

François Truffaut Rewrites Alfred Hitchcock: A Pygmalion Trilogy

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This paper examines the influence of Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958) on two of François Truffaut's films, *Tirez Sur le Pianiste* (1960) and *Jules et Jim* (1961). (Of course the influence exceeds these works by far.) On his way toward defining his own voice (as well as shaping the modern cinema of the early sixties) Truffaut both absorbed from Hitchcock and rebelled against him. Such a case study should prove particularly rewarding because *Vertigo* holds a special position within Hitchcock's oeuvre, and it is intensely reflexive in that it is consciously concerned with the artistic act of filmmaking.

My treatment of Truffaut's relation to Hitchcock draws heavily on my (mis)understanding of Harold Bloom's theory of literary influence. According to Bloom, any strong poem, no matter what its ostensible topic, is essentially about an earlier poem (or poems).¹ It is the enactment of the latecomer's anxiety lest he be imaginatively constricted by his precursor, since "everything has already been said." The younger poet thus adopts a highly charged "oedipal" relation to his "father" poet.² If he is strong enough he deploys certain strategies (the six "ratios" specified by Bloom)³ that enable him to "swerve" away from the precursor at the point where the aspirant feels he deviated from what would have been the right course. Thus

the ephebe revises, rewrites, or as Bloom usually puts it, *misreads* the old poem.

To live, the poet must misinterpret the father, by the crucial act of misprision, which is the re-writing of the father.⁴

He thereby gains an illusory sense of having originated the old masterpiece rather than having been influenced by it.

Poets tend to think of themselves as stars because their deepest desire is to be an influence, rather than to be influenced, but even in the strongest, whose desire is accomplished, the anxiety of having been formed by influence still persists.⁵

The psychological and rhetorical strategies enable the ephebe both to negate the influence and also maintain it emotionally, through a repressed processing of it. The drama envisioned by Bloom is a veritable power struggle (a “wrestling”). There is no correct interpretation whether by poet or critic; there are only stronger or weaker misreadings.



Poetic strength comes only from a triumphant wrestling with the greatest of the dead⁶

One should note that in the case of Truffaut, critic turned filmmaker, his relation to Hitchcock is not a relation to a “dead poet,” as Bloom’s theory of influence would seem to require, Hitchcock at the time being very much alive and at the peak of his creativity. Moreover, as we shall see, much of Truffaut’s cinematic reaction to *Vertigo* is fully conscious, which in no way excludes there being repressed features that are not explicitly dealt with in the present study.

My starting point is Hitchcock’s “vertigo shot,” when James Stewart looks down the tower stairway in the first chapel scene, and the corresponding shot in *Jules et Jim* (1961), when the



two men discover the Greek statue for the first time. Truffaut emphasizes the discovery of the Greek statue by Jules and Jim through a special shooting technique. The camera backs away from the statue in a “dolly” movement, and at the same time the lens approaches it with a “zoom in” movement. These contrary movements jointly induce giddiness, as the statue’s size remains fixed, while the space between it and the background shrinks. This is a distinctive cinematic expression of the emotional impact the statue has on Jules and Jim, and also a cinematic ploy that draws Catherine out of her material reality, suggesting her transcendent or “divine” quality. Since looking at the statue has a dizzying effect on the spectator, Catherine comes to be perceived as the cause of the dizziness. Furthermore, this specific cinematic device, in which her image remains unchanged in size, while the space around her shrinks, defines her as the center around which the entire world revolves. The *Vertigo* association

intensifies our perception of her as a whirlpool that draws in the men in her vicinity. Indeed, in an interview, Hitchcock tells Truffaut that in *Vertigo* he invented this shot, which he had been seeking for years since shooting *Rebecca* (1940), and explains what it meant to him:

Hitchcock. Did you notice the distortion when Stewart looks down the tower stairway? Do you know how we did that?

Truffaut. Wasn't that a track-out combined with a forward zoom?

