



**BETTE DAVIS: HOLLYWOOD REBEL**

# All about Eve

Davis is on prime, imperious form in *All about Eve*, imbuing acclaimed stage actress Margo Channing with the imposing resilience of a woman who's made it to middle age in an industry that reveres youth. She's the glamorous sun around which all her friends and fans orbit, commanding attention both off-stage and on. When the youthful, seemingly sweet aspiring actress Eve (Anne Baxter) enters the picture, loudly idolising Margo while quietly trying to claim her life as her own, the older actress is among the first to see what's going on.

When she tries to tell her social circle, including her director boyfriend Bill (Gary Merrill, whom Davis would marry shortly after filming wrapped), they put her worries down to paranoia. They know she's self-conscious about being eight years Bill's senior, and assume she just feels threatened by the arrival of a pretty younger woman on her turf. Soon they learn that she was right all along, but while Margo's been waiting for them to catch up, she's been re-evaluating what she wants from life.

*All about Eve* encapsulates all that was magnetic about Davis as a performer. Joseph L. Mankiewicz's screenplay gifts her some of the most enduring lines in film history ('Fasten your seat belts, it's going to be a bumpy night!'), and she delivers them with the regal acidity that was her calling card. Margo may see through Eve's sugary-sweet charade, but she's still shaken by what she represents – how easily a bright-eyed newcomer could upset all she's worked so hard for. There's a real vulnerability beneath Margo's spiky outer shell that allows Davis to play hard and soft simultaneously, and the result is a turn that deepens her established intimidating persona into a rounded, textured performance that stands as one of the greatest of her career.

**Chloe Walker, [bfi.org.uk](https://www.bfi.org.uk), 19 July 2021**

## A contemporary review

Mankiewicz's new film *All about Eve* makes a grandiose effect of being very cynical and very sophisticated about the New York stage, and it has been accepted at its face value by a large part of the American press and the American public. (Its chances at the British box-offices are perhaps not so good.) *All about Eve* cannot truly be compared with *Sunset Boulevard*, which looked detachedly at a tragedy of a silent film star who has outlived her fame, and wrung from it an acrid pictorial sort of poetry. Mankiewicz's film is an emotional backstage drama from within, studded with glib Coward-Arlen epigrams and so starved of visual substance that nearly the whole weight of its 2 hours 18 minutes falls on the shoulders of one player – Bette Davis. It will leave nobody any wiser (or sadder) about the New York or any other stage.

The near opening shot of Eve Harrington (Anne Baxter) receiving the Sarah Siddons award for the best acting of the year in a well-presented scene, is frozen while the five 'friends' she is about to thank in her speech take up in turn a flashback account of her career. This goes back to a year before, when, as a stage-struck fan in a cheap mackintosh, Eve is led wide-eyed into the dressing room of her idol and leading New York actress, Margo Channing (Bette Davis).

This first sequence of the recapitulation is promising. Margo, removing her make-up, scoffs viciously at the worshipping intruder until the latter shyly tells

her sob-story of devotion and war-widowhood. The moment when the hard façade of the exhibitionist actress melts into sentimentality and tears contains a comment on theatre people not to be matched in any of the subsequent passages. It also establishes that authority that Bette Davis exhibits throughout the film.

Present and equally affected by this pathetic confession are Margo's director and lover (Gary Merrill) her playwright (Hugh Marlowe) and his wife (Celeste Holm), the discoverer of Eve. Sole abstainer and heretic is Thelma Ritter, now typed for ever as a distiller of hard-bitten female repartee. Eve is established as Margo's friend, secretary and helpmeet and it is clear to the initiated eye that she is a slut who will bite every hand that feeds her.

In next to no time she is attempting to seduce the director and getting herself fixed up as Margo's understudy by a system of lying and blackmail that could hardly suffice in a milieu so jealously alerted to the stab-in-the-back.

To substantiate the hypnotic powers of deception to which all her hardboiled victims pay such ready tribute, she should have for the audience something of the morbid lure of a Becky Sharp. Miss Baxter's guile, after its first exposure, is transparent, tedious and repetitive. It is not within her power to salvage the part as Bette Davis so brilliantly does with that of Margo.

As the ageing actress fearful of losing her younger lover, the latter is jealous, tormented, hysterical and vain, full of theatrical emotion but always warmly sympathetic; perhaps too consciously 'courageous' in lending herself to unflattering lighting and make-up, but always in absolute command of a very great talent. This she demonstrates at its fullest when, without a word but with a whole range of expression, she moves about in the theatre foyer while the villainous dramatic critic maliciously extols the brilliance of the understudy she rightly suspects of designs on her lover as on her career.

The dramatic critic, played by George Sanders at his sleekest in an astrakhan collar, is a favourite Hollywood stereotype, and it is he who purrs out the juiciest epigrams while deliberately advancing the career of Eve, and in turn blackmailing her into accepting his advances: ('We are very much alike, we have talent, unlimited ambition and no human feelings. We deserve each other.') Not only does he consolidate the plushy unrealism of the atmosphere but, together with Eve, he serves to emphasise by contrast the essential golden-heartedness of a bunch of abnormally (for a film) articulate troupers.

They are, Miss Davis and the wisecracks aside, conventional film types, just as the film is a conventional backstage story, despite its pretensions. For Margo's dream which underneath the grease-paint is just like any other girl's – of a fireside and a man coming home to it – comes true; and Celeste Holm, who was highest on Eve's list for liquidation, keeps her man, who was Eve's most gullible customer. And to keep realism further at bay Mankiewicz has seen fit to annexe a clever-clever epilogue in which Eve, alone on her night of triumph with the Sarah Siddons trophy, is offered and falls for the exact line she worked on Margo by another young fan, also a slut, thus presenting us with poetic justice in action.

