ORSON WELLES' *CITIZEN KANE*:

AN ANALYSIS

An Honors Thesis
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Little Orson Annie's come to our house to play,
An' josh the motion pictures up and skeer the stars away,
An' shoo the Laughton's off the lot an' build the sets an' sweep,
An' wind the film an' write the talk an' earn her board-an'-'keep;
An' all us other actors, when our pitchur work is done,
We set around the Derby bar an' has the nostest fun,
A-listenin' to the me-tales 'at Annie tells about,
An' the Gobbleselles'll git YOU
Ef you DON'T WATCH OUT!!

Public opinion concerning the cinema of Orson Welles seems to focus on two very different points of view: either the one taken in actor Gene Lockhart's parody of James Whitcomb Riley, or the one expressed in such phrases as "the best actor in the history of acting," "great artist," and "the biggest man in Hollywood." Welles' involvement with directing, acting, and writing for the screen has elicited responses ranging from patronizing sarcasm to admiration and wonder. Welles himself is not easily labeled, either; he is hailed by one critic as European in temperament, and by another as a unique product of America.

The criticism of Welles and his work is varied and complicated; and the most diversity is found in the reactions to what may have been his greatest film, Citizen Kane.

Produced in 1940, Citizen Kane was the first film in which Welles was involved (he was director, producer, and star), and...
it seems to contain the strengths and weaknesses which have come to be recognized as his "style." Praise has been given for the innovative photographic technique, a technique developed by Welles and his camera man, using methods that appear to have been ten or fifteen years ahead of their time; the Hollywood of 1940 was fixed in a tradition of photography, sound, and even structural styles that offered no encouragement to newcomers who were interested in "undisciplined, extravagant experimentation." The script for the movie, written by Welles and Herman J. Mankiewicz, is known for the conciseness with which it summarizes and yet leaves open for investigation the entire life of one man.

The good comments can be balanced by negative ones. The film is accused of being too lengthy, with too little action. It doesn't really enlighten the audience with solid answers to the hero's problems. One reviewer says simply that there is little "intellectual content" to it. And there is a charge that only the controversial publicity surrounding its production made Kane's impact what it was.

The reasons for the controversy surrounding Citizen Kane might be Welles' admitted ignorance of the traditional Hollywood film techniques and his willingness to experiment with the techniques as he discovered them. His later films failed to match Kane in either style or critical acclaim.

The events leading to the production of Citizen Kane are related to an earlier project of Welles, the creation of the
Mercury Theater, organized in 1937. The group was begun "to establish a solid and permanent repertoire of plays," and to produce these plays around New York and, later on, in weekly radio broadcasts. The players were closely associated and included several later motion picture stars, such as Agnes Moorehead and Joseph Cotten. The Mercury Theater was one of Welles' special dreams; he says of the project: "The whole thing gave the New York of that time an extraordinary vitality. The quality of actors and that of spectators is no longer what it was in those marvelous years." It was this group of "Mercury Theater nobodies" (a term supplied by one reviewer) that presented the famous War of the Worlds broadcast in 1938. The instant success that Welles achieved from directing this self-admitted Halloween joke gained him an opening into Hollywood: Radio-Keith-Orpheum offered him a contract with RKO Radio Pictures in 1939.

Apparently the deal with RKO was not the big opportunity it might have appeared to be; the company was "the financially weakest studio on the Coast," and Welles was wanted simply to improve business. Welles' first picture under contract was to be Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness; and although he was given the unlimited freedom he desired (he wanted to try filming the picture in "first person"), the scarcity of funds plus the outbreak of war in Europe curtailed operations of RKO as well as other studios. Welles was forced to postpone his experiment, the opportunity he had referred to as his new "electric train."
As a substitute Welles produced a script based on Nicholas Blake's novel, *The Smiler with a Knife*. This, too, was put off indefinitely, for lack of a competent actress who wanted to play the heroine.\(^{12}\)

Welles next began a collaboration with a script writer named Herman Mankiewicz, on a work titled *American*. The title was later changed to *John Citizen, U.S.A.*, and then to *Citizen Kane*.\(^{13}\) The script, ready for filming by July, 1940, dealt with (according to Welles himself) "the portrait of a fictional newspaper tycoon...a public man's private life."\(^{14}\) The idea was approved for filming by RKO.