Hitchcock. That's it. When Joan Fontaine fainted at the inquest in *Rebecca*, I wanted to show how she felt that everything was moving far away from her before she toppled over. I always remember one night at the Chelsea Arts Ball, at Albert Hall in London, when I got terribly drunk, and I had the sensation that everything was going far away from me. I tried to get that into *Rebecca*, but they couldn't do it. The viewpoint must be fixed, you see, while the perspective is changed as it stretches lengthwise. I thought about the problem for fifteen years. By the time we got to *Vertigo*, we solved it by using the dolly and zoom simultaneously.⁷

The *Vertigo* shot emphasizes the character's weakness and helplessness. Truffaut's use of Hitchcock's shot could obviously be a mere borrowing of a Hitchcockian technique. But given the further multiple links to *Vertigo*, the shot is clearly part of a Bloomian misreading (albeit in the above-mentioned conscious mode) of a poetic precursor. Truffaut inverts the meaning with an identical shot. He expresses the excitement of the viewers and the glorification of the object viewed. At the same time, the quotation

hints at the helplessness of the men vis-à-vis Catherine's powers, which becomes evident further on.

I suggest that *Vertigo* itself should be seen as a misreading of the myth of Pygmalion—a sculptor who, though he hated women, fell in love with his own ivory statue of Aphrodite. In answer to his prayer, the goddess gave life to the statue and he married her. This is how Truffaut himself sums up the plot of *Vertigo*⁸:

Scottie Ferguson (James Stewart), who, due to acrophobia (fear of heights), has resigned from the San Francisco police force, is asked by Gavin Elster (Tom Helmore), a former friend, to shadow his wife, Madeleine (Kim Novak), whom he describes as a suicidal neurotic. The former detective gradually falls deeply in love with the woman he is trailing. He saves her life when she attempts to drown herself but, because of his phobia, is unable to prevent her death when, some time later, she throws herself from the top of a church steeple. Overwhelmed by guilt feelings, Scottie has a nervous breakdown. With the help of an old girlfriend, Midge (Barbara Bel Geddes), he returns to a normal life. One day, on the street, he encounters the living image of his dead love, who claims she is Judy Barton and maintains she has never seen him, or heard of Madeleine. He is attracted to the girl but puzzled by the uncanny resemblance. The truth is that Judy is Madeleine, who, at the time of their former meeting, was not Elster's wife but his mistress. Her supposed death was part of a carefully planned hoax to get rid of the real wife, with the two accomplices staging the killing in such a way that the helpless detective would swear he has witnessed Mrs. Elster's suicide. Scottie finally becomes suspicious, and in an attempt to make Judy confess, he takes her back to the tower and forces himself to accompany her to the top,

only to see the terrified young woman accidentally trip and this time really fall to her death.⁹



The missing fact in Truffaut's eloquent synopsis, for the purpose of our discussion, is that Judy plays Madeleine not after the model of the real Mrs. Elster, but after the model of Carlotta, who had lived several generations earlier, and whose portrait hangs in a museum in San Francisco. What we have here is the incarnation of an image of a historical figure.

The plot is conveyed through a narrative structure emphasizing that *Vertigo* is a film about cinema. The film is divided into two parts, the second part being a kind of "Take 2" on the first part. In the first part Judy plays Madeleine whose ontological status is that of a total fiction—except for the fact that she stands for the idea of "the wife." The fact that neither the audience nor Scottie ever sees Elster's wife leaves her as a mere idea whose appearance through Judy's performance is the only thing we see. The cinematic reflexive aspect of *Vertigo* is especially highlighted by the historical-mythical background that Elster (archetypal director/producer) lends to the artistic image of the fictitious Madeleine, by using the figure of Carlotta—both her story and her museum's portrait—in shaping her artistic image.

In the second part we see a reconstruction/recreation/reflection of the first part, in which Scottie changes from an actor maneuvered by Elster into a director who maneuvers Judy, and in the course of his directing, eventually



acquires a genuine insight into his situation. This time Judy plays a Madeleine who exists in Scottie's memory as Elster had shaped her for him. To achieve the reconstruction, Scottie makes use of the same cinematic means that Hitchcock uses: casting, costumes, shoes, hair-dos, make-up, props, shooting locations, and narrative. The two parts of the film link together an objective external situation and a subjective internal situation. The first is Elster's desire to eliminate his wife and gain her money. The second is Scottie's subjective condition, namely, his desperate need for a "second chance" (a key expression) to redeem himself from his crippling guilt feelings for the death of his colleague in the prologue. The encounter between the two obsessions—Elster's and Scottie's—makes possible the first "artistic" act of creating a character and a plot, the one in which Elster is the "director," and subsequently the second, the one in which Scottie is a "spectator" turned "director."

