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The Power of Illusion and the Illusion of Power in Mary Orr's "The Wisdom of Eve" and Mankiewicz's *All About Eve*

Alice Clark-Wehinger

- ¹ The title of Mary Orr's short story, "The Wisdom of Eve,"¹ calls to mind the biblical temptress. Narrative voice corroborates this from the outset by evoking Eve's "snaky activities in a once-peaceful garden" (284). The story focuses on two actresses: Eve Harrington and Margola Cranston. Eve is portrayed as the carbon copy of the famous actress Margola, who resembles the "childish figure of a Botticelli angel" (285). Mankiewicz's film, *All About Eve*², was taken directly from the short story, which appeared in *Cosmopolitan* magazine in May 1946. Mankiewicz's tenuous financial circumstances in 1949 brought him to produce a radio drama from the hypotext for NBC. This radio diffusion is what probably caught the attention of Fox Studios. It later became a film in 1950. As Stephanie Harrison has pointed out in *Adaptations from Short Story to Big Screen*: "He saw it as the backbone for the show-business film he wanted to write and direct" (280). The short story, "The Wisdom of Eve," can be summed up in three acts; Act I: Eve Harrington arrives on Broadway, unknown to the world of theatre, and wins over even the most hard-core New York playwrights and movie producers. She insinuates herself into the good graces of the wife of Lloyd Richards, a celebrity playwright. She goes on to capture the attention of Mrs. Richards' best friend, Margola Cranston, a Broadway star, studies her on the sly, and finally supplants her rival by stealing her leading role. Act II: A press release reveals Eve's sordid past, her bogus identity and she is cast out of Broadway's paradise. Act III: Her fall proves to be a trick perspective; Eve, by an ultimate act of duplicity, rises to fame once again when Lloyd Richards succumbs to her charm, divorces his wife and marries Eve who becomes a Broadway star overnight.

- 2 Both character and narrative voice in the film mirror the theme of deceit, which orchestrates the plot in the short story. Indeed, the short story functions like a miniature script, from which Mankiewicz extracts the fundamental gist of his film, which relates the rise and fall of an unknown woman to celebrity status in Hollywood. In both the short story and the film, focalization is on the figure of an actress. In the filmic adaptation of the short story, secrets about the actress's enigmatic character and life are divulged through the polyphonic voice of friends and enemies in a long flashback. The narrative strategy adopted by Mary Orr also uses multiple narrators to tell the story of Eve's rise to fame. The story opens with the main, semi-anonymous narrator, Mrs. Richards, telling the story about Eve. Mrs. Richards' story is the framing narrative and encases Margola's embedded story about Eve which gives additional inside information about how Eve Harrington became a star overnight. When Margola Cranston's story ends, the main narrator, Mrs. Richards takes over the narration again and discloses the fact that she is married to Lloyd Richards, the playwright who has contributed to making Margola Cranston famous. It is not until the end that the reader discovers Eve used Mrs. Richards to gain access to her husband. Eve has not only become famous; she is going to marry the playwright, Lloyd Richards. This narrative twist in the short story reveals the true identity of the narrator who is the former Mrs. Richards, on her way to get a divorce in Reno. In Mary Orr's story, the omniscient narrator (Mrs. Richards) already knows *All About Eve*, although she feigns ignorance and withholds information until the end. In this way, she functions as a lure, or mirror representation of Eve who embodies a figure of subterfuge. Mankiewicz's cinematic adaptation of Orr's short story fully exploits the trope of deceit as well, but it is incarnated wholly in the figure of the actress. All three actresses in the filmic version are mirror images of each other and function as a trope to dramatize the power of illusion. In *All About Eve*, Anne Baxter interprets the role of Eve Harrington who is a master manipulator of appearances; Bette Davis plays the part of Margo Channing, Eve's rival, and young Phoebe (Barbara Bates), plays a bit part, as the treacherous doppelgänger, who will supplant Eve.
- 3 In this paper, I will argue that the paradigm of theatricality in Mankiewicz's film, taken from Mary Orr's short story, focuses on the stage as a means of exploring the art of illusion on several levels, beginning with questions concerning the art of performance. The performance act is inextricably linked to deception in the short story and this clearly colored the filmic adaptation as well. This commentary on the movie industry becomes metatextual in the film. Eve and Margo exemplify performers who are so at ease in the art of make-believe that they naturally impose a script on the world, regardless of its authenticity. Deceit is thus a core theme in *All About Eve*. We can identify several very brief, but pertinent intersemiotic allusions to the stage as a locus of deception embedded within Mankiewicz's film. These intersemiotic references to acting and to the stage (paintings, posters and playbills) are of specific interest in my paper. They link the Broadway actress to a predatory killer, and in so doing they present the stage as a displacement for the Machiavellian political arena. These images disclose a seminal motif at the core of the film, suggesting that the power to destroy is as essential to an actress's career as her potential to dissemble. The message resonates with violence, and thus calls for a deeper socio-political interpretation of the film. Indeed, the film questions the authenticity of a cultural referent separating man from beast. "What are the differences between theatre and civilization?" jests Margo's boyfriend, Bill, the film director. As we shall see, *All About Eve*, a dialogic film, inquires

