a Freudian perspective, which would certainly take note of two castration symbols, the corset and a small step-stool. Scottie reveals that he feels threatened by wearing this woman's apparel in the following lines of dialogue: "Midge, do you suppose many men wear corsets?" "More than you think," answers Midge in a classically Hitchcockian double-entendre. One is reminded of the leg cast that immobilizes the Stewart character in *Rear Window*. As for the step-stool, which Midge uses in this sequence to theoretically help Scottie "lick" his vertigo, here again Hitchcock offers a double-edged image. Midge's gesture may very well appear helpful; but the step-stool reduces to the absurd and insignificant the heights that Scottie has previously tried to conquer and will again tackle in the two climactic bell-tower sequences, with their obvious phallic implications. Here, there is a parallel with the miniscule razor Eva Marie Saint gives to Cary Grant in *North by Northwest,* a device that both helps him and belittles him. In *Vertigo,* it is also worth noting, with Robin Wood, that the cross-cutting generally allows Hitchcock to avoid showing Midge and Scottie in the same frame.

The initial Midge/Scottie sequence, then, gives the audience a strong dose of reality after the jolting unreality of the first two sequences: the dialogue is expository, the camera work unspectacular (save at the end), the editing fairly "invisible"; and while at the outset there is still music, it too is realistic, since it is diegetic music—an anodyne, minor-mode, "classical" *Sinfonia* by Johann-Christian Bach—coming from Midge's phonograph. Scottie's rejection of Midge's world includes a rejection of her music: shortly after rather piquedly telling his ex-fiancée, "Don't be so motherly. I'm not going to crack up," Scottie complains about the music, which Midge turns off. And when, following "Madeleine's fall from the tower, Midge tries to use a recording

of similar if more interesting and sophisticated, music—the second movement of the Mozart Thirty-Fourth Symphony—to draw Scottie back from the depths of nightmare and depression, Scottie does not even react.

Scottie, then, will allow himself to be drawn out of the world of the present, the known, and the ordinary into a universe bound up in the past (Carlotta Valdez), mystery, and the hispanically exotic (the latter is reinforced by Bernard Herrmann's use of a habanera motive in the music). In his Orphic attempts to bring light into the latter domain, he will set off tragedy, his punishment for which will be a sense of guilt common to both Greek mythology and Christian religion. As the stern coroner (Henry Jones) says following the inquest after the first tower scene, "It is a matter between him and his own conscience." In this sense, Scottie becomes a tragic hero, a man several cuts above the ordinary, both in James Stewart's status as a movie super-star and as a character, who, like Orestes, is pursued by the furies of guilt for a "crime" the gods led him to commit. Certainly, the presence of the gods is felt quite strongly in *Vertigo*. The first of the gods is obviously the wealthy shipping magnate, Gavin Elster, whom Scottie has initially thought to be on the skids and who, profiting from both the vertigo and the detective inclinations that pre-exist in his former acquaintance, needs only set the wheels in motion and oil them once or twice while remaining a dispassionate (and, for the most part, absent) observer. But following the inquest after the death of "Madeleine"/Madeleine, Elster bows out of the picture, telling Scottie he is going far away. At this point, it is Hitchcock who briefly takes over as both manipulator and as the prototypical artist-hero.

If this seems farfetched, it should be remembered that one of the director's distancing techniques has always been the brief appearance he makes in almost every film he has shot. Even though fleeting, Hitchcock's apparition in his own work subtly signals the presence of a force guiding every move made by every character and shaping every photographic frame in the film. A film such as *Vertigo* strengthens the artist/characters = gods/mortals analogy by actually having the actors play roles within their roles: Elster puts on an act for Scottie; Judy plays Elster's wife and then, under Scottie's control, accepts to play the role again, up to and including her own death. (In Hitchcock's next film, *North by Northwest*, role-playing reaches a dizzying apogee within the director's *oeuvre*.) Furthermore, it is just before Scottie enters Elster's office that Hitchcock makes his appearance in *Vertigo*. Elster's British accent further puts him in the domain of the English-born director (as "Madeleine," Kim Novak also affects a British accent). Elster more or less becomes, in the first half of the film, a surrogate Hitchcock directing the movements of his player/victims. This makes the character's cocksureness concerning Scottie's behavior much less outrageous than it would be in a non-mythic narrative, even though Hitchcock himself has objected to the improbability of Elster's *knowing* Scottie would not make it to the top of the tower.

