Hauntings in High Places: How *Hamlet* Haunts *Vertigo*

Blaire Krakowitz
Pennsylvania State University

In *Reading Shakespeare in the Movies: Non-Adaptations and their Meaning*, Eric Mallin outlines a critical method for exploring Shakespearean analogues and meanings in films that are not adaptations of Shakespeare's plays. Mallin defines a non-adaptation as "like a traditional form of cinematic production in that it summons a relationship between (in this case) a Shakespeare play and a movie that can be read through or in that play. But such a film lacks the discursive or extra-textual features of the adaptation: a known, implied, or readily deduced derivation from a prior text."[1] This approach views non-adaptations as films in dialogue with Shakespeare's work: the non-adaptational lens aims to highlight how two works with little to no direct relation "might have rewarding samenesses, and in those we might find something true and new about each text."[2] The non-adaptation framework allows for creative critical exercise through which the similarities and differences between a Shakespeare play and a given film open new insights about both works while bypassing the oft-debated constraints associated with adaptation theory.[3] To explore the Shakespearean non-adaptation is not to capture, in relation to the Shakespearean text, what the film is, but to re-contextualize and reexamine what it might mean.

Alfred Hitchcock had posited the notion of a modernized film of *Hamlet* in the 1940s, but the project never came to fruition.[4]

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Echoes of Shakespeare—and, more narrowly, of *Hamlet*—are prominent throughout his filmography (*North by Northwest* (1959) should speak for itself). James Vest argues that "In *Vertigo* (Paramount, 1958), Hitchcock came closest to realizing his ambition of filming a modern *Hamlet*."[5] Of primary concern in Vest's analysis is the manner in which Madeline Elster/Judy Barton (Kim Novak)[6] and John "Scottie" Ferguson (James Stewart) reflect Ophelia and Hamlet, respectively. Madeline/Judy is the delicate woman associated with flowers, madness, and water, molded and manipulated by men, while Scottie is an impassioned "man under severe mental stress who appears to see ghosts and to have difficulty acting in time."[7] The two engage in a romantic relationship that ends in death and tragedy.

Amid his analysis of these character parallels, Vest acknowledges that "The role of Hamlet, like other roles in *Vertigo*, is diffused, fragmented, and set spinning."[8] Scottie's role in the narrative is not limited to that of Hamlet, nor is he the only Hamletesque figure in the film. Vest's essay does not analyze these diffusions and distortions of character archetypes in depth; they remain a side note in his analysis of *Vertigo* as a modern *Hamlet*. As *Vertigo* is not a direct adaptation of *Hamlet*, these diffusions and fragmentations are crucial to any intertextual analysis of the play and the film. To meaningfully analyze *Vertigo* as a text in dialogue with *Hamlet*, we must examine not only the respects in which the film resembles Shakespeare's play, but those in which *Hamlet* is distorted, echoed, and reconfigured. Much like Scottie's vertigo, the reflections and distortions of *Hamlet* in *Vertigo* are unsettling and disorienting, revealing new layers to the film's unsettling character.[9]

The concept of haunting provides a helpful throughline for this analysis.[10] Haunting, here (as in Derrida), references that which "is neither living nor dead, present nor absent." Derrida continues, "It does not belong to ontology, to the discourse of Being of beings, or to the essence of life or death."[11] Haunting is not quite presence, not quite absence, but a lingering of something past but not yet gone. Both *Hamlet* and *Vertigo* are saturated with hauntings figurative and literal: deceased ancestors, traumatic events, painful remembrances, and lost loves. These hauntings incite the plots of both works, and characters' actions are direct responses to the ghosts that haunt them. Characters' responses to hauntings

in *Hamlet* and *Vertigo* ultimately reveal uncanny and disturbing dynamics of power and control—particularly regarding gender. I argue that *Vertigo* echoes *Hamlet* through ghostly feminine figures that create a powerful sense of distortion, confusion, and unease, ultimately painting a tragic picture of masculine control over women. In exploring how *Hamlet* haunts *Vertigo*, then, it is fitting to begin with ghosts.

Vertigo opens with a death and a haunting. Scottie and a fellow policeman are chasing a criminal across a series of San Francisco rooftops. Scottie fails to land a leap onto a steep roof and slips, leaving him clinging to a gutter pipe five stories above the ground. The other officer extends a hand to Scottie, who, paralyzed by a sudden spell of vertigo, cannot accept it, and the officer plummets to his death. Scottie's defining trait in this opening scene is helplessness: he is unable to save himself or the other officer. Some weeks later, Scottie sits in the apartment of friend and former fiancée Midge Wood (Barbara Bel Geddes), having quit the police force due to his acrophobia. The traumatic incident has turned what appeared to be a mild fear of heights into a crippling phobia. Throughout the film, we are presented with a visual indicator of Scottie's vertigo in the form of the film's groundbreaking dolly zoom shot (the "vertigo effect"), when Scottie's acrophobia is triggered (Figures 1 and 2).[12] The dolly zoom is first seen as Scottie dangles from the gutter, before the officer reaches for him (we will see it four more times throughout the film, twice in each ascension up the San Juan Bautista bell tower). The lingering trauma of the rooftop chase manifests in more than Scottie's acrophobia. "I wake up at night seeing that man fall from the roof, and I try to reach out to him" he says, staring at an unsteady hand. Scottie specifies that he sees the officer while waking, not dreaming; these visions are not confined to his subconscious. The ghost of his fellow officer, dead due to Scottie's inability to act, haunts him.