into and offers responses to works ranging from Shakespeare, to Machiavelli and Freud. Bill's quip suggests that both theatre and civilization constitute a "rat race" from which there is no escape. From this perspective, the theatrical arena can be transposed onto a political arena where language, the locus of deception, embodies a lethal weapon without which one cannot survive. In both models, the dramatic and the political, power is derived from the art of making people believe in the truth of appearances, no matter how far removed they are from reality. And in this sense, power is illusion. Finally, this interpretation must be reframed to account for the limitations of Machiavellian opportunism and the concept of the power of appearances. Indeed, the climax of the film offers a strong suggestion that the power of illusion is merely a trick perspective, which can shift at any moment, opening up on its inverted perspective: the illusion of power.

- 4 *All About Eve* begins as the camera pans in on an elderly gentleman quoting Shakespeare at the Sarah Siddons Award Ceremony. He hands the young actress, Eve Harrington, a trophy for her "loyalty and devotion" to theatre. This scene is a follow up to everything that happened before Eve became a star. The frame functions as a means of introducing the main story, and is linked to a set of smaller framed narratives forming one long flashback sequence. Mankiewicz uses different narrative view points in each flashback: DeWitt, the "manure-slinging" theatre critic; Margo, the ageing Broadway star and Karen, Margo's best friend. In the opening scene of the film, a freeze frame stops on Eve holding the trophy, indicating to the viewer that a series of analeptic sequences are about to follow. Then Karen's off voice can be heard and the story about how Eve rose to fame begins. The camera zooms in on Eve in a shabby raincoat waiting to catch a glimpse of Margo outside the theatre. By coincidence, she meets Karen who proposes to escort her personally to Margo's dressing room. This chance encounter turns into a veritable performance where Eve captivates her first Broadway audience (Margo, Karen, Lloyd and Bill) by revealing intimate biographical elements about her life, and her love of theatre. This highly theatrical scene has a powerful performative function since Eve relates her life story as if she were on stage. This is just one of the numerous scenes where the trope of theatre has a dialogic function. It carries dramatic implications linked to the writings of Shakespeare—notably the concept that "All the World's a Stage."³ The trope of theatre colors the socio-political subtext of the film as well, since it alludes to the art of deception as an empowering tool in the professional arena. Mankiewicz's cinematic technique intentionally blurs these two functions. As the film progresses they become so mutually compatible that the frontiers separating the life of the stage and the staging of life break down entirely. Eve's performance in Margo's dressing room illustrates the imbricated nature of theatre and life. Her life story contains little or no truth, and yet she vouches for the veracity of the narrative, delivering it with such emphasis that her life story has precisely the same effect as a script, so brilliantly staged that it provokes a dramatic effect on her audience. Indeed, Eve admits that as a child the frontier between illusion and reality did not really exist: "I couldn't tell the difference between make-believe and the real world. I used to make believe as a child, acted out all kinds of things: unreal more real than real." Her story continues, focusing on the pathos of her adult life, and the loss of her husband Eddy, who was in the Air Force: "They forwarded a telegram to say that Eddy [...] was not coming at all [...] Eddy was dead." She adds: "If I hadn't gone to see Margo Channing's performances in San Francisco I would have had nowhere to go." Mankiewicz takes this

from Orr's short story where Margola relates an analeptic scene of Eve's life in indirect discourse:

