



# Vertigo

Workshop

Advanced English Literature (3.2)

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## Vertigo

### Workshop Goals

The student demonstrates knowledge of and insight into the defining characteristics of film by using cinematic terms. The students can explain the psychological thriller and can use cinematic terms to describe how Hitchcock creates suspense. The student is able to write a thesis statement for a literary essay.



# Vertigo

Workshop Plan

**Activity 1**  
Setting in Cinematography

**Activity 2**  
Group Discussion

**Activity 3**  
Lecture on Hitchcock and the  
Psychological Thriller

**Activity 4**  
The best film ever?





Hitchcock's Vertigo can almost be seen as an ode to San Francisco. For this opening activity, each group will be given an important place in San Francisco that was in the film.

Left: Mission San Francisco de Asís

Top: Legion of Honor

Bottom: Fort Point and the Golden Gate Bridge



Left: Drive down the peninsula from San Francisco

Above: Muir Woods (redwood forest)

Bottom: Mission San Juan Bautista

# Activity 1

## Setting in Cinematography (5 minutes in group + 10 share)

For this opening activity, each group will be given an important place in San Francisco that was in the film. Your group will have 5 minutes to prepare answers the following questions:

1. What happened at this place? (What was its significance for the plot?)
2. What emotion does this place (or scene) elicit from the audience?

- Group 1: the San Francisco Legion of Honor
- Group 2: Mission San Francisco de Asís
- Group 3: Fort Point
- Group 4: Muir Woods
- Group 5: Mission San Juan Bautista



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**What feelings does the viewer experience throughout the film? How does Hitchcock achieve this?**





**Film critics have argued that *Vertigo* is a film about the male-gaze, about seeing and being seen. Do you agree? Where can we see this the most in the film?**



**What role does Midge play in the film? What are her feelings towards Scottie, and Scottie's feelings towards her? Why don't they ever foster a relationship?**



**What is the viewer supposed to feel about Scottie and his obsession with Judy's looks, how she dresses, how she does her hair? Is this feminist or misogynistic of Hitchcock to put in the film?**



**In Judy's apartment (before she writes the letter), the viewer does not know whether Judy and Madeline are the same person. How does Hitchcock do this (cinematographically) and why?**



**Why do you think Judy commits  
suicide in the end?**



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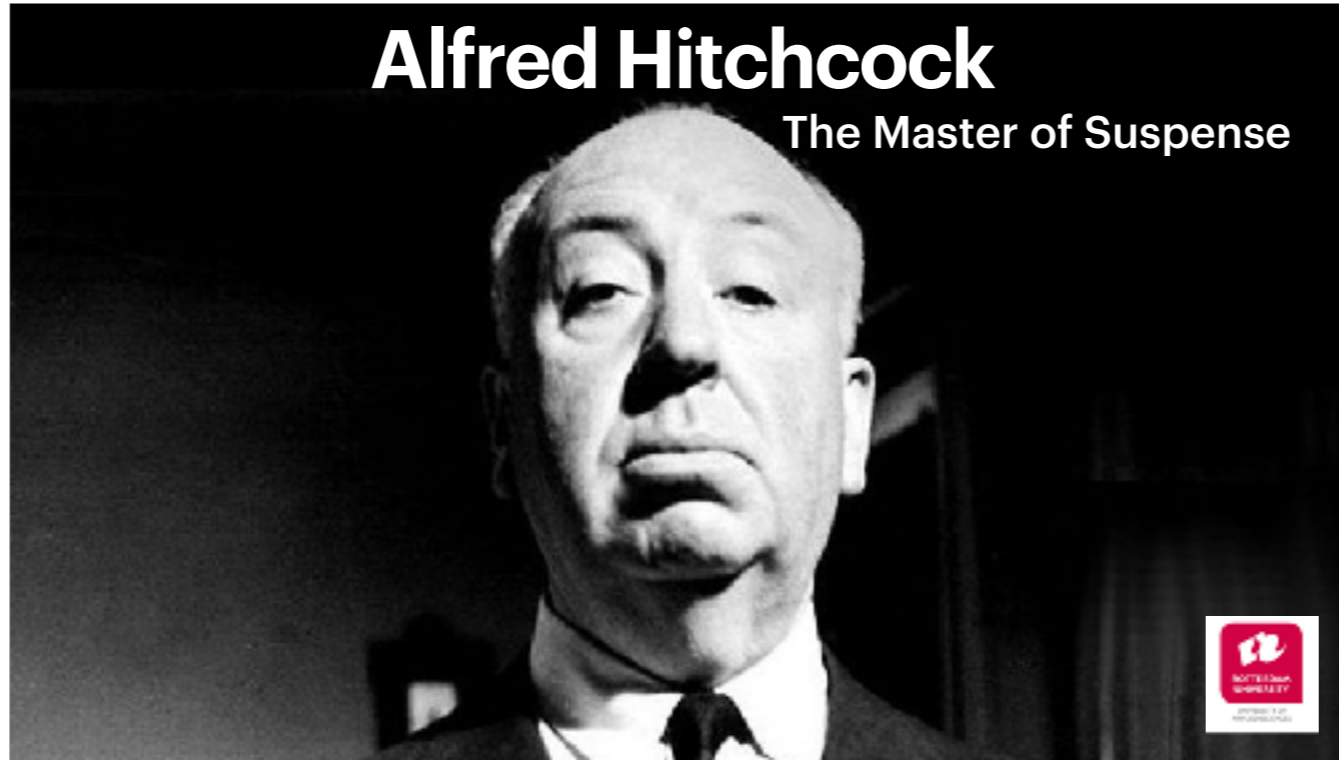
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# Alfred Hitchcock

