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# Abstracts

**FASTEN YOUR SEAT BELTS!  
THERE'S GOING TO BE A STORM TONIGHT!**

*Carlos J. Plaza*

Joseph L. Mankiewicz only directed twenty feature films, but he played a role in a number of others as producer and screenwriter. Only one of his films, however, was actually based on his own screenplay: **The Barefoot Contessa** (1954). Mankiewicz was born in Pennsylvania in 1909 to a German father and Latvian mother; his brother, Herman, also worked in the motion picture industry, and was perhaps best known for writing the screenplay for **Citizen Kane** (1940). Mankiewicz's first work in cinema dates back to 1929, when he started writing intertitles for silent versions of 'talking' films. He then went on to writing dialogues and screenplays, first for Paramount Studios and then for MGM, where some of his finest work includes the screenplay for **Manhattan Melodrama** (1934) and the dialogues for **Our Daily Bread** (1934). Mankiewicz then worked as producer for such films as **Fury** (1936), **The Philadelphia Story** (1940), **Woman of the Year** (1942) and a number of Frank Borzage pictures (**Mannequin**, 1938; **Three Comrades**, 1938; **Strange Cargo**, 1940, among others). In 1946 he directed his first film, **Dragonwyck**. His most fruitful period as director ran from 1946 to 1959 (16 feature films), with such outstanding titles as **A Letter to Three Wives** (1949), **All About Eve** (1950), **Julius Caesar** (1953), **The Barefoot Contessa** (1954) and **Suddenly, Last Summer** (1959). Mankiewicz directed only four more films, the last one, **Sleuth**, in 1972. He died in 1993.

**THE SCOUNDREL WHO REWROTE F. SCOTT  
FITZGERALD. JOSEPH L. MANKIEWICZ, PRODUCER**

*Tag Gallagher*

For several years before getting into directing, Mankiewicz was the producer of films made by other directors. Between 1936 and 1944 he produced a total of twenty pictures, the most brilliant of which are **Fury** and **The Philadelphia Story**. All of them were made for Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, except for the last one, **The Keys of the Kingdom**, which was made under contract to Twentieth Century Fox. Although the personality of MGM kingpin Louis B. Mayer always overpowered those of his subordinates, Mankiewicz's mark managed to shine through in a good part of his productions. Thus, the American director's love for theatre and literature is obvious in most of his productions, which, in the author's words, were often times more like "photo-theatre" than cinema. This aspect was particularly evident when directing actors like Spencer Tracy and Margaret Sullavan, who the author categorises as 'mannequins'.

**RATIONALIST ILLUSIONS. STORIES, PERFORMANCE  
AND LIFE IN THE FILMS OF MANKIEWICZ**

*Carlos F. Heredero*

Together with the work of Douglas Sirk, Mankiewicz's films lie somewhere between classicism and modernity, equidistant from classic narration and modern reflection. Conventional classic narration began being replaced by "fiction within fiction", created and directed by some of the characters themselves: Nicholas Van Ryn in **Dragonwyck**, Addie Ross in **A Letter to Three Wives**, Eve Harrington and Addison de Witt in **All About Eve**. These characters did not simply perform among and like the rest; they also wanted to write the screenplay, distribute the parts and direct the scene. All of this meant the predominance of reason over sentiment and the constant presence of machinations, plots, conspiracies and the like. In the films of Mankiewicz scheming becomes a constructive element and the star of the show, way above and beyond the characters who actually take part in the scheme. The crown jewel of this Mannerist mechanism, **The Honey Pot**, is a perfect example. When all else fails, the scheme devours its own creators, who go from executioners to

victims. There is always (or nearly always) a demiurge-type character who sets the game into motion and another person who tries to oust him. In the end they are all devoured by the mechanism itself, in a downhill path of degradation. In the end it is a power struggle, a lucid questioning of the *American way of life* with a self-critical spirit. After all, the person responsible for weaving the plot is none other than Mankiewicz himself.