"She said that [...] she had married a young American flier and had been living in San Francisco because he had gone to the Pacific from there. I asked her how she got along and she said that at first she had had her husband's allotment, but then he had been killed over Bougainville and since then she had lived very meagerly on his insurance." (288)

- 5 Dewitt's investigation into Eve's personal life later reveals that the war bride scenario she related in Margo's dressing room was bogus. She staged it in order to win over her audience's empathy. Like many scenes in the film, this particular one resonates with a sense of hypotyposis (Gk. *hypotypoein*, to sketch and *typos* impression, form). When the fictional representation of reality is so convincing that it outdoes the reality it is supposed to be representing, it can be referred to as hypotyposis (vivid, emotional word-picturing of scenes and events).⁴ In the short story, Margola (like Dewitt) comes to realize that Eve has conned her entourage into believing her tragic life story: "she had played a role in real life so convincingly that we had both been taken completely for a ride" (293). In the filmic adaptation, Eve's carefully improvised piece of prevarication takes place in the dressing room and is an example of hypotyposis. Disregarding the improbability of a penniless, young woman coming to the same performance, six days a week, for months on end, Lloyd and the whole slew of Broadway actors are caught in the suspension of disbelief when Eve tells her pathetic tale: "Eddy wasn't coming home at all. Eddy was dead." She explains that afterwards, the only thing that counted in life was seeing Margo Channing's performances in San Francisco. Eve's performance is well received by the credulous Broadway clan and Margo, the star, actually wipes away a tear. Mankiewicz borrowed this scene from Orr where Margola recounts the story Eve told her about how she purportedly saw all of the actress's [Margola's] shows:

"She said she had first seen me [Margola] in San Francisco when I toured in *Have a Heart*. [...] She said she had followed me to Los Angeles and eventually come on to New York." (288)

- 6 Mankiewicz's adaptation focuses on Eve's mythomania. He makes this one of the film's core themes and portrays the actress as a potentially empty trope. In *All About Eve*, the actress is under the unspoken obligation of renouncing her identity and her personal life in exchange for the fictional representations of the stage. The metatheatrical representation of Eve's life story in Margo's dressing room has become a model for films about theatre. Vincent Amiel, in *Joseph Mankiewicz et son double*⁵ has noted:

Eve tells the story of her youth and uses it as a scenic device which gives the impression of an actress speaking to her audience; the latter is grouped together in a reverse angle shot, whereas she is alone facing them, and the cuts are done in such a way as to accentuate the impression we have of the scene as an instance of improvisational theatre. A character [Eve] comes into the scenic space by happenchance; as a result, the flow of the central narrative is interrupted much like a theatrical representation [...]. The device is all the more effective since the young woman's story is pure confabulation, as we will learn much later. In this way, her performativity appears, in retrospect, as a sign of mythomania. (62-63)

- 7 Little by little, it becomes clear that the account of Eve's life story was an elaborate fantasy which allowed her to play the role of a modest *ingénue* so as to insinuate herself into the good graces of Margo Channing and gain a footing in Broadway. In this way, her improvisation is a catalyst for transforming her dream of becoming a star into

reality, but the nature of this reality is double, as we can see from the way Mankiewicz dramatizes the theatricalisation of private space. Indeed, according to Amiel, Mankiewicz's protagonists inhabit a dual space, symbolically fusing theatre with scenes from domestic, intimate and professional life:

All of the situations in which he places his actors are binary [...]. Thus the dramatic function of domestic space is reinforced by the inner frame of a micro scene with its stage props: from the kitchen, the living room, the dressing room [...]. Each one of the people is alternately actor, then spectator. In showing that they can move from one realm to the other, they prove, to a certain extent, that they can master the dramatic space of acting. (61-62)

- 8 In essence, Mankiewicz's cinematic technique follows closely on the heels of Shakespearean theatre. Both are imbued with a sense of duality and metatheatricality, suggesting that life is but a metaphorical stage. The veracity of the tale is insignificant, provided one's performance excites the imagination. In *All About Eve*, this duality transfers over to character in the form of an "actress-woman dichotomy,"⁶ setting friends, family and lovers against the harsh demands of professional life. Margo starts her career at age four as a naked fairy in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and in her spinster years she becomes notorious for playing a role even after she has completed her performance on stage. When friends come over to her dinner party they note that the atmosphere is "Macbethish." Bill suggests that Margo must maintain a cutting sense of wit in order to survive on Broadway:

Darling, there are certain characteristics for which you are famous onstage and off [...] They're part of your equipment for getting along in what is laughingly called our environment. You have to keep your teeth sharp, alright.

