

MALS 5800  
Contemporary Cinema Studies/Bonner

*Vertigo* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1958; 128 minutes)

Producers: Herbert Coleman (associate)  
& Alfred Hitchcock  
Screenplay: Samuel A. Taylor & Alec  
Coppel (based on novel *d'Entre les Morts*  
by Pierre Boileau and Thomas Narcejac)

Music: Bernard Hermann  
Cinematographer: Robert Burks  
Editor: George Tomasini  
Costumes: Edith Head  
Special Effects: John P. Fulton

**Abstract:**

San Francisco police detective Scottie Ferguson (James Stewart) develops a fear of heights ("vertigo") and is forced to retire when a colleague falls to his death during a chase. An old college friend (Gavin Elster) soon hires Scottie to watch his wife Madeleine (Kim Novak), who has become obsessed with the past. Scottie follows her around San Francisco and is drawn into a complex plot of love, death, and deception.

**Cast:**

John "Scottie" Fergusson (James Stewart)  
Madeleine Elster/Judy Barton (Kim Novak)  
Marjorie "Midge" Wood (Barbara Bel Geddes)  
Gavin Elster (Tom Helmore)

**Questions for Discussion (for your response papers, please answer #4):**

1. Whose story is this? Scottie's? Madeleine's? Judy's? How does Hitchcock shoot the film in order to convince you of this? How does the narrative walk you through the story's shifting points of view?
2. How does the film approach and employ psychoanalysis and "pop" psychology?
3. How are femininity and masculinity constructed in *Vertigo*? Give some examples from the film, and explain how your examples illustrate constructed femininity and masculinity. How does this film's depiction of femininity/masculinity differ from that of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*?
4. **How does Mulvey's article relate to *Vertigo*? Find examples that represent Mulvey's arguments for scopophilia, sadistic voyeurism (e.g., demystification or punishment) and fetishistic scopophilia (e.g., disavowal through fragmentation or layering). Describe how your examples illustrate and/or counter Mulvey's terms.**
5. Are there ways to read this film "against the grain," as a feminist film? That is, are there feminist interpretations that can be gleaned from *Vertigo*? If so, describe how and give examples from the film.