



# The Testament of JUDITH BARTON

a novel by Wendy Powers and Robin McLeod

[www.thetestamentofjudithbarton.com](http://www.thetestamentofjudithbarton.com)

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## Authors' Note on the Novel's Sources

Frustrated at losing the chance to film the French novel **Celle Qui N'était Plus** to director Henri-Georges Clouzot, who turned that book into **Les Diaboliques**, Hitchcock waited for more of the authors' work. Pierre Boileau and Thomas Narcejac then wrote **D'entre Les Morts**, which roughly translates as **From Among the Dead**. They continued writing through the 1980's, though **Les Diaboliques** and **From Among the Dead** remain their most famous novels because of the film adaptations.

As often happens in page-to-screen translations, Hitchcock's screenwriters had to condense the novel for their screenplay, and **D'entre Les Morts** does indeed present a more complete picture of Renée Sourange, the Judith Barton character. Boileau and Narcejac's Renée is fully complicit in the antagonist's plot to kill his wife because she's his mistress and wants to marry him.

**Vertigo** viewers asking why Judy participates in Gavin Elster's plan might be told, "It's obvious – she's his mistress in the original novel," and probably agree. But all that remains of this motivation in the film is Scottie's gumshoe accusation in the movie's final moments that Judy was Elster's "girl"; she does not assent.

It's possible the screenwriters wanted us to shift our sympathies to the heroine in **Vertigo's** last act, and so made Judy softer and more vulnerable than her French counterpart. Indeed, in Hitchcock's later **Psycho**, the narrative takes the risk that **Vertigo** considers but doesn't bet on: a similar shift in our identification from a "decoy" protagonist, Marion Crane, to the anguished, if homicidal, Norman Bates. But the changes made to the novel's character in the **Vertigo** screenplay are not reconciled with Judy's perceived complicity in Elster's plot.

While Judy is no innocent, and as we depict, *could* have become Elster's mistress, neither is she naive – as his mistress, she would have known she was part of his deadly plan. She is not the hard-bitten film noir paramour of **D'entre Les Morts**, and we cannot see the tortured, heartbroken Judith Barton we meet in **Vertigo's** third act as a willing accomplice to murder.

But most viewers are satisfied, like Scottie, like the film itself, with objectifying Judy. As long as she looks the part, nobody on either side of the screen seems interested in who Judy really is and why she does what she does. One night while watching **Vertigo**, and Judy in particular, very closely, we got extremely interested in those very things, and our novel tells her side of the story.

What's your take? Consider this the start of a conversation. Tell us how and why you think Judy Barton got mixed up with Gavin Elster and Scottie Ferguson...



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## Where to begin: Film or Novel?

Readers frequently tell us they're going to start our novel "right after I've watched **Vertigo** (again)."

As compulsive film viewers ourselves (with a loaded Netflix queue to prove it) and storytellers with a creative fixation on how the written word is interpreted on screen (the multiple movie versions of **Great Expectations** are particularly fascinating), we understand this impulse. And we're delighted *anytime* someone starts our novel. But there's more than one way to pair **The Testament of Judith Barton** with **Vertigo**.

We wrote the book to stand on its own as a novel, though it's obviously a parallel narrative meant to enrich and illuminate its cinematic inspiration. As such, our book is the result of inverting the standard Hollywood process. Instead of the usual condensing of a novel into a screenplay, we've expanded a screenplay into a novel.

The crosstalk between page and screen is often garbled, since a two-hour screenplay can seldom accurately translate most full-length novels. But while many beloved literary properties have been leveled by the movies, others have sprung up brilliantly on the big screen, sometimes even transcending their printed sources. This inconsistency is the inevitable consequence of telling the same story in two media with very different strengths. While film visualizes thought, no director's vision will better the film you make in your head while reading your favorite novel.

It's a tough call. Read a book first, and the subsequent film will be no match for your mental movie. See a film first, and you can never read the source book without the director's imagery filling your mind's eye.

So where does **Judith Barton** enter into this Faustian bargain? Consider these approaches, according to your priorities as a reader and viewer...

**1.** If you've **never seen Vertigo**, or have seen it and forgotten it:

- a. Read the novel, then watch the movie. You won't know what's going to happen, and you'll have the unusual opportunity to read a novel based on a classic film, then view the film as part of a larger literary narrative.
- b. Watch the movie, then read the novel. You'll know how the book ends, but the journey's details should be more poignant and vivid.

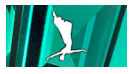
**2.** If you've **seen Vertigo** recently, or know it well:

- a. Read the novel, then watch the movie. Familiar scenes and details should take on new meaning and resonance.
- b. Watch the movie, then read the novel. Improbable plot points should now make sense.

**3.** If you are, like us, **Vertigo obsessives**:

- a. Read the novel, then watch the movie again. See **2a** and **2b** above.
- b. Watch the movie again, then read the novel, then watch the movie again. Everything on screen should look somewhat different this time.
- c. Watch the movie scene by scene, while reading the novel. This should give you a glimpse of our manic mindset while writing it!

Let us know what worked for you...



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## Reader's Guide

1. Judy responds strongly to the emotional pull of colors. How does color imagery influence her life?
2. Judy favors her mother in appearance, but shares more interests with her father. Does she have any of her mother's character traits?
3. Judy both admires and resents her older sister, Maggie. How does Maggie take advantage of Judy, and to what extent?
4. Judy loves gemstones, but not for the expected reasons. What is it about gems and jewelry-making that Judy finds so compelling?
5. Judy tells Scottie that her mother re-married, but she "didn't like the guy." Nethers seems harmless enough – why does Judy find him so distasteful?
6. Judy calls Elster's plot "cockamamie" when he first broaches it at The Top of the Mark, yet she eventually agrees to it. What aspects of her character and experience make her vulnerable to his scheme?
7. Elster could be called the "absent villain" of **Vertigo**. He's a strong presence in this novel – how does that affect the story?
8. In what ways does Scottie become both more and less sympathetic in this novel, than in **Vertigo**?
9. How do Judy's relationships with Jake, Terry, Phillips and Mr. Lange, respectively, make her more or less likely to stand up for herself?
10. World War II isn't even mentioned in **Vertigo**, but looking at the time period and the characters' pasts, it can't be ignored. How are the characters, both male and female, affected by it?
11. Method acting, as Judy studies with Ben, is said by some to be destructive to the actor's mental health if carried too far. How does her training in method acting affect Judy's performance as Madeline?
12. Judy says she's never entered a Catholic church since she moved to San Francisco, until the day Elster sends her to Mission Dolores. But how is she still affected by her religious upbringing?
13. Judy thinks she could be happy with Scottie, if he would love her for herself and forget Madeline. Is Scottie a good match for Judy?
14. Dreams are critical to **Vertigo**, and Judy has her own crucial dream in this novel. How does imagery in Judy's dream of Coronado Heights resonate through her story?
15. Judy says she can't explain why she puts on Carlotta's necklace before the last trip to San Juan Bautista. What conscious or unconscious motivations would she have for this, and why does she have trouble admitting them to herself?