The first half of the picture is shot essentially from Scottie's point of view; as soon as Elster disappears from the action, though, Hitchcock becomes much more strongly the "omniscient director." In the sanatorium, for instance, Hitchcock shows Midge, once she has left Scottie's room talking to a doctor and then leaving, a lonely figure in an abandoned corridor (this is the one point in the film when Midge gets ther own non-diegetic music; earlier in the film, the camera had stayed briefly with Midge at the end of sequence XII). Later, we are given Judy's point of view, to which are added the devices of the flashback and the letter/voice-over that further show the presence of the film director at work. Even more important, it is not long after the second half of the film is underway that Hitchcock reveals to the audience the key to the Judy/Madeleine mystery. It is in this manner, as Hitchcock has often explained, that the director is able to stress the element of suspense, thus relying on the much stronger aesthetic effect of expectation rather than surprise.[11] And the audience, having seen the work of the gods, becomes fully aware of the inevitability connected to the story-line.

Following the "revelation" scene, however, the camera again begins to mirror Scottie's subjectivity. Following through on his hubris to the hilt, Scottie accomplishes the god-like function of bringing "Madeleine" back to life—more as a work of art than as a human being, or, to be more precise, as a work of art to the second degree, since "Madeleine" never was a full human being, within the narrative context, to begin with. No sooner has he accomplished this than Judy "Madeleine" makes the fatal slip of putting on the Carlotta Valdez necklace. Indicatively, Scottie perceives this not on Judy/"Madeleine" the human being but in her reflection in the mirror (it might be recalled here that the character of Orphée in Jean Cocteau's 1950 film of the same title loses Eurydice by looking at her in the rear-view mirror of Death's automobile). And the camera work—a track-in to Scottie's face; cut to a track-in to the mirror showing the necklace worn by July/"Madeleine"; cut to a track-out from the necklace on the portrait of Carlotta Valdez, ultimately giving the audience a quick flashback of the museum scene (Bernard Herrmann's habanera also is suggested on the music track); dissolve back to a close-up of Scottie's face—perfectly communicates the drama inherent in the Orphic gaze while also bringing back Scottie's subjectivity and recalling his vertigo, which is set off by the hero's suspension not only between high and low (camera work), between life and death (narrative structure), but also between past and present (editing). Juxtaposed as a mirror image with the recalled portrait of the long-dead Carlotta Valdez, Judy/"Madeleine" now joins Carlotta as a portrait of "someone dead."

"Madeleine," then, is now dead for Scottie: dead because she has already been murdered, dead because she has been revealed as a veneer, a work of art, dead because she has joined Carlotta Valdez in the past. Scottie/Orpheus' tragedy is apparently over. Why, then, does *Vertigo* continue and return a second time to San Juan Batista? The answer is that the tragedy is only half the picture at best. For if Scottie can be seen as the victim of god-like machinations, he also, in quite another vein, represents the third in a line of men—following Carlotta Valdez's lover (as defined in the story told by Pop Leibel in sequence VII) and Gavin Elster—who were able to exercise the power of life and death through the sacrifice of three women—Carlotta, Madeleine Elster, and Judy Barton. Within this perspective, Scottie aligns himself with the male-dominated forces of the Apollonian in an ongoing struggle with the female-dominated forces of the Dionysian. Each of the Apollonion combatants implicit or explicit in *Vertigo*'s narrative will wield his power in a different way: Carlotta Valdez's lover by exercising a kind of frontier "power and freedom," Gavin Elster through the perfect murder, and Scottie Ferguson via art. Each will be victorious.