- 9 Karen, on the other hand, has nothing but antipathy for her friend's staginess: "Stop treating your guests as your supporting cast!" she yelps. "It's about time Margo realized that what's attractive onstage need not be attractive off." Orr's actresses display a similar penchant for metatheatricality, mixing life and stage. Margola reproaches Mrs. Richards' interrupting her story about Eve, as if it were a script: "Don't jump cues," she snaps. Mrs Richards complains: "And for my impatience, I had to wait until she had drawn three or four puffs on her cigarette" (289). In the film, the binary structure of the actress-woman evolves into a predator-actress dichotomy and functions as a trope for the uncivilized world of theatre. This trope extends into the political sphere suggesting that Broadway, peopled with ambitious stars, is emblematic of a food chain where the most powerful devour the feeblest. Indeed, Mankiewicz takes a Darwinian approach to filming the power struggle on Broadway by portraying his actresses as crafty beasts and Machiavellian types. Mankiewicz's ambitious stars are often incarnated by feline creatures with an incisive mind and bite. Margo, for instance, is metonymically associated with animals that have sharp teeth. When she begins to demonstrate a "maternal instinct" for her young fan, she does the improbable—taking Eve under her wings and acting as her mentor. Fearful for the "lost lamb in the jungle," she lets Eve move into her flat: she lends her clothes, and allows her to become her private secretary. Eve insinuates herself into Margo's private and cultural sphere, all the while studying her on the sly. In no time, the modest *ingénue* has become irreplaceable.
- 10 The figure of the Machiavellian actress-woman was directly inspired by Eve in Orr's short story where Margola tells Mrs. Richards how Eve became her rival, studying her speech and behavior in order to become her understudy and supplant her one day.

"So I asked her if she'd like to work for me [...] Well, I gave the wretched girl clothes to wear. I gave her twenty-five dollars a week. All she had to do was tend to my correspondence, send out pictures, and so forth. [...] Then after a month or so she began to annoy me."

"How?" I couldn't help asking.

"By staring at me. She stared at me all the time. I would turn around suddenly and catch her eyes on me. It gave me the creeps. Finally, I couldn't stand it any longer. I suddenly realized that she was studying me, imitating my gestures, my ways of speech, almost doing the same things." (289)

- 11 This inversion of roles, which is about to take place, evokes a master-servant paradigm commonly used in theatre. In the same way that Oliver Goldsmith's Kate Hardcastle "stoops to conquer" Charles Marlow by posing as a barmaid, Eve stoops to vanquish her rival, Margo. The didactic message we can discern in Mankiewicz's film is that Eve's loyalty to Margo is as bogus as her devotion to theatre is authentic. By putting on a convincing show of possessing personal qualities she does not have, Eve supplants Margo. From this standpoint, the film stages the theatrical arena as a reflection of Machiavellian ambitions where the end justifies the means: "The means will always be judged honorable and praised by everyone, for the vulgar will always be taken by appearances and the issue of the event" (Machiavelli, *The Prince* 66). This Machiavellian scenario finds an echo in the opening scene of the film where Eve, whose life has been a string of disloyal relations, is judged worthy of receiving the highest honor based on her appearance of loyalty. The Broadway awards episode thus reads as a staged event where the most knowledgeable in the art of seeming are compensated for feigning their way to fame so as to fulfill personal aspirations for empowerment. Theatre thus forms the red line where aesthetic, professional and ethical references meet in order to test out the veracity of the performative act.