Figure 1-2. The famous dolly zoom shot of the San Juan Bautista stairs. Images from *Vertigo* (1958) copyright Universal Pictures. Accessed via https://the.hitchcock.zone/wiki/1000_Frames_of_Vertigo_(1958). Images used for research purposes under Fair Use as specified in Section 107 of the U.S. Copyright Act, 1976.

Hamlet likewise begins with haunting and great height. The play opens atop the guards' platform on the Elsinore castle battlements. Instead of a person falling to his death from the battlements, death rises to meet the living in the form of the ghost of the dead king. In the original Elizabethan staging of the play, the ghost likely would have initially entered the scene by rising

from a trap door beneath the stage. Such an entrance conveyed the dramatic and narrative importance of the ghost's appearance while calling to mind demons and hell (or, in this particular spirit's case, purgatory).[13] Act one ends with Prince Hamlet speaking with the ghost of his father, who tasks his son, "If ever thou didst thy dear father love … revenge his foul and most unnatural murder" (1.5.25).[14] The spirit departs, urging the prince to "remember me" (1.5.91). Hamlet's response is resolute:

> Remember thee?
> Ay, thou poor ghost, while memory holds a seat
> In this distracted globe. Remember thee?
> Yea, from the table of my memory
> I'll wipe away all trivial fond records,
> All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past,
> That youth and observation copied there,
> And thy commandment all alone shall live
> Within the book and volume of my brain,
> Unmix'd with baser matter. (1.5.95-104)

This impassioned vow indicates two objects: to "remember thee" is to remember both the task and the task-giver. In other words, "The test of love is vengeance; but love must be kept alive by memory."[15] Of course, Hamlet's vow does not come to fruition; he cannot "wipe away all trivial fond records," nor can he dispel thoughts extending "beyond the deed to its possible consequences."[16] Indeed, the ghost returns in Act three, scene four (in its only appearance not atop the high platform) to chastise Hamlet for neglecting his vow. Though he spends much of the play failing to remember the ghost by means of action, the memory of the ghost is never far from Hamlet; in his musings on vengeance, where and when to act, life and death, and the nature of action itself, he continually returns to the person of the ghost and its task. Though the ghost is not seen (with the sole exception of 3.4), he continues to haunt Hamlet through memory—just as Scottie is haunted by the memory of his dead coworker.[17]

The officer on the rooftop is not the only ghost haunting Scottie. Height and death are intimately entangled in *Vertigo*: "Madeline" attempts suicide by leaping (albeit from a small height) into the San Francisco Bay and later falls to her death from the San Juan Bautista mission bell tower. In the latter case, the association

of death and height is deliberately evoked; Gavin Elster's (Tom Helmore) plan to disguise his wife's murder as a suicide hinges on Scottie's acrophobia keeping him from reaching the top of the bell tower. Judy, in a disturbing reflection of her alter ego's demise, likewise meets her end by falling from the bell tower. The film ends as it began, with Scottie staring, transfixed, at a corpse from above.

The figure of Madeline is an Ophelia analogue—given Hitchcock's appreciation for *Hamlet*, a certain level of reference to Ophelia was likely intentional. Madeline is, in the world of the film, deliberately evoking a preexisting image: that of Carlotta Valdes, the ghost whom Madeline believes is possessing her. Carlotta is herself an Ophelia figure. Like Ophelia, Carlotta's legacy is one of male rejection and eventual madness, and her bouquet of flowers recalls both Ophelia's floral distributions in act four, scene two and her flower-tinged death in act four, scene four.[18] Finally, and most critically for the film's plot, Carlotta commits suicide. The means by which she does so are not revealed, but both "suicide attempts" into which she drives Madeline (the bay scene and the first scene at San Juan Bautista mission) are associated with falling. Later, of course, we find that the evocation of height and death in these attempts, much like Madeline's appropriation of Carlotta's Ophelia imagery, are deliberate. Through her association (via fictitious possession) with the ghostly Carlotta Valdes, Madeline is intentionally constructed as an Ophelia figure at the direction of Elster, a masculine authority; ironically, she mirrors Ophelia's own manipulation at the hands of Polonius and Claudius. Scottie, then, is Madeline/Judy's Hamlet—the man she is meant to manipulate as an agent of patriarchal power.[19]

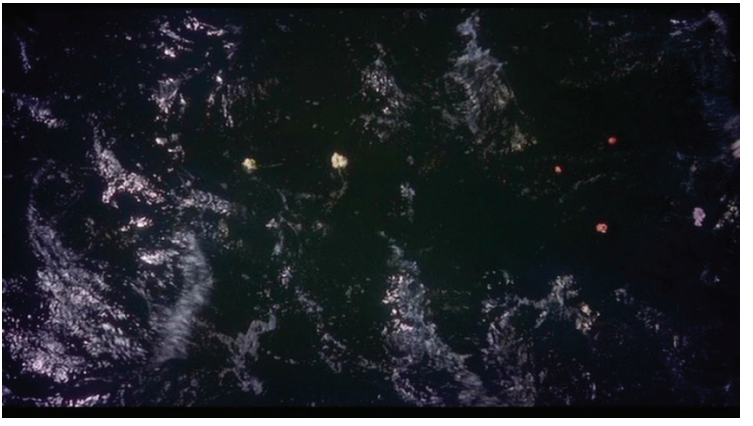

Figure 3. Madeline's flowers floating in the bay. Copyright Universal Pictures. Accessed via https://the.hitchcock.zone/wiki/1000_Frames_of_Vertigo_(1958).

Figure 4. Scottie rescuing Madeline from the bay. Copyright Universal Pictures. Accessed via https://the.hitchcock.zone/wiki/1000_Frames_of_Vertigo_(1958).

