SEPTEMBER 27, 2000: ALL ABOUT EVE (1950)

20th Century Fox, 1950, 138 minutes

Bette Davis....Margo Channing
Anne Baxter....Eve Harrington
George Sanders....Addison De Witt
Celeste Holm....Karen Richards
Gary Merrill....Bill Sampson
Hugh Marlowe....Lloyd Richards
Gregory Ratoff....Max Fabian
Barbara Bates....Phoebe
Marilyn Monroe....Claudia Caswell
Thelma Ritter....Birdie
Walter Hampden....Dinner Speaker

DIRECTOR Joseph L. Mankiewicz
SCRIPT Joseph L. Mankiewicz
based on a story by Mary Orr
PRODUCER Darryl F. Zanuck
MUSIC Alfred Newman, Franz Liszt
CINEMATOGRAPHER Milton R. Krasner
EDITOR Barbara McLean
COSTUME DESIGN Edith Head


BETTE DAVIS (Ruth Elizabeth Davis, 5 April 1908, Lowell, Massachusetts—6 October 1989, Paris, France, breast cancer) won best actress Oscars for Jezebel 1938 and Dangerous 1934. She was also nominated for best actress for What Ever Happened to Baby Jane? 1962, The Star 1952, All About Eve 1950, Mr. Skeffington 1944, Now, Voyager 1942, The Little Foxes 1941, The Letter 1940, Dark Victory 1940, and Of Human Bondage 1934. The American Film Institute gave her a Life Achievement Award in 1977. She was a top star in the 1930s and early 1940s, then the pictures got weaker and weaker until she replaced Claudette Colbert (who had disk problems) in All About Eve, whereupon the roles improved for a while. Her work was so uneven in the 1950s that she eventually had no work at all, so she placed her famous “Job Wanted” ad in the Hollywood trade papers. That led to her comeback role as the demented former child star in Whatever Happened to Baby Jane? Some of her notable films are Death on the Nile 1978, The Nanny 1965, Hush... Hush, Sweet Charlotte 1964, The Virgin Queen 1955, The Man Who Came to Dinner 1942, The Private Lives of Elizabeth and Essex 1939, and The Petrified Forest 1936. In the 1950s and 1960s, she had roles in many of the major television series: “It Takes a Thief,” “Gunsmoke,” “Perry Mason,” “The Andy Williams Show,” “The Virginian,” “Wagon Train,” “Alfred Hitchcock Presents,” “Ford Theater,” “General Electric Theater,” and even “What’s My Line.” Illness forced her to pull out of the 1982-83 television series “Hotel”—her replacement was Anne Baxter. Who says movies ain’t real?

ANNE BAXTER (7 May 1923, Michigan City, Indiana—12 December 1985, New York), granddaughter of Frank Lloyd Wright, did a good deal of television miniseries work in the 1980s. In the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s she appeared in the major dramatic omnibus series,
as well as such shows as ‘Banacek,’ ‘Cannon,’ “Marcus Welby, MD,” “The Big Valley,” “The Virginia,” “The F.B.I.,” and “Batman” (as ‘Olga, Queen of the Cossacks’ and ‘Zelda the Great’). She won a best supporting actress Oscar for The Razor’s Edge 1946, and a best actress nomination for All About Eve. Some of her other films were A Walk on the Wild Side 1962, Cimarron 1960, The Ten Commandments 1956, The Sullivans 1944, The North Star 1943, and The Magnificent Ambersons 1942.

**George Sanders** (3 July 1906, St. Petersburg, Russia [British parents]—25 April 1972, Barcelona, Spain) was in more than 120 movies, several of whom about two suave detectives, The Saint and The Falcon. Some of his films: The Quiller Memorandum 1966, The Amorous Adventures of Moll Flanders 1965, Solomon and Sheba 1959, Call Me Madam 1953, I Can Get It for You Wholesale 1951, Samson and Delilah 1949, Forever Amber 1947, The Picture of Dorian Gray 1945, A Date with the Falcon 1941, and 1940. In his later films and in many tv roles he played charming villains and heels. In 1937 he told David Niven that he intended to commit suicide when he got older. And so he did in 1973, swallowing three bottles of Nembutol and leaving this note: “Dear World, I am leaving because I am bored. I feel I have lived long enough. I am leaving you with your worries in this sweet cesspool. Good luck.”

**Celeste Holm** (29 April 1919, New York) appeared in Broadway plays before coming to Hollywood, among them The Women, Oklahoma! and Bloomer Girl. She won a best supporting actress Oscar for her third film, Gentlemen’s Agreement 1947, and two best supporting nominations—for Come to the Stable 1949 and All About Eve 1950. In the ’70s and ’80s she appeared in many popular tv series, such as “Wonder Woman,” “Trapper John, M.D.,” “Falcon Crest,” “Matt Houston,” “Magnum, P.I.,” “Spenser: For Hire,” and “Cheers”; in 1994 she appeared in two episodes of “Touched by an Angel.” She several times interrupted her film career to work on Broadway. Some of her other films are High Society 1956, The Tender Trap 1955, Everybody Does It 1949, The Snake Pit 1948, and Gentleman’s Agreement 1947.

