

Femininity By Design

Vertigo

Masochism is characterized as a species of vertigo, vertigo not before a precipice of rock and earth but before the abyss of the Other's subjectivity.

Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*

In criticism of *Vertigo* (1958), as in that of *Rear Window*, one repeatedly encounters the assertion that "the spectator constructed by the film is clearly male."¹ My analyses of Hitchcock have in part been meant to demonstrate that this male spectator is as much "deconstructed" as constructed by the films, which reveal a fascination with femininity that throws masculine identity into question and crisis. This fascination opens a space for the female spectator of the films, providing for a more complicated relation to the texts than has generally been allowed in contemporary film criticism. As I hope to have made clear by now, the questions relating to spectatorship and identification, despite the difficult theoretical language in which they are often couched, have often been posed too simply. Take, for example, Mulvey's contention that *Vertigo*, like all narrative films, is "cut to the measure of male desire" because it is from the male point of view: "In *Vertigo*, subjective camera predominates. Apart from one flashback from Judy's point of view, the narrative is woven around what Scottie sees or fails to see."² What Mulvey dismisses as an aberration, an exceptional instance that proves the rule (of Hollywood cinema as male cinema), has been seen by at least one critic—quite rightly, I think—as a privileged moment, the flashback producing "a spectator position painfully split between Scotty and Judy for the rest of the film."³ Thus identification is, in the words of Robin Wood, "severely disturbed, made problematic."⁴ My analysis will suggest, however, that identification is "severely disturbed" long before this moment and that the film may indeed be taken as a kind of "limit text" in its treatment of the problematics of identification first introduced in the film *Rebecca*.⁵

Vertigo begins with the credits shot over an extreme closeup of a



9. Alicia and Devlin.

If Alicia appears to be the perfect masochist, Devlin appears to be the perfect sadist—stern, remote, and punishing.

dream she has had of a Spanish mission where she believes she lived as a child, he joyfully tells her that her dream has a basis in reality. The next day he takes her to the mission in order to convince her that she has been to the place before. She, however, becomes distraught and runs into the tower. He tries to follow her up the stairs, but his vertigo prevents him from reaching her before she falls.

After an inquest, which reaches a verdict of suicide, Scottie is placed in an asylum where Midge attempts to get him to respond by playing Mozart records, but Scottie is inconsolable. Later we see him walking the streets, becoming upset when he sees Madeleine's car, which has been sold, and mistaking various women for Madeleine. Then he spots a woman who looks uncannily like Madeleine and follows her to her hotel. At first the woman is annoyed at being importuned by a stranger, but then she relents and allows him to come inside her room, where she shows him her identity cards to persuade him that she really is Judy Barton from Salina, Kansas, rather than the woman he seems to be mistaking her for. When he leaves, the camera for the first time deserts Scottie and stays with the woman. A flashback and a letter Judy writes and then tears up tell the whole story: Scottie was part of Gavin Elster's plan to murder his wife, Madeleine. Elster had made up Judy, his mistress, to look like his wife, in order to get Scottie to witness Madeleine's "suicide." Knowing that Scottie's vertigo would prevent him from reaching the top of the mission tower Elster had waited that day for Judy to ascend the stairs and then had flung his own wife from the roof.

Out of love for Scottie Judy decides not to run away, but to stay and try to make him love her for herself. He, however, becomes obsessed with recreating Madeleine, and he dresses Judy in the same clothes and shoes Madeleine had worn and even has her hair dyed and restyled. One night at her hotel room while they are preparing to go out for dinner, Judy puts on the necklace worn by Carlotta in the portrait and Scottie suddenly understands everything. He forces Judy to go back with him to the mission and to climb the stairs while he relates the events of Madeleine's death. Cured at last of his vertigo, he makes it to the top and the panic-stricken Judy tries to convince him that they can still go on together. As they begin to embrace, a dark shape suddenly looms up at the top of the stairs and Judy screams at this apparition—which turns out to be a nun—and falls from the tower. The last shot of the film shows Scottie emerge from the arched door of the tower onto the roof as he looks blankly downward, arms slightly extended.