**THE OPEN STAGE. THEATRICALITY AND  
PERFORMANCE IN THE FILMS OF MANKIEWICZ**

*Ángel Quintana*

Joseph Mankiewicz was a great lover of theatre, a passion which is clearly manifested in his motion pictures. In fact, in one of his last films, **The Honey Pot**, he very subtly fused both of these arts. The title credits coincide with the end of the second-to-last act in *Volpone*, a seventeenth-century play by Ben Jonson, thus suggesting a continuity between theatre and cinema. However, the Mankiewicz picture most directly coupled with theatre is **All About Eve**, although ironically enough the theatre does not appear even once and the real action takes place off stage. What the American director is actually defending in his work is the Mannerist idea of the world as a performance, a great stage. At the same time, the framework of the cinematographic (theatrical) performance is not confined to the shot itself, but is instead blended with the exterior and real life, becoming a fusion-integration between the two levels - reality and fiction. The theatrical imprint in Mankiewicz's films, more than the visual and screenplay revelations, takes on even greater importance in terms of the actors' body movement and dialogues. And let us not forget the great demiurge, whether it be the author himself or one of the alter egos that wander through his films, even though his plans may be constantly challenged by the outside reality.

**TIME, A BAROQUE SENTIMENT**

*Antonio Santamarina*

After revealing Mankiewicz's concern for finding a way to simultaneously fit together the past, present and future in his stories, the author discloses the principal narrative procedures the filmmaker uses in the heart of his stories to suggest the presence of the past (flashbacks, portraits, memories) and the future (statues, premonitions, apparitions). He then talks about how the three time periods also shape the lives of the characters in the stories (tormented by the past, fearful of the future and living in a present they loathe). The author goes on to show the link between sentiment and the baroque imagery of time (the fleetingness of life, the search for immortality) and Mankiewicz's vision of the same subject.

**JULIUS CAESAR: UNTO WELLES THE THINGS THAT ARE  
SHAKESPEARE'S AND UNTO MANKIEWICZ THE  
THINGS THAT ARE WELLES'**

*Esteve Rimbau*

Mankiewicz's passion for the theatre is only too well known, particularly his love for baroque theatre and, needless to say, for its embodiment: William Shakespeare. This fact connects him to another motion picture virtuoso who also created a number of adaptations of the English playwright's works: Orson Welles. In fact, Welles had been toying with the idea of taking Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* to the big screen; but producer John Houseman opted for Mankiewicz, over the participation of the creator of **Citizen Kane**. Nevertheless, Mankiewicz's final motion picture version has a lot in common with Welles' earlier stage version, although without the modern component that Welles did manage to include. There is no question that Welles came a lot closer to capturing the English playwright's spirit than did Mankiewicz. In the author's words "Welles inherited from Shakespeare what Mankiewicz never managed to absorb from Welles".

## GENRE ACCORDING TO MANKIEWICZ

Antonio José Navarro

As opposed to so many directors who specialise in a particular genre, Mankiewicz cultivated a good number of different genres. However, he did so not from the perspective of the film industry (responsible for the genre phenomenon), but instead from a very personal angle, based on several literary, artistic and philosophical references that have little to do with standard genre classification. In other words, rather than Mankiewicz adapting to the genres, it was the other way around. Within the very structure of genre (any genre), Mankiewicz pushes it to the limit and subverts it, adding elements which in principle are not typical of the particular genre but which are related to the director's personal world. Therefore, the outcome tends to be more a Mankiewicz picture than a genre film. Some of the different genres visited by Mankiewicz include fantasy (*The Ghost and Mrs. Muir*), melodrama (*A Letter to Three Wives*), film noir (*House of Strangers*), political (*The Quiet American*), films about cinema (*The Barefoot Contessa*), peplum (*Cleopatra*), films about theatre (*All About Eve*), Western (*There Was a Crooked Man...*), etc.

## WORDS LIKE EMPTY SHELLS

Carlos Losilla

A number of scholars have considered Joseph L. Mankiewicz to be a more a creator of words than of images. Perhaps the most characteristic aspects of his work are spoken language, oral discourse and words, in spite of the fact that their importance is often diluted. Authors such as Otto Preminger, Billy Wilder and Mankiewicz himself coincide in terms of verbal language, the three of them have the same concept of cinematographic expression. They stand out as masters in the use of dialogue, taking advantage of viewpoint and the manipulative character of language to construct a series of discourses which are somewhat ambiguous and diffuse while at the same time incontrovertibly beautiful. Paradoxically they create images that are more forceful than in classic cinema. Mankiewicz's ability to turn language into beauty might be explained, on the one hand, by the fact that he was a screenwriter and therefore an expert in language. Another explanation is that many of his films contain literary references, such as *Cleopatra* (1963), based on pieces by Shakespeare and Bernard Shaw, or *Julius Caesar*, also based on the Shakespearean play.