We find the most blatant Madeline-Ophelia parallels in the San Francisco bay scene. Madeline pulls apart her (read: Carlotta Valdes's) bouquet, dropping flowers into the bay (Figure 3), and abruptly jumps into the water. As Scottie dives into the bay to rescue her, the viewer's eye is drawn not to him, but to the figure of

the seemingly unconscious Madeline floating among the discarded petals—the respectively dark and light fabrics of her dress and scarf billowing around her (Figure 4). The sequence evokes Gertrude's report of Ophelia's death (Figure 5):

> There is a willow grows aslant a brook,
> That shows his hoar leaves in the glassy stream;
> There with fantastic garlands did she come
> Of crow-flowers, nettles, daisies, and long purples
> That liberal shepherds give a grosser name,
> But our cold maids do dead men's fingers call them.
> There, on the pendent boughs her coronet weeds
> Clambering to hang, an envious sliver broke,
> When down her weedy trophies and herself
> Fell in the weeping brook. Her clothes spread wide;
> And, mermaid-like, awhile they bore her up,
> Which time she chanted snatches of old tunes;
> As one incapable of her own distress,
> Or like a creature native and indued
> Unto that element. (4.4.165-179)

Both Ophelia's death and Madeline's plunge into the bay incorporate an act of falling—Ophelia falls into the stream when the branch she perches on snaps beneath her weight, and Madeline jumps from a height of approximately 5-6 feet into the bay—an extension of the height/death associations in both works.[20] Vest points out an important distinction from Shakespeare in the Ophelia imagery of this scene: Madeline does not drown but is "rescued" by Scottie, the "Gertrude-like witness" to her plunge.[21]

Figure 5. John Everett Millais, Ophelia (1851-2). Public domain.

Viewing the characters as non-adaptational analogues, it is worth noting here an important distinction between the Madeline/Scottie and Ophelia/Hamlet relationships; Hamlet never witnesses Ophelia's madness. Ophelia's mad scene and her death both occur while Hamlet is away from court, and he is devastated to witness her funeral upon his return. What Hamlet's reaction would have been to Ophelia's madness is unknown. Seen instead are the reactions of the Danish court, where "The subversive power of madness is made clear by Ophelia's conjectures."[22] She hands each character flowers symbolically appropriate for the sins they keep beneath their pristine personas. While, as Duncan Salkeld suggests, "Her sanity keeps her … moderately useful to Polonius and the King,"[23] Ophelia's madness turns her meek, obedient self on its head; she can no longer be controlled and is simultaneously a victim to and symbol of liberty from the patriarchal systems that use and abuse her.[24] Her madness is uncanny. The familiar feminine (heimlich) is rendered unfamiliar (unheimlich) in a manner that upsets the status quo of Elsinore; the court can no longer hide from the consequences of their lack of care for Ophelia nor their personal hypocrisy. The chilling figure of the mad Ophelia marks

the final time she is seen onstage (her offstage death is recounted by Gertrude). Ophelia never appears as a ghost, but the final images of her, mad and, later, drowned, are haunting.

Madeline's morbid speeches in her "trances" are reminiscent of Ophelia's act four speeches and songs. Madeline describes her "possession" as an inescapable journey through Carlotta's memories: sad, mad, and Ophelia-like, ending only in death:

> It's as though I were walking down a long corridor that once was mirrored, and fragments of that mirror still hang there. And when I come to the end of the corridor, there's nothing but darkness. And I know that when I walk into the darkness…that I'll die…an open grave. I stand by the gravestone looking down into it. And it's my grave.

Madeline is, it seems, being forced to remember Carlotta's life and death. In addition to Carlotta's presence as a ghost—one that possesses, haunts, and demands to be remembered—the imagery associated with her can also be connected back to the height/death association pervading the film long before the Spanish mission comes into the narrative.[25] The spiral hairstyle Carlotta wears in her portrait, which Madeline mimics, evokes the spirals seen in the opening credits. The shot comparing the two hairstyles—a pair of zooms onto distinctly feminine features—likewise recall the close-ups of the unidentified woman's face (Figures 6 and 7). The spiral shape suggests dizziness and disorientation, aided by their visual association with the film's title (Figure 8). Recalling the vertigo imagery of the opening credits, Carlotta/Madeline's hairstyle evokes not only the ghost of Carlotta, but the film's theme of height and death. Scottie's obsession with Madeline, then, parallels the dizziness and disorientation that accompanies his vertigo. Thus, Madeline/Carlotta's ghostly Ophelia-like presence is intimately entangled with the trauma that haunts Scottie—an association that anticipates Madeline's "death" at San Juan Bautista mission.[26]

Figure 6. Madeline's spiral hairstyle. Copyright Universal Pictures. Accessed via https://the.hitchcock.zone/wiki/1000_Frames_of_Vertigo_(1958).

Figure 7-8. Stills from the film's opening sequence. Copyright Universal Pictures. Accessed via https://the.hitchcock.zone/wiki/1000_Frames_of_Vertigo_(1958).

Through the intimate tracking shots in the portrait gallery, Tania Modleski, drawing from Freudian conceptions of woman as uncanny, highlights the twisted appeal of Madeline's madness for Scottie. His desire for Madeline "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 the woman before the portrait, Scottie is driven to break

the spell she exerts by competing with Carlotta for possession of Madeline."[27] Of course, the fact that "Madeline" does not really exist has not yet been revealed. Yet the nature of Scottie's self-destructive desire for Madeline is made visible in the spiral hairstyle on which he fixates, associated both with the ghost of Carlotta Valdes and with death via vertigo. The uncanniness of Madeline's apparent madness does not, unlike that of Ophelia, disturb the patriarchal figure into repulsion, but instead deliberately plays on his desire to control her.

