

# Crossing Borders and the Female Body

## The Vampirization of the Female Characters in Hitchcock's *Vertigo*

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Filmed in San Francisco, Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958) depicts bodies coping in liminal and limited spaces when the parameters for corporeal movement for certain bodies still had not been radically challenged. Specifically, one of these constricted spaces consists of the prescriptive gender guidelines for the woman's body, designed by men in the post-WWII era. In *Vertigo* the collective male-driven effort to shackle the female body manifests itself in a virtual reincarnation of the 'Cult of True Womanhood,' an ideology from the mid-nineteenth century that characterized women's bodies as physiologically and biologically inferior and thus socially and scientifically predetermined to be dominated by male force and rationality. *Vertigo* visually manifests this resurrection of an antiquated ideal most palpably through the inclusion of the portrait of Carlotta Valdes, the foreign female likeness from the nineteenth century against which all other female bodies, especially those of characters Madeleine and Judy (both played by actress Kim Novak) get compared in the 1950s. This framed portrait

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*During the 1950s, women and men were encouraged to return to the gendered spaces that had been transgressed during World War II. This resulted in tension as new desires warred with old expectations. In Hitchcock's classic film *Vertigo*, this conflict is mapped onto the film's female bodies. The women are portrayed through plot and image as monstrous symbolic vampires. However, their monstrousness results from the main male character's unending "resurrection process," in which he attempts to use their multiple living bodies to resurrect a single, dead, idealized one. His desires, in turn, are part of a general desire for control of the female body so that the past of San Francisco's glory days can be brought back to life.*

of a silent, fragile, beauty aesthetic hangs upon the wall of a classical San Francisco museum. The ghost-like, labyrinthine depiction of San Francisco, much like the bodies of the women depicted in this film, creates an environment that floats precariously between the present and the past, the tangible and the intangible, the real and the constructed, life and death.

The original title for this film, *From the Dead*, speaks directly to the two consistently longed for bodies: Carlotta Valdes and what the male characters in the film characterize as the “power and freedom” days of San Francisco. In both cases male society yearns for a dead past and seeks to map onto modern, spatial bodies a manifest destiny project, one that seeks to demonize, explore, colonize, and conquer. However, only the body of the woman can be effectively labeled monstrous: she is the problem, the jigsaw puzzle that detective Scottie (James Stewart) has to solve, and from the monstrosity of her 1950s bodily presence, male society seemingly hears: “[r]emember me: restore my fragmented body, piece me back together, allow the past to return” (Cohen 1996b:ix). Scottie, as the stand-in for the male spectator’s perspective, becomes Hitchcock’s tool for the experiment of trying to reclaim both a dead landscape and a certain model of female companionship.

The bodies in need of colonization in the name of “progress” are the women of the 1950s, namely *Vertigo*’s Madeleine/Judy character. As the film depicts, the history of women in the 1950s represents bodies caught between misogyny and the stirrings of feminism. In testing the borders that straddle these ideologies, the women of *Vertigo* threaten to unman men, or more film specific, Scottie the detective. It is the body of the woman that stands in direct opposition to the reclaiming of a past male ideal, an opposition that the psychological rhetoric of the time labeled as a threat to Western civilization as a whole. The physical presence of women professionally and their absence domestically provide a warning to the male characters who express a consistent longing for the days of “power and freedom” of early San Francisco, translated here as those days when the gender hierarchy was seemingly more stable.

Although this nostalgia for masculine “power and freedom”

occurs throughout the film, the most potent example takes place in an early scene that depicts Scottie and his “old college buddy” Elster as they ruminate on a framed drawing of “gay old San Francisco” on the wall of Elster’s office. Upon Scottie’s questioning of Elster’s happiness to be back in San Francisco (“ya like it, huh?”), Elster answers,

E: Well, San Francisco’s changed. The things that spell San Francisco to me are disappearing fast.

S: Like all this. (Scottie rises from his chair and moves closer to the drawing of San Francisco to get a better look at its detail.)

E: Yes, I would have liked to have lived here then. The color, the excitement, the power, the freedom.

A close inspection of the drawing of San Francisco and what it represents for Elster, here male society’s nostalgic longing for the past, evokes the portrait of Carlotta Valdes in the museum. Elster’s yearning for the past is linked to a past ideal of womanhood, an ideal that Scottie actively pursues and endeavors to reanimate for the rest of the film.

Yet the real body of the woman represents a hurdle to what I call Scottie’s “resurrection process.” In *Vertigo* the character of Judy threatens Scottie’s “manhood” through her independent and sexual being, deemed a monstrous entity within the social context of both the 1950s and the film. Judy’s body is quite literally an “unassimilated hybrid” and thus “a monstrous body” (Cohen 1996a:4). The Oxford English Dictionary defines the word “monster” or “monstrum” as “that which reveals” or “that which warns.” In *Vertigo* the woman’s body reveals itself as monstrous and thus necessitates a male-driven project to limit that body spatially (sexually and socially) in order to reclaim a lost manhood inhabiting a particular type of city and particular gender hierarchy.