*All about Eve* is in essence a play fabricated into celluloid with absolutely no feeling for pictorial style or form. Yet one is not surprised to hear Mankiewicz cited as the writer-director of the year. The film has just the sort of surface glitter that dazzles the eyes of the selection committee of the Academy of Motion Picture Art. It will undoubtedly add to Darryl Zanuck's conviction that Art pays off.

**Richard Winnington, *Sight & Sound*, January 1951**

ALL ABOUT EVE

Directed by: Joseph L. Mankiewicz  
©/Production Company:  
Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corporation  
Produced by: Darryl F. Zanuck  
Written for the screen by: Joseph L. Mankiewicz  
Based on the short story ‘The Wisdom of Eve’ by: Mary Orr  
Director of Photography: Milton Krasner  
Special Photographic Effects: Fred Sersen  
Editor: Barbara McLean  
Art Direction: Lyle Wheeler, George W. Davis  
Set Decorations: Thomas Little, Walter M. Scott  
Wardrobe Direction: Charles LeMaire  
Costumes for Miss Bette Davis Designed by: Edith Head  
Make-up Artist: Ben Nye  
Music: Alfred Newman  
Orchestration: Edward Powell  
Sound: W.D. Flick, Roger Heman

uncredited  
Production Manager: Max Golden  
Unit Production Manager: Robert Snody  
Location Manager: W.F. Fitzgerald  
Assistant Director: Gaston Glass  
2nd Assistant Directors: Hal Klein, Jerry Braun  
Dialogue Director: Flo O’Neill  
Script Supervisor: Wesley Jones  
Camera Operator: Paul Lockwood  
Camera Assistants: Bud Brooks, Al Lebovitz  
Grip: James Lavin  
Grip Best Boy: Joe Robinson  
Crane Grips: Jack Richter, Rex Turnmire  
Gaffer: Vaughn Ashen  
Best Boy: Charles Edler  
Electrician: Jack Dimmack  
Stills Photography: Ray Nolan  
Effects: Jess Wolf  
Property Master: Fred Simpson

Wardrobe: Merle Williams, Josephine Brown, Ann Landers  
Make-up: Frank Prehoda, Gene Romer  
Body Make-up: Beatrice Gardell  
Hairstylists: Gladys Witten, Kay Reed  
Sound Recordist: Zoe Cummings  
Boom Operator: Paul Gilbert  
Cable: Harry Roberts  
Publicity: Grady Johnson

Cast

Bette Davis (Margo Channing)  
Anne Baxter (Eve Harrington)  
George Sanders (Addison DeWitt)  
Celeste Holm (Karen Richards)  
Gary Merrill (Bill Simpson)  
Hugh Marlowe (Lloyd Richards)  
Gregory Ratoff (Max Fabian)  
Barbara Bates (Phoebe)  
Marilyn Monroe (Miss Casswell)  
Thelma Ritter (Birdie Coonan)  
Walter Hampden (aged actor)  
Randy Stuart (girl)  
Craig Hill (leading man)  
Leland Harris (doorman)  
Barbara White (autograph seeker)  
Eddie Fisher (stage manager)  
William Pullen (clerk)  
Claude Stroud (pianist)  
Eugene Borden (Frenchman)  
Helen Mowery (reporter)  
Steve Geray (captain of waiters)  
Bess Flowers (woman congratulating Eve) \*

USA 1950©  
138 mins

\* Uncredited

BETTE DAVIS: HOLLYWOOD REBEL

Of Human Bondage

Sun 1 Aug 12:40; Thu 12 Aug 18:00

Dangerous

Mon 2 Aug 18:15; Fri 13 Aug 21:00; Wed 18 Aug 18:10

All about Eve

Tue 3 Aug 14:30; Sat 14 Aug 20:25; Sun 29 Aug 15:00

Marked Woman

Tue 3 Aug 18:10; Thu 12 Aug 20:40; Sat 14 Aug 14:45

What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?

Wed 4 Aug 14:15; Wed 11 Aug 20:30; Mon 16 Aug 18:00;  
Sat 28 Aug 17:20

Jezebel

Wed 4 Aug 20:40; Sun 15 Aug 15:30; Fri 27 Aug 18:00

Hush... Hush, Sweet Charlotte

Thu 5 Aug 14:15; Fri 13 Aug 17:40; Wed 18 Aug 14:30; Sat 28 Aug 20:30

All about Bette Davis

Thu 5 Aug 18:10

Dark Victory

Fri 6 Aug 14:15; Mon 23 Aug 18:00

The Private Lives of Elizabeth and Essex

Sat 7 Aug 15:00; Sat 21 Aug 11:40

With thanks to Martin Shingler

The Letter

Sun 8 Aug 15:45; Tue 17 Aug 17:50

The Man Who Came to Dinner

Sun 8 Aug 18:20; Thu 19 Aug 20:40

The Little Foxes

Mon 9 Aug 18:00; Mon 16 Aug 20:30; Thu 19 Aug 17:40

The Whales of August

Wed 11 Aug 14:30; Thu 26 Aug 20:30; Tue 31 Aug 18:10

Old Acquaintance

Wed 11 Aug 17:40; Sun 22 Aug 15:30

Mr. Skeffington

Sat 14 Aug 17:10; Sun 29 Aug 11:30

The Star

Sun 15 Aug 18:30; Wed 25 Aug 20:45

Dead Ringer

Fri 20 Aug 17:45; Mon 30 Aug 15:20

The Nanny

Tue 24 Aug 20:45; Mon 30 Aug 12:40

Promotional drinks partner



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