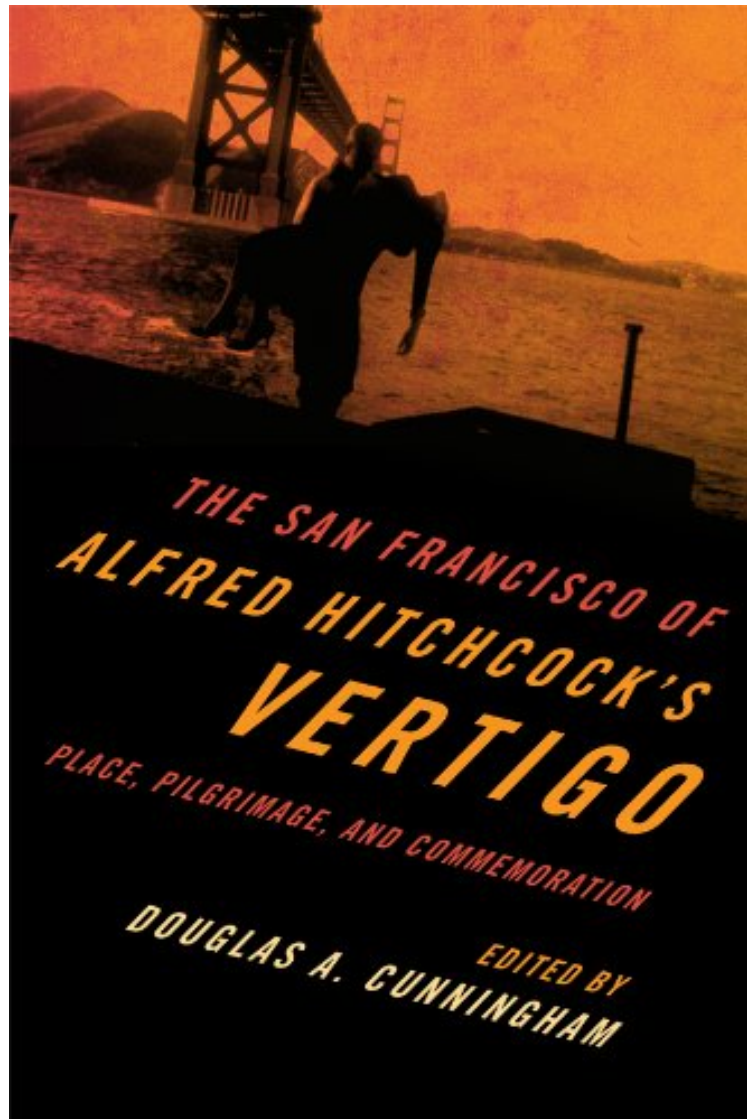


The San Francisco of Alfred Hitchcock's Vertigo: Place, Pilgrimage, and Commemoration

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From Scarecrow Press : The San Francisco of Alfred Hitchcock's Vertigo: Place, Pilgrimage, and Commemoration before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The San Francisco of Alfred Hitchcock's Vertigo: Place, Pilgrimage, and Commemoration:

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have never seen Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958), stop reading this book review and find it and see it. You should do this first because it is just a truly entertaining and enigmatic movie, brilliantly set out and devastating in its denouement. You should do this second because even if *Vertigo* is not the master's most popular film, most critics agree that it is the one with the most depth and richness for interpretation. You might want to do this third because of all the critical writing that has been done about the characters, and, for instance, the way Hitchcock tried to mold his actresses with the same forced control shown by Jimmy Stewart over Kim Novak in the movie. You will want to do this fourth if you want to enjoy critical appreciation on another theme, the place of San Francisco in *Vertigo* and the place of *Vertigo* in San Francisco, laid out in (now we get to the review) *The San Francisco of Alfred Hitchcock's Vertigo: Place, Pilgrimage, and Commemoration* (The Scarecrow Press), edited by Douglas A. Cunningham, with contributions by sixteen critics, artists, San Franciscans, and Hitchcock fans. You need to do this fifth because in this review, I may well give away plot points, and believe me, *Vertigo* is a movie that you want to see the first time with as little preview as possible. Now, with that out of the way, I will tell you that I am newly eager to see *Vertigo* again, armed with the knowledge in this entertaining and instructive book. I'm also eager to see San Francisco again!