Throughout the production of *Kane*, the proceedings on the set were completely unpublicized; when reporters came around, the cast retreated to a vacant lot for a baseball game. The contract he had signed gave Welles freedom to film without the dictation of RKO officials; Welles in one interview comments that "I had too much power....Never has a man been given so much power in the Hollywood system. An absolute power. And artistic control."\(^{15}\)

The eagerness of RKO to let Welles bring the studio to solvency and success, the freedom Welles secured for his picture, and the secrecy in which the whole crew worked—all these combined to create the suggestions of a radical experiment, a change from Hollywood tradition. The traditional Hollywood movie makers saw Welles as a strange, though harmless, boy wizard.

The secrecy naturally created a host of rumors about the picture. The exact relationship of the plot of *Kane* to the life
of newspaper publisher William Randolph Hearst is still rather unclear, but it seems evident that ambiguous reports enlarged upon the suspicion of a connection. The origin of rumors connecting Charles Foster Kane and Hearst are most often traced to Louella Parsons, the Hollywood representative for the Hearst syndicate.

In January, 1941, the first copy of the film was ready for showing, and by this time Miss Parsons had decided that the subject was her boss. Although she had previously written what Welles terms "lavish praise" about himself, she walked out of a private preview of the film (shown in February), told Hearst that Kane was libelous, and attempted to talk the president of RKO into withholding it. 17

The president, George Schaefer, refused to suppress the film and also rejected a large monetary offer from Louis B. Mayer (a friend of Hearst) to destroy the negative. Hearst consequently imposed a ban on any mention of Welles or his movie in the Hearst papers. 18

Welles himself reacted with humor to the entire situation. He announced "plans" to do another feature film, this time dealing with Hearst. It was once alleged that Welles had admitted the subject to be Hearst, but he denied the allegation in a magazine article titled, "Citizen Kane is Not about Louella Parson's Boss." 19 Welles and Schaefer later issued a joint statement denying any direct connection between Kane and Hearst.

Welles continues to insist that his film used no subject material taken from the life of William Randolph Hearst. "He
[Hearst] was a great figure. I didn't have a battle with him. He had one with me. Citizen Kane was not an expose of Hearst as everyone believes. I didn't make a picture about him."20

The matter isn't quite this simple, however. The same critics that stress the differences between Hearst and Welles' subject also admit some "startlingly close" resemblances of the real person to the imaginary one.21 Such resemblances are found in the political careers of Kane and Hearst, in the personal lives of the two, and even in their character traits.

As Charles Higham summarizes:

Both Hearst and Kane were only children, born in 1863, and both were expelled from Harvard. George Hearst (the father) was a well-to-do farmer's son, whose silver strike at the Comstock Lode made him a millionaire....In the film these parents are left a deed to the Colorado Lode by a defaulting boarder.... Hearst's love for his mother is echoed in Kane's love for his....The origin of the character of Susan Alexander Kane has usually been attributed to Marion Davies alone (Hearst's mistress)....Hearst secured for her a career in the cinema which she really didn't want and was embarrassed to see applauded by every Hearst newspaper critic who valued his job.22

The two biographies continue to parallel in several respects. Both Hearst and Kane were accused of starting the Spanish-American War through their papers. Both developed an admiration for the Fascist leaders before World War II. And both ran unsuccessfully for the governorship of New York.

The resemblance of Kane to Hearst is not, of course, without discrepancies; but there is such a basis for comparison that a biographer of Hearst, W.A. Swanberg, called his book Citizen Hearst. Welles hedges the argument by saying that if
men with the stature and characteristics of Hearst and others had not existed, the film he directed would have been impossible.²³

Hearst, it is interesting to note, eventually saw the film he had ordered his newspapers to ban. His reaction was that "it was a little too long: he told friends privately that he enjoyed seeing himself on the screen."²⁴ Later the ban on the film was lifted, although Kane continued to be denounced in the Hearst system.

The original opening night for the film was set for February 14, 1941. But the RKO board of directors voted (against the opinion of George Schaefer) to postpone the opening, in view of all the adverse publicity. A press preview on March 12 was canceled.²⁵ No dates for city showings had yet been taken. Citizen Kane was in a state of suspension.