Before turning to *Jules et Jim*, I will draw attention to the two Turning Points in *Vertigo*, which are obviously prominent scenes. The first one is the "Golden Gate Bridge" scene, where Madeleine jumps off the bridge into the water, to be rescued by Scottie, and thus they meet for the first time. The second turning point occurs when Scottie spots Judy as resembling the dead Madeleine, and proceeds to transform her into Madeleine. From here on the film moves on to its inevitable resolution, where Judy is led to her death by falling from the tower and Scottie is liberated from his vertigo.

Jules et Jim breaks the Aristotelian "unity of plot & action" rule and therefore its fragmented plot can not be summarized in few sentences. Its story however, is composed of fragmented episodes out of twenty years in the lives of its three main characters Jules, Jim, and Catherine. It is

revolving around their “manage a trios,” after the two men found in Catherine the incarnation of the smile on a Greek statue in which they had fallen in love. I read *Jules et Jim* as a film about a woman who wanted to be “God”



and discovered that she was mortal. To be “God,” according to this film, means to rebel against all limitations that restrict one’s life: physical and bodily limitations, the limitations imposed by the laws of nature, and those of social codes and interpersonal loyalties. To be “God” means to control your life and the lives of those around you, to experience absolute freedom, to create your life anew every day. This is Catherine’s personality and this is the way she acts. As a result, her personality and behavior lead her along the route of a Greek tragedy to the total destruction of her life and her loves. Such a reading of the film stems from the cinematic means of expression, as well as from an intertextual reading of the film. From the outset, Catherine is not ordinary flesh and blood. She is a “Pygmalion”-like incarnation of a smile that appears on a Greek statue that is first revealed to Jules and Jim on a projected slide, a reflection of an ancient object that is not connected with any real person. (Much as Elster’s creation of Madeleine relates to the idea of the wife or to historical Carlotta.)



We now revert to the above-emphasized turning points in *Vertigo*. The first one corresponds to Catherine’s two jumps into the river. The first apparently suicidal jump is

in protest against Jules and Jim's chauvinistic talk. The second jump is her real suicide. These two jumps echo the analogous jumps in *Vertigo*. In both cases we have the woman staging an apparent suicidal jumping into the water for the man spectator. Scottie in *Vertigo* ultimately extricates himself from the seductive power of the woman and consequently, through his dogged pursuit of his obsession, undergoes a therapeutic process. In *Jules et Jim*, by contrast, the woman takes the man along with her to his death, despite his attempts to liberate himself from her destructive influence.

The skeletons of the plots of both films display a strong affinity. The same affinity also exists with *Tirez Sur le Pianiste* (1960), and it establishes a unique relationship among the three films. Had the same filmmaker made them all, we could call them "The Pygmalion Trilogy." Now if we look at the following plot elements in *Jules et Jim*, by a slight transformation we can obtain the plot patterns of the entire trilogy:



1. A woman is the embodiment of a prior artistic representation (a statue, a slide of a statue). The men fall in love with her after they have fallen in love with the artistic representation that she is supposed to embody.

2. The woman jumps into the water, apparently as an act of suicide, but in reality as a manipulative protest against the men.

3. The woman commits suicide—at the end of the film she leaps from the heights to her death.

Now let us replace in number 1 the slide of the statue and the statue itself with an actress who plays the role of a woman in a painting. And let us replace in number 2 the woman's motive for jumping into the water as an act of protest, by a sheer manipulation designed to spread a net of seduction. What we get are conspicuous elements that distinctively single out *Vertigo*.



A minimal change reveals the plot of *Tirez Sur le Pianiste*. The plot of Truffaut's second film focuses on Charlie, a lonely bar pianist, who seems to live a quiet life. In the film's opening scene his serenity is shattered with the

appearance of Chico, his elder brother, who is fleeing from gangsters who want to kill him. Lena, the waitress at the bar, exploits the incident to come closer to the aloof and alienated Charlie by hiding him in her home from the

gangsters who want to reach Chico through him. On the walls of her room Charlie discovers posters of the famous classical pianist Edouard Saroyan—that is, of himself in an earlier identity before he vanished at the height of his



artistic success. Charlie/Edouard tells Lena, who in fact already knows about his hidden identity, the reasons for his disappearance from the stage.