The figure of theatre in *Eve* is not only a cultural reference, but a moral one, in the sense that the actress embodies a question which haunted Mankiewicz: how truth is molded and shaped. (Amiel, 64)

- 12 Indeed, the trope of the actress in the works of both Orr and Mankiewicz has shifting significations. Mankiewicz's actresses achieve fame as a result of illusion, i.e. their power to elude ("ludere" latin for play, meaning to evade, in a skilful way), and their protean capacity to take on new identities. This explains why Eve's triumph on stage and off results from her propensity to incarnate qualities she appears to possess. Eve, whose name is etymologically linked to "evil,"⁷ demonstrates the capacity for exercising the political realism of Machiavelli's Prince who is advised to avoid exercising zealous integrity:

It is not, therefore necessary for a Prince to have all the above-named qualities, but it is very necessary to seem to have them. I would even be bold to say that to possess them and always to observe them is dangerous, but to appear to possess them is useful. And, therefore, he must have a mind disposed to adapt itself according to the wind [...] and be able to do evil if constrained. (*The Prince*, 65)

- 13 The theatrical arena in *All About Eve* promotes a reflection on Machiavellian opportunism where the most important thing for the performer to acquire is the appearance, not the possession, of qualities such as sincerity, nobility and truthfulness: "Everybody sees what you appear to be, few feel what you are" (66). Indeed, both Mankiewicz's cinematic paradigm and Machiavelli's political philosophy suggest that the great majority of mankind is satisfied with appearances, as though they were realities, and is often more influenced by the things that seem than by those that are.

This is illustrated by the story of Eve's life which constitutes an elaborate lie, a script invented to give the impression that she is a lamb in an iron jungle, in need of protection and incapable of subterfuge. Her pretense of doe-eyed naivety allows her to dissemble the fact that her stories are destined to conceal baser truths such as the fact that her parents haven't heard from her in three years, or that her name is not Eve Harrington, or the fact that she was chased out of town for having an affair with her boss's husband, and that her fiancé, Eddy, the war hero, never existed. Mankiewicz's representation of Eve as a mythomaniac corroborates the fact that life and theatre are closely aligned in the actress's consciousness, and are deeply rooted in the belief that "the world of make-believe" is more empowering than the real world. All of this echoes the conception of theatre as a mirage or a virtual reality as elaborated by Antonin Artaud in *Le Théâtre et son double*.⁸

- 14 In the audition scene of *All About Eve*, the power of appearances, signified by the capacity to elaborate and interpret a script on stage, translates into the power to deceive and subvert. The scene stands out as a climax in the film and the reversal of situation can be interpreted according to the Hegelian system of the struggle between master and servant where one self-consciousness is obliged to yield to the other. If Eve supplants her rival, it is because Margo has become more and more dependent. Indeed, Eve has grown more and more skilled until she finally transforms into "a truly independent consciousness,"⁹ capable of replacing her rival. Mankiewicz borrowed this doppelgänger paradigm from Orr's short story in which Margola relates a similar "audition scene" story to Mrs. Richards where Eve supplants her rival:

"Was she really good?"

"Good?" Margola raised a penciled eyebrow. "Good? She was marvelous! Clement even hinted she was slightly better than I am. He didn't dare say so, of course, but he teased me that she was." (290)

- 15 The Hegelian paradigm can be transcribed onto this scene if we consider Margo as the embodiment of the negligent master. Arriving too late for the audition, she sees DeWitt and spats: "I must start wearing a watch!" DeWitt tells her that Eve did the audition: "[...] it wasn't a reading. It was a performance! Something made of music and fire!" He assures Margo that Lloyd was "beside himself" and adds, in a last jab: "She'll soon be what you are now, Margo." To further insist upon the power struggle that is about to take place between the two actresses fighting to preserve their territory, Mankiewicz inserts visual references which link the actress to a predatory beast, devil or assassin. When Margo arrives at the theatre, the camera cuts in on the title of a play currently running: *The Devil's Disciple*, which is strangely devoid of an actress's name. The billboard illuminated at the entrance of the theatre thus stages a sort of play within the play in which the name of the missing actress can be read as Eve, "the devil's disciple," since she has supplanted Margo by replacing her at the audition. The camera then pans in on a billboard where her name figures next to a play, *Aged in Wood*, and her caricature. When Margo enters the theatre, she approaches DeWitt. The camera pans in on her long enough for the viewer to notice that she is framed next to a poster where she is caricatured as a Southern Belle, holding a half open fan in her left hand. A closer look reveals that in the other hand she is holding a smoking gun. The semiotic association of the gun and the fan incite the spectator to connect acting with killing. This metatheatrical image of theatre functions as a displacement for the locus of "civilization" where the affable manners of the Southern Belle actress disguise her potential for doing lethal harm. This conveys the ontological position of language as a

weapon of deceit. From a semiotic point of view, Margo's elegant gown and Southern Belle image are incongruous with the pistol she holds in her right hand. The intersemiotic function of this scene is to align duplicity with the performative function of acting.