**Gary Merrill** (2 August 1915, Hartford, Connecticut—Falmouth, Maine, lung cancer) was 35 and Bette Davis 42 when they starred All About Eve close enough for her line about him in the film to ring true: “Bill's thirty-two. He looks thirty-two. He looked it five years ago, he'll look it twenty years from now. I hate men.” Playing a married couple must have felt pretty good to both of them: after the film was done they divorced their respective spouses and got married. Merrill is perhaps best known as a disembodied voice on scores of radio and television voice-over commercials. Two of his better early films are Twelve O’clock High (1949) and Slattery’s Hurricane (1949).


All About Eve received 13 Academy Award nominations and won 6 of them: picture, director, supporting actor, sound, screenplay, costume design. It probably would have won two more if four members of the cast hasn’t been in direct competition with one another: Davis and Baxter for Best Actress and Celeste Holm and Thelma Ritter for Best Supporting Actress. The story is that the studio tried to get Baxter to go for Supporting but she refused because she already had one of those and wanted to move up. Years later, the same story goes, she allowed as maybe she made a bad career move there and Bette Davis allowed as she was finally right about something.

Some memorable lines from the film......

**Margo Channing:** Funny business, a woman's career, the things you drop on the way up the ladder so you can move faster. You forget you'll need them again when you get back to being a woman. It's one career all females have in common--being a woman. Sooner or later we've got to work at it no matter how many other careers we've had or wanted. And in the last analysis nothing is any good unless you can look up just before dinner or turn around in bed and there he is. Without that you're not a woman. You're something with a French provincial office or a book full of clippings but you're not a woman. Slow, curtain, the end.

**Addison DeWitt:** I'm Addison DeWitt. I'm nobody's fool, least of all yours.

**Margo Channing:** Fasten your seatbelts, it's going to be a bumpy night!
Addison DeWitt: You're maudlin and full of self-pity. You're magnificent!

Margo Channing: I'll admit I may have seen better days... but I'm still not to be had for the price of a cocktail, like a salted peanut.

Bill Sampson: How about calling it a night?
Margo Channing: And you, pose as a playwright? A situation pregnant with possibilities and all you can think of is everybody go to sleep.

Addison DeWitt: [voiceover] Margo Channing is a star of the theater. She made her stage debut at the age of four in "Midsummer Night's Dream," playing a fairy. She entered, quite unexpectedly, stark naked. She has been a star ever since.

Addison DeWitt: While you wait you can read my column. It'll make minutes fly like hours.

Bette Davis was every bit as intelligent and acerbic as she seems in this film. She and Joan Crawford had one of Hollywood’s most enduring feuds. Crawford was the widow of Pepsi’s CEO, so Davis had a Coke machine installed on the set of Whatever Happened to Baby Jane? In retaliation, Crawford put heavy weights in her pockets for the scenes when Davis had to drag her across the floor. Davis’s two best known lines on Crawford are. "I wouldn't piss on her if she was on fire" and “She has slept with every male star at MGM except Lassie.” (No, Davis did not get her genders bent: at least two of the dogs who played Lassie were males.) Some of her other lines:

“At 50, I thought proudly, ‘Here we are, half century!’ Being 60 was fairly frightening. You want to know how I spent my 70th birthday? I put on a completely black face, a fuzzy black a fro wig, wore black clothes, and hung a black wreath on my door.”

“Margo Channing was not a bitch. She was an actress who was getting older and was not too happy about it. And why should she? Anyone who says that life begins at forty is full of it. As people get older their bodies begin to decay. They get sick. They forget things. What’s good about that?”

About Mankiewicz:

Godard: “one of the most brilliant American directors.”

Truffaut: “master of théâtre filmé” Mankiewicz had a lifelong fascination with theatre’s “creative community. . .the quirks, the frailties, the needs and talents of the performing personality....This fascination, deeply sentimental behind a cynical facade, informs the quintessential Mankiewicz movie All About Eve.”

Celeste Holm: “Joe was in love with the concept of the theater as a wolverine’s lair of skullduggery and bitchcraft.”

David Shipman: “The highest quotient of (verbal) wit of any film made before or since.”

Godard: “...the most intelligent man in all contemporary cinema.... He is too perfect a writer to be a director as well.”

Accused often of an uncinematic priority of words over images. Mankiewicz responded “I don’t believe that the word is of prime importance. I believe that the word is worthy of equal respect,” that film is “a medium for the exchange of ideas and exchange of comment as well as purely visual effects.”

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