However, understanding the project of reanimation or resurrection from a dead past requires a more particular monster analysis of *Vertigo*’s women—for they are not merely monsters, but specifically vampire figures. The vampire is known to be the most elusive monster, capable of a thousand disguises, and thus hard to define. At its root, though, the vampire is a reanimated corpse. In *Vertigo*, Scottie

looks to the portrait of Carlotta Valdes as the template and means to reclaim masculinity and restructure San Franciscan society along the lines of that masculinity. In other words, if he, with the help of Judy, can reanimate the lifeless, portrait of Carlotta by mapping it onto Judy's body, then he, along with male society, will be saved from the exotic and transgressive behavior festering and sometimes manifesting itself on the body and behavior of the 1950s woman. Unfortunately, for Scottie, the template itself is also an "unassimilated hybrid," a woman and a foreigner with an unacceptable sexual past.

Thus, with the semiotic mapping of the vampire onto the histories and bodies of the female characters, *Vertigo's* women come to symbolically represent vampire figures. A complication of the vampire tradition occurs with the numerous symbolic resurrections/reanimations that actress Kim Novak, as Madeleine/Judy, only nominally performs on screen as part of Elster's guise to cover up the murder of his wife, the real Madeleine Elster, who is keeping him from acquiring the "power and freedom" he sees in his wife's fortune. Also, in contrast to the traditional story of the vampire, that being the reanimation of a dead corpse, the living bodies of *Vertigo's* women provide male society with the material to bring back figures like Carlotta and the days of a "liberated" male potency. In this sense, the women of *Vertigo* are not literal vampires, but symbolic ones.

Upon these living bodies the men of *Vertigo* place the symbols of the vampire, thus seemingly recreating both Carlotta and the old days of San Francisco due to what they see as the looming threat of female independence that the 1950s woman more literally represents. This "reincarnation process" renders the female body into a piece of uninhabited, arable land that makes monstrous any woman who expresses the notion that she has already been claimed by her own desires. Instead, this process pursues, in Freudian terms, that which is missing, or a lack, and subsequently seeks to fill that gap with a nostalgic rendering of dead past of "power and freedom". The missing puzzle piece, based on an intangible memory of a past "ideal" of womanhood, assumes its shape in Madeleine's textural costume, but never fully recaptures the seemingly stock and static portrait of Carlotta Valdes, which is predictably fabricated in the garments of weakness, dependability,

vulnerability, and a certain beauty aesthetic that purposefully neglects to note her foreign status.

The fact that Scottie actively works with living bodies, with bodies in the state of becoming, and not with a dead corpse or a piece of moist clay as in the case of Pygmalion, dooms the resurrection process to failure in *Vertigo*. Learning the history of Carlotta Valdes teaches the conscientious spectator that the template for all women is also “tainted” by transgressions similar to those of the 1950s woman. Hitchcock’s catastrophic ending to the film suggests that he also views the rendering of a monster, or what I call the “vampirization” of his female characters, a likewise monstrosity. For Hitchcock, the transgressive female body reflects the anxieties of male society, but so too does the project to alleviate these anxieties, a project thus doomed to failure and the destruction of more than just the symbolic female vampire.

### **The Need for Reincarnation: *Vertiginous Women of the 1950s***

Scottie discovers his anxiety-ridden vertigo complex in the first scene of the film as his acrophobia and subsequent dizziness prevent him from saving the life of a fellow police officer. What follows soon after is his pursuit of Madeleine (Judy), the fake and supposedly possessed wife of Elster, with whom he fast falls in love. Hired by Elster to follow “his wife,” Scottie is convinced by Elster’s story which claims that Madeleine is possessed by her great grandmother, Carlotta Valdes, whose portrait and grave she visits frequently, and whose presence will, according to Elster, drive her to commit suicide as Carlotta did. Throughout what Madeleine calls her “wanderings,” Scottie watches her intently. The point of view presented by the camera is shared by the spectator, a point Laura Mulvey makes in theorizing *Vertigo*’s male gaze in her seminal work *Visual and Other Pleasures* (1989). The spectator is made to feel the debilitating hold on the male protagonist, which is caused, according to the film’s rhetoric, by the longing to reanimate a past ideal; the present absence of that ideal’s realization in turn causes gender confusion and therefore, a dizzying, emasculating

“swimming of the head” for both Scottie and viewer alike (from the original trailer).

Two years after Mulvey’s landmark analysis of the phallic gaze, however, Paul Coates challenges Mulvey’s assessment that the entire film is told from a male perspective. Not only does he situate *Vertigo* as the “epitaph” to film noir (Coates 1991:178), a critique that suggests Hitchcock’s awareness of the coming of an end to the gendered story of manly detective and dark female lover, he also locates a moment in the film where the camera’s perspective changes from Scottie’s to Judy’s. Late in the film, after both the real and the fake Madeleine have “committed suicide,” Scottie happens upon Judy. Drawn by her resemblance to Madeleine,<sup>1</sup> Scottie pursues her and begins the “resurrection process” of semiotically recreating Madeleine. After their first encounter, Judy is terrified that Scottie will come to know her accomplice status in murder; through the camera’s eye, she reflects upon the moment at the San Juan Bautista mission, where Scottie expressed his love right before Judy feigned suicide as part of Elster’s plan to murder his wife, the real Madeleine Elster, by flinging her from the tower onto the churchyard below. As Judy’s thoughts become the eyes of camera and spectator alike (Coates 1991:179), the viewer becomes forced to consider another point of view, another way of seeing the world, and this way of seeing characterizes the very decision-making, sexual monster that is the woman of the 1950s.