Scottie does not believe that Carlotta's ghost is actually haunting Madeline. When it becomes clear that the location she describes is San Juan Bautista mission, Scottie "is convinced in some way he does not explain that if he can show her that the site of her dream is a real place, she will believe that she has been there before, that that is how she knows all the details, and she will then be cured, will not be able to continue to believe she is haunted, possessed, by a dead Carlotta."[28] His attempts to conform Madeline to his perceived version of reality—a world where she is not possessed and can be cured—are well-intentioned. All the same, his talk of freeing Madeline from Carlotta's "possession" is underscored by a desire to possess her himself. "There is nothing you must do. No one possesses you. You're safe with me," Scottie whispers to Madeline as he holds her in a tight embrace, kissing her while she looks past him to the mission tower. No one possesses Madeline; "No one—the implication is," offers Modleski, "but himself."[29]

At the mission, Madeline is apparently unable to break free from Carlotta's influence and, after professing her love for Scottie, races up the mission bell tower. Scottie's acrophobia is triggered, and unable to follow her further, he sees her plummet to her "death." He is once again left helpless to save someone, reliving the trauma that incited his vertigo.

The coroner's inquest, wherein the cause of Madeline's death is investigated and declared suicide, recalls Ophelia's funeral; authorities determine whether or not the seeming madwoman took her own life. During the inquest, the presiding official callously emphasizes Scottie's failure to save Madeline, despite acknowledging that Scottie's behavior has no impact on the inquest's ruling. The implication is clear; Scottie should have been able to control the situation, but he did not. Scottie, Elster, and the

audience are aware that Scottie's vertigo left him powerless, but the presiding officer conveys the idea that Scottie's powerlessness is, if not unbelievable, unacceptable.

The scene following the inquest is perhaps the most disorienting one in the film—the nightmare sequence. This surreal scene marks the turning point of the film and, likewise, it is where the *Hamlet* analogues (their reflections and distortions of Shakespearean precedents heretofore fairly straightforward) become far more "diffused, fragmented, and set spinning."[30] With its unsettling close-ups, vivid colors, and use of animation, Scottie's nightmare visually echoes the opening credits. The dream unfolds as follows: Scottie's bed and pillow vanish behind him as he seemingly awakens. A quick animated sequence shows Carlotta's bouquet scattering in a colorful burst of petals (reminiscent of the bay scene). Scottie is shown speaking to Elster at the coroner's inquest, while Carlotta stands, ghostlike, between them, clinging to Elster but shifting her gaze to look at Scottie, her expression inscrutable (Figure 9). Cut to a close-up of Carlotta's necklace, the portrait here uncannily recreated as a photograph. Scottie then approaches Carlotta's open grave and falls in, his descent represented by a close-up of his disembodied head plummeting down a tunnel until the rooftop of San Juan Bautista comes into view. We see a silhouette of Scottie's body falling onto the roof, which fades to a white void just before he makes contact.

Despite the dream ostensibly being the product of grief and trauma brought on by Madeline's "suicide," Madeline does not appear in the dream, but Carlotta does, pointedly "linked with Elster and not with Madeline.[31] Much of the imagery in the nightmare sequence is that of the Ophelia-like Carlotta: her bouquet, her grave, and continued height/death juxtaposition (in this case, falling into a grave onto the scene of the "suicide"). Though she is not seen in the dream sequence, Madeline is not absent. As Modleski notes,

> What is most extraordinary about this dream is that Scottie actually lives out Madeline's hallucination [Figure 10], that very hallucination of which he had tried so desperately to cure her, and he dies Madeline's death [Figure 11]. His attempts at a cure having failed, he himself is plunged into the "feminine" world of psychic disintegration, madness, and death.[32]

The emphasis on Carlotta in the nightmare sequence, then, does not necessarily indicate that Scottie now believes the possession story; as he now identifies with the haunted Madeline, Carlotta's ghost haunts him in turn.

The "'feminine world' of psychic disintegration, madness, and death" that Modleski identifies is made manifest in a series of hauntings. The uncanny feminine figures in *Vertigo* are ghostly women who destabilize the masculine figures who desire them. Following the nightmare sequence, Scottie enters a state of intense depression, spending the next year wandering—haunting—San Francisco, revisiting the places associated with Madeline/Carlotta, occasionally mistaking other women for her. "Scottie," remarks Modleski, "not only identifies with Madeline in his dream, but becomes caught up in the very madness he had feared in her. In his quest for his lost Madeline, 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."[33] Carlotta has taken over Madeline; now she takes over Scottie. Scottie does not lose his association with Hamlet, but from the nightmare sequence onward, Scottie takes up the role of Ophelia: the mad, the victim, the haunted.

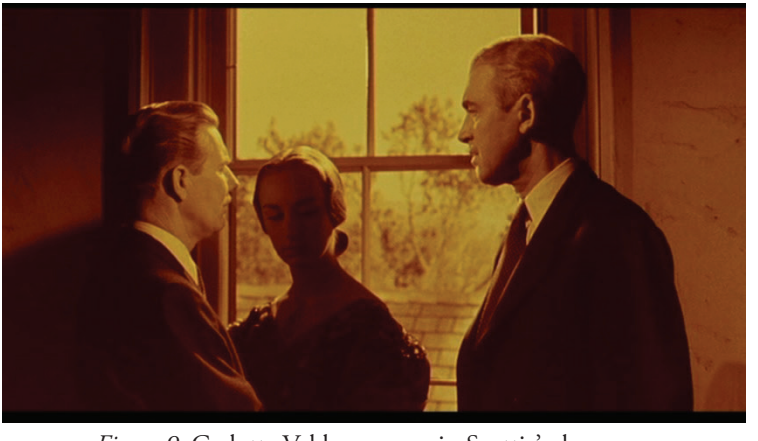

Figure 9. Carlotta Valdes appears in Scottie's dream. Copyright Universal Pictures. Accessed via https://the.hitchcock.zone/wiki/1000_Frames_of_Vertigo_(1958).

