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## Eve and Margo as Victims

Mankiewicz's *All About Eve* uses the theatre as a medium in which the female protagonists, Eve and Margo, are victimized at the hands of varying internal and external factors. The film clearly portrays Margo as a casualty of lies and scheming, as she is swindled and exploited by Eve's guise of meekness. Moreover, the female leads are forced into a helpless and passive role at the mercy of the male gaze, which is personified by figures such as Bill Sampson and Addison DeWitt. The power dynamic between males and females is typified in this film as it suggests there is an underlying patriarchal expectation that women should fulfil traditional roles as housewives, rather than pursuing another career. In light of these expectations, the protagonists fall victim to the theatre, which forces Margo to sacrifice her life for her career, and also fuels Eve's ploys to seduce in order to establish herself in this cutthroat industry. Finally, Mankiewicz challenges the viewers to see Eve as a victim, first as a woman and an actress, but more so, that she is a victim of herself and her unrelenting ambition, as it ultimately leads to her downfall.

Margo, who takes Eve under her wing out of sympathy, is betrayed by the ingénue, whose scheming actions exploit the aging star's insecurities. When the two leads first meet, Margo is immediately enraptured by a seemingly modest and hard-working girl, which leaves her exposed to Eve's guise from the beginning. As Eve dictates her rehearsed story, an over-the-shoulder shot by the camera portrays the on-lookers (Margo, Karen and Lloyd) as part of an audience, suggesting that her tale is a performance: it is 'make-believe'. Margo's tears and the sharp dismissal of Birdie's scrutinizing comment ("What a story...") emphasises her wholehearted sympathy for Eve. Evidently moved, the actress is conned by Eve's recital and thus, the trust she lays in her novice heavily dictates the course of her future, effectively leaving her at the mercy of Eve. Furthermore, Eve gradually undermines her "champion's" relationship with Bill Sampson, as she attempts "to take Bill away" (Addison) from Margo. Romantically involved with a younger man, Margo aims to tighten her stronghold on her lover as her self-confidence increasingly wanes, often reminding him not to "get stuck on some glamour puss". Despite Bill's reassurances of his unwavering love, Margo's fears heighten with the rise of a younger, innocent Eve and her indisputable charm. Eve betrays Margo as she attempts to seduce Bill and as the film progresses, the audience witnesses the transition of Eve into Margo, and the ingénue deceptively "studies [Margo] as if she were a... blueprint". Effectively, the rising star takes advantage of Margo's hospitality and trust, upheaving her life to satiate her ambition. The aging protagonist, who offered nothing but kindness and sympathy, is emotionally tampered with and her relationship with her love is endangered by Eve's ruthless actions, leaving her as a sufferer at the hands of lies.

Collectively, the female leads are predated by the male gaze, which compels Margo to

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eventually succumb to the pressures of the social milieu, and since Eve does not meet these stereotypes, which are based on patriarchal hegemony, her success is short-lived. *All About Eve* juxtaposes the two female leads who ultimately fulfill different roles - Eve as the over-ambitious career woman, and Margo as the docile wife – highlighting the male-controlled expectations of women during that time. The transition of Margo from an actress to a married woman (and thus achieving happiness) underlines the limits society has placed on females, leaving them confined within a single role. The film condemns the nature of the theatre (and any form of industry in which women pursue careers) depicting it as a fraudulent world blight with egotism and manipulation. Importantly, it is a male protagonist (Bill) that defines the theatre as “make-believe” to the hopeful novice, Eve. Captured with a low-angle shot, Bill is in a position of authority, symbolic of the dominance of males, reiterating that women, who are defined by men, are victims of this control. In comparison to Margo, Eve is bereft of happiness and satisfaction as she chooses not to accept a traditional role, and thus, by the limitations placed on women, her success in acting is ultimately void. After receiving the Sarah Siddons award, Eve receives a snide remark from Margo (“you can always put that award where your heart ought to be”) suggesting that by not succumbing to these expectations, Eve’s “heart” is replaced by a metal award, highlighting the false fulfillment that accompanies a career for a woman. Though Margo is portrayed happily as a married woman, she is ultimately forced into this role due to patriarchal pressures which have limited her identity, and moreover, as the embodiment of the other stereotype, Eve’s position is one that is shunned upon, and her career success is unfairly overlooked.