Though the gender of the perspective radically changes in *Vertigo*, throughout most of the film the spectator sees through Scottie’s eyes and feels his growing emasculated madness as Madeleine remains elusive. Alone, in his car, he pursues Madeleine, traversing the lolling hills and eerily foggy landscape of San Francisco. Just as the perspective is male for most of the film, so is the depiction of the landscape, whose contours assume the stereotypical ideal of the voluptuous curves of a woman’s body. Thus, as the viewer experiences Scottie’s emasculation, his hope, his vertigo, and his pursuit of a feminine ideal, he/she is also forced to gender the landscape which, in the rising and falling of its labyrinthine eeriness, becomes the perfect backdrop in which to depict a monstrous, and vampiric female presence.

Scottie’s anxiety-ridden perspective and the eeriness of San

Francisco weave together to create a tapestry of the general sentiment and ideology of the 1950s male regarding the question of woman and her place in society. In *Women in Modern America: A Brief History*, Lois W. Banner labels the 1950s as one of virulent antifeminism. Although antifeminist rhetoric dates well before this decade, rarely before had women so closely been associated with 'evil' (1984:231). According to Banner, 'evil' and 'woman' took on such synonymous proportions due to the woman's refusal to completely resurrect their role as dutiful wife and mother, roles that had previously characterized their society induced, pre-WWII responsibility. Thus, the working women of *Vertigo* are socially constructed into monsters through the need of male society to reanimate the gender hierarchy. This view of the transgressive female worker, responsible for the ills of society by denying and destroying the American family, was widely publicized. Such blatant antifeminist rhetoric occurs in *Modern Woman: The Lost Sex* (1947). In this book, sociologist Marynia Farnham and historian Ferdinand Lundberg argue that "the problems of modern society—including war and depression—could be traced to the fact that women had left the home." (Banner 1984:231) Engaging in a "futile battle with men", women had forfeited their femininity, thus causing children to become delinquents and/or neurotics and their husbands to become alcoholics and sexually impotent. The 1950s woman, then, was not merely associated with the monstrous, but she was also accused of fashioning monstrous men and children due to her socially transgressive behavior.

This social estimation of women's behavior grew out of an essentialist attitude that a woman's "natural" place was in the home, giving birth to and nurturing her children (Banner 1984:231). Many analysts, such as Lundberg and Farnham, propagated this Freudian ideology in the postwar years (Banner 1984:233). Combining the Freudian belief in essentialism with functionalism, which "stressed value-free analysis of existing institutions with little room for criticism" (Banner 1984:234), society seemed determined on reigning in any loose-end Rosie the Riveter leftovers. *Vertigo* offers three potential female characters for analysis, those being, Madeleine, Judy, and Midge. Although two of these characters, Judy and Midge, represent indepen-

dent workingwomen, Judy quickly gives up her job when Scottie reappears in her life, while Midge helps to design and distribute a “cantilever bra” that shifts and binds women into their socially acceptable place.

In the 1950s we experience the woman’s willingness to comply with male society’s boundary placements. Few feminist radicals existed in the 1950s and those who did label themselves (or can be labeled by us) as feminists “did not envision a vastly altered future.” (Banner 1984:242) More typical of feminism in the 1950s was a middle-of-the-road approach between feminism and antifeminism as depicted in Mirra Komarovsky’s 1953 book *Women in the Modern World: Their Education and Their Dilemmas* (Banner 1984:234). Although Komarovsky refutes the essentialist arguments of Freudians and functionalists and criticizes the widespread concern about the destruction of male masculinity posed by female competition, she “clearly implies” that women, not men, were responsible for maintenance of home and family (Banner 1984:234).

Thus, even “feminists” in the 1950s maintained the spatial boundaries that male society so actively pushed. In *Vertigo*, for example, Judy initially gets angry when Scottie tries to convince her not to go to work the next morning, but then shortly after, she melts at the thought of having him “take care of [her]”. Likewise, women activists of the 1950s never refuted the same romantic, chivalrous ideal that trapped their gender into a false security and a separate sphere. Perhaps Coates was wrong in his assertion that *Vertigo* marks the end of film noir. Indeed, the last third of the film shows the ease with which Scottie convinces Judy to once again inhabit that previous space, apart from and below the status of working men.

On the other hand, Midge, the ex-lover and still enamored friend of Scottie, remains a woman of “independent means”. However, after Madeleine’s “death” and during Scottie’s stay in the sanatorium, she gets completely blotted out of the film. Definitively the most empowered representation of any woman in the film, Midge still resorts to the sphere of mother to appeal to Scottie in his distress. In the second scene of the film, Scottie labels her as ‘motherly’ when she suggests going away for awhile after the first scene’s accident of the fallen police officer. In Midge’s last scene in the film, however, she labels her-

self “the mother” to an unresponsive Scottie who is devastated by the seeming loss of the mysterious but ultimately vulnerable Madeleine. In a beautiful cut, Midge’s gray-clad body glides down the empty hall and out of the hospital, removed from the film and placed, as we logically assume, into a land of loveless alienation. Almost as if male society has sniffed out this counterfeiting cantilever bra designer, her role as “mother” and disseminator of patriarchal boundaries is unconvincing to Scottie, and thus, she poses no worthy candidate for the resurrection project that will occur with Judy, and thus no worthy candidate for Scottie’s love and adoration.