- 16 If we now reconsider the signification of the titles of the two plays: *Aged in Wood* and *The Devil's Disciple*, it is clear that the semantics of wood and ageing point to the symbolic last hour of Margo's glory, substantiating the fact that the older actress is about to be replaced by her disciple, Eve, who, like the devil, possesses an infinite number of disguises. In the audition scene, Eve dissimulates her cutthroat ambition by adopting an attitude of lamblike modesty. When Margo storms in to confront her as a traitor who schemed in order to become her understudy, Eve replies meekly: "I was dreadful! I have no right to be anybody's understudy!" Her lines display the same sense of staged iniquity as Iago's which evoke an ontic vacuum in the place of a true identity: "I am not what I am" (1.1.65). This moment of disclosure reveals the fact that Eve is as skilled as Margo, her *doppelgänger*, in the art of illusion. Their struggle for preeminence translates into an allegorical pattern of repetition and doubling where the preyed upon become the predators—the tiger who protected the lamb is devoured by the lamb, and so forth. This pattern of subversion and doubling—in which the servant replaces the master—forms the backbone of Mankiewicz's film. Eve outmaneuvers her adversary by securing the role of Cora which Lloyd had initially written for Margo. When Dewitt threatens to expose her further by revealing her real name, Gertrude Slescinsky, and her tawdry life story, Eve takes him on: "killer to killer," an expression which was initially associated with Margo, through the poster of a smoking gun and the leading actress's association with Lady Macbeth. DeWitt hushes up the true story and, equipped with "the inability to love or be loved and insatiable ambition," Eve continues to trample her way to Hollywood.
- 17 In what Mankiewicz deems to be his second act—the part he added to Mary Orr's short story—we can discern a crucial moment of anagnorisis. Margo decides that she no longer wants to be part of the Broadway "rat race" and will thus cease to compete with Eve. This puts an end to the power struggle with Eve and can be interpreted as a form of Hegelian sublation¹⁰ (the terminal phase of mirror-like emulation). It further suggests that Margo has come to view the power of illusion she exercised during her Broadway career as a delusion. This is substantiated by the fact that she announces, to everyone's surprise, that she does not wish to play Cora, instead, she wants to have a life to live and be a married woman. In essence, her sudden insight into Broadway provides her with a new vision of the world of make-believe, which has the capacity of devastating a woman's personal life: "No more make-believe off stage or on," she affirms.
- 18 As the film draws to an end, Mankiewicz introduces a series of proleptic signs (mimetic gestures and voice inflection), suggesting that Eve's character, now that she is a star, mirrors Margo's cynical prima donna pose when she was at the height of celebrity. And from this perspective Mankiewicz compels the spectator to view Eve's victory over Margo as a Pyrrhic victory. Margo has been redeemed by love, and though it is clear that Eve has triumphed, her accomplishment comes at a high price. Like Margo, Eve has become an inveterate drinker with no companion apart from the stage. Her velvet voice has grown harsh and raucous, and her gestures agitated and commanding.

Indeed, Mankiewicz's films often conclude on this no win throw of the dice where the confrontation between rivals is self-annulling:

In Mankiewicz's films, the stakes balance out in terms of seduction and manipulation. There is always a winner and a loser [...]. So, in the end, it's a zero sum game: the gains of the winning party are equivalent to the losses of the adversary. (Amiel, 64)

- 19 In the protasis or exposition scene, which has been repeated at the end of the film and extended upon so as to give additional information to the viewer, we are invited to (re)view the moment where Eve is awarded the trophy for most accomplished actress. Most significantly, this second viewing of her acclamation no longer conveys the jubilation it did in the expository scene. Instead, it transmits a sense of bleak deception, dark cynicism and self-delusion. The falling action (catastasis) of the dramatic forces accelerates, leading to a change of momentum as Eve approaches her anti-triumphant end. She refuses to accompany DeWitt to the party held in her honor following the ceremony, and forgets her cherished award in the taxi on her way home. With no rival to vie with any longer, Eve's thirst for power evaporates like a mirage. In Hegelian terms this inability to savor victory is linked to the absence of an adversary, bringing the symmetry of cooperation¹¹ to break down. Hegel's "Bondage and Servitude" sheds light on this Mankiewiczian scenario where power, once wrested from the adversary, is projected as delusory since it leaves the subject isolated. In other words, if one subject annihilates the other, it thereby destroys its own freedom, as there is nobody there to recognize the triumphant victory.¹² In contrast, the closing scene in the short story is restricted to maintain focus on Eve's victory and Mrs. Richards' loss:

Eve is on the train with her contract in her pocket. I'm going on a trip also. I'm heading for Reno to get a divorce. For in spite of her success, Eve had found the time to get engaged to a famous playwright. She's going to marry my husband, Lloyd Richards. (295)

- 20 If Mankiewicz allows Margo a respectable exit, presenting her fall from stardom as an illusion (since being deposed will allow her to get married and find happiness), he presents Eve's victory equally as an illusion. In so doing, he dramatizes a system of exits and entrances so complete and symmetrical that they seem to cancel each other out, leaving interpretation open to swinging doors and recalling the Shakespearean view that reality and illusion are bedfellows, and that men and women are merely players on the stage of the world. In the closing scene, the repetitive cycle of defeat and triumph continues to reverberate. Mankiewicz introduces the trope of the mirror to invoke the master-servant paradigm again. Eve's doppelgänger, the young journalist, Phoebe, has sneaked into her room while Eve was at the Awards Ceremony. Eve comes back (having left her trophy in the taxi) and finds the young fan, Phoebe, who has drowsed off, waiting for her. DeWitt arrives at the door with Eve's trophy. While Eve nurses her whisky, Phoebe goes into Eve's bedroom with the trophy in hand and slips on her gown, curtsying to an invisible audience in front of a mirror which transforms so as to reveal an infinite number of duplicated images of the young woman. Phoebe's name, Greek for *moon goddess of the hunt*, is another predatory reference to actresses in the film. Phoebe embodies the virgin moon goddess: prepared to sacrifice herself for the hunt¹³ which constitutes the rat race of Broadway and Hollywood. Mankiewicz thus brings us full circle in the pattern of doubling, and subversion. Eve, a celebrity, is now a lonely alcoholic, an inverted image of Margo, who has purportedly found personal happiness in marriage. Phoebe, as do Eve and Margo, embodies the multi-faceted implications of

the power of illusion and the illusion of power inherent to acting both on and off stage. This paradigm provides a compelling metatheatrical message which promotes a reflection on the performative function of theatre in *All About Eve*. Like the speech act, the performance act is always split, and the knowledge of this gap (between object and object of desire; signifier and signified) is precisely the stuff that the creative act, i.e., illusion, needs to feed upon. This is reflected in the title of Lloyd's new play, *Footsteps on the Ceiling*, (presumably the one that Phoebe will star in once she supplants Eve). The very absurdity of footsteps on a ceiling reveals something about the actress's role, theatre and the power of illusion, which is generated from the act of performativity. Identity, as such, is dramatized as a performance act, a construct of theatre, a role to be played, a script to be learned and recited. In *All About Eve* Mankiewicz's actresses double as a trope for theatre: like a hall of mirrors they reflect the liminal zone between reality and illusion. This pertains to both the short story and the film, where the actress is a no-win figure associated with a smoke-screen, an empty script, an ontic void.

- 21 Such, at least, is the vision of theatre, and of cinema where the stage is a metaphor for the world suggesting that we are all copies of copies. Stephen Greenblatt's observations about *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (a play, which is a dream about watching a play about dreams) finds an echo in *All About Eve* (a movie, which is about theatre where actresses are playing the role of actresses who deceive each other): "Whatever its meaning, its existence is closely linked to the nature of theatre itself. In the theatre, we confront a living representation of the complex relation between transfiguration and delusion."¹⁴ This can be carried over to the mimetic function of cinema in *All About Eve* and theatre in "The Wisdom of Eve," both of which depend on the imagination as the agent of delusion and deceit.
- 22 Delusion and deception have a topical significance as well, if we consider the way in which Mankiewicz went about giving credit to people who had inspired his film. In an act of perverse subterfuge, he promised Mary Orr that her name would be on the screen credits, but when Fox Studios "purchased the story for him for 5,000 dollars, screen credit for Orr wasn't written into the contract. As a result her name does not appear anywhere in the credits" (Harrison, 280-281). Ironically, Orr would have the last laugh. Like Eve, her starlet protagonist, Orr "retained the rights to her play, and when it was adapted into the stage musical *Applause*, sole credit went to Orr, and Mankiewicz's name was left off the playbill" (281).