Even in *Vertigo*'s title sequence (I), ingeniously designed by Saul Bass (who also did the titles for *North by Northwest* and *Psycho*), the mask-like appearance of the face of a woman with no diegetic relationship to the film acts as a visual generator for *Vertigo*'s definition of the artist-hero's Apollonioan goal, namely to take the living, sexual female and transform her into a cold, dead *objet d' art*. As in Greek tragedy, this actually begins in a distanced, Apollonion, formalistic mirroring of Dionysian ritual. For, in the title sequence's cinematic poetry, the woman is visually dismembered: not only do we see only her head, we see only half of her face, then the lips, then the eyes (which, by the way, look in each direction), and then a single eye; she is finally transformed with a blood-red monochrome (towards the end of the film, as Judy Barton is being transformed at the beauty parlor, a similar dismemberment takes place). We are then allowed to penetrate, via the woman's eye, into the mysteries of darkness, out of which emerge a series of perfectly geometrical figures that are the visual essence of Apollonian order and abstraction. Behind all of this, Bernard Herrmann's musical score, if not stereotypically ritualistic, reflects, in its series of non-resolving, broken seventh-chords, the darkness,[12] while the titles inform us of the artists who have created the audio-visual cosmos we are about to experience. At the end of the title sequence, the woman's face returns to re-establish the presence of the

eternal feminine in a manner that foreshadows Robbe-Grillet's 1963 *L'Immortelle*, a film that has a remarkable number of points in common with *Vertigo*, not the least of which is its doubled Orphic structure.

The abstraction of *Vertigo*'s "overture" resolves only partially into the concrete in the post-title sequence. Departing from the novel's initial action, which has Flavières, a lawyer, being hired by his friend to follow "Madeleine," the lawyer's wife, Hitchcock establishes Stewart as a man who, failing in his attempt to establish *order*, hangs suspended between the heights and the depths, between life and death, while another pays the price for his gropings towards the light. After the opening shot, which shows a pair of hands grabbing hold of a horizontal bar, followed by a rack-focus that brings a San Francisco panorama into perspective, a man who is apparently a lawbreaker is seen being chased across the rooftops by a police officer in uniform and a plain-clothed James Stewart. Stewart slips and is left hanging onto a gutter high over the streets below. Unable to help himself because of an attack of vertigo, Stewart is assisted by the police officer, who suddenly loses his grip and falls, screaming, to his death. (A close examination of this sequence reveals all sorts of impossibilities, not the least of which is that the rooftop offers nothing whatsoever to grasp onto.) The entire Orphic ambivalency is abstracted in the hero's acrophobia, which Hitchcock turns into a cinematic motif. This is accomplished first of all in the use of a vertical track-out/zoom-in shot, which gives the feeling of two opposite motions experienced simultaneously, and which somewhat mirrors the more dreamy in/out motion of the title sequence's whorls. Complementing the visual depiction of the acrophobia motif are dissonant chords, alternating high and low, and harp glissandi on the music track. Hitchcock definitely makes the association, noted by Robin Wood,[13] between acrophobia—the desire to fall versus the dread of falling—and the death wish—the love of death versus the dread of death—that will become quite apparent in Scottie's relationship with "Madeleine."

The "Rooftop" sequence offers the possibility of at least four different readings, each of which interacts and overlaps with the others. On the most obvious level, Hitchcock uses the sequence to visually and viscerally set up the tragic theme of Scottie's guilt, a guilt from which he tries to escape only to have it re-created twice more under similar circumstances involving a falling body and a scream (in Robbe-Grillet's *L'Immortelle*, a scream likewise punctuates each of the three "accidents," with the opening accident, experienced only as a lateral tracking shot and sound, serving an encapsulating function that parallels that of the "Rooftop" sequence in *Vertigo*). A second, more Oedipal level is well described by Wood in "Fear of Spying"; speaking of the three characters and their interconnection, Wood notes that

> They can be taken to represent the fundamental Freudian triumvirate id-ego-superego. The id is associated with unrestrained libido, pursuit of pleasure, which is—in our surplus-repressive culture—commonly associated with criminality. The superego is conscience, the law, the internalized authority of the father—our psychic police officer in fact. The ego is the self, within which the struggle for dominance between the id and the superego is played out. At the opening of *Vertigo*, then, the symbolic father is killed and the "son," if not the actual agent of his death, is responsible for it. The id escapes to wander freely in the darkness, reflected—at the end of the film—in the fact that the murderer, Gavin Elster, is never caught. (p. 32-33).