Under his contract, however, Welles had been given the right to sue RKO and demand the release of his film, and he lost no time in preparing to do so. In a statement to the press in late March, he insisted:

I believe that the public is entitled to see Citizen Kane. For me to stand by while this picture was being suppressed would constitute a breach of faith with the public on my part as a producer. I have at the moment sufficient financial backing to buy Citizen Kane from RKO and to release it myself. Under my contract with RKO, I have the right to demand that the picture be released and to bring legal action to force its release. RKO must release Citizen Kane. Any...attempts at suppression would involve a serious interference with freedom of speech and with the integrity of the moving-picture industry as the foremost medium of artistic expression in the country.²⁶
Schaefer, of course, hastened to assure Welles that Kane would indeed be shown, and on April 9, 1941, it was given simultaneous press showings in New York and Los Angeles. Despite some difficulty in finding a theater for the occasion (after Radio City Music Hall refused to show it), Citizen Kane premiered on May 1 at the Palace in New York, to "enthusiastic" reviews and a somewhat less than imaginative publicity slogan, "Now you know...it's terrific!"27

In the 1942 Academy Award presentations, Citizen Kane received the Oscar for best screenplay. It isn't clear who is more responsible for the script, Welles or Mankiewicz; Welles asserts that his is the major portion of the work, while Mankiewicz says that the script is mainly his. Either way, the finished work has been termed sufficient "to form the basis of a masterpiece."28

The basic plot of the story deals with the career of a world-famous American journalist. The story would be relatively simple, except for the method of presentation—a series of flashbacks and leaps of time, with seemingly haphazard narration by Kane's friends and acquaintances. The movie does not reveal the story of Charles Foster Kane in any sequential order; the film begins with Kane's death and follows the trial-and-error search of a reporter investigating the meaning of Kane's last word, "Rosebud." The information is pieced together in an "interlocking jigsaw puzzle," with only the piece concerning "Rosebud" missing till the end.29
The patchwork used to put together Kane's story is not the only complication of the screenplay. Literary techniques are applied to the camera: techniques such as symbolism, irony, and the audio impact of the dialogue.

The symbolism in *Citizen Kane* revolves very obviously around the sled, Rosebud. "Rosebud" is the first word in the movie, spoken by the dying Kane; and it is the sled that is revealed to the audience as Rosebud at the end. Through the entire movie the sled seems to provide an instant connection with Kane's childhood, his happy and innocent days; in fact, the symbolism of the sled might be too apparent. It is Rosebud that the young Charles holds when first confronted by Thatcher and the settling of his future adulthood. Kane murmurs the name of the sled once more after the fight when Susan leaves him. And the riddle of Rosebud is at last made clear (though not to the reporter) as it is burned following Kane's death.

Orson Welles admits that Rosebud "is a gimmick, really, and rather dollar-book Freud." But Rosebud need not be dismissed so easily; it is tied to several other symbols in the film.

The sled, of course, brings ideas of snow, whiteness, and purity; and this whole picture is compressed and condensed in the paperweight that falls from Kane's hand as he dies. "The paperweight," according to one reviewer, "is not merely an artificial snow scene recalling a real one but a snow scene encapsulated and unattainable, like Kane's lost innocence."
The symbolism of the paperweight becomes as important to the theme of the plot as the sled. A paperweight figures, however inconspicuously, in key scenes throughout the movie. Of course, there's the shattered snow scene at the beginning. Then we find a paperweight in Susan's apartment when Kane first meets her—it isn't highlighted, but it is there. And when Susan announces she is leaving him, Kane begins to violently destroy her room until he discovers the paperweight, which stops him short.

Kane's loss of innocence is not the only such loss in the story; it is echoed in a minor way through the reflections of his partner Bernstein on a similarly symbolized loss in his own life. When asked about Rosebud, "Bernstein suggests that it may have referred to some very fleeting experience in Kane's past." For example, Bernstein tells of a girl in white whom he glimpsed once when he was young: "I only saw her for a second, and she didn't see me at all, but I bet a month hasn't gone by that I haven't thought about her." The sense of whiteness and innocence lost is present even here; it emphasizes the changes in Kane's own life.

Besides the general motif of some kind of loss, there are smaller symbols that combine to underline the character Welles and Mankiewicz present in Kane. One small detail is the use of Kane's initial. Beginning with the large "K" on the gate to Xanadu, the single initial points out the man's complete involvement with himself; everything must center on Kane, and his use
of the "K" as a monogram and a tie pin is a subtle reminder of this fact.