Figure 10. Carlotta's open grave. Copyright Universal Pictures. Accessed via https://the.hitchcock.zone/wiki/1000_Frames_of_Vertigo_(1958).

Figure 11. Scottie falls into Carlotta's grave. Copyright Universal Pictures. Accessed via https://the.hitchcock.zone/wiki/1000_Frames_of_Vertigo_(1958).

Enter Judy Barton. With the reveal of her role in the plot—playing the part of "Madeline" in order to create Scottie as witness to an apparent suicide—Judy is, albeit in a different respect than her Madeline persona, an Ophelia-like figure.[34] Like Ophelia, Judy is manipulated and molded by men—first Elster, then Scottie—for their own selfish purposes. The two single out Judy for the same

reason: "Because I look like her." Judy is not respected, loved, or valued for herself, but rather for her use, just as Ophelia is tolerated by the men of the Danish court so long as she is useful to their ends. Ophelia loves Hamlet, who claims to have never reciprocated her feelings, and cries to heaven for his "restoration"—to regain the love they'd had before. Scottie has never loved Judy—only Madeline—but Judy submits to his manipulations in the hopes that he will love her for herself, that their romance will, in some form, live again.

In examining the diffusions and fragmentations of *Hamlet* characters in *Vertigo*, it is tempting to view Judy as a Hamlet figure as well as an Ophelia one. "Judy," remarks Vest, "who plays so many roles in this story, also resembles Hamlet in one important way. Her origins are presented in terms of the traditional Hamlet-Orestes paradigm: 'That's me with my mother and that's my father. He's dead. My mother married again, but I didn't like the guy.'"[35] Vest fails to note other critical respects in which Judy echoes Hamlet. Her role as a person feigning madness for the sake of committing a murder (though she is not the one doing the killing), leaving a heartbroken and deeply unsettled lover in her wake, is strikingly Hamletesque. Moreover, the way in which she plays the role of Madeline, powerfully yet subtly embodying the character in "not just the hair and the clothes," but "the look, the manner, the words," evokes Hamlet's own advice to the players in act three. She "speak[s] the speech…trippingly on the tongue" (3.2.1) and holds "as 'twere, / the mirror up to nature" (3.2.20)—a "very apt pupil," indeed.

The ways in which Judy echoes Ophelia are more pronounced than those in which she echoes Hamlet. Yet it is important to note her similarities to Hamlet because the comparison emphasizes a key element of her character that Ophelia lacks: internality. There is only one moment in *Hamlet* where Ophelia is alone onstage—her short soliloquy in 3.1, where she laments Hamlet's apparent madness following his cruel rejection. Even then she is not truly alone; she knows that Polonius and Claudius are watching. Her thoughts regarding her manipulation at the hands of the Danish court are never revealed. Even her death is related through Gertrude's perspective, as opposed to being shown directly. The audience is never granted internality into Ophelia's thoughts; at

every moment, she is presented as a character to be evaluated, judged, and handled by the predominantly male members of the Danish court.

The audience is confronted with extensive scenes of Judy's internality. When Scottie leaves Judy's room following their first conversation, "the camera for the first time [except for two very brief scenes with Midge earlier in the film] deserts Scottie and remains with the woman."[36] Her letter to Scottie explaining her role in the plot is a soliloquy. The soliloquy presents a form of internality that the audience never receives from Scottie—private thoughts with no audience within the fourth wall. This level of internality evokes sympathy for Judy by way of identification, a pattern that will continue as "the revelation [of her role in the plot and love for Scottie, through her letter-soliloquy] functions to produce a spectator position painfully split between Scotty [sic] and Judy for the rest of the film."[37] Thus, unlike Ophelia, Judy's perspective on her manipulation at the hands of Scottie is explicitly and consistently shown through her perspective. Focus is taken away from Scottie and granted to the subject of his control, making his actions less sympathetic and significantly more disturbing. Moreover, the film's emphasis on Judy as a clever woman with demonstrable capacity and capability for manipulation further emphasizes the tragedy of her doomed love for Scottie, and his own unnatural actions.

The duality of Ophelia's character—demure, obedient lady of the court and uncontrollable madwoman—is sharply split into the Madeline and Judy personas. Madeline is Ophelia from act four onward—mad, associated with flowers, and unable to be controlled by the male influences that seek to "cure" her. Judy, who is manipulated and molded by patriarchal figures, echoes Ophelia from acts one through three. Through the doubling of Madeline and Judy, Ophelia is herself doubled, split into two characters. As Vest notes, "The order of events in Shakespeare's play is reversed in Hitchcock's film."[38] The two Ophelias are shown in reverse order; the mad Ophelia precedes the manipulated/molded Ophelia. Subsequently, *Vertigo*'s Ophelia figure undergoes a change in power dynamics that is the reverse of her *Hamlet* counterpart. Where Ophelia begins *Hamlet* with little power in the face of patriarchal dominance, she gains her freedom in madness. Judy,

pretending at madness, begins the film under Elster's power, but she is in control of Scottie, the male focal character, whom she manipulates with ease. After the murder plot is over, Judy becomes fully independent; she is comfortably departing with a set of female companions when Scottie first sees her—no male tether in sight.[39] In the final third of the film, however, she completely (albeit unhappily) submits to Scottie's manipulations and control. Though he points out that she could leave at any time, Judy's love for Scottie keeps her helpless under his manipulations; she cannot leave any more than he can erase the memory of Madeline.