A third level has more initiatory implications: trying to enter, as an adult male, the world of the father, the world of (law and) order, the world of the superego, Scottie fails precisely because he is still too strongly drawn back towards the world of the mother, where he will end up (Lord knows how) in the next sequence. In other words, the "Rooftop" sequence stands as an initiation manqué; yet Scottie, in telling Midge he knows he can "lick" his vertigo, is all ready to try again: sequence IV (Scottie/Elster I) will start him out on a much more cinematically elaborated second attempt, which will also be manqué, since it is "Madeleine"/Eurydice who precedes Scottie/Orpheus in the ascent, which negates Scottie's Orphic destiny. Contrary to her own, play-acted prediction ("I know that when I walk into the darkness, then I'll die"), it is by rising towards the light that the Madeleine incarnated by Judy Barton is lost (temporarily) to Scottie, while the murder of the "real" Madeleine (paradoxically never seen as a character in either the movie or the novel) is rendered "perfect." After the rooftop sequence, the initiation here amounts to a kind of second rehearsal, with Scottie a surrogate Elster and Judy a surrogate Madeleine (which creates a symbolic bond of marriage between this Orpheus and this Eurydice). Scottie must start yet once again from the bottom.

Finally, a fourth, Orphic level allows us to look at Scottie as a character forever "wandering" between the Apollonian and the Dionysian while seeking his destiny, which will not be found as a member of the collective superego (the police force) or as a "private" detective working for a single individual but as the solo artist-hero working for himself—by transforming Judy Barton into "Madeleine," Scottie will remarkably mirror precisely what Hitchcock did with his famous "blondes." Seen within this perspective, *Vertigo*'s Orphism mirrors the sexism inherent in the patriarchal, American culture. And thus, the police officer in the "Rooftop" sequence can also be seen to stand as just the opposite of a father figure: being uniformed, he is inferior in status to Scottie, who is in plain clothes; being inferior, he is just as sacrificeable as the women, with whom he shares the same audio-visual fate.

In light of the above, the first sequence between Scottie and Elster (IV) likewise offers more than one perspective. As Wood notes, this "sequence . . . is also built on alternation patterns, but the series are interrupted much more frequently by two-shots. The main purpose of these is to underline—with the additional emphasis of a low angle—Elster's growing domination of Scottie as he imposes his story on him. Scottie sits, Elster stands; when Scottie rises, Elster moves to the room's higher level, dominating even in long shot" ("Fear of Spying," p. 34). But the very fact that Scottie and Elster are often seen in the same frame while Scottie and Midge rarely are emphasizes the male orientation of both the *ethos* and the *mythos* in which Scottie is involved. This is even more apparent in the second (and last) pre-tower meeting between Elster and Scottie (sequence VIII), which seems to take place in a male-only club. As Elster compliments Scottie on a job well done, we have a long (1'14") two-shot in which the men, both seated, appear exactly the same height. A nearly perfect symmetry likewise characterizes the shot: two identical glasses sit on a table between them, while in the background, two other men can be seen between two pillars. The second half of the sequence, which begins as the conversation becomes dramatic ("She never heard of Carlotta Valdez"), offers a totally different form of symmetry that is created by the editing. In some forty-six seconds, Hitchcock cross-cuts nine times between over-Scottie's-shoulder shots of Elster and over-Elster's-shoulder shots of Scottie, ending, in a tenth shot, with a solo shot of Scottie taking a drink ("Boy, I *need* this!") without ever returning to the two-shot. In almost every cinematic way, Scottie and Elster are set up not only as equals but as two sides of the same male-oriented, order-pervasive coin. Scottie is now ready to save "Madeleine" from the depths (San Francisco Bay) and to make a second attempt to carry his knowledge back to the heights. For Scottie will *know* death again, not only in the sense of having plunged into its waters but also, if one can believe the necrophiliac sub-text given to *Vertigo*, by Hitchcock and others,[14] in the Biblical sense of the word.