If in *Rear Window*, the hero continually expresses a masculine contempt for the feminine world of fashion (while the film itself exhibits and elicits a near-obsessional interest in what Grace Kelly is wearing), this is

woman's face; spiral shaped figures emerge from her eye and form themselves into the names of the credits, and then the camera moves directly into the eye as the spirals continue to shape themselves into words. At the end of the sequence the camera returns to the eye and the final credit emerges from it: "Directed by Alfred Hitchcock." Immediately we are placed into a state of anxiety: a man is being chased across some roof tops in San Francisco by two men, one in police uniform and the other—the Jimmy Stewart character, Scottie Ferguson—in plain clothes. In a leap from one building to another, Scottie loses his footing and winds up hanging precariously from the edge. The man in uniform abandons his pursuit to help Scottie but slips and falls; the sequence ends with Scottie clinging for his life to the gutter of the roof.

After the fade, Scottie is shown in the apartment of Midge (Barbara Bel Geddes), a woman to whom he was once briefly engaged. One of the more benign of Hitchcock's many bespectacled female characters, Midge is a "motherly" type, as the film continually emphasizes, too prosaic for Scottie's romantic imagination. Scottie explains that he has quit the police force because he is suffering from vertigo as a result of his recent traumatic experience. He says he has received a message from an old schoolmate of theirs, Gavin Elster (Tom Helmore), who, when Scottie visits him, says that he wants Scottie to follow his wife in order to find out why she has been behaving peculiarly. Scottie at first resists the idea of doing detective work, but soon finds himself lured into it by the mystery of Elster's beautiful wife, Madeleine (Kim Novak), with whom he rapidly becomes obsessed. In his investigation of the woman, he follows her around San Francisco and learns that she appears to be "possessed" by an ancestor from the past, Carlotta Valdez, whose portrait hangs in the art gallery in the Palace of the Legion of Honor. In order to find out more about this mysterious figure, Scottie asks Midge to take him to Pop Liebl (Konstantine Shayne), a bookstore owner conversant with San Francisco lore. According to Pop Liebl, Carlotta Valdez was the beautiful mistress of a wealthy and influential man, who at length wearied of her and "threw her away," keeping their child. "A man could do that in those days," says Pop Liebl reflectively. "They had the power, and the freedom." The woman pined away for her lost child, becoming first "the sad Carlotta," and then at length "the mad Carlotta," stopping strangers in the street to ask, "Have you seen my child?" and eventually committing suicide.

One day, in an apparent suicide attempt, Madeleine jumps into the bay, and Scottie rescues her, brings her to his home, and puts her into his bed. Soon after, they go "wandering" together, and Scottie learns of Madeleine's hallucinations of death, her vision of walking down a long corridor that ends with the sight of an open grave. He becomes desperate to solve the mystery, and when she visits him one night to tell of a recurring

hardly the case with *Vertigo's* hero, Scottie.⁶ In attempting to re-create Judy as Madeleine, Scottie displays the most minute knowledge of women's clothing, to the point where the saleswoman twice remarks on how well the gentleman knows what he wants. To reinvoke the metaphor central to my analysis of *Rear Window*, the female character, Madeleine/Judy, is like a living doll whom the hero strips and changes and makes over according to his ideal image.

Indeed, it might be said that the film's preoccupation with female clothing borders on the perverse. Midge's job as a designer in the female "underwear business" has gone largely unremarked in criticism of *Vertigo*, perhaps because it is felt to be unworthy of the film's great theme of love and death, a theme which places it in the tradition of *Tristan and Isolde*. (In fact, critics tend to slight all those parodic elements of the film which work against the seriousness of the "love theme," and in this they reveal themselves to be like Scottie, who rejects Midge's demystificatory act of painting her own face into the Carlotta portrait as "not funny.") In the early scene in Midge's apartment she is shown sketching a brassiere that is prominently suspended in the air from wires. Scottie is attempting to balance a cane in his palm, and as it falls he utters an exclamation of pain and then speaks his first line in the film: "It's this darned corset—it binds." Midge replies, "No three-way stretch? How very unchic." From the outset, then, with his failure to perform his proper role in relation to the Symbolic order and the law, Scottie is placed in the same position of enforced passivity as L.B. Jeffries, a position that the film explicitly links to femininity and associates with unfreedom: "Midge," Scottie asks a moment later, "do you suppose many men wear corsets?" He is elated because tomorrow is "the big day" when "the corset comes off" and he will be a "free man."