### **The Societal and Cinematic Vampirization of the Female Body Image**

As mentioned earlier, the 1950s’ societal take on the notion of “separate spheres” acts as a means of separating the male’s geographic space from the threatening, and dangerous, presence of the female. Since this essay aims to connect *Vertigo* to the vampire motif that colors much of horror history, it is also fitting to direct our attention to the nature of horror films during the 1950s. These films, like *Vertigo*, exhibit a modernized version of the same antiquated, separate-sphere rhetoric and imagery normally associated with the days of “power and freedom” and Carlotta Valdes. For the Madeleine/Judy situation, *Vertigo* associates the corporeal female body with symbols of the undesirable, and at times, as in the case of Judy, symbols of the repulsive. These symbols carefully reconstruct the mark of the vampire onto each female character, just as 1950s horror films semiotically locate the transgressive female as a monstrous border violator.

Sci-fi horror films of the 1950s become useful tools in providing a more exaggerated example of border crossing. With no more earthly land to colonize, male society jets off to foreign planets to fight alien beings, who often assume the look of ghastly feminized monsters or colonies of voluptuous space bimbos. Though the year 1950 and the film *Destination Moon* marks the last time a wife would kiss her husband good-bye before his cosmic manifest-destiny assignment (Svehla 1986:155), female accompaniment in outer space, while helping to kill

aliens and claim new territories, signals a bitter-sweet victory; women's bodies remain a territory in themselves as they maintain an image that American society expects of them: "[t]hat is, they could be highly competent and professional. They could be courageous and outspoken", but they could not be radicals, railing against the Western patriarchy or putting forth an image that seemed like an attempt to thwart that system (Svehla 1986:156). In other words, although this scientifically competent, space-warrior woman faced sexism and alienation from a group in which she was the only female, she was expected to counter this resistance with passive acceptance (Svehla 1986:158).

As in *Vertigo*, the goal of 1950s sci-fi is never an equal partnership but a reclaiming of a submissive female companion and a reinstatement of the pre-WWII gender hierarchy. Overall, the typical scenario for the 1950s filmic, space female represents a sole woman in a group of men who do not respect her, but who eventually will, at least enough to consider her for marriage; all the while, the film gives off the uneasy impression that this is fantasy and not Earth, not reality, where a woman would never be considered to share in man's work and humanity's hopes for "progress." The advertisements for 1950s sci-fi films seem to anticipate societal resistance to even this slightly more empowered woman, much like Midge is linguistically placed back into the role of the "mother" on two occasions in *Vertigo*. One of the most famous sci-fi films from the 1950s, *Unknown World*, stars Marilyn Nash as she plays, according to the publicity poster, the "Shocking!" woman "who lost life's most precious gift," which we can assume is due to the "Daring...[a]dventure of six men and a *girl* (emphasis added) who pierced the heart of the earth!" (Svehla 1986:157) The face of Marilyn Nash grabs the attention of the spectator's eye, followed by the emboldened and italicized "Shocking!" that heads the poster, which of course, becomes visually associated with Nash herself or at least the role she plays in the film. Mention of "six men and a girl" immediately relegates Nash to second-citizen status on the journey, as she is denied her full maturity as a woman and a scientist. Even within the boundaries that the visual and rhetorical aspects of the poster set up, Nash must still remain the one who loses her "most precious gift," which sounds mysteriously threatening and strikingly similar to those Freud-

ian arguments that labeled working women as denying their femininity and thus, “their deepest needs” “being unable to experience love or sexual satisfaction.” (Banner 1984:233) Similarly in *Vertigo*, part of Scottie’s sales pitch to Judy as he endeavors to resurrect her in the image of Madeleine is that this change is actually good for her.

As previously mentioned, *Vertigo*’s 1958 rendition of the working woman also presents a bittersweet victory over the tyranny of the “separate sphere” ideology. Judy moves from Salinas, Kansas to San Francisco to escape the doldrums of the female suburban lifestyle, only to face lukewarm success in the city, as we can assume from her willingness to participate in Elster’s sordid plan of murder and deceit. She does so in the hopes of financial gain, but also for the love of Elster, who, we later discover, throws her away much as Carlotta Valdes is discarded by the man who made her a ‘proper’ woman in the days of “power and freedom”. Her defiant though ephemeral resistance to Scottie’s proposals disintegrates when faced with his promise to take care of her.

The character of Midge functions as the other working woman in the film and represents a unique challenge to the “resurrection process.” Midge considers herself a “real artist” but devotes her time to re-creating the same spatially bound images of womanhood that society so actively pursues. The result is low-art, low-talent lingerie sketches that market body-conforming bras. In the film the “cantilever bra” sits besides her artist’s desk, a bra whose sales pitch emphasizes how the design holds breasts in place with the same force and technology that keeps a bridge steady and immobile. In recalling the Pygmalion reference mentioned earlier in the essay, it seems that Midge’s lingerie sketches become even more degraded when considering the re-creation of the ideal female using this ancient metaphor. In comparison, Elster and Scottie are the highbrow artists reshaping the female form, while Midge merely accessorizes her.