In order to accomplish the final stage of his initiation and/or ritual, Scottie must rise to a level that is not only more purely Orphic but, ultimately, Narcissistic. In her role as a woman haunted by a figure from the past, "Madeleine is also the mirror image of Scottie himself, as is La Mort for Orphée in the Cocteau film. In Jungian terminology, these two females are anima figures vis-à-vis the respective heroes. As Douchet puts it, Scottie's "love for Madeleine is necessarily a lie, since it is essentially Narcissistic. Our hero is attracted only by the reflection she gives him of his own self" (p. 26). Interestingly, it is only in the final part of the film that Scottie is seen

reflected in a mirror. This occurs in a dramatic shot at the dress-shop (sequence XIX), in which both Scottie and Judy are doubled in a modeling mirror. This doubling, incomplete vis-à-vis the policeman, allows Scottie, via the phoney Madeleine's faked suicide, to experience his own death, which is very much the principal function of initiation rites. But if Midge is a "life mother," Judy/"Madeleine" must be seen as a "death mother" (the green she wears when first seen in the second half of the film supports this) from whom Scottie must also free himself (in the Cocteau film, Death is not just *la* Mort but *ma* Mort—my death—which in French sounds very close to *maman).*

It is in the final part of the film that Scottie's hubris fully defines itself. In his total despondency at the loss of "Madeleine," Scotty mirrors Orpheus who, once having lost Eurydice to Hades, turns to the Apollonian religion, with its goal of a "fixed and changeless immortality which Olympian theology ascsribed to its gods."[15] So thoroughly does Scottie now reject existential reality that he refuses to accept its major premise, that of mortality. Where Orpheus had his music, Scottie brings "Madeleine" back to life like a stage or film director, as has been suggested. But not only is "Madeleine"/Eurydice brought back from death via art, she becomes a work of art, a transformation that is made most dramatic when the "completed" Madeleine steps out of her bathroom surrounded by a green haze. This is her destiny, just as it is Scottie's to become the artist, a destiny made evident as of the very first time we see "Madeleine" (sequence V). In this first encounter, "Madeleine" is at first aestheticized not by Scottie's gaze but the oftnoted, lyrical arc and track-in, accompanied by Bernard Herrmann's slow, sad waltz; this is Hitchcock's gaze, not Scottie's. For the latter has been leaning back to look at "Madeleine," and when, after a rather confusing cut,we get his point of view, we see "Madeleine" framed like a painting in a doorway. Both Hitchcock's and Scottie's points of view merge as "Madeleine," leaving the restaurant, pauses for a close-up profile shot as Hitchcock raises and then lowers the lights on the background wallpaper.

Once re-introduced to Scottie, Judy/"Madeleine" becomes the strangely cyclical double of the Scottie of part one of *Vertigo*—she is in love with a person haunted by the death of somebody from the past ("Madeleine") while at the same time *being* that person from the past who herself has been in love with a man (Scottie) haunted by another being (the police officer) further from the past. Having freed himself from the life-mother world of Midge, and having freed himself from the death-mother world of "Madeleine" both by freezing her as a work of art and by "looking" at her, Scottie continues to move simultaneously in two parallel directions. As an initiate, he must free himself from the humiliation of the initiation by accomplishing on his own an exploit similar to Elster's. We now know that "Madeleine" is his by the music, which, instead of repeating the "Rooftop" music, as has the first tower sequence, now offers various parts of the love theme. We also see a bit of explicit rivalry when, alluding to Elster, Scottie tells Judy/"Madeleine,, during the final tower scene, "He made you over, just like I made you over, only better." The "only better" attitude can be erased only by Scottie's carrying the act to the same point Elster had carried it. But by having this ordeal undergone at the same place as the original ordeal. San Juan Batista, and one that strongly evokes religious ceremony, Hitchcock considerably heightens the ritualistic implications of Scottie's final act, which, instead of simply allowing him to attain "manhood" by "knowing" a woman, sets him within the framework of a series of male upholders of the patriarchal culture. At the end *leading* Judy/"Madeleine" up the final flight of stairs, Scottie completely becomes the Orphic hero by attaining a symbolic, god-like immortality, living his own death (that of his double) while not dying himself, so that Judy/"Madeleine's" demise becomes a sort of sacrificial murder. In fact, at this final moment, Scottie, Judy and the audience actually "see" death in the unsettling apparition of the nun, which leads Judy to what can be seen as suicide. (The novel considerably weakens the final scene by having it set in a Marseilles hotel room where Flavières actually murders Renèe Sourange, who had played Madeleine, by strangling her.) This certainly corresponds with one of the possible interpretations of Orpheus' loss of Eurydice and is fully in keeping with the preaching of sacrificial murder often attributed to the post-Eurydice behavior of Orpheus. Scottie is now free from everything, including his own death. The woman's head seen in the title sequence becomes his head which, like Orpheus' will continue to sing even after the hero has been torn limb from limb by the Maenads.