The mad Ophelia's ghostly nature increases the effect of the uncanny in *Vertigo*, and the effect is redoubled when Scottie begins to remake Judy into the Ophelia-like Madeline. By the time Judy is introduced, Madeline is, like Carlotta before her, a ghost. The character is dead, but she haunts Scottie's mind, drawing him into her "world of psychic disintegration, madness, and death."[40]

Figure 12. Judy dressed as Madeline. Copyright Universal Pictures. Accessed via https://the.hitchcock.zone/wiki/1000_Frames_of_Vertigo_(1958).

In Judy's post-makeover reveal, the image of Madeline is distinctly ghostlike, obscured by fog and cast in a sickly green light, the shot a recollection of her appearance in the doorway of Scottie's bedroom (Figure 12).[41] The flowers on the hotel bedspread and the picture above it, later arranged in a bouquet, recall the Ophelia-like imagery so intimately linked to Madeline. Pippin credits Kim Novak's beautifully subtle acting in this shot; despite now looking exactly like Madeline, her posture and facial expressions convey that this is indeed Judy playing the part.[42] The ghostly presence of Madeline made manifest in Judy is almost like a possession. When Scottie kisses Judy-Madeline, he is struck by what for the audience is dramatic irony and for him a deeply disturbing uncanniness; the background changes to the San Juan Bautista stables where he last kissed Madeline. Here, for Scottie, the lines between reality and fantasy are at their most confused and blurred; he is kissing Judy, not Madeline, but everything about the kiss is just like when he kissed Madeline.[43] This is a moment of profound uncanniness for Scottie and of tragic, distressing irony for the audience. Despite the recreation of Judy-as-Madeline, the fact remains that Judy is not Madeline because Madeline, the "Madeline" Scottie fell in love with, never existed. Judy's role in the plot and the nature of Scottie's deception necessitate that the Madeline character can never live again. Madeline truly is, for all intents and purposes, dead, her ghostly, fantastic presence the only real existence she has. And because Scottie loves Madeline, not Judy—despite his claims to the contrary—Judy can never be free of her ghostly double. To borrow from Derrida, Madeline's "specter" is "as powerful as it is unreal, a hallucination or simulacrum that is virtually more actual than what is so blithely called a living presence."[44] Scottie's love for Judy is contingent on her being a vessel for Madeline—an ironic parallel to Madeline as Carlotta's vessel.

When Scottie discovers the truth behind the ruse, he is outraged at being tricked. Here another parallel is drawn between Scottie and the film's female Ophelia figures: "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."[45] Like Judy, Scottie is a victim of masculine manipulation, which perhaps further bruises his already shattered ego. Scottie is justifiably filled with rage at the revelation.

In the film's final scene, we return to the mission tower—the home of Carlotta, of death, of height, of hauntings. "I have to go back into the past once more, just once more," Scottie tells a distressed Judy, "for the last time." At this point, Scottie has pieced together the truth behind Madeline's death and Judy's identity; he has regained, to a certain extent, a sense of what was real. As they ascend the bell tower, Scottie presses on despite his vertigo—signaled once more by two dolly zooms—determined to get full clarity, to finally put to rest the uncertainty that has plagued him since losing Madeline.

His actions at the mission tower are also an assertion of control, the control he realizes he never possessed—control over his fear and control over Judy/Madeline. "I tried but I couldn't get to the top. One doesn't often get a second chance," he says, preparing to guide her up the tower. "I want to stop being haunted. You're my second chance, Judy. You're my second chance." As he says this, he holds her, eventually forcing her up the stairs, a physical assertion of power and control. To make it to the top of the tower, to discern reality from fiction, and to regain power over his own life is to assert control over the ghosts that haunt him. Only in firmly and finally establishing control can Scottie "stop being haunted" by Madeline, by his trauma, and by the ultimate lack of control both symbolize.[46] "In the end, like Hamlet," Vest notes, "John Ferguson finally makes up his mind and asserts his own needs, with tragic results."[47]

When he reaches the height at which he originally broke down, Scottie tells Judy that he knows the truth, and he drags her up the tower despite his fear. The moment he has gotten her full confession regarding her part in the murder, he remarks that he has "made it" to the tower's highest point, only for the confrontation to resume on the bell tower platform. Scottie's confrontation with Judy—his violent language, his rough physical treatment of her—echoes Hamlet at his cruelest, in the act three, scene one, "get thee to a nunnery" scene. Scottie's anguished "I loved you so, Madeline" is, in effect, telling Judy, "I loved you not" (3.1.116-17). Judy pleads with him to love her, but he knows that the fantasy has ended, and he has finally accepted that "there's no bringing her back."

"Love me," Judy whispers once more, and the two kiss—the first time Scottie has kissed Judy and only Judy, not Madeline. She

will no longer be molded, no longer manipulated. Judy is, it seems, finally free from Madeline's ghost. And at this precise moment, Judy sees a final shadowy, ghostly figure (actually a nun) ascending the stairs. *Vertigo* ends as *Hamlet* begins, with a Catholic "ghost" on a platform and the striking of a bell (Figure 13). Judy is startled and breaks out of Scottie's grasp, darts out of frame, and screams. Much like Ophelia's death, it is unclear whether Judy's fall from the bell tower is an accident or an act of suicide. Furthermore Judy, like Ophelia, is the only character to die in *Vertigo* whose body is not shown.[48] The film ends with the image of Scottie standing on the tower ledge, staring at the scene below (Figure 14). The implication is that he is cured of his acrophobia ("Only another emotional shock could do it"); the shock that seemingly cures him comes only after he has put away his fantasy and is again able to properly perceive reality.