The Master of Suspense



## Alfred Hitchcock

### Biographical information

- 1899-1980 (British)
- One of the most prolific directors of all time.
- Always in the lists of the best films ever are: Rear Window (1954), Vertigo (1958), North by Northwest (1959), and Psycho (1960)
- King of Suspense







## Suspense and Hitchcock's Bomb theory

When do we see this in *Vertigo*?



## The psychological thriller genre

**Psychological thriller** (genre): "The psychological thriller is a subgenre of thriller that explores the psychology of its characters, who are often unstable. What makes a thriller psychological is that the biggest questions revolve around the minds and behavior. Psychological thrillers often incorporate elements of mystery and include themes of crime, morality, mental illness, substance abuse, multiple realities or a dissolving sense of reality, and unreliable narrators." ([Source: Master class](#))



## point of view

### cinematic term

“Point of view (POV) is a variation of eye-line match. The two are similar, in that a character looks offscreen and we see where he or she is looking. With POV, however, the audience is, in effect, looking through the character’s eye.” ([Source: The Columbia Film Language Glossary](#)).



<https://youtu.be/cJxM5rG82aA>

For point-of-view we will examine the “First sighting” scene where we are introduced to Madeline. Notice how the scene is shot from our point-of-view. Look at how we walk into the restaurant and then we look at Scottie and see him gaze at Madeline and then we focus on Madeline and then we too look at her as she walks towards us to leave the restaurant.

Class discussion: What effect does this point-of-view have on the viewer? What emotions does it elicit?

## close-up

### cinematic term

The close-up (cinematographic term): "A close-up is a shot in which a person's face fills most of the screen, although the term can also refer to any shot that appears to have been taken at close range (or through a telephoto lens), and in which an object appears relatively large and in detail." (Source: [The Columbia Film Language Glossary](#))



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[insert video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4CZfSc6nJ8U> ]

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Class discussion: What is the significance of this introduction? Why do you think Hitchcock used it? How can it be tied into some of the movie's themes?

## lighting and filter

### cinematic term

Lighting and filter  
(cinematographic term):  
This is the way a director  
uses light and color to  
change an object in the  
film.



3) Lighting and filter (cinematographic term): This is the way a director uses light and color to change an object in the film.

For this part of the lecture we will look at the clip of Judy becoming Madeline:

[insert film here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tesqTwX7cpc> ]

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Class discussion: How does Hitchcock use light to introduce Madeline back to us? What effect does this have on the viewer?

## camera angle and rule of thirds

### terms

**Camera angle** (cinematographic term): "Camera angle refers to where the camera is placed in relation to the subject of the image. In general, the camera is placed approximately at eye level, or up to six feet off the ground." (Source: [The Columbia Film Language Glossary](#))

**Rule of thirds** (cinematographic term): "The rule of thirds is a concept in video and film production in which the frame is divided into nine imaginary sections, as illustrated on the right. This creates reference points which act as guides for framing the image. Points (or lines) of interest should occur at 1/3 or 2/3 of the way up (or across) the frame, rather than in the centre. Like many rules of framing, this is not always necessary (or desirable) but it is one of those rules you should understand well before you break it." (Source: [Media College](#))



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For these two terms we will look at Scottie saving Madeline as she attempts to commit suicide under the Golden Gate Bridge.

[insert film here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B8cWjLMuJgo> ]

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Class discussion: Why do directors use the rule of thirds and what effect does it have on us as viewers?

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The best film ever?



## Activity 4. The best film ever?

25 minutes

- Discuss Marías's article "Forever falling: what makes Vertigo great" and compile a list of at least five arguments he has for why Vertigo is the greatest film of all time.
- Add two of your own examples if you agree, or two counterarguments (or examples) if you disagree. (Be specific, name a better film, etc.)
- You will have 10-15 minutes to discuss, the last 10 minutes will be used to share our answers.



### Activity 4: The best film ever? (25 minutes)

Many critics, including the British Film Institute, have called Vertigo the best film of all times. Before class, students were asked to read "Forever falling: what makes Vertigo great" by Miguel Marías for the British Film Institute (2019). For this 20-minute activity, the students will work in short groups to compile a list of reasons Marías believes that Vertigo is the greatest film of all times, and they will also be asked to add two of their own (if they agree), or two counterarguments (if they disagree). In short, the instructions are:

- Discuss Marías's article "Forever falling: what makes Vertigo great" and compile a list of at least five arguments he has for why Vertigo is the greatest film of all time.
- Add two of your own examples if you agree, or two counterarguments (or examples) if you disagree.
- You will have 10-15 minutes to discuss, the last 10 minutes will be used to share our answers.