Shortly thereafter he spots the brassiere, walks up to it and points to it with his cane. "What's this doohickey?" he asks, and Midge answers, "It's a brassiere; you know about such things, you're a big boy now." And she proceeds to describe it as the latest thing in "revolutionary uplift," explaining that it was designed by an aircraft engineer down the peninsula, who built it on the "principle of the cantilever bridge." Now, given the prominence in the film's mise-en-scène of high places—the Golden Gate Bridge, for example—and given the association of these places with Scottie's vertigo,⁷ it seems clear that the film is humorously linking his condition to femininity, a relation that later sequences will treat with deadly seriousness. (An association between femaleness and fear of heights may also be found in *North by Northwest* [1959]. Roger O. Thornhill [Cary Grant] claims that Eve [Eva Marie Saint] uses sex "like some people use a flyswatter," and throughout the film we see him performing a human fly act, hanging over precipices, scaling walls, and clinging, as it were, to nothing

as he attempts to gain possession of the woman, who is mistress to the villain.)

It is as if at this early moment in *Vertigo*, the film is humorously suggesting that femininity in our culture is largely a male construct, a male "design," and that this femininity is in fact a matter of external trappings, of roles and masquerade, without essence. This is an idea that the film will subsequently evoke with horror. For if woman, who is posited as she whom man must know and possess in order to guarantee his truth and his identity, does not exist, then in some important sense he does not exist either, but rather is faced with the possibility of his own nothingness—the nothingness, for example, that is at the heart of Roger O. Thornhill's identity ("What does the 'O' stand for?" Eve asks, and he answers, "Nothing"). In this respect, it is possible to see the film's great theme of romantic love as something of a ruse, a red herring—and Hitchcock, of course, was master of the red herring. Hélène Cixous writes, "the spirit of male/female relationships . . . isn't normally revealed, because what is normally revealed is actually a decoy . . . all those words about love, etc. All that is always just a cover for hatred nourished by the fear of death: woman, for man, is death."⁸ Certainly these words have a strong resonance in relation to *Vertigo*, since the source of the man's fascination with the woman is her own fascination with death, with the gaping abyss, which she hallucinates as her open grave and which is imaged continually in the film in its many arch-shaped forms of church, museum, cemetery, mission.

But for this moment at least, the film is lighthearted; and the "hatred nourished by fear" will be suppressed until later in the film. Until that point the film will only be concerned to arouse in us as spectators a curiosity and desire for the woman as idealized object of romantic love. When Scottie goes to see Gavin Elster, a shipbuilding magnate from the east, Elster articulates a longing for the past which will eventually be Scottie's own, and he speaks of the old San Francisco as a place where men had "freedom" and "power," terms that Pop Liebl will later echo. As in *Marnie*, with which *Vertigo* in some ways invites comparison, the film first presents the woman as object in a dialogue between men, creating the triangle on which desire so frequently depends. Then, as in *Marnie*, the camera itself takes over the enunciation: in Ernie's Restaurant it first shows Scottie sitting at a bar and then detaches itself from his searching gaze to conduct its own search for the woman through the restaurant.⁹ Finally, it comes to rest in a long shot of a woman seated with Elster at a table, with her back to the camera. Romantic music emerges slowly on the soundtrack, and the camera moves slightly forward. It cuts back to Scottie looking and then to a point of view shot of Madeleine, who gets up from her chair and walks into a closeup shot of her profile. Only much later will we be able to see her entire face and only at that time will we get to hear her speak;

for much of the first part of the film she will be the mute, only half-seen object of man's romantic quest: the eternal feminine.

When Scottie starts to follow Madeleine in her car, she leads him in a downward spiral—a typical trajectory of Hitchcock heroines—to a back alley, gets out of her car and disappears into a building. Scottie follows her through a dark back room, with the camera insistently wedding our subjectivity to his through point of view shots. Then the door is slowly opened in a very striking point of view shot, the romantic strains of the love theme again come on the soundtrack, and a long shot reveals Madeleine standing with her back to the camera amidst an array of flowers and bathed in soft light. The mise-en-scène at once conveys the woman's ideality and links her to death, the flowers adding a distinctly funereal touch. Madeleine turns around and comes toward the camera, and with the cut we expect the reverse shot to show that, as is usual in classical cinema, the man is in visual possession of the woman. Quite startlingly, however, it turns out that the door has a mirror attached to it, so this shot shows both Scottie, as he looks at Madeleine, and Madeleine's mirror image. Donald Spoto says of this shot, "by implication he (and we) may be seen as her reflection."¹⁰ Spoto, however, does not pause to note the extraordinary significance of this observation, which suggests that identification is "disturbed, made problematic" at the very outset of Scottie's investigation—just as we saw his identity as a man thrown into doubt with his very first words. The shot is in many ways prophetic: despite all his attempts to gain control over Madeleine, Scottie will find himself repeatedly thrown back into an identification, a mirroring relationship, with her and her desires, will be unable to master the woman the way Gavin Elster and Carlotta's paramour are able to do.