Figure 13. The nun's silhouette appears atop the bell tower. Copyright Universal Pictures. Accessed via https://the.hitchcock.zone/wiki/1000_Frames_of_Vertigo_(1958).

Figure 14. The final shot of the film. Copyright Universal Pictures. Accessed via https://the.hitchcock.zone/wiki/1000_Frames_of_Vertigo_(1958).

Scottie's ultimate assertion of control is his control over his vertigo: the source of his helplessness throughout the film. Conquering his vertigo, however, comes at the expense of Judy's life. Masculine assertion of control comes at the expense of the woman. The same happens in *Hamlet*. Ophelia, constantly used as a pawn in the political machinations of the patriarchal Danish court, loses her sanity—almost entirely due to Hamlet's own actions—and her life. The men who manipulate Ophelia and Judy do so with little to no regard for their emotional or mental well-being. Ophelia is a tool to be used in Hamlet's manipulation, later thrown back at his enemies with callous cruelty. Judy is a conduit for Scottie to recreate the woman he loved and, ultimately, to gain control after over a year of helplessness in the face of his trauma.

Though he does not bear witness to her madness, Hamlet is haunted by Ophelia. Returning from the sea to her funeral, Hamlet has to confront the sudden death of his lover and his role in her demise. He is, appropriately enough, horrified, and he loudly makes his grief known. Because the film ends at the moment of Judy's death, it is unclear how Scottie would respond to her demise. Judging by the ghostly imagery that ends the scene—above all the ominous ringing of the bell—it is implied that this death will continue to haunt Scottie.

The non-adaptive critical lens is imperfect; as Mallin notes, its use hinges on specific, presupposed interpretations of two distinct texts.[49] An interpretation of *Vertigo* as a non-adaptation of *Hamlet* is, like any interpretation, highly subjective to the critical inclinations of the reader. In this particular case, both texts are infamously ambiguous on a psychological level. The non-adaptive interpretation, however, does invite a new sense of appreciation—both critical and artistic—for the works it examines. In viewing *Vertigo* through the lens of *Hamlet*, we find that the film's Shakespearean echoes highlight and evoke further uncanniness—madness, doubling, haunting presences, and the confusion of reality and fantasy. Like the vertigo that plagues Scottie, the deviations from the film's Shakespearean echoes—the reconfiguring of Ophelia-like imagery into ghostly presences; the doubling, division, and reversal of Ophelia; and the conflation and diffraction of Hamlet character analogues—are disorienting and confusing, drawing the audience into the characters' mental and emotional disorientation and tension. The characters' reactions to these hauntings amplify the unsettling and tragic nature of the gendered power dynamics in both works, where the man who seizes control over his trauma-onset, struggles at the woman's expense.

Notes

1. Eric S. Mallin, *Reading Shakespeare in the Movies: Non-Adaptations and Their Meaning* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 12.

2. Mallin, *Reading Shakespeare,* 43.

3. See Margaret Kidnie, *Shakespeare and the Problem of Adaptation* (London: Routledge, 2009).

4. Dan Aulier, *Hitchcock's Notebooks: an Authorized and Illustrated Look Inside the Creative Mind of Alfred Hitchcock* (New York: Spike, 1999), 1.

5. James M. Vest, "Reflections of Ophelia (and of *Hamlet*) in Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo*" *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association* 22.1 (1989): 1.

6. References to "Madeline" herein refer to the constructed identity that Kim Novak's character, Judy Barton, wears throughout the film, not Gavin Eslter's wife. This "Madeline" is not a real person, but rather a character created specifically for the purpose of the murder plot. Given that the "real" Madeline Elster has little presence in the film, all references to "Madeline" refer to the constructed persona with whom Scottie falls in love (unless otherwise noted).

7. Vest, "Reflections of Ophelia," 5.

8. Vest, "Reflections of Ophelia," 5.

9. Hitchcock's film is an adaptation of the 1954 novel *D'entre les morts* (generally referenced as *The Living and the Dead*) by Pierre Boileau and Thomas Narcejac (known together as Boileau-Narcejac). While some of the parallels to *Hamlet* are present in the plot of the novel (for instance, Madeline still attempts suicide in a body of water—the Siene), my analysis focuses on Hitchcock's film instead of the novel itself. The haunting motifs in *Vertigo* are inherently cinematic (imagery, visual framing, cinematography, etc.), and these elements are central to my analysis. I acknowledge the origin of some of these parallels to *Hamlet* in *D'entre les morts*, but my argument is built on Hitchcock's use of the filmic medium to echo Shakespeare's play.

10. See definition 5 in "haunt, v," OED Online.

11. Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (London: Routledge, 2011), 63.

12. There is one instance in the film where one of Scottie's vertigo episodes is not accompanied by a dolly zoom shot—the stepladder scene in Midge's apartment. This is also the only point in the film in which Scottie's acrophobia is triggered in a scene that does not end in death.

13. Diana Macintyre DeLuca, "The Movements of the Ghost in *Hamlet*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 24.2 (1973): 148.

14. Quotations of *Hamlet* reference the Norton Shakespeare, third edition.

15. Michael Cameron Andrews, "'Remember Me:' Memory and Action in *Hamlet*," *The Journal of General Education* 32. 4 (1981): 261.