Edouard had been a talented pianist who did not succeed in becoming known until meeting the impresario Lars Schmeel in a restaurant where

Edouard's beloved wife Thérèse was working. Schmeel made Edouard an international star. His success ruined his seemingly happy marriage. The couple's relationship reached its nadir when Thérèse confessed that it was she who had paved his way to the top by agreeing to sexual relations with Schmeel in return for Edouard's career advancement. Now Edouard is stunned. On the soundtrack we hear his inner voice telling him to go to her and embrace her, but in actuality he walks out of the room in anger. When he has a change of heart and comes back in panic, he finds an open window, from which Thérèse has jumped to her death. Edouard retires from his former life and builds himself a new identity, that of Charlie. Charlie earns his living by doing the cleaning in the neighborhood bar. His hands are drawn to the abandoned piano in the bar, and the owner makes him the house pianist. Lena decides to bring Edouard Saroyan back to life. Charlie's love for Lena overcomes the isolation he had sentenced himself to, and he tries to return to life. As in a Greek tragedy, Charlie does not manage to extricate himself from his fate and from his fragmented personality. His relationship with Lena repeats the pattern of his relationship with Thérèse and also ends with a death, when Lena is accidentally shot by the gangsters firing at Charlie's brother. Charlie's failures and his inability to act and to take responsibility play a major part in the tragic ending. We see that *Tirez Sur le Pianiste*'s two-part structure is a misreading of *Vertigo*'s two-part pattern: Two love stories. The second episode is a reconstruction of the first, which ends as a murder staged as a suicide. The man twice loses the woman he loves through his own fault, because of a personal flaw (the fear of heights is a metaphor for his inadequate functioning and for his anxieties concerning relations with women, a theme that recurs in *Rear Window* and

other Hitchcock films). The first loss is caused by the murder of Mrs. Elster and Madeleine's disappearance. In the second instance the reconstruction ends by Judy's inevitable death. For once she yielded to Scottie's obsession she was tragically doomed.

As in *Vertigo*, in *Tirez Sur le Pianiste* too, there are two stories of two different periods, in between which, the hero undergoes a crisis that causes him to change his identity and his profession. Both stories have to do with falling in love, and in *Tirez Sur le Pianiste*, too, the second case is a reconstruction, albeit metaphorical, of the first. The parallelism between the two films suggests Edouard's guilt for the suicide of the woman he loved. As in *Vertigo*, the sacrifice is a response to Edouard's passivity, which is a kind of emotional vertigo. The correspondence between Scottie's vertigo and Edouard's internal split is further confirmed when we notice the respective verbal and cinematic emphasis that both films give to the representation of the protagonists' defects. In the first scene between Midge and Scottie, right after the prologue, Scottie's problem is described by the use of three different terms, which only the accumulation of their nuances serves to define the problem besetting him, namely vertigo, acrophobia, and fear of heights. The impression is that, in the exchange between Midge and Scottie, Hitchcock employs all three terms most deliberately. Fear of heights simply defines the phenomenon and emphasizes the connection between it and the fear of falling, the fear of losing control. Acrophobia is the technical term referring to the mental disturbance. It suggests the deep-seated pathology. Vertigo refers to the resulting sensation of dizziness, the whirlpool that sucks the victim in totally. All these are graphically expressed in the credit scene by the spiral in the woman's eye, which is also

echoed by the curl in the hairdos of Madeleine/Carlotta/Judy. Equally, in Edouard/Charlie's case we have passivity, shyness and a few references to fear. In the first dialogue between Charlie and his employer the latter says: "You're afraid of women." Charlie listens and says to himself: "I'm afraid, I'm afraid." In the second part of the film Lars Schmeel, the impresario, tells Edouard that for the sake of the success of his career one must treat his shyness and his stage fear. So again we have several modes of references to his tragic flaw. This clearly alludes to Scottie's having to abandon his promising career in the police force because of his vertigo. In an attempt to overcome his failing, Edouard buys books about shyness and, conspicuously, a book titled *Stage Fright*. This title echoes Hitchcock's film of the same title, which only strengthens the link to Hitchcock and to the fear of heights central to *Vertigo*.

