Alfred in Wonderland: Hitchcock through the Looking-Glass

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“Th e logic of your pictures,” Francois Truffaut once remarked to Alfred Hitchcock, “is rather like the logic of dreams” (Truffaut 260). This comparison may seem unsurprising, for parallels between motion pictures and dreams are almost as old as cinema itself. But Hitchcock’s films partake of dream logic in specific and peculiar ways. Indeed, a primary element of the “Hitchcockian” is the films’ atmosphere of heightened realism (which Raymond Bellour calls “irreality” [in French, “irréalisme”]: 256) generated by the director’s habitual use of metonymy and synecdoche, or what Freud terms “condensation” and “displacement,” to represent interior conditions. Objects and motifs such as the cups and keys in Notorious, the vertical lines in Spellbound, Strangers on a Train’s shoes and lighter, Vertigo’s bouquet, and the red flashes in Marnie address audiences as dream images, striking at a level below or beyond the rational. I propose here that Hitchcock derived this method and a good deal of its specific content from a single source: Lewis Carroll’s Alice books, both of which end by revealing that her adventures were really dreams. It is extremely likely that young Alfie, as a Cockney child in late Victorian and early Edwardian England, was aware of the Alice books, yet the strongest evidence derives not from his biography but from his movies, which repeatedly borrow tropes, plot devices, themes and visual elements from the Carroll texts and from John Tenniel’s iconic drawings. Oddly, no critic has yet examined this evidence. These Carrollian echoes—most of them from the first book—are most obvious and pervasive in Blackmail and Notorious, whose protagonists’ very names allude to Carroll’s intrepid adventurer. But they don’t end there. Later Hitchcock films use mirrors to represent their protagonists’ entry into inverted or insane dominions and their attempts to make sense of them. More broadly, the Hitchcockian landscape is both a realm of wonders and an absurd universe governed, like Carroll’s dream worlds, by a preposterous system of justice.

Hitchcarroll

“[B]urning with curiosity” (Carroll, Alice 8) yet possessed of a “ridiculous self-assurance” (Rackin 14), Alice follows a white rabbit down
his hole into Wonderland, where many strange and upsetting events transpire. At the bottom of the hole, Alice encounters "doors all round the hall, but they were all locked" (9). After trying each door unsuccessfully, she happens upon a table with a "tiny golden key" (9), a very important object that permits her to move from place to place. Near one door is a bottle labeled "DRINK ME" (10); Alice drinks and shrinks to ten inches high, a change that enables her to enter a garden but that prevents her from retrieving the golden key. She begins to cry, then stops to give herself a lecture, which is easy because "this curious child [is] very fond of pretending to be two people" (12). Fortunately, she discovers a cake carrying the command "EAT ME"; upon obeying, she becomes gigantic. But not for long: soon she shrinks again, nearly drowning in her own tears (13–19). "Curiouser and curiouser" (13)! Is it any wonder that when the caterpillar asks "Who are you?" she answers, "I-I hardly know, Sir, just at present" (35). Like Norman Bates's mother, she's "not [her]self, you see" (35). For Alice as for many Hitchcock protagonists, identity is a "great puzzle" (15).

Carrollian tropes and motifs are everywhere in Hitchcock's oeuvre. For example, vertical movements in his films almost always signal transitions from one state of being to another, and many Hitchcock protagonists fall down—or up—into perilous conditions. Numerous critics have remarked on Hitchcock's frequent use of stairways as thresholds to violence and danger (see, for example, Modleski 18). One thinks of the upstairs chamber where The Lodger lodges, of the artist's studio in Blackmail, of Uncle Charlie's room in Shadow of a Doubt and of those bedrooms in the Bates mansion. Contrariwise, the original—or culminating—Hitchcockian sin is often a fall, as exemplified in Spellbound by John Ballantine's lethal downward slide into his brother, by the blackmailer's plunge to his death in Blackmail, by the villains' precipitous descents from national monuments in Saboteur and North by Northwest, by Jeffries's dropping from his window at the end of Rear Window and, most definitively, by Scottie Ferguson's vertiginous descent into an underworld where his long feared and desired fall is carried out by his lover(s).³ Doors are prominent as well: for example, young Mrs. de Winter faces a series of intimidating doors in Rebecca, and the kiss between Ballantine and Dr. Constance Peterson opens a series of psychic doors. Keys are crucial in Notorious, where the legendary crane shot during the Sebastians' party comes to rest on Alicia's hand holding a particular Unica, and in Marnie, whose protagonist fixates on keys as instruments to escape her traumatized childhood. And Marnie, she of the numerous aliases, is just one of many Hitchcock protagonists who are fond of pretending to be two (or more) people.
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In Wonderland sentences are dictated before verdicts are given (96), and nobody is guilty of stealing the tarts, which means that everyone is guilty and thus subject to beheading. The sardonic Through the Looking-Glass is even more concerned with crime and punishment and pervaded by a sense of fatalism, being at once a game of chess and a chase in which one must run as fast as one can merely to stay in the same place (127). In Looking-Glass Land “things go the other way” (110): characters hand out cakes, then cut them (177), “Nobody” is somebody (170), and memory works forward (150). The laws of Hitchcockia are nearly as preposterous: implausible events occur regularly, and innocent people are punished, sometimes before their trials, while the guilty often go free. Of course, Hitchcockian justice mandates that nobody is really innocent: the wrong man is, inevitably, also the right man. Ultimately, Carroll’s dream worlds reveal, as Nina Auerbach puts it, that “the dainty child carries the threatening kingdom of Wonderland within her”: the “fabulous monster[ ]” (Carroll, Through 175) is really herself (Auerbach 336). Isn’t this the same lesson learned by characters such as Norman Bates? Through the Looking-Glass ends in a mise en abyme in which Alice may be a figure in the dream of the Red King who is, in turn, being dreamed by Alice (208). Likewise, Vertigo forms a palindrome or Möbius strip: its end mirrors the beginning. And is Norman inhabiting his mother, or is she imagining him?