If, then, the final part of the Orpheus myth suggests the aspiration towards the Apollonian and towards an immortality tied in with a linearly conceived temporality and ultimate transcendence unrelated to the earth state, the Eurydice part of the Orpheus myth implies the necessity of a communion with an earth-oriented life-death cyclism in which male-female sexuality plays a key role (with this in mind, the use of the extremely sensuous Kim Novak, who was a second choice after Vera Miles, seems a particularly fortunate accident for *Vertigo*). The overwhelming equivocacy of the Orpheus myth stems from the murder, symbolic or otherwise, of the female double, allowing the Orphic hero a communication with a sex(life)/death totality that he assimilates with himself, thereby creating the illusion of an individualized, god-like transcendence and oneness that can somehow remain earthbound. Because it loses strength with the passage of time, the illusion needs periodic renewal, and this is particularly stressed in *Vertigo*'s cyclical structure, which leaves Scottie in the same position at the end of the film that he occupied in the beginning. Because Orpheus is a "god who remembers Dionysus and looks forward to Christ,"[16] his myth allows for the stressing of either side. It takes the entire film for Scottie to break free of the female-based darkness of the title sequence in order to reach the god-like, male-oriented isolation of the film's final shot. If mythic cycles continue, re-integration with the female will again become necessary, thus bringing together in an ongoing ritual the Hitchcockian *immortal* with the Robbe-Grilletian *immortelle*. Yet, unlike Robbe-Grillet, whose cyclicity leaves *L'Immortelle* in a very open-ended state, Hitchcock in *Vertigo* seems to suggest, as does Aeschylus in *The Eumenides,* that, if the Apollonain world of the father and the Dionysian world of the mother are on nearly equal footing, the patriarchal culture for which he speaks gives just the slighest edge to Apollo, as does Athena in *The Eumenides*.

Starting, as he has in almost all his films, with a work of popular fiction, Hitchcock was able, in *Vertigo,* to immediately draw his audiences into the drama by mystifying them and shocking them. Then, creating a hero of tragic dimensions, Hitchcock raised *Vertigo* to a level with which occidental audiences can rapidly identify, both because of the very character of the hero and because of the ethical guilt inherent in his suffering. Another level is suggested by Robin Wood's Freudian interpretation of *Vertigo* as a "dramatization of fundamental sexual anxieties." Wood's reading of *Vertigo* does not exclude, however, the mythic perspective so basic to the film. Mircea Eliade has noted that "sexuality never has been 'pure'" and that "everywhere and always it is a polyvalent function whose primary and perhaps supreme valency is the cosmological function: so that to translate a psychic situation into sexual terms is by no means to belittle it; for, except in the modern world, sexuality has everywhere and always been a hierophany, and the sexual act an integral action (therefore also a means to knowledge)."[17] Although a manifestation of the "modern world," *Vertigo* transforms the sexual content expressed on diverse levels of the cinematic language into hierophantic content. By allowing the audience to feel the presence of Scottie as an isolated, godlike (and rather dangerous, in the manner of quite a number of Hitchcock's male leads) egotist thriving on the sacrifice of human lives in order to guarantee the illusion of his own immortality, Hitchcock maintains, through the equivocal good-evil nature of his hero, the essential multivalency of mythic symbolism, a multivalency that can be felt on almost every level of the cinematic style as well. *Vertigo*'s Orphic ambiguities seem particularly appropriate to Hitchcock's Roman Catholic religion,

which, with its rituals and cult of the Virgin, incorporates much more of the Dionysian than most other forms of Christianity.[18] In many ways, *Vertigo* is the director's sexual, artistic, and metaphysical testament while also remaining sold, cathartic entertainment. While showing the role of the Orphic/artist-hero, *Vertigo* is also a meditation on the two poles towards which mythic man continually aspires while remaining on a mid-point tightrope, the principal dangers of which are stasis and fall.

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NOTES

1 Elizabeth Sewell, *The Orphic Voice, Poetry and Natural History* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961), pp. 40-41.