Visual images are also used to convey moods, in much the same manner as literary images are used in writing. Directions for the settings take advantage of the effect of large spaces, especially in the final scenes at Xanadu. The halls are impossibly immense, and they dwarf even the wealth and power of Kane. The fireplace yawns like a huge dragon mouth; and the space that results from the huge proportions physically separates Kane from Susan, a separation that becomes an actuality. The whole effect begins to enlarge upon the loneliness and grotesque eccentricity of Kane as an old man.

In fact, the trend of the entire film is toward loneliness and emptiness. The crowded scenes throughout Kane's career gradually turn into the desolate (though materially rich) scenes of his old age. Mirrors in Xanadu begin to reflect Kane, to focus finally on him, as his power brings him only isolation instead of the popularity he expects.

The irony of this change is further presented by the film's manipulation of time. Welles and Mankiewicz designed the whole film so as to bring Kane's predicament to life before our eyes; and (they do) this largely by giving an almost tangible presence to the passing of time....Nearly everything in the film contributes to this effect: the juxtaposition of scenes (shows) the different ages not only of Kane but also of those who know him....

As the reporter, Thompson, searches out the facts of Kane's life, he naturally does not find them in chronological order;
so the consequently sporadic time sequence works to emphasize what Kane has had in his life and what he has become at the time of his death. The comparison is repeatedly demonstrated. Kane's loss (as well as similar changes in Bernstein and Jedediah Leland) is always the underlying subject.

The characterization in *Citizen Kane* has led to criticism that the film is somehow unfinished. For instance, Bosley Crowther has said:

... at no point in the picture is a black mark actually checked against Kane.... there is no reason to assume from what is shown upon the screen that he is anything but an honest publisher with a consistently conscientious attitude toward society.\

Several critics have remarked that the film opens up a problem it does not solve; it simply does not explain what one critic calls Kane's transition from "good villain into bad hero." There is no character judgment here, and perhaps there is none in the movie.

In explaining and defending the erratic methods of characterization, Welles remarks, "I believe it is necessary to give all the characters their best arguments--including those I disagree with." Kane's "best arguments" come from conflicting sources, and of course they aren't conclusive; but the important thing, according to Welles, is that they are revealing. Welles says, "The point of the picture is not so much the solution of the problem as its presentation."

And there is a definite problem presented. The whole movie seems to be the framed puzzle of a man's life. The frame
could be Thompson's reactions to his reporting assignment at its beginning and end. At the start he is asked to work on the assumption that a dying man's last words should explain his life; he reacts with some doubt. By the end he realizes that the attempt to find Rosebud is futile, and he returns to his original opinion of the quest, saying "...it wouldn't have explained anything. I don't think any word explains a man's life."39

The frame could also be the Rosebud theme itself. Kane's gasp of the word at the opening and the burning of the sled at the end might tie the story together.

Or the frame might be, simply, the "No Trespassing" sign which both opens and closes the movie and Thompson's investigation.

Whatever the frame may be, however, of more importance is the picture within it. There are several viewpoints of the portrait Welles presents, but it generally agreed that Kane can be defined as a loveless man, a man who wants love but doesn't know how to get it. Though Kane was rich, Bernstein says in his interview with Thompson, he didn't want money: this is evident in his lavish use of it.40 He uses money, it becomes obvious through the story, to get love. Love is the one power Kane wants; he can neither buy nor intimidate people to love him, but he tries. His emotional ties are often the same as his business connections or political attachments. His closest "friends" are the people he has hired to work for him; his wife is the President's
niece; and he even attempts to exploit the "talent" of his mistress to gain recognition and affection for himself. (He announces to a reporter, "We're goint to be a great opera star."\textsuperscript{41})

The other characters realize Kane's motives, to a certain extent. Leland at one point confronts Kane:

> The truth is, Charlie, you just don't care about anything except you. You just want to convince people that you love them so much that they should love you back. Only you want love on your own terms. It's something to be played your way--according to your rules.\textsuperscript{42}

Susan says essentially the same thing in her quarrel with Kane in the Everglades: "You never gave me anything in your life! You just tried--to buy me into giving you something."\textsuperscript{43}

Jedediah Leland, Kane's best friend, summarizes the frustration that all those who knew Kane seem to have felt:

> It seems we weren't enough. He wanted all the voters to love him, too. All he really wanted out of life was love--That's Charlie's story--how he lost it. You see, he just didn't have any to give. He loved Charlie Kane, of course, very dearly--and his mother, I guess he always loved her.\textsuperscript{44}

Thus the actual content of Citizen Kane is like the puzzle Susan pieces together at Xanadu; but Kane's puzzle is only presented, not solved. Welles and Mankiewicz evidently don't intend their script to be a solution.