It is as if he were continually confronted with the fact that woman's uncanny otherness has some relation to himself, that he resembles her in ways intolerable to contemplate—intolerable because this resemblance throws into question his own fullness of being. Sarah Kofman puts it this way: "men's fascination with [the] eternal feminine is nothing but fascination with their own double, and the feeling of uncanniness, *Unheimlichkeit*, that men experience is the same as what one feels in the face of any double, any ghost, in the face of the abrupt reappearance of what one thought had been overcome or lost forever."¹¹ These words poetically capture the spirit of *Vertigo*, the way in which Woman keeps uncannily returning, keeps reminding man of what he in turn keeps trying to overcome, to master. And it captures as well the "ghostliness" of the figure of woman in *Vertigo* (Hitchcock's famous discussion of the theme of necrophilia notwithstanding), as she is photographed through diffusion filters, shot in soft light, dressed in white coat, and accompanied by haunting music on the soundtrack.

The uncanniness of woman for man is also rendered in a lengthy, dreamlike sequence in the middle of the film after Madeleine has been at Scottie's house. He is following her in his car, and she leads him on an especially circuitous route, while the camera, continually cutting back to his face, emphasizes his increasing perplexity. To his great surprise and puzzlement, they wind up back at his house, where she has come to deliver a note. Scottie's pursuit of the mysterious other, then, inevitably takes him to his own home, just as Freud has shown that the uncanny, the *unheimlich*, is precisely the "homelike," the familiar which has been made strange through repression.¹²

As for Madeleine, she herself becomes the very figure of identification, which here is realized in its most extreme and threatening form in the idea of possession. Hitchcock draws once again on the du Maurier plot, the Gothic plot he disparaged in his discussion with Truffaut, to tell Madeleine's story, a story of a woman who appears to be so obsessed with a female ancestor that she actually becomes that other woman from the past and finds herself compelled to live out the latter's tragic fate. It is ironic that the woman whose initials are M.E. (like those of Marrie Edgar) is a person with no identity, not only because Madeleine's persona has been made up by Elster in imitation of his wife, whom he murders, but also because Madeleine continually merges into the personality of Carlotta Valdez, who has committed suicide and who, we are led to believe, attempts to repeat the act through Madeleine (so much is death, and woman's association with death, overdetermined in this film). Madeleine represents the lost child whom "the mad Carlotta" had sought everywhere to no avail. A powerless and pitiful figure when she was alive, Carlotta becomes on her death a figure of terror and omnipotence. In contradistinction to the Lacanian scenario, according to which the dead *father* is endowed with an omnipotence that "real" fathers lack, Hitchcock presents us (not for the first or the last time), with the image of a mother who assumes unlimited power in death.¹³ Dispossessed in life, discarded by her lover, who also takes their child, the dead woman wields this new power in acts of psychic possession, thereby avenging her losses on patriarchy.

Scottie becomes progressively absorbed in Madeleine's situation, and we as spectators are made to share in his absorption, as the camera continually works to draw us into a closer and closer identification with the woman and her story. When Scottie enters the museum where Madeleine sits before the portrait in a hypnotic trance, the camera shows a closeup of the bouquet placed beside Madeleine, then tilts up and tracks forward into a closeup of the bouquet in the portrait. A similar movement begins with a shot of the spiral-shaped knot of hair at the back of her head, and then the camera tracks into a closeup of Carlotta's hair. These constant forward tracking shots do more than simply trace Scottie's observations;

to gain mastery over them: at the end, for example, he forces Judy to return to the tower and reenact the occurrences of the day Madeleine supposedly died. But in trying to effect the woman's cure Scottie only realizes the "tragic outcome . . . inscribed . . . from the outset in the very logic of representation inherent in the therapeutic project" (Felman, p. 9). The woman will die. The very effort to cure her, which is an effort to get her to mirror man and his desire, to see (his) reason, destroys woman's otherness.