Vertigo is not, of course, a travelogue (though one chapter here refers to it as a psychological thriller *traumalogue*), and Cunningham's book is not simply an examination of the many locales in the film (some important on their own, like the Golden Gate Bridge, while others, like the main character's apartment, important only because of association with the movie). You won't be able to take this book in hand as a guide to get to the thirteen sites evaluated here. You will understand their significance a lot better. For instance, two key settings are missions. The main character Scottie is assigned to follow the possibly possessed wife, Madeleine, of a shipping magnate. He trails her to Mission Dolores in San Francisco itself, where she stops at the grave of Carlotta Valdez by whom she is obsessed. Carlotta, according to the gravestone, lived from 1831 to 1857, and was part of the Hispanic past of San Francisco about which, in the mid-twentieth century, there was a cultural amnesia. "Spanish, you know," dismissively explains the shipping tycoon who has put Scottie on the case. The cultural misunderstandings contribute to the film's tragic events, with two culminations at another mission, Mission San Juan Batista which is a hundred miles away. Carlotta might have been among those born and raised at this mission, further deepening the film's questions about colonialism, empire, exploitation, and a tragic past. A chapter here is written by a man who for the 1995 San Francisco International Film Festival created a tour of *Vertigo* sites, like Mission Dolores, the museum where Madeleine goes to stare at the picture of Carlotta, Scottie's apartment, Fort Point with its view under the Golden Gate Bridge, and more. Nowadays he takes his laptop on the tours with him to show clips from the film at each stop. As tour guide, he frequently gets evidence that his flock is not composed of just tourists or film fans, but those seeking something deeper. The travelers revisit the emotions of Scottie and Madeline / Judy by revisiting the settings, no matter how changed they are. "This is why a *Vertigo* tour is more like a religious pilgrimage," the guide explains, "and an accompanying backstory about the sufferings of a saint with whom the pilgrim identifies, rather than just a recounting of the facts on a tour of historical landmarks." The pilgrims come full circle. Cunningham himself has been to all the locations, of course, and reflects on the passion that makes him and others hunt them out: "Was I not, after all, like Scottie, hoping to reify an apparition, chasing a precious, enigmatic memory rooted in a fiction, the truth of which I desperately hoped I, in my own time and space, could somehow make real?" The attempt is fraught with disappointment; Scottie cannot make things real in time enough to prevent tragedy, and some of the sites which pilgrims might try to attain are changed beyond recognition (and some are complete illusion, as was discovered by the first pilgrims who tried to find the Argosy Bookshop, where Scottie goes to research Carlotta's history). But the search is inspiring for those who want to visit the inside workings of *Vertigo*. The inspiration suffuses all the chapters of this fine study, a worthy contribution to the numerous books devoted to increasing our understanding of a true masterpiece.

In Sight and Sound magazine's 2012 poll of the greatest films of all time, *Vertigo* placed at the top of the list, supplanting *Citizen Kane*. A favorite among critics, it also made the American Film Institute's 100 Years, 100 Movies where it ranked in the top 10. Often regarded as Hitchcock's most personal work, the film explores such themes as obsession, exploitation, and voyeurism. In *The San Francisco of Alfred Hitchcock's Vertigo: Place, Pilgrimage, and Commemoration*, Douglas A. Cunningham has assembled provocative essays that examine the uniquely integrated relationship that the 1958 film enjoys with the histories and cultural imaginations of California and, more specifically, the San Francisco Bay Area. Contributors to this collection ponder a number of topics such as the ways in which *Vertigo* resurrects the narratives of San Francisco's violent past; how sightseeing informs the act of watching the film; the significance that landmarks in the film hold in our collective cultural memory; and the variety of ways in which *Vertigo* enthusiasts commemorate the film. The essays also ask larger questions about the specificities of place and the role such specificities play in our comprehensive efforts to understand this layered and seminal film. Because of its interdisciplinary approach, *The San Francisco of Alfred Hitchcock's Vertigo* will have a broad appeal to scholars of film, anthropology, geography, ethnic studies, the history of California and the West, tourism, and, of course, anyone with an abiding interest in the work of Alfred Hitchcock.

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