The effectiveness of the script gained Welles and Mankiewicz recognition at the Academy Awards ceremony, but the award for best screenplay was the only Oscar Kane received. Welles stresses the value of the actual writing of a movie in a 1950
interview:

...I feel that only the literary mind can help the movies out of that cul-de-sac into which they have been driven by mere technicians and artificers. In my opinion the writer should have the first and last word in film-making, the only better alternative being the writer-director, but with the stress on the first word.45

Despite the attention given to the writing of Citizen Kane, however, the movie's lasting impact was on photographic and audio devices. Some of these were so obvious that they seem showy to several critics; but Welles had an exactly opposite hope. "Toland (Gregg Toland, the camera man) and Welles wanted to achieve a flow of images so hypnotic that the audience would not be conscious of the mechanics of film making."46 At least one critic thinks that the two achieved their purpose.

Andrew Sarris cites one accusation that the film's technique "calls attention to itself," but he defends the "gimmicks" for working together so consistently for theme and structure.47 In his opinion, any showiness is compensated by the effect that results.

Gregg Toland got the job of working with the camera by calling Welles to ask for the opportunity. Toland had previously worked for Samuel Goldwyn and was loaned to other directors as well. He was already known for his experiments with lighting effects and low set ceilings, ideas he was to perfect in Kane.48

Lighting was the first consideration of Welles and Toland. Besides the sobering effect naturally created by filming in black and white, a more natural use of light was achieved. This
meant that scenes were often much darker and more "shadowy" than was customary in Hollywood movies. Deep shadows are used, for example, for Kane's death, for the projection-room sequence, and very often when Kane seems to loom over other characters such as Leland or Susan.49 Lights come from unusual angles, and single rays of light (such as the one light in the Thatcher Memorial Library) or cuts from light to dark (as when the projector light is shut off) are common. Patterns of light are created, such as daylight through Venetian blinds or the light shining on Susan's bed after she has attempted suicide.

Some details were extraordinary: Toland showed the light changing on Joseph Cotten's (Leland's) face at three points of the sun to indicate the lapse of time in which he is recounting a story in flashback form. To achieve great penetrating light power, twin-arc broadside lamps, normally used only in Technicolor, were used.50

Toland states that one result of the photography was "the attainment of approximate human-eye focus." In other words, Toland says, the normal eye can see everything within a certain distance with relative clarity; to achieve this same ability, this depth of focus, with the camera was an effect of the photography. "We built our system of 'visual reality' on the well-known fact that lenses of shorter length are characterized by comparatively greater depth...."51

The deeper focus resulted in the ability to photograph the foreground and the background with equal sharpness. "In some
cases," according to Toland, "we were able to hold sharp focus over a depth of 200 feet." In fact, the lens system he developed could eventually picture with clarity "anything from eighteen inches away from the camera to infinity."

This clarity of background added to the smooth "flow of images" that Welles and Toland wanted. Throughout the movie they avoided cutting between scenes as much as possible, to make things even smoother. Instead of cutting, dollying or panning was preferred, or lap dissolves for time transitions (in which the sets were faded out first, followed by the characters.)

One example of the conciseness of story transition over a long period of time has become famous. This is the breakfast sequence between Kane and his first wife, Emily, which shows in just a few scenes the gradual disintegration of their marriage. The first scene occurs soon after the wedding, and the two appear to be very much in love; but this opening scene is followed by several lap dissolves into succeeding scenes through which Kane's growing journalistic power and the interference of that power in his personal life are demonstrated. Eventually there is no communication at all between Kane and his wife: in the last shot Kane is reading a copy of his newspaper while Emily hides behind a rival paper.