Moreover, Edouard's wife jumps to her death at a moment when she needs him and he is paralyzed and does not reach out to her. This echoes the prologue of *Vertigo*, in which Scottie has a fit of vertigo that causes his partner—who *does* reach out to him—to fall to his death. Still further, the moment just preceding Thérèse's suicide directly reflects the moment just before Madeleine climbs up to the church tower for the first time. The dialogue in *Vertigo* goes thus:

Madeleine. You believe I love you?

Scottie. Yes.

Madeleine. If you lose me than you'll know that I loved you and I wanted to go on loving you.

Scottie. I won't lose you.

Madeleine. Let me go into the church alone.¹⁰

After which they kiss. Madeleine turns away leaving paralyzed Scottie behind. In *Tirez Sur le Pianiste* Edouard stands facing Thérèse, who just concluded her confession, motionless and silent, and we hear his inner voice saying:

Yes, look at her, go to her, kneel while there's time. If you go now she'll be alone. You mustn't.¹¹

Having said this, he turns away and leaves the room. The gap between Edouard's inner voice and his actual performance alludes to the similar gap between Scottie's feeble verbal attempt to hold Madeleine back from going toward the church and his utter paralysis in letting her go. In a flash of realization after having left the room, Edouard frantically rushes back. But as in classical tragedy, it is too late. The window is open and Thérèse has already leapt to her death. The same happened to Scottie who, immediately after Madeleine's disappearance into the church looks up to the tall tower, and in a flash of realization runs after her—but of course “too late,” a recurring formula in *Vertigo*. As he climbs up the steps he is once again seized by vertigo and he remains a transfixed witness to the woman's fall from the top of the tower. Truffaut thus transposes the dialogue between Scottie and Madeleine into an internal monologue. In a sense then, the film *Tirez Sur le Pianiste* could be seen as a corrective interpretation of *Vertigo*. Furthermore the knowledge that Truffaut affords us of Edouard's inner being by means of “voice-over” dramatizes his attempt to provide us with a

more explicit, or explicated, cinematic view of what takes place on the surface, as it were, in *Vertigo*.

Also, the deception that Elster builds around Madeleine and Carlotta in order to entrap Scottie is transformed in *Tirez Sur le Pianiste* into a game that begins innocently but later develops into the tragedy of the marriage of Edouard and Thérèse. In the first shot of the part telling Edouard's story, we see him sitting in a restaurant while Thérèse the waitress addresses him as a mere customer. In the background Lars Schmeel is seen sitting at a distant table. The frame is structured so that a triangle is formed. Schmeel is positioned at the far corner of the triangle—the line between him and the spectator bisecting the imaginary line connecting Thérèse and Edouard. The play-acting of the engaged couple behaving as if they were strangers performing a mere waitress/customer transaction is a set up so that Schmeel, like the spectator, is not aware of it. This is the inverse of what happens in *Vertigo* where Madeleine in collaboration with Elster deceives Scottie. Here, apparently, it is Edouard and Thérèse who are sharing the secret. But as it eventually transpires, the crucial secret is the one shared by Thérèse and Schmeel who conspire behind the back of Edouard the victim. In *Vertigo* the husband is the manipulator of the deception. In *Tirez Sur le Pianiste* the husband participates in the minor pretenses but ends up as the victim of a major setup.

And, finally, the three-way split Judy/Madeleine/Carlotta—three representations of one woman—in *Vertigo* is echoed by the personality split Edouard/Charlie—two representations of one person—in *Tirez Sur le Pianiste*.

A parallel split to Edouard's, albeit circumstantially different, besets Thérèse herself. In her confession to him she says:

You know how a spider works? Like pulling me away from myself as if the heart was one thing and the body another. Thérèse didn't go with him, only Thérèse's body. As if I weren't there myself.¹²

And when Edouard himself tells Schmeel about his problems with Thérèse he describes her in the following way:

It's as if she's fighting something. It's become obvious. For instance, she'll suddenly walk out while we're talking she locks herself in her room and won't reply. That's how we are now. It's the end.¹³

These words too seem like a condensed version of Elster's characterization to Scottie of his wife's behavior:

She'll be talking to me about something, suddenly the words fade into silence. A cloud comes into her eyes and they go blank. She is somewhere else away from me so I don't know, to call her? She doesn't even hear me. Then with a long sigh she is back looks at me brighter, doesn't even know she has been away, can't tell where or when.¹⁴

In both cases the husband is describing his wife's behavior to a third person that is tragically connected to the couple's relationship. In *Vertigo* it is a fictitious description whose manipulative purpose is to tighten the trap around Scottie. In *Tirez Sur le Pianiste* the description is veridical, and

precisely reflects Thérèse's mental state. In *Vertigo* the husband is the manipulator and his interlocutor, Scottie, is the victim. In *Tirez Sur le Pianiste* the situation is reversed: The husband is the totally unaware victim, although his career has benefited from the conspiracy behind his back, and his interlocutor is the manipulator who, despite his show of innocence, is fully in the know. When describing her desperation to her husband Thérèse says:

When it's dark you can't stop the darkness. It's dark, getting darker all the time. There's only one thing for me to do. Say good bye and go.¹⁵

These words allude to Madeleine's description of her desperation to Scottie for the first time:

It's as if I'm walking down a long corridor that once was mirrored. Fragments of that mirror are still there. When I come to the end of the corridor there is nothing but darkness and I know when I walk into the darkness that I'll die. But I never come into the end. I always come back before then, except once [...].¹⁶

A bit later she continues:

I'm scared. I'm not mad. I don't want to die. There is someone within me that says I must die. Scottie, don't let me go. I'm so afraid. Don't leave me.¹⁷

Truffaut does not content himself with a verbal statement of the split within Thérèse, but also gives it plastic expression through her double necklace. As opposed to ordinary necklaces that are displayed on one's chest and clasped at the nape, Thérèse wears a necklace that has two jewels, one in front and the other hanging from the back of her neck. Besides the suggestion that there are "two sides" to this woman, or that she is in a double bind, this conspicuous exaggeration of the necklace "phenomenon" forces us to recall Carlotta's necklace that was Scottie's only clue to the truth about Judy, whom he had just turned successfully into Madeleine.

Clearly, the split self is a central theme in *Tirez Sur le Pianiste* and Charlie/Edouard's problem is one of identity. "Who am I?" and "What is the connection between my past deeds and my present actions?" These questions are brought to the fore by the narrative structure of *Tirez Sur le Pianiste* via breaking the chronological order of the plot, in a way that creates the sense of the past being still very present. These questions are mirrored in Thérèse's question in her confession:

But it's strange. What you did yesterday is part of you today. I looked in the mirror. What did I see? Your Thérèse? No. No Thérèse.¹⁸

These words of Thérèse allude to the situation Judy finds herself in when she is resisting Scottie's attempt to transform her back into Madeleine. She repeatedly complains that the true object of Scottie's love is "her" (the woman from



his past, Madeleine) implying that she wants to be loved for her own self. But which is her true self? Her problem lies in the connection between her deeds in the past and her present. How could she bring Scottie to love her without the consequences of Madeleine's crime? She considers the possibility of confessing all to Scottie when she writes him a letter. But she feels she could only give him the letter if she disappeared. Unlike Thérèse, she was too weak to completely give up the prospect of his love and therefore stayed and exposed herself to his pressure to gradually turn into Madeleine. Yet, as she saw it, she could not be Madeleine, the woman who deceived him, and retains his love. That would be an ontological paradox. Thus the end in which she as Madeleine falls from the tower becomes inevitable, as reflected in Thérèse's throwing herself from the window.

In the intricate plot that Hitchcock weaves in *Vertigo* he sheds new light on an age-old problem concerning the relation between the interior and the exterior, the character's essence and its mere image, between the real person and his or her appearance, between reality and its representation. Hitchcock's treatment of this issue achieves exceptional thoroughness due to its reflexive quality. For one of the key questions in cinema is: How does the external or perceptible world express inner being—How does an actor act-out a character? Hitchcock blurs the boundary between the external and the internal, the objective and the subjective, and brings out the complexity of these issues, emphasizing the lack of correspondence, or even independence of the two. That is to say, in contrast to the received view that the exterior depends for its existence on the interior that it expresses, in *Vertigo* the external entity is dissociated from all interiority and achieves total separateness. Truffaut, who struggled with similar questions, could not

avoid engaging in an intensive dialogue with *Vertigo*, and it seems that he goes a step further in blurring the boundary between truth and falsity. In Hitchcock the deception is clear, and it is without a shred of truth. It is a collection of facts belonging to a remote and irrelevant past (of Carlotta's) now being fraudulently recycled by Elster only seemingly true. In Truffaut, by contrast, each hoax, each pretense, any embedding of one story in another, does not exist merely as a set of facts constituting an appearance, but always has more than a grain of truth to it as it occurs.