Scottie's failure to cure Madeleine deals a mortal blow to his masculine identity, as the dream that he has shortly after Madeleine's presumed death indicates. The dream begins with a closeup of Scottie's face, over which flashing lights of various colors are superimposed. A cartoon image of Madeleine's bouquet is seen disintegrating and then the camera tracks into an extreme closeup of the necklace in Carlotta's portrait and we see Carlotta come "alive" standing between Elster and Scottie. Scottie's "beheaded" face (castration has been "in the air" since the credit shots¹⁶) is superimposed over a "vertigo" shot of vertical lines on a purple background, and he walks forward toward an open grave into which the camera descends. Finally, there is a cartoon-like image of Scottie's silhouette falling first toward the red tiles of the mission roof and then into a blinding white light, an image of nothingness, of infinitude. What is most extraordinary about this dream is that Scottie actually *lives out Madeleine's hallucination*, that very hallucination of which he had tried so desperately to cure her, and he *dies Madeleine's death*. His attempts at a cure having failed, he himself is plunged into the "feminine" world of psychic disintegration, madness, and death. Even the form of the dream, which is offering to many viewers because it is so "phoney," suggests the failure of the "real" that we have seen to be the stake of Scottie's confrontation with Woman.

Looking for the source of this renewed identification with the woman implied by the dream, we find a clue in Freud's important paper, "Mourning and Melancholia." According to Freud, melancholia, the state of inconsolability for the loss of a loved person, differs from mourning in part because the former involves "an extraordinary diminution in [the sufferer's] self-regard, an impoverishment of his ego on a grand scale. In mourning," says Freud, "it is the world which has become poor and empty; in melancholia it is the ego itself."¹⁷ Freud attributes this diminution in self-regard to the fact that the melancholic internalizes the loved object, who had been the source of some disappointment to the subject and who henceforth becomes the object of severe reproaches which, as a result of internalization, appear to be self-reproaches (it might be said that the judge at the inquest who speaks so harshly of Scottie's "weakness" utters the reproaches that later get internalized). In effect, says Freud, "an identifi-

in their closeness and intensity they actually participate in his desire, which, paradoxically, is a desire to merge with a woman who in some sense doesn't exist—a desire, then, that points to self-annihilation. As a result of this threat posed by the figure of woman before the portrait, Scottie is driven to break the spell she exerts by competing with Carlotta for possession of Madeleine. As Kofman writes, "Because with 'woman' men never know for sure *with whom* they are dealing, they try to overcome her lack of 'proper' nature and propriety by making her their property."¹⁴ When Madeleine jumps into the bay Scottie rescues her and brings her home, later indicating that by saving her he now has a claim over her: "You know, the Chinese say that once you've saved a person's life, you're responsible for it forever." At one point he kisses her feverishly, insisting, "I've got you now"; during another embrace he urgently declares, "No one possesses you"—no one, the implication is, but himself. The more Scottie finds himself absorbed by this fascinating woman, the more he resorts to a rather brutal interrogation of her in his search for the "key" to her mystery.

At the heart of *Vertigo* lies the lure and the threat of madness. As Scottie desperately searches for the key to Madeleine's strange behavior, she says, "If I'm mad, that would explain everything." He looks horrified and then pursues her when she runs from him in order to grasp her ever more tightly. It is crucial for Scottie that he convince Madeleine of her sanity so that he can be assured of his own, and thus it is imperative that he make her *recognize* him, force her to turn her inward gaze away from the "mother" and to acknowledge his presence and his supremacy. "Where are you now?" he keeps asking, and she answers, not very convincingly, "Here with you." It might be said that Scottie's project is to reverse the state of affairs at the beginning of their relationship, and from being a reflection of the woman, to use Spoto's observation, he needs to make of her a reflection of himself. In an essay on "Women and Madness," Shoshana Felman argues that man needs woman to be his mirror in order to insure "his own self sufficiency as a subject."¹⁵ This requires removing the "mad" woman from the realm of the "supernatural" and the "unreal" to which patriarchal "reason" consigns her. "Woman," says Felman, is "the realistic invisible" (or as I put it in a previous chapter, she is occupant of patriarchy's "blind space"), that which "realism is inherently unable to see" (p. 6).

Scottie's "cure" for Madeleine involves bringing her to the scene of her dream in order to convince her of the "reality" of the place and to force her to remember a previous visit there. Scottie counters his truth—which is the law of representation and verisimilitude—to hers, which appears to masculine "reason" as mad and supernatural. Throughout the film Scottie will be concerned with staging these re-presentations in order

says Freud, in hatred coming to the fore: "the hate comes into operation on [the] substitutive object, abusing it, debasing it, making it suffer and deriving sadistic satisfaction from its suffering" (p. 251). Before this sadism receives complete release, however, Scottie tries to restore the lost object by making Judy over into Madeleine—forcing her to wear the same clothes, shoes and makeup and to change her hair color and style.