The effect of "deep focus" can be seen in the blend of two simultaneous pieces of action following Susan's disastrous opening in the opera. Kane finds Leland's unfinished review of
Susan's performance (a review that is strictly uncomplimentary) and stubbornly insists on completing it himself. As Kane sits typing in the foreground, Leland suddenly enters the scene from the background; he comes forward, always in sharp focus. The clarity in which both characters are photographed eliminates the need for cutting and close-ups. Action takes place simultaneously with both men, and the audience views the result more quickly and easily.

An especially noticeable photographic device was often termed unique, though it was actually not new: this was the addition of ceilings to the set rooms, an idea borrowed (rather than invented) by Toland. Toland traces the origin to at least one previous film, Transatlantic (1930). He included the technique "because we wanted reality, and we felt that it would be easier to believe a room was a room if its ceiling could be seen in the picture." This led to two fortunate results: the lighting would be from more believable angles, and microphones could be safely hidden above the muslin ceilings.

Over the years Welles has acquired one special photographic trademark—his "prolific use of unusual camera angles." Of course there is an extensive use of the relatively common shot upward from the floor in Citizen Kane; this shot is used most frequently to magnify Kane in relation to other characters. The shot downward from above dwarfs Kane in moments of weakness and occurs increasingly toward the end of his life, at Xanadu. Welles also calls for angles that achieve different effects; examples of
such effects would include the dizzying shot up and sideways as Gettys descends the stairs from Susan's apartment, followed by a blustery Kane; or the sudden shifts in the slant of the picture during the party celebrating Kane's purchase of the Chronicle. The use of the strange angles as a Welles specialty is further illustrated in a photograph of Welles himself taken around 1940; the picture is on an angle to the side.  

It is natural that Welles, who used sound so effectively in his War of the Worlds broadcast in 1938, should be equally interested in the audio aspect of his movie. As in the photography, there is a concern with presenting imagistic effects that represent what is taking place. One symbol that is always commented on favorably is the sudden screaming of the cockatoo that precedes Kane's destruction of Susan's room:

One flashback and several scenes previously, Kane and his second wife [Susan] are arguing in a tent surrounded by hundreds of Kane's picnic guests. A shrill scream punctuates the argument with a persistent, sensual rhythm. It is clear that some sexual outrage is being committed. When the parakeet [sic] screams at the appearance of Kane, the wound linkage in tone... further dehumanizes Kane's environment.

Sound is used in less obvious ways. Voices echo strangely, doors slam to cut off words, and at one point Kane's voice is answered by a far away car horn. The measured cadence of music and even of office typewriters heightens the moods, whether they are of Kane's disappointment (as in the bad review of Susan's opera) or manufactured cheerfulness (the party at the Chronicle office.) In one place in the film it is the lack of sound that achieves an emphatic effect: when Kane, dying, drops
the paperweight at the beginning of the film, the sound of
the shattering glass is expected—but the glass breaks in com-
plete, shocking silence.

The use of sound to provide transitions in time results
in sequences in which sound effects from one scene carry over
into another—or into several. When Thatcher wishes young
Charles "Merry Christmas," the finish of the sentence, "...and
a Happy New Year" is delivered by an older Thatcher to an older
Kane in a completely different scene.63 And when Kane applauds
Susan's singing at his first meeting with her, the applause is
carried into a series of transitional scenes, beginning with Le-
land's campaign speech endorsing Kane before a small group of
backers; when Leland begins "...who entered upon this campaign,"
his dialogue is finished by Kane himself ("...with one purpose
only...") in a huge auditorium.64 The overlapping dialogue and
sound effects serve to make the transitions faster and also to
emphasize the passage of time.

A "film within a film" is not an unheard-of idea in the
movie business, but Welles and Toland put together a parody of
a newsreel for Kane that is "still the funniest parody of mass-
media vulgarity ever filmed."65 The newsreel, titled News on
the March (after the popular March of Time series) is one of the
highlights of the movie. It follows the opening depiction of
Kane's death, giving the very first background details on the
central character and setting up the reasons behind Thompson's
search for the meaning of Rosebud. The newsreel provides a
photographic shock for the audience after the quiet solemnity of the beginning of the film, and it is easily a complete cinematic study in itself.