What’s Who?

How shall we classify this Hitchcarrollian relationship? Robert Stam borrows from Gerard Genette the word “transtextuality” to describe such complex interchanges among media (27). He might also term the relations between Hitchcock and Carroll “metatextual,” insofar as Hitchcock’s appropriations are largely “unmarked” (30). Thomas Leitch, who outlines ten categories for literature-film adaptation, would call them “analogues” (Film Adaptation 113). Perhaps more usefully, Kamilla Elliott posits a “genetic concept” that seeks to capture an “underlying ‘deep’ narrative structure” within adaptations (150). Such a structure, which I am calling the “vision of affrighted purity” (Hitchcock, “Gas” 107), underpins the films discussed below. In this dark rendering of the Alice narratives, a young woman (sometimes a man) is flung into an absurd, punitive realm that manifests her/his own deepest fears; tormented or repeatedly rebuffed, she/he desperately seeks a place of stability or meaning, eventually confronting (and sometimes conquering) her own unrecognized attraction to evil and to those fears. According to Donald Rackin, Alice’s quests represent
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a “failed search for the warm joy and security of love” (129), a summary that also fits many of Hitchcock’s protagonists. This pattern—a text/movie portmanteau akin to Carroll’s own hybrid words—captures films as different as Blackmail, Suspicion, Rebecca, Shadow of a Doubt, Notorious, Vertigo, Psycho, The Birds, and Marnie. The Hitchcarroll adaptations thus exemplify what Elliott dubs a “looking glass analogy,” which produces reverberations in “an endless series of inversions and reversals” (212). In this “reciprocally transformative model of adaptation” (Elliott 229), reading Hitchcock through Carroll’s mirror illuminates the films, even as examining Carroll’s texts through Hitchcockian lenses puts Alice through yet another set of metamorphoses.

Hitchcock’s work betrayed Carrollian influences even before he began to direct movies. His early stories, written for the Henley Telegraph in 1919 and 1920, show a fondness for the trick ending.⁴ According to Hitchcock biographer Patrick McGilligan, five of the seven Telegraph stories have “turnabout” conclusions (36). For example, “Gas” is a Gothic piece in which a woman walking through Paris is haunted by unnamed fears. She finds a door and a flight of stairs; descending, she enters an “evil-smelling” wine bar whose denizens gawk at this “vision of affrighted purity” (107). Grabbed and bound by “fiends” (108), she is thrown into the river, only to awaken in a dentist’s chair. In “The Woman’s Part” a man watches his wife give a lugubrious parting kiss to another man while the husband does nothing; the final sentence reveals that the man is viewing the scene from a theater seat (33–34). “And There Was No Rainbow” offers a twist ending in which Bob, sent by his friend Jim to find a woman to date, meets a female prospect and helps her enter her house, only to find that she is Jim’s wife (38–40). Even closer to Carroll is the farcical “What’s Who?” in which four men are told to impersonate each other in an acting exercise. Nobody can remember who he is supposed to be, the men argue, a scrap breaks out, and the story ends with the producer fainting (41–42). The characters in “What’s Who?” recall Carroll’s mad monarchs and belligerent clowns, particularly the pugnacious Tweedles Dee and Dum. These apprentice stories expose Hitchcock’s absorption of Carroll’s tone and plot gambits, as well as his suspicion that nobody is who she/he really seems to be.

Alice’s Evidence

Blackmail is the clearest early film example of the Hitchcarroll portmanteau. Its protagonist, Alice White (Anny Ondra), is engaged to Frank (John Longden), a Scotland Yard detective, but after the couple quarrels she falls in with an artist named Crewe (Cyril Ritchard). This
curious Alice's trip to Wonderland begins not with a fall but with an ascent (captured by a vertical crane shot) to Crewe's upstairs studio apartment, where she is given a drink that is "too strong." As Crewe plays the piano and sings "Miss Up-to-Date" ("They say you're wild, a naughty child": he notes that it's "about you, my dear"), we watch the flirtatious Alice don a revealing tutu (Crewe's back is turned so that only the audience is privy to this display). The charmer turns churlish after Alice resists his advances. Behind a curtain, he attacks her; she reaches out, grabs a handy butcher knife and apparently stabs him, though we see only her hand, then his dead hand after the deed is done. A "vision of affrighted purity" with knife still clutched in hand, the stunned Alice emerges from behind the curtain. She blackens her name, which she had written beneath a drawing of a nude woman she and Crewe painted: Alice is no longer white. But why not? Hasn't she merely defended herself? The answer scarcely matters, for when she descends the stairs—shot from above to resemble a vortex—she enters a nightmare from which she never awakens.