## JOSEPH L. MANKIEWICZ, A PROGRESSIVE LIBERAL? MORALISM AS IDEOLOGY

José Enrique Monterde

Joseph L. Mankiewicz was not a politically committed filmmaker. However, a number of biographies clearly underscore his "intellectual, rationalist, liberal and progressive" character. He was an intellectual - a condition which stemmed from his university education, a number of intellectual endeavours, his time in Europe and his experience as a writer - and was involved in the Screen Directors' Guild. But these traits describe a progressive liberal identity, not a clearly personal political commitment. According to most of the books written about the Hollywood witch hunt, Mankiewicz's role in the sad events was quite irrelevant. Clinging to this theory, however, is not altogether true. It is rather suspicious that in spite of being in the higher echelons of the Hollywood guild, he was never once interrogated. Nor should we forget that the real crux of the witch hunt was not Hollywood, but rather the world of trade unions.

## MANKIEWICZ AND WOMEN

Niria Bou

Despite the fact that the main characters in Mankiewicz's films are women, according to the author they are all dead women, either literally (*The Barefoot Contessa* and *Cleopatra*) or

symbolically (Gene Tierney in *Dragonwyck* and *The Ghost and Mrs. Muir*; Elizabeth Taylor and Katharine Hepburn in *Suddenly*, *Last Summer*, among others). They are dissatisfied women trying to escape and change their lives (*The Late George Apley*, *Five Fingers*, *Guys and Dolls*, *People Will Talk*, etc.), often persecuted or surrounded by death. In Mankiewicz's pictures there are no evil women or *femmes fatales*, per se (except for Addie Ross in *A Letter to Three Wives*, who never actually appears on screen). Mankiewicz makes a concerted effort to highlight the more domestic and 'feminine' qualities, adding a certain misogynist touch, which is not attributed to Mankiewicz alone but to the whole of American filmmaking of the period. A paradigmatic example can be seen in *All About Eve*, in which Margo Channing realises that it is much more important to concentrate her efforts on love and the home than to pursue her acting career, which the ambitious Eve Harrington takes over.

## THE FEAR OF FEAR ITSELF

Fernando Lara

The years between *A Letter to Three Wives* (filmed in 1948, although released a year later) and *People Will Talk* (1951) marked one of the bleakest periods in twentieth-century American filmmaking, shrouded by the Communist witch hunt. In this environment the most conservative sector of the motion picture industry, headed by the all powerful Cecil B. DeMille, began a process of persecution and destruction of Mankiewicz, who at the time was president of the Screen Directors' Guild. The ultraconservatives wanted all directors to pledge their loyalty to an anti-communist pact. DeMille's initial manoeuvres put Mankiewicz in an awkward position. However, opposition from the more liberal sector (which included such names as Billy Wilder, John Huston, Nicholas Ray, William Wyler, John Sturges and Joseph Losey), and John Ford's famous final statement ("*My name is John Ford and I make Westerns...*") managed to prevail over DeMille, and Mankiewicz was able to remain in his post.

## A QUIET AMERICAN (FILMMAKER): MANKIEWICZ IN VENICE

Esteve Rimbau

In 1987, six years before his death, Mankiewicz was interviewed for a Venice Film Festival retrospective in honour of the director's lifetime achievements. The interview addresses a number of subjects, from the old Hollywood studio system to the then current state of filmmaking. The interview gets underway with the role of the director and screenwriter and the concept of 'author', as well as the role of actors, etc. Mankiewicz then recalls the studio system years in Hollywood (he worked for Paramount, MGM and Fox) and his early stages as a writer of intertitles for silent versions of 'talking' pictures. He then goes on to talk about his own pictures (mainly *The Barefoot Contessa*, *Julius Caesar*, *All About Eve* and *The Quiet American*). The interview also covers political aspects (such as Cecil B. DeMille's attempt at blacklisting him during the famous McCarthy Hollywood witch hunt when Mankiewicz was president of the Screen Directors' Guild), and ends up with the final years of his career and the future of cinema in the world of entertainment.