Just as 'War of the Worlds' mimicked the form of radio broadcasting to persuade its audience of the Martian invasion, 'News' imitates the uniquely cinematic form of the newsreel to corroborate the existence of Charles Foster Kane.

In the first place, Kane's newsreel, like the genuine article, encapsulates a person's life, giving the audience the skeletal outline on which to build its judgments. But the news short also compresses the flashbacks that the audience will see later—the many different and "correct" analyses of Kane's personality, given by his acquaintances. "While Thatcher is telling a (Senate) Committee that Kane is a Communist, a speaker in Union Square attacks Kane as a Fascist;" the egocentric attitude of Kane himself is hinted when he assures an audience, "I am have been, and will be only one thing—American."

Not only do Welles and Toland summarize the facts, but they make the facts appear authentic by convincing the audience in technical ways that the reel is genuine.

Welles recalls that when the film opened in Italy just after the war, a lot of people booed and hissed and even shook their fists at the projection box because they thought the newsreel material was sheer bad photography. Of course they were right, but the poor quality was deliberate. The actual newsreels were made quickly, on the cheapest quality of film; the film had a coarse, "grainy" texture, and the light
was shaky and flickering. This was all closely copied in the
Kane newsreel, which even contained the same white-on-black
titles. In fact, some shots in the fake newsreel were actually
taken from existing footage on real people. 70

In the original script for the newsreel, the camera was
to move gradually toward a screen in the projection room, fram­
ing it as News on the March begins. However, in the final ver­
sion, "the short's frame is identical with that of the main
film..." 71 The resulting lack of visual explanation for what
is going on intensifies even more the shock of the transition
from Kane's deathbed to the biographic news film.

In summarizing the photography of Welles and Toland, sever­
al critics agree that "in Welles' case there has always been a
tendency towards baroque photography." 72 The terms "baroque,"
"Gothic," and "flamboyant" are often applied to the style of
the film. The halls of Xanadu and its huge fireplace (measuring
ten by eighteen by twenty-seven feet 73) are good illustrations
of the terms. And Charles Foster Kane's characteristics--his
egocentricity, his wealth, and his habit of haphazardly collect­
ing art--all lend themselves to a "flamboyant" portrayal. Kane's
character is baroque; this explains the appropriateness of Welles' 
choice of directorial style.

The scenery and settings for Citizen Kane were in some cases
borrowed from other RKO films, because of the shortage of funds.
Xanadu was used previously as the castle in Snow White and the
Seven Dwarfs; "it was painted (for Kane) with the aid of former
members of the Disney team."\(^{74}\) Similarly, the window in Kane's bedroom was first seen in John Ford's *Mary of Scotland*, and "the animated bats in the swamp at Kane's Everglades picnic are from *Son of Kong*" -- the ape was cut out of the shots.\(^{75}\)

The actors chosen for *Citizen Kane* were, of course, from Welles' Mercury Theater group, except for Ruth Warrick (Emily Kane) and Dorothy Comingore (Susan Alexander Kane). Everyone in the cast "had the double advantage of being new to films and being fully unified to execute Welles's concept."\(^{76}\) The performance of the players, "brilliant" as it was said to be, is largely credited to Welles' direction; for "just how much their performances were due to Welles is suggested by comparison with later ones under different directors."\(^{77}\)

Welles himself received immediate acclaim for his portrayal of Kane. Even the physical changes that Charles Foster Kane undergoes as he ages are detailed, thanks to the complicated make-up work:

Sixteen each of different chins, jowls, ears, hairlines, necks, lips, cheeks, noses, and eyesacs were designed in keeping with Kane's age. His eyes change with the years, becoming pale and veined: the effect was brought about by the use of contact lens. The flabbiness that the middle- and old-aged man assumes is a simulation of real flesh, built up by means of a synthetic rubber...\(^{78}\)

The preparation and problems involved in making *Citizen Kane* culminated in its public opening on May 1, 1941. The premiere performance took place at the Palace Theater in New York. "The facade of the theater...cost $26,000, a series of neon signs
of Welles gradually mounting in size..." In spite of the controversy and secrecy surrounding it, the movie received great reviews. "It was very well understood by the press," one critic explains, presumably because of the obvious connection with Kane's own career. 79

The press reacted with comments such as "Welles has shown Hollywood how to make movies" (Esquire), "A film possessing the sure dollar mark" (Variety), and "one of the great (if not the greatest) motion pictures of all time...." (New York Times). 80 It was expected by these critics that Welles, Mankiewicz, and crew would virtually sweep the 1942 Academy Awards; the movie had already received the New York Film Critics Award. But the award for the screenplay was the only one Citizen Kane received from the Academy. There were several nominations--nine, in fact--including one for best picture; but "each time the title or Orson Welles' name was read, there were hisses and loud boos." 81 The public antipathy was obviously due to the great amount of publicity the film had received: in this case all the publicity had unpopular connotations and created adverse opinions. The picture, and Welles as its director, were not appreciated.