As in the other Alice's dream world, here everything is in flux. Whatever Alice sees reminds her of the killing: through her point of view every hand becomes Crewe's dead hand, neon lights shaking a cocktail turn into a stabbing knife, and an advertisement comments ironically, "Gordon's White for Purity." Arriving home, Alice crawls between the sheets just seconds before her mother calls "Alice, wake up." Yet the knife continues to torment Alice, as Hitchcock brilliantly indicates via a neighbor's conversation about the murder, in which Alice hears only the word "knife," growing louder and more insistent with each repetition. Crewe's dead hand is soon transformed into a metonymic glove that Frank, investigating the murder, finds in the artist's apartment and hides from his fellow detectives. But someone else knows she was there, a man named Tracy, who was lurking outside when Alice and Crewe entered his studio. As he blackmails the couple, Alice is silenced by the men: as in Wonderland, everyone "order[s] [her] about" (Carroll 82). Tracy's scheme founders when Crewe's landlady fingers him as having been present at Crewe's that night. He flees and, in one of Hitchcock's first great setpieces, is pursued through the British Museum, where he lowers himself on a rope before a giant sculptured head that resembles the large heads of Alice's Wonderland tormentors. Ultimately, Tracy falls to his death from the roof, thereby completing Alice's descent. The well-known Hitchcockian transfer of guilt has occurred.

But not for Alice, who makes her way to Scotland Yard with the intention of confessing. She is preventing from clearing her conscience by Frank, the nominal representative of justice. In Wonderland behead-
ing is a one-size-fits-all punishment; likewise here, notes Lesley Brill, "the penalties for misbehavior are wildly out of proportion to the misbehavior itself" (160): Tracy dies trying to execute a minor blackmail scheme, and Crewe is stabbed to death. As for Alice, she is trapped in a looking-glass world, boxed in by authorities who won't let her speak, where cops hide evidence, where the innocent die and the guilty—or at least those who feel guilty—go unpunished. According to Rackin, in Wonderland "what is on trial is the 'law' itself" (63); the same is true in Blackmail. In both instances, the law loses its case. The film's final shot dollys in to the painting of a derisively pointing clown taken from Crewe's studio, another belligerent jester who, recalling those in Carroll's dreamlands, mocks the inverted justice system and confirms that this Alice, unlike Carroll's, never takes control of her own fate (see Avery 326). So much for the "warm joy" of love.

Looking-Glass House

"Last night I dreamt of Manderley again. . . . For awhile I could not enter, for the way was barred. Then, like all dreamers, I was possessed of a sudden by supernatural powers." As these words are heard in voiceover, a long tracking shot brings us through the gates and up the drive: we have entered a dream world, and not a pleasant one. The opening of Rebecca establishes the film's oniotic logic and indicates, as Hitchcock noted to Truffaut, that the story is essentially a fairy tale (Truffaut 131). Hitchcock declares that the nameless heroine (Joan Fontaine) is Cinderella, in which case her husband, the brooding Maxim de Winter (Laurence Olivier), would be the handsome prince (132). The evil stepmother? That would be the intimidating Mrs. Danvers (Judith Anderson), nominally a servant but really a harpy representing de Winter's first wife, Rebecca.8

The Carroll books offer more compelling pretexts. Like Alice, the meek heroine is beset by menacing and sometimes nonsensical authority figures. For example, by marrying Max, she merely escapes from one imperious maternal figure, the snobby Mrs. Van Hopper, into the clutches of Manderley's female guardian, the first of many domineering mother figures in the Hitchcock oeuvre. These women hark back to the hectoring matriarchs in the Alice books: Wonderland's hideously ugly, though relatively benign Duchess (47), the decapitation-fixed Queen of Hearts (64), and Looking-glass Land's peremptory Red Queen. Hitchcock's older women even look a bit like those absurd aristocrats (see Figures 1 and 2). Mrs. Danvers looms over the heroine in most compositions, fixes her with a gimlet eye and asks, "Do you
believe the dead come back and watch the living?” Manderley is a looking-glass world where, as Rackin describes Carroll’s domain, “the sensible child of the master class acts as servant, and the crazy servants act as masters” (8). Like Alice, the second Mrs. de Winter is dwarfed by the enormous rooms in her wondrous house, which Hitchcock emphasizes through deep focus shots and by holding the camera slightly above eye level to diminish her. Everywhere she looks she sees Rebecca’s monogram—a metonymy of the dead woman who overshadows her. Doors symbolically represent the heroine’s desire for transformation, but they also daunt her with their massive size and with knobs placed at shoulder height to make her seem small.

