

# Alfred Hitchcock

November 7, 2005

- *Vertigo* (1958)
- Career
- Style
- Themes

# Alfred Hitchcock (1899-1980)

- British; born in London, England
- Mostly made suspense thrillers
- Gets his start in silent films (1920s)
- Sound films in England, 1930s
  - *Murder* (1930)
  - *The 39 Steps* (1935)
  - *Sabotage* (1936)
  - *The Lady Vanishes* (1938)

# Hitchcock: Later Career

- Comes to United States & Hollywood, 1940
- Works with/for David O. Selznick
  - *Rebecca* (1940)
- Produces his own films, 1940s-1960s
  - *Notorious* (1946)
  - *Strangers on a Train* (1951)
  - *Rear Window* (1954)
  - *Vertigo* (1958)
  - *Psycho* (1960)
  - *The Birds* (1963)
- Becomes a US citizen, 1955
- TV as well as movies, 1950s & 1960s
- Later films (the last is *Family Plot*, 1976)

# Hitchcock: Style

- Combines the traditions of:
  - Storytelling via *mise en scene* & camera movement
  - Expression via montage, camera angles, & lighting
- Manipulation of sound and image
- Suspense vs. surprise
- Depth psychology: doubles, false identities, etc.
- Moral ambiguity
- Fetish objects: the McGuffin
- Formal experimentation
- Elaborate, highly charged set pieces
- Genre innovation

# *Vertigo*: Form and Style

- The stars: James Stewart and Kim Novak
- Lush, romantic music by Bernard Herrmann
- Reverse-tracking/forward-zoom shots for Scottie's vertigo
- Spirals: into the past, into obsession
- Camera movements and editing for Scottie's romantic obsession
  - Pans when Scottie first sees Madeleine
  - 360° shot when the makeover is complete
- Judy's flashback: Hitchcock deliberately ruins the suspense and interrupts our identification with Scottie
- Doublings, mirrorings, and splittings

# *Vertigo*: Themes (1)

- Romantic obsession and repetition
- Madeleine vs. Madge
- Madeleine vs. Judy
  - Scottie's eyes wander (to a pseudo-Madeline) as he dines with Judy
  - Scottie's disgust when he dances with Judy
- Who/What does Scottie want?
- He wants to make over Judy into Madeline...
- ...but he goes into a murderous rage when he discovers that Judy actually *is* the "Madeline" he was in love with

# Vertigo: Themes (2)

- The ideal vs. the actual
- The ideal as a cinematic illusion
- Desire for an unattainable object
- Desire as fetishism and illusion
- Desire as murderous possession
- “Neurosis, psychosis... necrophilia” (Cook)