

Narrative devices in 'all about eve'



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Director Joseph Mankiewicz's *All About Eve* utilizes a circular narrative to conceal the truth of Eve's story. However, the impact that Eve's story ultimately has on Margo is more important than Eve's story itself. This is because fabricated nature of Eve's story allows for it to be easily rewritten by other "carbon copies" like Phoebe, therefore rendering it worthless.

There lies great irony in Mankiewicz's title for the film, "All About Eve", as the story of Eve is never told by Eve herself, but rather through the narration of all those she has betrayed. Consequently, on a broader scale, the film is an exploration of the nature and effect of one's duplicity. Through introducing the key characters of the narrative in the Sarah Siddon's Dining Hall, and then utilizing a flashback to follow their retrospective trajectory, Mankiewicz makes the betrayal that Karen and Margo feel, as a result of Eve's beguiled manipulation, palpable to the audience. Therefore, Eve is introduced to the audience just as Karen was - in the shadows of a doorway, shrouded by darkness. That such darkness is an allusion to Eve's deceitful nature is unnoticed by the film's viewers, but rather, highlights the seeming impecuniosity of Eve. As such, the obsequiousness revealed by Eve through her thorough research on the careers and lives of Margo, Lloyd, and Bill is slightly unsettling, and further develops into disconcertion at her ability to make herself indispensable to Margo, through becoming her "sister, lawyer... and cop". The pinnacle of discomfort however, is experienced in Mankiewicz's first explicit disclosure of Eve's subterfuge, as she is rejected by Bill and childishly tears at her wig, before instantly switching from fury to charm at the sound of Addison's knock. Therefore, Mankiewicz circular

narrative effectively conceals Eve's deception, hence making her behavior more abhorrent to the audience.

Although the story of Eve is significant to Mankiewicz's narrative, it is not necessarily the most important. Rather, it is the impact of Eve's story on Margo which is most enthralling. Mankiewicz first introduces Margo through the narration of Addison Dewitt, where she is unquestioningly defined as a "true star". She is centralized in the frame and controls the caustic banter between her and the Richards, backstage, and is greatly disparaging of her fans. Thus, Margo is initially presented as the stereotypical celebrity who has outgrown her fame. However, whilst seemingly at the height of her career, the close-up of her face as she farewells Bill at the airport and questions, "am I going to lose you Bill?", reveals a woman who is deeply insecure, and hesitant to trust. Therefore, as Margo falls victim to Eve's manipulation, but is marginalized by her close friends as a result of their trust in Eve's "quiet graciousness" and "rare qualities", Mankiewicz evokes great sympathy from the audience. It culminates in the confessional scene between Margo and Karen, where Mankiewicz reveals that Eve's machinations have unburied deeper uncertainties within Margo's life. The dialogue carries great pathos, as Margo admits to feeling nothing more than "insecure, unwanted and unloved."

Hence, Margo's transformation ultimately prevails over the story of Eve, which is rendered worthless by Phoebe's rewriting of it. In the final scenes of the film, Margo finds genuine fulfillment in her role as a docile and humble housewife, whereas Eve is left wounded by the hollow victory her trophy represents. Whilst the men of the room rise to applaud Eve, she is

demoralized upon seeing that Karen and Margo do not clap. Addison's description of Eve from the first scene of the film - that "no brighter light has ever dazzled the eye than Eve" - is far more telling in the final scene, where the audience learns that through her skillful appropriation of Margo's identity, Eve literally blinded those around her in an attempt to succeed in the world of theater. However, the infinite reflections of Phoebe holding up Eve's costume in the mirror, indicates to the audience that there will always be another "carbon copy", willing to do "all that, just for a part in a play." As such, the value of Eve's narrative is reduced.

Therefore, while Mankiewicz's circular plotline allows for Eve's deception to unfurl in an engaging manner, such deception's impact on Margo is of greater significance. Margo's transformation and self-growth allows for her narrative to be most important, whereas Eve's story is rewritten by Phoebe, another "carbon copy" like herself, and is therefore of no value.