

According to Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" films from the classical period of Hollywood revolved around the male protagonist's quest to gain "control and possession of the woman within the diegesis" (Mulvey page 421). This ultimately forces the woman into the role of an object rather than a person. Mulvey claims that the woman represents the castration complex in the male lead and in controlling her he can overcome his fears. The man imposes his control over the woman through his gaze. And through the male gaze the audience is allowed to identify with the male protagonist. Alfred Hitchcock's "Vertigo" is a classic example of this archetype. Scottie, the male lead, is striving to make up for succumbing to his fear of heights in the opening scene.

Scottie's journey is based in his redemption. The film starts by showing the death of his partner which is also the death of his police career. Thus the narrative starts with the emasculation of Scottie. His role as a police officer is symbolic of his manhood and we never see him as police in the film. What we see is Scottie attempting to regain his lost masculinity. This is the motivating factor behind his agreement with Elster. Following Madeleine allows Scottie to be in control, notably of a woman. The fact that Scottie is following a woman is integral to regaining what he has lost. Madeleine "is no longer the bearer of guilt but a perfect product" (Mulvey page 419) Scottie places the guilt of his past failures onto Madeleine through his male gaze. It is a controlling gaze that develops from the sheer act of following her. The following and gaze are initially regarded as police type work, so we see that this is a deeply masculine act and is part of Scottie's attempts at recalling his previous station in life. This leads to Madeleine becoming Scottie's obsession as he tries to "save" her. The act of saving Madeleine is what will redeem Scottie, but he fails in the task. Scottie attempts to keep Madeleine from going into the bell tower, but she goes anyway, and in his pursuit he is unable to get up the tower.

His failure at redemption leads Scottie to be "castrated" in the court-room. The following scene with Midge it is clear that Scottie is the image of a broken man. Here he is treated as if he was a child by Midge. She plays the motherly role and he plays the role of the child dependent on his mother, before he identifies with his father. After this point, it is clear to Scottie that he has lost any chance at redemption as he has failed to save Madeleine, but Scottie meets Judy, who as it turns out is actually Madeleine, and another opportunity to save himself. This time by "saving" Judy.

It is important to recognize that Scottie becomes truly insane by this point. He realizes his need to control her and he forces Judy to become Madeleine; by changing Judy into the image of Madeleine. By finding the exact dress Madeleine once wore. These acts of domination are key to Scottie regaining his manhood. Through the recreation of Madeleine he is able to try and save her once again. So Scottie forces Judy up to the top of the bell tower and in doing so he overcomes his vertigo. The vertigo is symbolic of Scottie's castration. It is the reason for his departure from the police force and the reason he was unable to save Madeleine the first time. So by overcoming his fear of heights Scottie is able to reclaim some of his masculinity. But this is short lived, for Judy is not saved in the end, but rather she takes her own life. This act of suicide is Judy taking away control from Scottie. He does not get to save her and therefore he does not get to redeem himself. The final shot of the movie frames Scottie in a doorway and the visual image is that of a weak defeated man. This is where Hitchcock leaves the audience and we are left to ponder the future of Scottie, but we are not left with the feeling that things will work out for him in the end.

Hitchcock forces us to identify with the plight of Scottie, but he is never gains his redemption. In the end he ends up lost forever. This creates an internal conflict for the viewer. On one hand we feel for Scottie and we root for him though out the movie, but in the end we see that he is no longer mentally sound and we question his character and in turn we question ourselves.