Margo’s absence of a domestic life to maintain her career and Eve’s need to appeal to the male gaze for self-preservation are hardships caused by the theatre. Eve’s first appearance in the film occurs in a dirty, dark alleyway next to a theatre, symbolizing the malignant nature of the world she is about to enter. *All About Eve* suggests the theatre is male-dominated, and for actresses to receive recognition they must engage the male gaze. During Bill’s party, the characters are captured sitting on the flight of stairs, the two starlets, Eve and Claudia, are on the bottom rung which is symbolic of their position in the theatre’s hierarchy. To proceed further, the hopefuls must sway their male counterparts: Miss Caswell uses her sexual prowess to seduce Max Fabian, and is lauded for her efforts by DeWitt, who claims her “career [will] rise... like the sun”. Simultaneously, Eve attempts to allure Bill and Lloyd, suggesting that even the scheming ingénue relies on the support of the male protagonists to reach stardom, using intimacy as a tool to achieve this. Thus, the theatre views actresses as objects of sexuality, as mindless “[bodies] with a voice”, rather than seeing them as women. To become something, the actresses are forced to accept this patriarchal view of their gender, sexualising themselves to appease the men of the theatre. Additionally, to remain a successful actress, Margo had to sacrifice her domestic life, which is an integral part of the “traditional” role of a woman. The exchange between the aging star and Karen in the car highlights the toll the theatre has taken on a wary, beaten-down Margo. Captured through high-angle shots, Margo is portrayed as a

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victim as she battles her conflicting identities: that of being a wife or as a successful career woman. Perhaps at the lowest point in the film, she describes the detrimental effects of her journey in the theatre as she lost fundamental parts of her identity “on [her] way up the ladder”, only to realize that “[she’ll] need them again” to achieve a domestic life. In light of the societal norms of her time, these losses are profound, and the dual roles of being an actress and a woman leaves her a casualty of the theatre.

Furthermore, the Eve’s downfall is caused by her inability to see past her overpowering ambition as it traps her in the firm grasp of Addison DeWitt, alienates those who were genuinely loyal to her, and eventually imprisons her in the cutthroat cycle that exists in the theatre. The young actress’ ambition is depicted by the repeating motif of the staircase, which she is often captured with, highlighting her desire to climb the rungs to stardom. Her aspirations lead her to exploit DeWitt’s ability to secure the young starlet’s future in the theatre. However, once the ingénue’s façade is exposed by DeWitt, he commands his dominance over her (“you’ll belong to me”) and her future is thus controlled by him, leaving her trapped by her own determination. In the confrontation scene, the professional character assassin is captured from low angle shots whilst Eve remains seated at first, establishing his imperious stance over her. Moreover, the audience is forewarned that the protagonist will face the same loss Margo suffers during her decline as an actress. Eve’s reflection is shrouded by ambition and narcissism, distorting her perception of reality and she therefore remains woefully unaware of her future. The appearance of her understudy, Phoebe, and the final scene used as parallels drawn with the relationship between the star (Margo) and her devious novice (Eve). The concluding camera shots are of Phoebe covetously grasping Eve’s prize, curtsying and bowing, surrounded by huge mirror reflections of herself as an adoring audience, crowding the frame space. Self-love, self-adulation, craving fame and glory, this is no longer the story of *All About Eve*, for there is nothing more to tell about Eve, whose decline has been foreseen. This reiterates that the cyclic nature of deposing old stars and bringing in new ones will not stop, and the manipulative young actress will in turn be manipulated by future actresses to come. Thus, Eve is a casualty of the future, and her inescapable situation, perhaps, leaves her as the most victimized character of all.

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