Fig. 1
Alice and the Red Queen. Illustration by John Tenniel.

The film coyly acknowledges these borrowings by giving the name “Alice” to the heroine’s maid. More directly, as young Mrs. de Winter discusses with Maxim her plans for a costume ball, he asks about her costume. Will she come as “Alice in Wonderland with that ribbon round [her] hair?” When she descends the grand staircase wearing Rebecca’s dress (malevolently suggested by Mrs. Danvers), she is hu-
miliated by Max’s horrified response and then nearly (again at Mrs. D’s urging) jumps out the window—a precipitous, if averted, descent. Of course, the heroine’s namelessness is also significant: she is, literally, a non-entity. Nor does she possess the power of Looking-glass Land’s Humpty Dumpty, for whom a word means “just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less” (163); as Mr. Dumpty has grasped, the real question is “which is to be master?”. Likewise in Rebecca. Unlike Alice, this heroine never achieves mastery: although she eventually gains more confidence, the last third of the film switches to a mystery plot concerning Rebecca’s death, upon which the second Mrs. de Winter recedes into the background. Relinquishing center stage, this film’s Alice avatar never takes possession of the looking-glass house which, at the film’s end, burns to the ground with Mrs. Danvers inside.

![Fig. 2](image)

The second Mrs. de Winter and her Red Queen. Still from Rebecca.

Drink Me

“You’d better drink that,” T.R. Devlin (Cary Grant) advises Alicia Huberman (Ingrid Bergman), giving her a glass of liquid as she lies in bed, hungover after a night of alcoholic indulgence. The canted angle shot, which flips upside down as Alicia gazes at Devlin, dramatizes
her disorientation and sense of diminishment. Meanwhile, the large glass occupies the foreground. The motif of drinking impels the plot of *Notorious*, which offers perhaps the closest and most numerous Hitchcarrollonian portmanteaus. Alicia’s puzzle is, again, one of identity: is she German or American? And how far must she fall to find the solution? Devlin is her white rabbit, and as the two descend into Rio, she learns that her father, a former Nazi, ate a poisoned capsule. “It’s a very curious feeling,” she says, echoing Carroll’s Alice, “as if something had happened to me and not to him.” To prove she is a good American, Alicia infiltrates a group of ex-Nazis who knew her father. Things get curioser when, after she and Devlin spark a romance, she learns that she must seduce her former acquaintance Alex Sebastian (Claude Rains) to ascertain what plot the Nazis are hatching. She even marries Sebastian. For him, Alicia’s love is “like a tonic,” but for Alicia, love (both his and Devlin’s) is a toxin she must imbibe for the sake of her country. Yet Alex and Alicia, as their names indicate, are doubles: he a Nazi who defies his domineering mother to marry a woman who turns out to be an American spy, she a Nazi’s daughter who defies her father by becoming a spy. Alicia pretends to love a man she hates and pretends to hate the man she loves. It’s a looking-glass world, all right: even the checkered floor of the Sebastian mansion recalls Carroll’s chessboard. But Alicia is not the queen; she’s merely a pawn in a much larger game.

She tries to wrest control of the looking-glass house from her intimidating mother-in-law by procuring a Unica key that opens the wine cellar, where something unusual is stored. To underscore its significance, at the Sebastians’ party Hitchcock executes his famous crane shot, swooping over the balcony and down toward the chessboard floor, finally stopping on a closeup of the key in Alicia’s hand. In the cellar (visited after another descent into the underground) Devlin and Alicia find a wine bottle holding uranium ore—“vintage sand,” Devlin quips: this bottle can’t be drunk. Caught by Alex, the couple kiss, hoping to fool him into believing they’re not spies but lovers. In other words, they pretend to be what they are, an inversion typical of this backward domain. After Alex examines the opened phony wine bottle and discerns the truth, an overhead shot shows him despondently crossing the chessboard floor. He’s no longer a king: he has been rooked. Upstairs, sitting before a mirror that illustrates his self-division, he seems to understand that he has passed through the looking-glass. But he’s not alone there: his mother is with him. Another menacing matriarch, Madame Sebastian (Leopoldine Konstantin) sits up in bed, lights a cigarette and sends a glare worthy of the Queen of Hearts. “I knew but I didn’t see,” she says.
Mother and son then invite Alicia to their own mad tea party by introducing poison into her morning beverage. Hitchcock discloses their scheme via repeated shots of Alicia's cup and, in one scene, by placing her behind an enormous cup, as if she has shrunk to ten inches high. "Drink me!" it seems to shout (see Fig. 3). Through her point of view, we see the diabolical Sebastians as warring silhouettes that eventually merge into a single shadow. This sequence rhymes with the earlier POV shot of Devlin: in both cases drinking has altered Alicia's perceptions, changed her metaphorical size, and distorted her sense of herself (Leitch, "Notorious" 6–7). In that first scene she was merely drunk; this time she is intoxicated. After collapsing on the chessboard floor, she is helped upstairs. The woman who began the film as a wise-cracking party animal wearing a provocative top has been tamed into a bed-ridden invalid in a gauzy nightgown—a "vision of affrighted purity" imprisoned in a looking-glass house. Even though Alicia briefly possesses the key, she can neither control her changes nor disarm her enemies. Dominated by surrogate parents, she must rely on a white knight to rescue her and help her back down the stairs to the waiting car where, presumably, she finally achieves the sanity and "security of love" she has sought.