But by this time we have been let in on the secret and we know that Judy was a tool of Gavin Elster's nefarious plot to murder his wife. This knowledge makes us much more sympathetic toward the woman, who finds herself continually negated and manipulated by men, and it contributes as well to our increasing tendency to condemn Scottie for having become, in Hitchcock's word, "a maniac."²¹ As if to emphasize a shift in interest and point of view, Hitchcock includes a scene in Judy's hotel room, which at the beginning shows her in profile, the camera tracking forward in a shot which resembles the subjective shots of Madeleine that predominated in the first part of the film. By the end of the scene, however, Hitchcock has changed camera positions and placed the camera in front of her while Scottie remains to one side, so that we are made to see a part of her that he in his obsession cannot see. As a result of the expanded sympathetic consciousness Hitchcock arouses in the spectator, we feel the full irony and poignancy of her situation—as when Scottie is begging Judy to let herself be made over and urges, "It can't matter to you." Judy acquiesces, in great anguish, out of love for Scottie.

When the process of makeover is complete, Madeleine emerges, ghostlike, into the room where Scottie awaits her; she walks slowly toward him, and the two embrace in a famous shot in which the camera circles around the couple who, in turn, are placed on an (unseen) revolving pedestal. The romantic music swells and the background, Judy's hotel room, metamorphoses almost imperceptibly into the livery stable of San Juan Bautista. Ironically, the place where Scottie had attempted to cure Madeleine's hallucination by restoring her to the real now returns to signal the triumph of Scottie's hallucination over the real.

But "real" women, it seems, are not so easily vanquished, and Judy gives herself away by putting on the necklace worn by Carlotta in the portrait. At this moment Scottie's sadism reaches its peak for it becomes clear to him that he never was in possession of the woman, that she has always eluded his grasp. He forces her to return to the scene of the crime, his words as he drags her up to the tower making clear what has been at stake for him all along:

You played the wife very well, Judy. He made you over didn't he? He made you over just like I made you over. Only better. Not only the clothes and the hair, but the looks and the manner and the words. And those

of the ego with the abandoned object" is established. "Thus," he continues, rather poetically, "the shadow of the object fell upon the ego, and the latter could henceforth be judged by a special agency, as though it were an object, the forsaken object" (p. 249).¹⁸ This identification with the lost object that Freud takes to be characteristic of melancholia involves a regression to an earlier narcissistic phase, that same phase evoked in the film in the mirror image of Madeleine at the florist shop. "This substitution of identification for object-love . . . represents . . . a regression from one type of object-choice to original narcissism. [Identification] is a preliminary stage of object-choice, . . . the first way—one that is expressed in an ambivalent fashion" (p. 249). The shadow of the object having fallen upon him, Scottie not only identifies with Madeleine in his dream, but becomes caught up in the very madness he had feared in her. In his quest for his lost Madeleine, he becomes like "the mad Carlotta," who had accosted strangers in the street as she desperately sought the child that had been taken from her: after the dream we see Scottie wandering around the city and repeatedly mistaking other women for Madeleine, approaching them only to be bitterly disappointed at his error. Importantly, the film at this point emphatically *discredits* his vision—and by extension, *our* vision—on several occasions. On each of these occasions it sets us up for one of the point of view shots Hitchcock has employed throughout the first part of the film to draw us into Scottie's subjectivity, and then it reveals the sight to have been deceptive. In a way, we experience through Scottie the split that Freud says is characteristic of melancholia: on the one hand we identify with him, as before, but the repeated disqualification of his vision makes us wary; we become more judgmental than we had previously been. Further, Scottie's faulty vision provides additional proof that he now occupies a *feminine* position, in that Hitchcock frequently impairs the vision of his female protagonists in one way or another.¹⁹