Another level of the system of splits in the two movies is expressed through the talk of "a second chance." Scottie feels that his relationship with Judy in the second part of the movie affords him a second chance, an opportunity to mend what happened with Madeleine in the first part. The expression "second chance" is uttered several times both by Scottie and by Judy. In the deception staged for Scottie, Madeleine is presented as Carlotta's second chance. Truffaut uses the concept of a second chance in the way he tells the Charlie/Lena story as an attempted improvement on the Edouard/Therese fate. Whereas in *Vertigo* the second chance is with the "same" woman, in *Tirez Sur le Pianiste* it is with another woman. It is as if Truffaut is saying to us in his corrected version, as it were, that even with another woman, the same tragic fate would ensue. Fate, that is to say, is within us, perhaps even "genetic." It is not altered by the choice of with whom one lives it out.

Truffaut's man loses the woman he loves no less than Hitchcock's man. In Hitchcock's case, however, Scottie undergoes a therapeutic process. Scottie loses the woman but overcomes his vertigo. The opposite happens to Truffaut's protagonist. Edouard loses two women only to reappear at the

end in the same old piano bar, without any indication that he has overcome his flaw. In fact, the introduction of a new young waitress hints that the pattern is going to repeat itself cyclically. At this point we see once more Truffaut's misreading of *Vertigo*. In *Vertigo*, ironically, what happens is exactly what Midge had suggested at the beginning, that a repetition of the trauma would cure him. On Truffaut's misprision, the irony is intensified, and it is suggested that Hitchcock was wrong to have Scottie completely recover. True, he was cured for a short instant, and he even steps out to the edge to look at the fallen Judy, but Truffaut forces us to examine the end of *Vertigo* in a new light.

How should we understand the fact that in the end Hitchcock leaves Scottie at the top of the tower, rather than having him descend and walk away into the distance? Clearly, Hitchcock leaves him on top, where we encountered him in the prologue. So we have come full cycle. Still, Truffaut makes us question Scottie's recovery. Is it possible that a new trauma of another "partner" falling to her death—this time to enable him to overcome his vertigo—might cripple him once again?

To conclude, In Bloomian terms, we can see *Jules et Jim* and *Tirez, Sur le Pianiste* as two variant misreadings of *Vertigo*. The meaning of the misreadings inheres in the reflexive elements of the films. *Jules et Jim*, like *Vertigo*, examines the relation between the reality and the artistic image, and discusses the process of cinematic creation. Hitchcock employs a classical poetics and discusses classical cinema. Carlotta is a classical portrait of a woman who served as a model for a painter, and her historical reality is not in doubt. Here the real object that receives artistic representation indisputably exists. The tools used for the artistic realization

are classical and real: clothing, make-up, hair-do, props, locations, and even narrative. Hitchcock imposes art on reality just as Scottie imposes Madeleine on Judy, even as Elster had created Madeleine from Judy after the model of Carlotta. Here too Truffaut is misreading *Vertigo*. The artistic representation is not of a person but of a smile. In the case of Catherine we are dealing with an inner entity, an abstract nucleus, which has an elusive and mysterious expression. The smile belongs not to a real person but to an ancient Greek statue, and the original—the model after which it was made—is irrelevant. In order to create an artistic image of such an original, one cannot use the classical Hitchcockian tools. Truffaut has to create a new language, and to misread Hitchcock's rigorous and precise cinema, which in striving for full control and total perfection does not allow freedom for unplanned moments that are necessary sometimes for giving real expression to an elusive reality, as opposed to deceptive appearances in Hitchcock, whose reality is definite and unambiguous. Truffaut is rebelling against this kind of cinema. He desperately needs to free himself from Hitchcock in order to create the free and spontaneous cinema that fits the free smile whose essence he is seeking.