Fig. 3
The giant cup seems to say "Drink Me." Still from Notorious.
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Which Dreamed It?

Dr. Constance Peterson (Ingrid Bergman) explains to a patient that his guilt complex is “only a child’s bad dream.” She means to minimize his fears, but in fact a child’s bad dream lies at the core of Spellbound. It is the nightmare of an amnesiac, John Ballantine (Gregory Peck), who impersonates a psychiatrist, Dr. Edwardes, then falls in love with Dr. Peterson before his guilt complex—triggered by a childhood sliding accident that killed his brother—drives him away. “I’m someone else, I don’t know who. I killed him. . . . I have no memory; it’s like looking into a mirror and seeing nothing but the mirror,” says the agonized Ballantine, who at this point knows only that his initials are J.B. He yearns to see “behind that door” in his mind where his real self lurks. In fact, however, the Carrollian theme of identity is split between him and Constance, who learns in the course of the film to trust her emotions as much as her scientific curiosity. To do so, she must become a schoolgirl before growing up again. Thus, whereas Ballantine is associated with downward movements, Constance is constantly linked with upward motion. For example, when she visits “Edwardes” in his upstairs office early in the film, she admits that she is acting “like a frightened child.” Soon they kiss, upon which we see a series of doors being thrown open: her emotions unlocked. This unsubtle image reminds us how frequently Hitchcock resorted to Carrollian tropes to represent characters’ interior states.

Spellbound depicts another absurd universe where amnesiacs masquerade as doctors, doctors are really murderers, and a woman can fall in love with “a pair of initials.” The initials are those of Ballantine, who must also pass through the looking-glass to find the source of his traumatic memory, the forgotten event that he can’t stop remembering. During a visit with Constance’s mentor, Dr. Brulov (Michael Chekhov), Ballantine sees the vertical lines that trigger his fugue state, then goes downstairs to (we think) kill Brulov. Instead, the good doctor hands him a drink, and we see Brulov through the milk glass, as if he’s inside it. Drink me! Brulov drugs him. The next morning Brulov chides the smitten Constance that she has become a “schoolgirl in love with an actor.” But not a very good actor: Ballantine cannot sustain his impersonation of Edwardes, and can’t even mount a good performance as a sane lover, all because of his guilty, recurring dreams.

Brulov informs the amnesiac that dreams tell you what you are hiding, but “all mixed up, like pieces of a puzzle that don’t fit. The problem of the analyst,” he continues, as if describing Alice’s task in Wonderland, is to “examine this puzzle, and put the pieces together in the right place.” In the film’s reductive Freudian allegory, a dream is
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a riddle with a key; once the key is located, the “locked doors of [the] mind” (so called in the film’s epigraph) fall open and the solution emerges. Hitchcock depicts those dreams in two famous sequences created in collaboration with Salvador Dali; these sequences, notes Nathalie Bondil-Poupart, portray a male “Alice telling us about her dream in a childlike universe” (166). The first, very Carrollian dream includes ubiquitous staring eyes, enormous implements (in this case, scissors), giant playing cards, and a figure of authority who accuses the dreamer of dishonesty. The second dream features a sloping roof, a fall, and a series of metonymic images, including a chimney with a wheel and a set of predatory wings (perhaps a nod to the large avians that populate Wonderland). The doctors quickly, if implausibly, solve this oneric puzzle, and eventually learn that Ballantine witnessed the real Dr. Edwardes being killed while skiing, and that this incident evoked his childhood trauma—accidentally killing his brother by sliding down a roof and pushing him onto metal spikes. In a Carrollian plot twist, when Constance’s other mentor, Dr. Murchison (Leo G. Carroll), later interprets Ballantine’s second dream, he incriminates himself as the real murderer of Edwardes. He then turns a gun on himself in a POV shot that makes viewers the victims. Ultimately, Dr. Peterson thaws (finding that “warm joy”), both protagonists discover who they are, and Ballantine’s pathology is cured in a manner more akin to magic than to science (see Brill 259).

“The colors! Stop the colors!”