Also, Midge’s sketches clash dramatically with the portrait of Carlotta Valdes shown in the museum on various occasions during the film. Throughout the movie this portrait stands not only as a manifestation of a medium worthy to be viewed in a illustrious San Francisco gallery, but also as the renovated, modern take on the Pygmalion myth:

Scottie constantly refers back to that portrait as a benchmark for grading the women around him, and Elster symbolically renders Carlotta a revenant by fashioning, however modernizing, Madeleine after her image. Midge's joke of placing her own head on the portrait mocks Scottie's obsession, not only as this marks her entrance into the male trade of high-art portrait painting, but also by revealing the superficiality and insipidness of subjecting all women to one standard image of beauty and personality. However, her reaction to Scottie's disapproval of this joke renders the situation more problematic; Midge, seeking the love and attention of Scottie, proposes that she too embodies a candidate for the resurrection project, that she too can be remade into the image of vulnerability, weakness and dependability that Scottie so desires in his woman. Instead, Scottie interprets her portrait solely as a mockery of "unique" love interest, and completely misses that that Madeleine is just a remapping of the same motifs present in an antique portrait in a museum.

'Dress' becomes one of the most conspicuous and restricting motifs of the portrait mapped onto the entire cast of female characters in the film. Like the 'separate sphere' ideology, dress marks another aspect of the 1950s guidelines for women, as featured in *Vertigo*. According to Banner, women's fashion standards in the 1950s offered no less confinement than the Victorian era (1984:236). During WWII "mannish clothes" including narrow skirts, suits, and padded shoulders were the rage", yet in 1947, Christian Dior and his "new look" put women back into a more traditionally feminine uniform. This "new look" consisted of "long full skirts and emphasized a defined bosom and a tiny waist, which required wearing foundation garments" (Banner 1984:236). Again, the cantilever bra becomes an important metaphor that makes Midge into an accomplice for dressing the 1950s woman into her appropriate straight jacket. Midge herself does not appear to use the bra she designs. Rather, she opts instead for a more natural look, combined with narrow skirts and sweater tops that fail to emphasize the accentuated breasts envisioned by Dior.

Of course, the most conspicuous difference in dress distinguishes Madeleine from Judy. Although Madeleine's signature outfit is a simple gray suit with a straight skirt, the combination of her tightly

worn blonde hair gives the impression of washed-out confinement, or of a diaphanous being or ghost. To Scottie, her appearance communicates a blank canvas, without personality and ready to be molded into the shape that male society deems fit. However, when the viewer becomes aware that Judy has been remade by Elster into Madeleine, Judy simultaneously represents the diaphanous shape of that cherished yet unattainable memory of a past female ideal, the portrait of Carlotta Valdes.

Madeleine's most lavish presentation, the green dress she dons in Ernie's, signals the very height of Dior decadence as well as the height of Elster's plan to position her as the reanimation of Carlotta. The lavish undulating folds of her garment, though exquisite, definitely serve as a status marker when compared to Judy's green dress; the rough cotton-like material and the braless breasts moving freely contrast greatly with the bra-controlled movement of the green and black satin gliding smoothly across the floor. Also, the material and full design of the dress give the impression that she glides, phantomlike out of the room and into the already obsessed heart of Scottie who may associate that trailing train with the signature dark cape of the tempting vampiress.

Later in the film, when Judy sits across from Scottie at Ernie's, her violet dress clashes with the red background whereas Madeleine's green dress previously complemented the same red-lacquered walls. Though the rich hues of red and green naturally work as a superior combination to violet and red, Hitchcock aids the viewer's association of these two colors through his frequent use of them throughout the film. Three instances in particular highlight Hitchcock's use of red and green in anticipation of a certain spectator response.

Coates describes this color-coding in conjunction with profile angles as a way of decoding Hitchcock's message. While Madeleine herself wears green, she is engulfed in red in the scene at Ernie's. According to Coates, "[r]ed provokes and attracts, but also halts" (1991:181). Combined with this association to the ambiguous red color (of which Coates notes also colors the door of Scottie's apartment), Madeleine is profiled to the right at Ernie's, which Coates identifies as "positively coded in our culture." Like the gray suit that Madeleine

wore, there seems to be something oddly contradictory in the way she is portrayed, and although she will come to define the guidelines between which all women must squeeze for Scottie, the contrasting messages of socially constructed positives and negatives signal to the viewer the improbability of experiencing Pygmalion's fruitful artistic culmination.

Conversely, Hitchcock bathes Judy in a green light, most notably during her flashback, which occurs after Scottie once again enters her life. Here, there is a slight right to left movement of the head which has "negative, regressive connotations" (Coates 1991:181), although the most impressive green/right-to-left movement occurs earlier in the scene before Scottie departs for the night. If red halts, the green light says "go" which may connect to a sexual transgressiveness suggested earlier by Judy's admittance to having been "picked up" before.