2 *D'entre les morts* (literally "Amongst the Dead"), is by Pierre Boileau and Thomas Narcejac (Paris: Denoël, 1956), who have had a remarkable number of their novels turned into films, including Clouzot's 1955 *Les Diaboliques*. *D'entre les morts*, later retitled *Sueurs froides*, after the initial French title for *Vertigo*, in its paperback reissue (Paris: Collection Folio), appeared in a translation by Geoffrey Sainsbury under the title of *The Living and the Dead* (London: Hutchinson, 1956). The Boileau/Narcejac team apparently wrote the novel with Hitchcock in mind, after the latter was unsuccessful in his attempts to acquire the rights to *Les Diaboliques*.

3 In a plot twist wholly characteristic of the intra-aesthetic French, Boileau and Narcejac have Flavières rediscover Madeleine by catching a fleeting glimpse of her in a movie newsreel shown in a Paris theater. Leaving the hell of a German-occupied Paris, Flavières goes to the sunny climes of Marseilles in his attempt to retrieve Madeleine.

4 See my "An Interview with Bernard Herrmann (1911-1975)," *High Fidelity*, 26, No. 9 (1976), 64-67.

5 Jean Douchet, *Alfred Hitchcock*, 1'Herne Cinéma Series, No. 1 (Paris: Editions de l'Herne, 1967), 16, my translation.

6 As is often the case in the cinema, *Vertigo* defies, at certain points, a clear-cut delineation of its sequences. In addition to the nine sequences suggested in the main text above, I would propose the following as the remainder of *Vertigo*'s sequences: X. PORTRAIT OF MIDGE (3'05"); XIII. SAN JUAN BATISTA I (9'42"); XIV. INQUEST (5'15") XV. NIGHTMARE (1'54"); XVI. SANATORIUM (3'37"); XVII. LOOKING FOR MADELEINE AND REDISCOVERY (13'19"); XVIII. NEW LOVE (3'07"); XIX. TRANSFORMATION (6'37"); XX. RE-EMERGENCE OF MADELEINE (5'24"); XXI. REVELATION AND SAN JUAN BATISTA II (1)'44"). Titles are mine and timings are approximate.

7 Besides its broader mythic overtones, the name "Argosy" becomes doubly appropriate when one recalls that Orpheus, in later versions of the Jason myth, is supposed to have been a member of the crew.

8 *American Film*, 9, No. 2 (1983), 28-35.

9 In his "Films in Focus" column, Andrew Sarris, in a piece entitled "Hitchcock's Split Vision" (*The Village Voice*, 3 January 1984, p. 47), recalls, in opposition to this vision of Bel Geddes, "the slip-clad tigress played by Bel Geddes in the original New York stage production of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*."

10 See *Hitchcock*, rev. ed. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984), p. 248.

11 Leonard B. Meyer, in his *Emotion and Meaning in Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956), stresses "active expectation," rather than surprise, as a key element of musical aesthetics (see p. 29). The musical structure of Hitchcock's films, which deserves a separate study, certainly adds to their mythic quality.

12 For a more detailed discussion of the relationship of Herrmann's music to Hitchcock's films, see my "Herrmann, Hitchcock, and the Music of the Irrational," *Cinema Journal*, 21, No. 2 (1982), 14-49; rev. rpt. in *Film Theory and Criticism*, 3rd ed., ed. Gerald Mast and Marshall Cohen (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 618-49.

13 See *Hitchcock's Films* (London/New York: A Zwemmer Ltd./ A. S. Barnes and Co., 1965), p. 74.

14 See Truffaut's *Hitchcock*, p. 245.

15 F. M. Cornford, *From Religion to Philosophy, A Study in the Origins of Western Speculation* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1957), p. 185.

16 Joseph L. Henderson, "Ancient Myths and Modern Man," in *Man and His Symbols*, ed. Carl G. Jung (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1964), p. 145.

17 *Images and Symbols, Studies in Religious Symbolism*, trans. Philip Mairet (New York: Sheed and Ward/Search, 1969), p. 14.

18 It is interesting that in Italy, where the Roman Catholic cult of the Virgin is perhaps the strongest, the title given to *Vertigo*, *la Donna che visse due volte* (*The Lady Who Lived Twice*), stresses the female element.