So cries Marnie Edgar (Tippi Hedren) during one of her blackouts. Or perhaps one should call them “red-outs,” for it is redness that floods the screen when she sees a drop of blood on a white blouse, scarlet polka-dotted racing silks, or crimson gladioli and is thrown back to the suppressed childhood trauma that impels her serial robbery scams. Indeed, the entire film is color coded: if red is the color of sexuality and trauma, green appears as the index of Marnie’s pathology, and yellow as the hue of liberation. For example, Marnie wears a green dress during her envy-laden visit with her mother early in the film; as she prepares to steal from Rutland, her latest employer, she sports a dark green coat; during her fractious honeymoon with Mark Rutland (Sean Connery), she has on a green nightgown (and refuses to have sex with him). Later, in an attempt to understand his wife’s frigidity, Rutland reads a green-covered book entitled Sexual Aberrations of the Female. The first shot in the film, however, is a closeup of a yellow purse belonging to Marion Holland—one of Marnie’s alter-egos—who has just absconded with
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stolen money; later, when Mark brings to Marnie her beloved horse Forio she is attired in a yellow dress. The colors provide a powerful illustration of Marnie's damaged psyche that addresses viewers at the level of unconscious association. Such an appeal fits the film's tale of childhood trauma leading to repression, in which an amnesiac is troubled by fragmented, recurring nightmares. In this virtual remake of Spellbound, Marnie combines in one person the trajectories of Constance Peterson and John Ballantine: she must find out who she is and, in so doing, unlock her frozen libido to find warmth and security in love.

Its aura of unreality enhanced by seemingly clumsy rear projections and backdrops, Marnie is another Hitchcockian portmanteau tale of a girl who falls into an abyss. She too possesses Alicean motives: when Rutland asks how she began her series of complicated robbery schemes, she answers, "I was just curious at first, then things got out of control." Like Alice, too, Marnie is obsessed with keys, closely observing her coworkers' frequent trips to retrieve a key that opens a drawer holding the combination to the green office safe. She eventually obtains that key and the money it holds (before she is caught). A key that opens a different green safe figures prominently late in the film, after Marnie is forced to euthanize her beloved horse. Opening these doors makes her feel large and powerful. As vaginal images, these doors represent Marnie's conflation of sex, money and violence, and thus disclose the sexual elements lurking behind the original Alice's quests. To solve the puzzle of who she is, Marnie must unlock the vault containing the trauma that has turned her red with fear and green with envy.

As in Spellbound, the solution requires interpreting the protagonist's nightmares and the metonymic residues left by a partially forgotten childhood event: insistent tapping, a violent thunderstorm, the color of blood. Rutland (here combining Brulov and Ballantine) ultimately determines that Marnie's mother, a prostitute, would displace her daughter from bed when entertaining customers. Covered in a dark green blanket, Marnie would sleep on the couch. But when one john, a sailor, touched Marnie too insistently, her mother clubbed him with a poker; after her mother fell, Marnie completed the job by braining the man until blood gushed from his head. Although this triggering incident is revealed fully only at the conclusion, Marnie's earlier words to Rutland, when he pressed her about her thieving, summarize her feelings at that moment and every time she recalls it: "I just went kind of crazy, I guess." She's not alone, for in Hitchcockia as in Wonderland, anyone may go mad at any time. In this film Hitchcock transmutes Alice's relatively benign adventures into a disturbing vision of "affrighted purity" and the desperate search for love. The epigraph to Through the Looking-glass, though meant in a different way, seems to fit Marnie perfectly:
Come, hearken then, ere voice of dread,
With bitter tidings laden,
Shall summon to unwelcome bed
A melancholy maiden!
We are but older children, dear,
Who fret to find our bedtime near. (Carroll 103; italics in original)

Marnie is a child who never grew up: time stopped for her at age five, when her mother ceased to love her, and now she dreads bedtime—whether it be a place for dreams or for sex. At the bottom of this film’s rabbit hole, then, we find one of Hitchcock’s most pathetic renderings of Alice’s adventures underground: a portrait of a blonde girl-child in hell.

Vertigo Inverted

*Marnie* exemplifies Bellour’s contention that at the heart of Hitchcock’s vision lies “the question of trauma and of its interpretation” (254; italics his). That trauma is often, as I have noted, represented by a fall. Yet, curiously, the film most blatantly organized around descents begins with an averted fall: Scottie Ferguson (James Stewart) does *not* drop from the roof gutter where he hangs at the beginning of *Vertigo*, though his unfortunate partner does. Nevertheless, the traumatic nature of this uncompleted fall is revealed by its repetition and transposition: Scottie’s descent is transferred more than once in the film. First, after his pursuit and rescue of “Madeleine,” his fall is shifted to Gavin Elster’s wife (who he thinks is the woman he has been trailing), who plummets to her death from the top of the bell tower at Mission Dolores. In the film’s devastating conclusion, Judy Barton (Kim Novak), the woman who impersonated Madeleine, falls “again” from the same tower. But Scottie also falls, and he does so, like Alice, in slow motion. For example, as he first shadows “Madeleine,” his numerous turns retrace the spirals displayed in the film’s opening credits; a bit later a similar vortex leads him back to his own apartment. Judy/Madeleine herself jumps into San Francisco Bay, prompting Scottie’s heroic plunge to save her. These scenes and the later ones in which Scottie remakes Judy into Madeleine suggest that he not only reincarnates Alice by pursuing his quarry into the underground, but also embodies Carroll and Hitchcock, those authorial arrangers and admirers of blondes. Yet Madeleine/Judy is also
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Alice, the female who is "fond of pretending to be two people" and who wants, more than anything, to be loved.