These contrasting color and angle associations connect to the resurrection project that Scottie will embark upon when meeting Judy. Although Madeleine embodies an ambiguous message, she still fits better into those cantilever bra cups of Carlotta's portrait than Judy, who initially refuses to even try them on for size. However, fearing that her continued rejection of such confines will destroy forever her chances at love with Scottie, Judy reluctantly though definitively becomes the spitting image of the Madeleine she embodied earlier in the film.

The last instance of green light is what I term the "mora scene." The word "diaphanous" has thus far been used to capture the description of the incorporeality of both Carlotta and old San Francisco. Here, as well, "mora" suggests an airy or ghost-like quality that implies magic or the supernatural for the duped Scottie, as well as a marker of the *man-made* creation of the revenant for the informed viewer. The "mora", as communicated by the green light, aids *Vertigo's* semiotic mapping of the vampire, just as it convinces Scottie that Madeleine has literally risen from the dead out of Judy. After numerous shopping excursions and a trip to the beauty salon, Judy's transformation into Madeleine is complete except for the tightly worn hair that reminds the viewer, not only of Madeleine, but of the antique portrait of Carlotta and the "power and freedom" days. Judy's last attempt to be an individual fails as

Scottie refuses to look upon her amorously because she is wearing loose hair. Illuminated by the light of the green neon hotel sign, she enters the bathroom, while Scottie waits in breathless anticipation. When she finally exits, Bernard Hermann's score assumes a dramatic crescendo as a ghost-like Madeleine/Judy floats imploringly toward the Pygmalion figure who has engineered her make-over. Scottie immediately embraces her, and in the famous kissing/turning wheel scene that flashes back to the Spanish mission stable, recalls the last time that he held Madeleine before her "death." We again see the resurrected Madeleine in her gray suit just as we had earlier seen her staring at the portrait or over the grave of Carlotta Valdes. She seems paler, however, more washed out, and perhaps exhausted at assuming the same form for the second time.

In addition to becoming a paler version of Madeleine, Judy's Kansas accent strikes a sharp contrast to the demure European-like manners and speech that she assumed under Elster's instruction. After she and Scottie have embraced, and the implied but unseen sex episode takes place, we see Judy looking exactly as she did earlier in the film as Madeleine, but vocally altered and degraded. Combined with the recollection of Judy's previous dress choices, the maintenance of a Midwestern accent sets up a class distinction between Madeleine and Judy that we, as viewers know is fabricated, but that Scottie attributes to the essence of each woman.

This conflation of high and low class in one actress's character portrayals combines the tradition of low and high-class vampires who characterize folklore and nineteenth-century literature respectively. Madeleine is Lord Ruthven, insidiously but elegantly invading high-class society in Polidori's "The Vampyre," while Judy sits up in her tomb "like a...Turk" (Murgoci 1998:17), a hideous and repulsive site that calls for an immediate stake through the heart and a decapitation of the head.

Despite the societal and cinematic mappings of the 'ideal woman' on Madeleine's fabricated character, she still remains imperfect in terms of 1950s antifeminist rhetoric. When we meet her, the childless Madeleine is twenty-six, which not only marks the age when Carlotta Valdes, her foreign great-grandmother, committed suicide, but

also designates the average age for a woman to have her last child in 1950 (Banner 1984:243). And though she keeps her distance from the workplace, she wanders aimlessly around San Francisco instead of fulfilling any domestic responsibilities. With these characteristics taken into consideration, Madeleine fails to be the most desirable female body in the film. Silently positioned between Scottie and Elster during Scottie's dream, Carlotta Valdes remains that "foreign but sweet" idol whose memory provides a more suitable site for manipulation as the established patriarchal and religious institutions of her time insured their "power and freedom."

Despite Madeleine's obvious imperfections, Judy remains the most repulsive female and is marked accordingly by Hitchcock's choice of her name and hair color. While Madeleine's name recalls the New Testament's Mary Magdalene, Judy's namesake recalls the Old Testament decapitator Judith. Her name literally means 'Jewess' but her story also identifies her with a sexual awareness and strength that forbids attempts of male protection (Levine 1992). Furthermore, she uses her beauty to captivate the Assyrian general, Holofernes, and uses his momentary "intoxication" with her sexual self to cut off his head.

Unlike *Vertigo's* Judy, the Old Testament Judith represents a community unifier, decapitating the enemy and debilitating the Assyrian forces. Judith's return to the city of Bethulia with Holofernes' head as a trophy has been frequently and triumphantly depicted in paintings by such Western artists as Donatello, Goya, and Sandro Boticelli among others. In all of these, she represents a threatening though Westernized metaphor of beauty and power. In terms of the vampire, Judith can legitimately be read as the vampire hunter, decapitating and thus destroying the foreign bloodsucker that plagues God's chosen people. The 1950s Freudian framework within which *Vertigo* was created, however, suggests a connection between Judith's reputation as a decapitator and Hitchcock's portrayal of Judy as an emasculating threat. Unlike her namesake, then, Judy becomes solely a transgressive force that destroys Western society and preys on male victims.