Truffaut is looking for the cinematic language that will enable him to retain full creative control and still flow with the constraints attached to actors, real locations, etc. The modern cinema that Truffaut defines begins with images that are elusive, internal, and imperceptible.

Furthermore, in *Vertigo*, as in the Pygmalion myth, the men—the artists—are obsessed, and the woman—the piece of art—is just a tool. In *Jules et Jim*, however, the obsession is the woman's—art has a life of its own that comes to dominate the creator. Since Catherine is both “God” and the

creation, in Truffaut's film the line between art and life is blurred, or even erased.

The misreading of *Vertigo* in *Tirez Sur le Pianiste* casts light on yet another facet of Truffaut's conception of modern narrative. Both films contain two parts, with the second part reconstructing the first. In *Vertigo* the structure is linear. The second story begins after the first story ends. There is a total correspondence between the order of the narrative and the chronological sequence of the plot. In *Tirez Sur le Pianiste*, there is no correspondence between the chronologies of the stories and the order in which they are told. The film opens with the second story, the story of Charlie, the bar pianist. The story that preceded this chronologically, the story of Edouard the concert pianist who disappeared at the height of his career, is revealed later. The narrative returns to Charlie's story after the viewer is aware of his past as Edouard. By breaking up the narrative, Truffaut eliminates the possibility of making a schematic, psychological, reduction of the connection between the past and the present. The connection exists, but the reciprocal relations between the two events and their metaphorical and semiotic meaning are more important than their psychological meaning. The reality that is built in Truffaut's films is more elusive than the reality depicted in Hitchcock's films.

Beyond the reflexive meaning of Truffaut's various misreadings of *Vertigo*, they also have a thematic meaning. In *Vertigo*, as in the Pygmalion story, the man's fear of women and his inability to develop a connection with a woman cause him to create a woman he wants, but even then, at the critical moment he is unable to be with her. The woman pays the price. In *Tirez Sur le Pianiste* the man needs the woman and is dependent on her. In

contrast to *Vertigo*, the woman has a part, if not in the creation of the man, then in transforming him into a creative artist. As in Hitchcock's film, here too the woman pays the price for the man's difficulties in functioning, but she exists as a strong and independent person, not as the product of the man's creation. In *Jules et Jim* the man creates the woman, as in the Pygmalion story. He is not afraid of the woman; rather, he actively seeks the "vertigo" into which he will dive together with her. In the end he becomes her victim. In contrast to *Vertigo*, in both of Truffaut's films the man is dependent on the woman, needs her, and accepts this willingly.

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Notes

¹ Bloom, Harold, *A Map of Misreading* (London: Oxford UP, 1975) 18.

² Bloom, Harold, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (London: Oxford UP, 1973) 11.

³ *Ibid* 14-16.

⁴ Bloom, *Map* 19.

⁵ *Ibid* 12-13.

⁶ *Ibid* 9.

⁷ Truffaut, François, *Hitchcock by François Truffaut* (New York: Simon, 1967) 186-87.

⁸ In spite of the fact that it is better to summarize a film in one's own words rather than quoting someone else, I quote here Truffaut's summary of the plot since it is interesting to compare his conscious summary of the film, as a film critic, to what has come out in his misreading of the film as a filmmaker.

⁹ Truffaut 184.

¹⁰ *Vertigo*, dir. Alfred Hitchcock, perf. James Stewart, Kim Novak, and Barbara Bel Geddes, 1958. 1:11:53-1:12:08.

¹¹ *Tirez Sur le Pianiste*, dir. François Truffaut, perf. Charles Aznavor, Marie Dubois, Nicole Berger, Michele Mercier, and Albert Remy, 1960. 0:43:14-0:43:22.

¹² *Tirez* 0:41:40-0:41:57.

¹³ *Tirez* 0:38:47-0:39:05.

¹⁴ *Vertigo* 0:13:32-0:13:58.

¹⁵ *Tirez* 0:40:11-0:40:26.

¹⁶ *Vertigo* 0:59:37-1:00:10.

¹⁷ *Vertigo* 1:01:42-1:02:12.

¹⁸ *Tirez* 0:42:34-0:42:54.

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