Even if we do not accept James Maxfield's intriguing argument that everything after the film's opening sequence "is the dream or fantasy of a dying man" (4), it is undeniable that Vertigo unfolds with the pace, illogic, and sense of fatality of dreams. Preposterous in more than one sense, its dreams are mirrors in which everything is reversed or recurs. During his initial pursuit of Madeleine, for example, Scottie follows her into a clothing store. As he eyes her, Hitchcock splits the screen: on the left is a mirror image of Madeleine; on the right is Scottie in a doorway, seeming to be crushed. Certainly there are two women here, or perhaps three: Carlotta Valdes, the alleged ancestor of Madeleine; Madeleine, the woman Judy is pretending to be; and Judy herself. There also two Scotties: the passive, probably virginal man who both desires and fears falling, and the romantic obsessed with a dead woman. Both characters pass through the looking-glass into a realm bursting with recurring metonymies. These include Carlotta's bouquet and that spiraling vortex figure, itself a symbol of recurrence, seen in Madeleine's (and Carlotta's) hairdo and in the rings of the sequoia tree that Madeleine touches and says, "Somewhere in here I was born, and there I died." A few moments later, Madeleine tells Scottie she feels as though she were living in a dream in which she walks down 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." Those fragments reveal an open grave—her own. "If I could just find the key, the beginning, and put it together," Scottie responds. She replies, "If I'm mad, that would explain it, wouldn't it?"

She isn't mad, but he is, and he relives this conversation in his own nightmare after Madeleine seems to have fallen to her death. In this (apparently recurring) dream, fragmented metonymies of Madeleine torment him: an animated bouquet pulls apart, after which a yellow-washed shot of Carlotta zooms in on the red pendant she (and Madeleine) wore. Then, amidst flashing reds, Scottie trudges through the cemetery where Carlotta is buried to the brink of her open grave. He falls in and keeps falling, his head severed from his body, descending slowly through space until his body replaces Madeleine's on the reddish roof. He has found the key, but the only door it opens is that of a coffin. He has, in effect, become Madeleine—and Carlotta—plunging through the wonderland of her/his own psyche (Modleski 95). And then he falls again—for Judy, whom he remakes as Madeleine, only to see her complete his first averted fall. However, Scottie passed through the looking-glass long before that moment, as the film indicates through its matched sequences and through Scottie's ardent attempts
to create a mirror image of Madeleine. Thus, just before he consummates his transformation of Judy (who favors green dresses) into the ghost of Madeleine, they visit Ransohoff’s, where Scottie obsessively searches for the gray suit Madeleine wore. Protesting this treatment, Judy runs to a mirror, where we again see two Judys and two Scotties—images of the living (or reborn) and the dead, one on each side of the looking-glass. But Scottie’s mirror can look only backward, and even after he wakes up (the alarm being that pendant, which Judy foolishly wears again) and realizes he has been duped, he still cannot escape from his *mise en abyme*. Madeleine must fall again and Scottie must end where he began. In this regard the film is not so much preposterous (inverting time) as palindromic, like a chessboard or Möbius strip. Viewed beside the Alice books, *Vertigo* reveals that the deepest fear and desire of Carroll’s curious child is to die and be resurrected. But Scottie’s fate is more dire: to dwell forever a looking-glass land of eternal recurrence and living death.

**A Little Mad**

*Psycho*’s Marion Crane (Janet Leigh) also steps through the looking-glass into an insane world. On what seems a whim, she steals $40,000 from her employer and becomes a different person. The film’s logic is, again, that of dreams, communicated through metonymy and synecdoche: stuffed birds, automobiles, mirrors. For example, the moment when Marion decides to steal the money is marked by a shot of her gazing at herself in a mirror. “Who am I?” she seems to ask herself. From that point onward, as George Toles has noted, “almost every interior scene prominently features a mirror that doubles as a character’s image, but that *no one* turns to face” (134; italics his). A mirror appears in the washroom of the car dealership where Marion trades in her traceable auto, and she frequently stares worryingly in the rear-view mirror while driving, unwittingly, to meet Norman Bates (Anthony Perkins), a “ghastly inversion” of her lover, Sam Loomis (John Gavin; Toles 135). While checking into the Bates Motel (where she signs her name “Marie Samuels”) Marion is shown twice in a mirror: like Norman’s mother, she’s “not herself” today. In each of these mirror scenes, Marion’s body is only partially visible, as if she has already been cut into pieces by Hitchcock before Norman/Mother ever takes out his/her knife. The check-in and dinner scenes with Norman are also dominated by singles rather than two-shots to suggest that Norman and Marion are mirror images of each other (see Toles 134). Soon Marion falls violently: in the legendary shower scene she collapses in the tub, her life blood swirl-
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ing down the drain and then, as Norman watches, her metonymic car
is slowly sucked into the swamp. If she is Alice, she is also the white
rabbit whom Normalice follows down into the muck of his troubled
unconscious. For even more than Marion, Norman is fond of pretend-
ing to be two people.