Although many critics have written about Hitchcock's obsession with blonde women, *Vertigo* features not only the blonde beauty but also the "tawdry red head," a shift in hair color that fits perfectly

within the vampire tradition. According to Greek mythology, redheads often reanimate after death and become vampires. In Egyptian mythology, red hair is said to be the mark of the devil. Furthermore, pre-Raphaelites like Dante Rossetti and Edward Burne-Jones oftentimes depicted their vampires or notorious women with red hair as a mark of rebellion and transgressiveness, or directly as the vampire. Within the vampire tradition, Judy's "tawdry red hair" signals the repulsive, re-animated corpse of the transgressive woman, responsible for the downfall of an empire.

Just as Madeleine/Judy's hair goes from light to dark, so too does the most famous hair transformation in vampire tradition. In Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, the character Lucy Westenra represents a character much like Madeleine, though without Madeleine's mysterious wanderings. Lucy embodies a high-class "sunny ripple[d]" innocence and beauty that attracts, not one, but three eligible men to proposal. Upon her transformation into the vampire, Stoker writes the following description:

[t]he figure stopped, and at that moment a ray of moonlight fell between the masses of driving clouds and showed in startling prominence a dark-haired woman...Lucy Westenra, but yet how changed. The sweetness was turned to adamant, heartless cruelty, and the purity to voluptuous wantonness... We shuddered with horror. [Stoker 1997:187]

Although Lucy is also described as having lips "crimson with fresh blood, and that the stream had trickled over her chin", it is her whole appearance that contributes to the horror and the willingness of her fiancé, Arthur, to eventually destroy her by driving a stake through her heart and cutting off her head. After this completed move, Stoker describes her transformation back into the "the face of unequalled beauty sweetness and purity" (1997:192), which calls to mind the previously detailed "mora scene".

Likewise in *Vertigo*, Judy represents a sexual and authoritative character, but while the Old Testament decapitator shares her name, Judy is the decapitated one, a stake driven through her heart so that she can lifelessly resume the "sunny ripple[d]" curls of Madeleine and

Carlotta Valdes. Judy as the decapitated figure once again reminds us that she has been made into the vampire by a tradition that reads her physical and behavioral qualities monstrously.

### **The Missing Puzzle Piece: Mission Life and Carlotta Valdes**

Throughout this essay, the obsession with resurrecting a more ideal woman has been attributed both to *Vertigo* and 1950s society on the whole. Madeleine possesses the look, but the fabrication of her character and her mysterious wanderings render her more a woman on the border of patriarchal guidelines than a woman bound by them. Though the portrait of Carlotta Valdes haunts the entire film and its women with her image of silence, passivity, and a Western beauty aesthetic, her story reveals certain transgressive and even vampiric characteristics. Thus, even the goal of the “resurrection process” is “tainted” by 1950s standards. Even after learning Carlotta’s history, however, Scottie continues to pursue her reincarnation in the character of Madeleine, which possibly suggests Hitchcock’s own awareness of the superficiality of Scottie’s goal. However, with Carlotta’s reanimation, Elster and Scottie (Hitchcock’s stand-ins for 1950s male society) believe that so too will the “power and freedom” days of San Francisco reappear to empower their gender-confused selves.

Perhaps the most influential factor feeding the male obsession with Carlotta Valdes (1831-1857) in *Vertigo* is that of her history, which takes place during the “power and freedom days” of San Francisco as seen in the lithograph that hangs in Elster’s office. In the film this period represents a time when women and land were part of the manifest-destiny project which consisted of exploring, demonizing, and colonizing bodies. Carlotta’s life spans a time when borders literally shifted, most notably in 1848 with the ceding of California to the United States. However, in 1822, only nine years before the supposed birth of Carlotta, borders shifted for the first time when Mexico won independence from Spain. Although painted in the clothes and skin color of the ideal Western beauty aesthetic, Carlotta’s status as non-American ‘Other’ (either Mexican or Spanish) is definitive. Regardless of her nationality, the

portrait of a foreign woman during a period of imperial manifest destiny in America most certainly implies her oppression.

According to Virginia Marie Bouvier in *Women and the Conquest of California, 1542-1840*, Spanish conquistadores arrived in California with a preconceived idea of the land and its inhabitants which they saw as “pagan, as well as female, hierarchically governed, and easily subdued, [which] reinforced the conqueror’s imagined superiority” (2001:11). California’s initial status as an empire-run terrain, therefore, becomes intimately interlaced with the subjugated female whom we learn Carlotta to be from book store owner and cultural memory resource, Pop Liebel. Furthermore, the colonizer’s dream of conquering a land uninhabited by males and full of available and vulnerable women seems strangely reminiscent of the 1950s sci-fi movies that traveled to outer space to discover dangerous but sexually available space bimbos. These Hollywood-based female archetypes differ little from what the conquistadores expected to find upon their arrival in New World California, and characterize the goal of reanimating Carlotta in *Vertigo*.

