

## Maenads in Hitchcock Films: Midge, Mrs. Bates, and Other Bacchic Relief

Maenadic figures in Hitchcock's two most prominent films play essential roles in developing the plot in each. *Vertigo* (1958) is netherworld recovery built upon the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice (Brown, 1984), but the character of Midge (Barbara Bel Geddes) enhances the mythological adaptation in remarkable ways. Midge's character, the creation of a somewhat omnibus screenplay, (Auiler, 1998) represents a significant variant from the Boileau-Narcejac source novel; Midge's inclusion in the plot is overtly Dionysiac and ultimately essential in showing what Hitchcock's cinematic adaptation gains by suppressing the Orphic allusions that were present in the novel. *Psycho* (1960) also depends upon mythological imagery and adaptation on the minute and macrocosmic scale. (Solomon, 2001; Steltzner-Large, 1990; Macfarlane 2015) The set decoration of this important film is built upon systematic mythological allusivity; and at one particular moment, which I believe has never been observed in scholarly discourse on the film, a maenadic figure plays a functional role in advancing the film's most important classical mythological allusion.

In my paper I illustrate with stills and one film clip that Hitchcock worked purposefully with the classical mythological iconography of maenads in *Psycho* and in *Vertigo*. I argue against Brown that *Vertigo*'s Midge is not so "motherly" as much as she is overtly bacchantic. I observe how an obvious but overlooked visual placement of the maenad in the Bates home affects *Psycho*'s mythological tenor, (cf. Macfarlane) a thematic thread running from the film's start to its finish. I show more quickly that Hitchcock and artists he supervised had adumbrated maenadic myth in other narratives — e.g. *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*, season 1 (1955) episode 5 "Into Thin Air". But the key focus of my paper is to show what Hitchcock gains by interlacing

subtle yet operative allusions to the mythological maenads in his ambitious cinematic undertakings of 1958 and 1960. For theoretical underpinnings, I rely upon Hutcheon's influential *Theory of Adaptation* and show how Hitchcock's cinematic adaptations of classical myths deserve further analysis.

### Bibliography

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