16. Andrews, "Memory and Action," 261.

17. It would be remiss to neglect Lawrence Olivier's *Hamlet* (1948), specifically, the height/death juxtaposition present in the staggering cliffside setting of the "To be or not to be" scene as a potential influence on *Vertigo* and intermediary between Hitchcock's film and Shakespeare's play.

18. Ophelia was a popular subject in 19th-century artwork. Carlotta's floral portrait, presumably painted during her life (and before her husband's rejection), would have been painted in the same timeframe.

19. Madeline is a character, and Judy is playing the part; each enacts different aspects of the Ophelia character.

20. Scottie's acrophobia is not triggered in this scene, despite him diving into the bay from above. There are multiple explanations to account for this apparent inconsistency. First, the distance may not be high enough to trigger Scottie's acrophobia. In the earlier scene in Midge's apartment, Scottie's vertigo is triggered not by climbing on the stepladder but by staring out the window into the alley several stories below. Thus, we may conclude that Scottie's acrophobia is not triggered at smaller heights. Second, the presence of water below him may alleviate the fear; Scottie is obviously a strong swimmer, and every bout of vertigo depicted in the film is associated with a fall onto a solid surface. Third and finally, Vest interprets this scene as Scottie's "first positive step toward overcoming his acrophobia: he survives a drop from a height and thinks he has saved her life in the bargain," though the film does little to indicate that such progress has taken place; indeed, for Scottie' acrophobia to be somewhat healed by rescuing Madeline from her dive would be antithetical to Elster and Judy's plot.

21. Vest, "Reflections of Ophelia (and of *Hamlet*)," 5.

22. Duncan Salkeld, *Madness and Drama in the Age of Shakespeare* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), 94.

23. Salkeld, *Madness and Drama,* 94.

24. Salkeld, *Madness and Drama,* 95.

25. Another notable moment of ghost imagery is Madeline's inexplicable appearance and disappearance at the McKittrick Hotel, where she is seen in a high window only to vanish before Scottie goes up to her room, the hotel clerk unable to recall her presence that day. This moment is never explained in the film, nor has Hitchcock provided one in interviews. In any case, the scene further emphasizes Carlotta/Madeline's uncanny, ghostlike presence.

26. Of course, Elster's plan hinges on Scottie's acrophobia and subsequent vertigo, so the connection between the ghostly Carlotta/Madeline and Scottie's trauma is, in the world of the film, deliberate. The full extent of the effect Madeline was meant to have on Scottie in the context of the plan remains ambiguous. Though the character of Madeline was engineered to allure Scottie, the enduring impact of their relationship and her apparent demise was likely more than Elster had accounted for or cared enough to consider.

27. Tania Modleski, *The Women Who Knew Too Much: Hitchcock and Feminist Theory* (New York: Methuen, 1988), 93-94.

28. Robert B. Pippin, *The Philosophical Hitchcock:* Vertigo *and the Anxieties of Unknowingness* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017), 77. Pippin proceeds to mention that Scottie's conception of "curing" Madeline is "rather like telling a depressed person that she has no good reason to be depressed, and insisting that when she realizes that, she will stop being depressed," in addition to several other reasons his plan is an ill-conceived one. This can be read as a foreshadowing of his relationship with Judy, where the woman is forced to conform to Scottie's ideal of what is right.

29. Modleski, *The Women Who Knew Too Much*, 94.

30. Vest, "Reflections of Ophelia (and of *Hamlet*)," 5.

31. Pippin, *The Philosophical Hitchcock*, 91. It is worth highlighting that Carlotta, despite serving as a double of Madeline, is not played by Kim Novak when she appears in the nightmare sequence, but by an uncredited Joanne Genthon.

32. Modleski, *The Women Who Knew Too Much*, 95. Emphasis Modleski's.

33. Modeleski, *The Women Who Knew Too Much*, 96.

34. The twist of the murder plot is not revealed until near the conclusion of *D'entre les morts*. Hitchcock's decision to place the revelation of Judy/Madeline's true identity earlier in the story places emphasis on Scottie's madness as well as Judy's personal tragedy. The hauntings here, laced with dramatic irony, take on a much more sinister air.

35. Vest, "Reflections of Ophelia (and of *Hamlet*)," 5.

36. Modleski, *The Women Who Knew Too Much*, 89.

37. Richard Abel, "*Stage Fright*: The Knowing Performance," *Film Criticism* 9. 2 (1984-85): 50n.

38. Vest, "Reflections of Ophelia (and of *Hamlet*)," 3.

39. In their final confrontation, Scottie suggests that Judy was Elster's mistress and that he rejected her once the plot was through. In the original screenplay,

Madeline confirms this. In the film, the answer is more ambiguous; throughout the exchange, Kim Novak seems to emphasize Judy's fear more than her answer to Scottie's question. At any rate, considering she was in love with Scottie at the time and seemed fairly content a year after the crime, Judy appears pointedly independent by the time Scottie finds her.

40. Modleski, *The Women Who Knew Too Much*, 95.
41. Pippin, *The Philosophical Hitchcock*, 58-59.
42. Pippin, *The Philosophical Hitchcock*, 112.
43. Pippin, *The Philosophical Hitchcock*, 114-115.
44. Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 13.
45. Modleski, *The Women Who Knew Too Much*, 98.
46. "Nothing could be worse, for the work of mourning, than confusion or doubt: one *has to know* who is buried where—and *it is necessary* (to know—to make certain) that, in what remains of him, *he remain there*." Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 9.
47. Vest, "Reflections of Ophelia (and of *Hamlet*)," 3.
48. Vest, "Reflections of Ophelia (and of *Hamlet*)," 7.
49. Mallin, *Reading Shakespeare in the Movies*, 37-38.