Finally, Judy appears walking down the street with some other women. A brunette dressed in a cheap, green, tight-fitting dress and wearing gaudy makeup, she is not, as Truffaut observes (without, however, recalling the early scene in Midge's apartment), wearing a brassiere.²⁰ Though we have not yet been apprized of the situation, Judy is the "original" woman, who will soon be remade (for the second time) into the fully fetishized and idealized, "constructed" object of male desire and male "design." The camera lingers on her profile as she bids her friends goodbye, and the romantic music once again is heard on the soundtrack. But it doesn't altogether work. Not only are we wary of this "apparition" because of all the previous faulty point of view shots, but she looks "wrong," a disappointing counterfeit of the beautiful Madeleine. That woman seems to be come at this point in the film a debased version of her former self is not surprising. The melancholiac's disappointment in the love object results,

beautiful phony trances. And you jumped into the Bay! I bet you're a wonderful swimmer, aren't you . . . aren't you . . . aren't you! And then what did he do? Did he *train* you? Did he *rehearse* you? Did he tell you exactly what to do and what to say? You were a very apt pupil, weren't you? You were a very apt pupil! But why did you pick on me? Why me? I was the set-up, wasn't I? I was the made-to-order-witness. This is where it happened. And then, you were his girl. What happened to you? Did he ditch you? Oh Judy, with all of his wife's money, and all that freedom and all that power . . . and he ditched you.

Scottie's pain results not only—not even primarily—from discovering that Madeleine was a fraud, but from realizing that she had been made up by another man, who “rehearsed” and “trained” her in the same way that Scottie had rehearsed and trained Judy. Just when Scottie had thought himself to be most in control of the woman, to have achieved the “freedom” and “power” that he has been longing for and that the film associates with masculinity, he discovers that he is caught up in repetition, like Judy/Madeleine/Carlotta, repetition which, as Freud has shown, is linked to unfreedom, to masochism, and to death. Scottie must now confront the fact that, like a woman, he was manipulated and used by Gavin Elster, that his plot too had been scripted for him: “You were the victim,” writes Judy in the letter she tears up—just as Judy and Carlotta and the real Madeleine Elster are all ultimately victims in the plots of men.

“Some portion of what we men call ‘the enigma of woman’ may perhaps be derived from [the] expression of bisexuality in women’s lives,” Freud wrote.²² This bisexuality is attributable both to the fact that the little girl undergoes a “phallic phase”—an active phase, in contrast to the passivity typically associated with femininity—and that her first love object is the mother, just as is the male’s. In order to achieve what Freud called “normal femininity,” the female must turn away from her mother and shift her object of desire to the father—a trajectory we have seen is traced in the film *Rebecca*. As I noted in my chapter on that film, however, Freud was forced to recognize how frequently desire for the mother persists throughout the woman’s life, affecting her heterosexual relationships as well as her relationships with other women. Woman is thus often caught up in a “double desire,” and feminist film theory has tried to draw out the implications of this double desire for a theory of female spectatorship. Speaking of *Rebecca*, for example, Teresa de Lauretis argues that there are “two positionalities of desire that define the female’s Oedipal situation.”²³ In contrast to those feminists who claim that the situation of woman at the cinema is an either/or situation (either she is a masochist, or she is

a transvestite), de Lauretis believes that female identification is double: “This manner of identification would uphold both positionalities of desire, both active and passive aims: desire for the other and desire to be desired by the other.”²⁴

De Lauretis contrasts *Vertigo* unfavorably to *Rebecca* because for all their similarities, in *Vertigo* it is through the male protagonist that we experience events. As I observed at the outset, however, the situation is considerably more complicated. There is first of all the “painful split” in identification between Judy and Scottie opened up by Judy’s flashback and sustained throughout the last part of the film. But even before this point, we have seen how one of the major attractions of Scottie to Madeleine is his identification with her, an identification that the film works to elicit in the audience as well: we are identifying with Scottie identifying with Madeleine (who is identifying with Carlotta Valdez). Woman thus becomes the ultimate point of identification for all of the film’s spectators. Not only is “a double desire” on the part of a female viewer not precluded by this set-up, but it is possible to see the film as soliciting a masculine bisexual identification because of the way the male character oscillates between a passive mode and an active mode, between a hypnotic and masochistic fascination with the woman’s desire and a sadistic attempt to gain control over her, to possess her. (Hence the aptness of the famous “*vertigo* shot,” the track-out/zoom-forward that so viscerally conveys Scottie’s feeling of ambivalence whenever he confronts the depths.) Of course, sadism wins the day, and the woman dies. “To make a dead body of woman,” writes Sarah Kofman, speaking of Freud’s “killing off” of woman at the end of his essay on “Femininity,” “is to try one last time to overcome her enigmatic and ungraspable character, to fix in a definitive and immovable position instability and mobility themselves. . . . For woman’s deathlike rigidity . . . makes it possible to put an end to the perpetual shifting back and forth between masculinity and femininity which constitutes the whole enigma of ‘woman.’”²⁵