Marion comes back to life in the form of her sister, Lila (Vera Miles),
who passes through those very looking-glasses. As she and Sam check
into the Bates Motel, they stand where Marion stood, reflected in the
same mirror. Later, pretending to be Lila’s husband, Sam questions
Norman while standing before that mirror. This is the same mirror
where detective Arbogast was earlier captured as he interrogated
Norman—before he too was murdered while climbing the stairs in
the Bates house. Investigating the Bates home later, Lila ascends those
stairs. In Mother’s room, she is startled by a vision of herself in a double
mirror, positioned so that three Lillas seem to watch Lilalice watch her-
sel: she is Lila, Marion, Alice and Mother all at once. Then things go
the other way: Lila descends the stairs to the root cellar. Here she finds
what Scottie Ferguson discovered in his Wonderland—a corpse. Again
we comprehend what lies, at once feared and desired, behind every
door in Carroll’s and Hitchcock’s wonderlands: none other than death
itself. But in Hitchcockia, as in Carroll’s dream worlds, not every dead
person stays dead.

The Hitchcock universe, like Carroll’s, is a realm of seemingly
random absurdities. Here a man can be mistaken for someone else and,
despite his denials, become that man (North by Northwest); here men
fall in love with dead women and women fall for “a pair of initials.”
Here, too, a man who resembles a thief is jailed for crimes he didn’t
commit, his very innocence the chief reason he cannot defend himself
(The Wrong Man). As the Cheshire Cat tells Alice, “we’re all mad here.
I’m mad. You’re mad. . . . You must be, . . . or you wouldn’t have come
here” (Carroll, Alice 51). Hitchcock’s films, like Carroll’s books, por-
tray their characters’ desperate attempts to engender order in a crazy
world. But not just the characters’ attempts. Indeed, Rackin’s descrip-
tion of Alice’s goals applies equally to Alfred’s: both seek to create “an
ominous, rather illusory beauty and order out of dangerous, disorderly,
and essentially ugly and grotesque materials . . . by shaping them into
what she (and we) can call patterned, plotted ‘adventures’” (101). Yet
those attempts never completely disarm the danger or resolve the dis-
order. Hence, even if Alice’s awakening amounts, as Rackin argues, to
a “symbolic rejection of mad sanity in favor of the sane madness of ordi-
ary existence” (65), that “sane madness” remains fragile, constantly
imperiled by outbreaks of inexplicable violence. For as Norman Bates
observes, “we all go a little mad sometimes.”

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Notes
1. For example, in 1927 Siegfried Kracauer wrote, "the game that film plays with the pieces of disjointed nature is reminiscent of dreams in which the fragments of daily life become jumbled" (qtd in Dimendberg 143).

2. Freud 312–44. States also recognizes that Freud's terms are just other names for metonymy and synecdoche.

3. See Spoto, Art 345 for a list of culminating falls. In "Hitchcock and the World of Dream," Spoto briefly examines the dream-like elements in Hitchcock's films, but does not link them to Carroll's books.

4. These stories are all reproduced in McGilligan 31–45.

5. Brill observes that "[a]ll movements upward in the main plot will end in similar violence and/or restraint" (150).

6. This shot closely resembles Tenniel's drawing of Alice, with a key rather than knife in her right hand, moving a curtain aside early in her Wonderland sojourn. See Carroll, Alice 10.

7. Modleski notes in passing that Alice now "finds herself in Wonderland" (23); Ryall (48) and Brill (151) also describe this scene as a descent into a nightmare.

8. In the Truffaut interview, Hitchcock identifies her as one of Cinderella's step-sisters: 132.

9. Leitch ("Notorious" 7) quotes Marian Keane on the film's "fairy-tale elements," including a vulnerable princess, a sinister castle, and a heroic last-minute rescue. See also Abel 162.

10. Modleski points out that the name "Alex" indicates that he is "a-lex" or outside the law, and that Alicia's task is to "reverse the initial image of her 'lawless sexuality,'" as suggested by her name (64).

11. According to Leitch, Hitchcock's later films "are about the crushing experience of being watched by Mother" ("Notorious" 39). A bit earlier, as Alex argues with his mother about Alicia, there is a low-angle shot with Mme. Sebastian sitting in the foreground embroidering, her diminutive son in the background in front of a window. The shot is a mirror image of Tenniel's drawing in the "Wool and Water" chapter of Through the Looking-Glass. See Carroll 154.

12. Bondil-Poupard helpfully provides the background for these dream sequences, and traces their sources in and similarities to other Surrealist and Expressionist works (157–59). One deleted scene, in which Ingrid Bergman was to be depicted turning into a statue, was intended to be played back in reverse (160).

13. Red, comments Bellour, is associated with trauma (he does not observe that it is also the color of sex); he notes that these red-outs occur seven times in the film (255–56).
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14. As attentive viewers recognize, Vertigo is also color coded, with red being the color of passion and green the tint of death and rebirth; both are associated with Madeleine/Judy.

15. Kolker, among others, has remarked on the frequent presence of circular, hole-like figures in Psycho, which include Norman’s peephole, the toilet bowl in Marion’s room, the shower head, the drain, and Marion’s dead eye (243–45).

Works Cited


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