From Pop Liebel, we learn that Carlotta was most likely born into one of the mission settlements set up along the coast. Throughout the film, numerous visits to Mission San Juan Bautista connect Carlotta’s early childhood days to this Catholic-based institution. What we do not learn from the film is Carlotta’s probable situation in one of the *monjería* establishments set up by the Spanish to hinder menstruating girls from their sexual selves; the goal of the *monjería* sought to protect the virginity of these neophyte or widowed women to prepare them for proper Catholic union in marriage. Outside these prisons, every aspect of the mission architecture “embodied Franciscan attitudes about gender[:] it symbolized simultaneously protection, isolation, opportunity, and imprisonment for those who lived within its confines” (Bouvier 2001:81). While visiting the Argosy bookstore, Pop tells Scottie and Midge that Carlotta was dancing in the cabaret, when a man made her into a ‘proper’ woman by simultaneously building her a house and making her a mother. This sexually transgressive occupation of cabaret dancing flies in the face of what the missions set out to do; one can only guess that Carlotta must have escaped from the mission or was

sent out due to other rebellious displays.

As was the case with all foreign women, society excluded Carlotta from some of the “progressive” changes regarding women’s bodies in the early to mid-nineteenth century. During this time, two competing ideologies, the ‘Ideal of Real Womanhood’ and the ‘Cult of True Womanhood’, principally disagreed on what a woman should look like and how she should act. The latter ideology perfectly defines the conflation of Carlotta’s story and portrait in *Vertigo*. Defined by Frances B. Cogan in her book *All American Girl: the Ideal of New Womanhood in Mid-Nineteenth Century*, the ‘Cult of True Womanhood’ called for a “uniform acceptance of the pale, delicate, invalidated maiden” as well as European mannerisms and dress and an unwillingness to engage in any activity that might suggest independent survival (1989:7). According to Pop, a wealthy young, yet married man rescued the cabaret-dancing Carlotta from her struggling financial state and built her a big house in which to impregnate her. Shortly after, he and his wife left with the child, abandoning a quickly maddening Carlotta in the house.

Contrastingly, the more popular notion of womanhood, called ‘the Ideal of Real Womanhood’, encompassed “American [mannerisms], ruddy cheek[s], [and] a robust, healthy, active” lifestyle, but that still included the roles of “dutiful wives, daughters and mothers” (Cogan 1989:17). Already suggested here but driven home by an article called a “Revolutionary Girl’s Pluck” published in July 1876 in the *Illustrated Christian Weekly* is the notion that “real” American women were capable of living up to the previously delineated profile; foreign women, on the other hand, were “too weak and too timid” to live out an ‘Ideal of Real Womanhood’ standard (Cogan 1989:8). Carlotta, then, represents the ultimate in subjugated beings, as she experiences the double jeopardy of being both female and ‘Other’.

Just before Scottie leaves the Argosy bookstore, he learns that the end result of Carlotta’s madness at the loss of her child surmounted to suicide. In a private conference between Elster and Scottie, Elster explains that Madeleine, supposedly Carlotta’s great-granddaughter, possesses her blood, both foreign and suicidally tainted. Suicides, like red heads, are traditional harbingers of reanimated monsters in the form of vampires. In the film, the rumor of suicide combines with the many

other markers of the vampire that get mapped onto the female characters and that aid in creating a symbolic vampire and thus the resurrection process. When thinking in terms of vampires, the women in the film get progressively more powerful and need to be completely leveled (decapitated) so as to get back to those days of “power and glory” when a man could throw away his women once he had gotten what he needed from them, as in the case of Carlotta Valdes.

## CONCLUSION

Hitchcock’s catastrophic ending to *Vertigo* sends Scottie’s completed resurrection process falling to her death at Mission San Juan Bautista. This fall marks the second time Scottie loses “Madeleine” and in this scene Scottie has overcome vertigo, a signal that he has regained his manhood, and sent the murder-complicit Judy — completely remade in Madeleine’s and thus also, Carlotta’s likeness — to her death. The appearance of the nun who frights the already vulnerable Judy/Madeleine couples with Scottie’s crazed search for masculinity as catalysts to her ruin. The semiotic mixture at the close of the film becomes a symbolic gesture and commentary on the part of Hitchcock. After the demise of the resurrection process with Judy, Scottie and the nun are left alone atop the huge, phallic tower that symbolizes a fount of his emasculation throughout the film. Unlike Pygmalion’s Galatea, Scottie’s disapproval of the independent immorality of women such as Midge results in his final union with a cloistered figure, still bound within the walls of the fortress-like San Juan Bautista, much like Carlotta must have been. If women are the monsters destroying Western civilization, then so is the resurrection/vampire fashioning project, as it leaves us with a non-sexual symbol and no chance for recreation in procreation.

The last cut of the film presents the dubious situation of Scottie hanging over the side of the bell tower, and possibly contemplating his own suicide, as suggested by the limp posture he assumes. This posture recalls Scottie’s dream sequence in which he, and not Madeleine or Judy, falls silhouette-like to the roof of the adjoining chapel. The implication that the resurrection of a past ideal destroys vampire and

vampire-hunter alike symbolizes the destabilizing posture of both men and women in the 1950s. By placing one sex between the boundaries of an untenable gender ideal, the other must naturally assume the complementary role, a role that is equally destructive and unstable.

## ENDNOTES

1 At this point in the film, the careful viewer may see the strings of Elster's plan, that is, that Judy and Madeleine are, in the reality of the film, the same character. Any viewer, however, may note that the same actress, Kim Novak, plays both the Judy and the Madeleine role.

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