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NOTES

1. Reference to the short story in this article is to the 2005 edition *Adaptations from Short Story to Big Screen*, "The Wisdom of Eve" (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2005) 284-295.
2. *All About Eve*, written and directed by Joseph L. Mankiewicz. All quotes from the film are taken from the Twentieth Century Fox Productions' 1950 edition.
3. Shakespeare, *As You Like it* (Act 2, scene 7, 139-143).
4. A case in point is the Hecuba soliloquy in *Hamlet* (2.2) where the player's imitation of Priam's widow is so convincing that he outdoes Gertrude's authentic grief. Hypotyposis informs Jean Baudrillard's theory of simulacra. His appreciation of objects and ideas convey a postmodern sense of the potential for 'hyperreal' representations when reinitiating traditional aesthetic, cultural and architectural mediums from which they were originated.
5. All translations from Amiel are my own.
6. Karen Hildenbrand has commented on the fact that this dichotomy informs a larger ontological aspect of Broadway stars which opposes being and seeming: "The question of being and seeming is pertinent to all stars. It corresponds to the celebrated actress-woman dichotomy that Mankiewicz mentions often in reference to *All About Eve*." *Figures du Double dans le Cinéma de Joseph L. Mankiewicz* (thèse, Paris III, 2002) 84.
7. Fem. proper name, from Biblical first woman, late Latin from Hebrew Hawah, literally "to breathe"; "a living being." Like most of the explanations of names in Genesis, Eve's name is probably based on folk etymology. In the Hebrew here, the phonetic similarity is between Hawah, "Eve," and the verbal root hayah, "to live." It has been proposed that Eve's name conceals very different origins for it sounds suspiciously like the Aramaic word for "serpent." [Robert Alter, "The Five Books of Moses," 2004, commentary on Gen. iii 20].
8. Artaud associates the principle of theatre with the mirage of alchemical knowledge which he in turn aligns with the virtual reality of theatre (75).
9. The quote is taken from chapter four of *Phénoménologie de l'Esprit* (Paris: Gallimard, 1993) 188-201. The chapter concerning the master and servant dialectic is translated into French as "Maîtrise et Servitude" from the German: "*Herrschaft und Knechtschaft*," and translates into English as "Lordship and Bondage."
10. The Hegelian notion of sublation corresponds to the end of the antithesis of subject and object. Hegel explains that if this moment does not occur, the two consciousnesses may become

mesmerized by the mirror-like other and attempt to assert their will by entering into a struggle for pre-eminence.

11. *Op cit.*, "Maîtrise et Servitude," 91.

12. *Ibid.*, 188-201. Hegel describes the encounter between two individuals who engage in a "struggle to the death" before one enslaves the other--only to find that this does not give him the control over the world he had sought.

13. Phoebe is said to have her own militia of female warriors in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (Paris: Gallimard, 1992) II, 400-419.

14. See Stephen Greenblatt's introduction to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in *The Norton Shakespeare*, (New York: Norton, 1997) 809.

ABSTRACTS

Dans la nouvelle de Mary Orr, "The Wisdom of Eve", la narration met en exergue les manipulations machiavéliques d'une jeune comédienne, Eve, dont l'opportunisme farouche se dissimule sous le masque de l'innocence. Lors du tournage de son adaptation cinématographique d'*All About Eve*, Mankiewicz avouera que la relecture de la nouvelle lui avait inspiré l'agencement final du scénario: "L'idée me trottait dans la tête depuis dix ans, mais le deuxième acte m'échappait." On peut considérer que le trope du théâtre constitue le fil conducteur de la nouvelle comme du film. Nous allons donc examiner le trope du théâtre dans *All About Eve*, et la façon dont ce dernier déconstruit à la fois l'espace et le concept d'identité; puis nous démontrerons que cette dimension théâtrale est porteuse d'un motif baroque où règne une esthétique de l'illusion et de dédoublement.

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