The mother/daughter relationship central to the enigma of bisexuality is presented over and over again in Hitchcock films as the main problem.²⁶ No doubt this is partly because it signifies that woman never wholly belongs to the patriarchy. But perhaps too it is troublesome because it provides a model of “overidentification” in which the boundaries between self and other become blurred, and desire for and identification with the other are not clearly separable processes. This “boundary confusion” can be intimating to the male who, unlike the female, appears to achieve his identity through establishing a firm boundary between himself and woman. But *Vertigo* shows just how precarious the boundary can be. As Freud noted in *Mourning and Melancholia*, it is always possible to “regress” to narcissistic identification with the object. And this is so because identification

is "a preliminary stage of object choice." Far from being opposed to object love as Freud at times argued, narcissistic identification is in fact *constitutive* of it, and thus, he here implies, the boundaries between self and (m)other tend to be more fluid for the male than is sometimes supposed.

Hitchcock himself provides us with an illustration of the fluidity of these boundaries in his explanation of how he came to construct *Vertigo* the way he did, in particular of how he came to give away the secret of the film before the end:

Though Stewart isn't aware of it yet, the viewers already know that Judy isn't just a girl who looks like Madeleine, but that she *is* Madeleine! Every-one around me was against this change; they all felt that the revelation should be saved for the end of the picture. I put myself in the place of a child whose mother is telling him a story. When there's a pause in her narration, the child always says, "What comes next, Mommy?" Well, I felt that the second part of the novel was written as if nothing came next, whereas in my formula, the little boy, *knowing* that Madeleine and Judy are the same person, would then ask, "And Stewart doesn't know it, does he? What will he do when he finds out about it?"²⁷

Hitchcock here imagines himself in the double role—a bisexual role—the little boy (the audience) who listens to a story and the mother (the director) who tells it. Interestingly, despite Hitchcock's implication that the focus remains on the Stewart character, this appropriation of the mother's story, her authority, means that Hitchcock defies all expectations to give the *female* point of view, to make us privy to Judy's thoughts and feelings. It may be possible to argue, then, that "Mother wins," that woman's story gets out, though weakened and distorted in the process. However much we may be invited to condemn her as duplicitous in her "double desire," we must also see the way she is used and cast aside or tortured and finally killed off, as man desperately tries to sustain a sense of himself that necessitates the end of woman.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Rituals of Defilement: *Frenzy*

Food in *Frenzy* is a basic visual metaphor for the devouring abuses of man-against-man.

Donald Spoto, *The Art of Alfred Hitchcock*
Seeing a rotten fruit full of worms, Mair, the Urubu demiurge, exclaimed. "That would make a nice woman!" and straightaway the fruit turned into a woman. . . . In a Tacana myth the jaguar decides not to rape an Indian woman after he has caught the smell of her vulva, which seems to him to reek of worm-ridden meat. . . . Here again, then, we are dealing with stench and decay which, as has already been established, signify nature, as opposed to culture. . . . And woman is everywhere synonymous with nature.

Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked*
Curiosity in an animal is always either sexual or alimentary. . . . In knowing, consciousness attracts the object to itself and incorporates it in itself. . . . But this movement of dissolution is fixed by the fact that the known remains in the same place, indefinitely absorbed, devoured, and yet indefinitely intact, wholly digested and yet wholly outside, as indigestible as a stone.

Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*

Having begun with a discussion of Hitchcock's *Blackmail*, this study ends appropriately with *Frenzy* (1972), which is concerned with many of the same issues as the early film. In particular, both films include a rape that has proven to be very problematic to Hitchcock's critics, though for opposite reasons: in *Blackmail*, the difficulty is that *nothing is shown* (only shadows of the characters projected onto the walls), whereas in *Frenzy* too much is shown, nothing is left to the imagination. In the later film Hitchcock provides the kind of "incontrovertible evidence" of rape that Durnat had found lacking in *Blackmail* and that enabled him to disqualify the heroine's view of her own experience.

Some critics have looked at the increasing use of graphic violence in Hitchcock films as evidence of a rather sick mind. For example, in his biography of Hitchcock, Donald Spoto has documented Hitchcock's obsession with filming a rape/murder and has condemned the director as