In fact, even the one Oscar the film received was not presented as a favor to Welles at all, Pauline Kael suggests, but rather as a tribute to Mankiewicz. Mankiewicz had made known his contributions to Kane. Consequently, "Kane was Mankiewicz's
finest moment," while "the film community had closed ranks against Orson Welles." Kael suggests an interesting point: that the night of the Academy Awards was a turning point in the careers of both men, as well as in the future of their movie. Mankiewicz became a sought-after writer; Welles turned out to have "peaked early," in part because of a lack of the opportunities that might have come from a big success at this time; and as for Citizen Kane, it failed at the box office.82

The first week that the film was released for public showing was a successful one. The seats were filled at the Palace, and advanced booking there netted $10,000. The Palace grossed $30,000 in all.83 After this initial triumph, however, the returns began to be disappointing.

Test runs in Chicago, Washington, Los Angeles, and San Francisco showed the same results: good reception at the beginning, and disappointment later.84

When the film circulated generally, the results were, by then, predictable. Some managers even preferred to pay for the film and not show it. Roy Fowler reports that "exhibitors still gather around the fire on winter evenings, and tell their children grim, ghastly tales of their experiences with Citizen Kane."85

In England, as in America, the reviewers praised the film and the public largely shunned it. Everywhere "the film flopped.... but finally broke even; today, because of television, it can be said to have made a profit."86 The film that was too experimental
for many movie theaters was purchased for showing by a new, experimental medium; and Kane's profit was made, not at the box office, but through television broadcasts.

Mankiewicz, as mentioned, went on to achieve modest success as a screenplay writer after Citizen Kane. The actors in the movie, most notably Cotten and Moorehead, "had scored their separate successes in Kane, and they went on to conventional careers."\(^87\) But Welles didn't fare even moderately well; his career, after starting out with such generally accepted promise, took a downhill turn that never again rose to the height of Kane. The immediate problem for Welles was that the studios were simply afraid to take another such chance on him, after his first film venture ended in a financial fiasco.

Ten years after Kane, the comments about the "boy wonder" and the "genius" were losing their sincerity. Walter Kerr referred to Welles as "the youngest living has-been" (Welles was only twenty-five when Kane was produced).\(^88\) Perhaps the public expected too much of him; at any rate, by 1961 a film magazine dismissed him with this description:

> ...the cinema pariah of recent years, has directed seven pictures since Citizen Kane, but none was cited (by the National Board of Review of Motion Pictures).... Unorthodox and extravagant directing methods have reduced him to acting for a living.\(^89\)

Today Welles has the strange distinction of being famous without being quite successful. As Pauline Kael puts it:

> When he appears on television to recite from Shakespeare, he is introduced as if he were the epitome of the highbrow; it's television's more polite way of cutting off his necktie.\(^90\)
What are the reasons for Welles' gradual decline? It seems improbable that the fault lies completely with a possession of "genius without talent," a phrase of the New Yorker;91 because there is difficulty in separating the two characteristics and in proving that the latter doesn't exist, at least in Kane.

Perhaps we come closer to the main problem in the sympathetic, yet revealing, words of a critic who interviewed Welles in 1950:

Admired by a discerning minority, hated and bitterly attacked by ... majorities in most countries, the picture [Kane] did not bring the financial results expected.... It cost him that unlimited freedom hardly ever given before to a film-maker by Hollywood executives: a freedom that is to him an essential condition of creative filmwork. Lack of this condition is discernible in the pictures that followed....

Welles himself, when asked his opinion of his attempts after his first film, replies:

I have lost years and years of my life fighting for the right to do things my own way, and mostly fighting in vain. I have wasted... years writing film scripts which no producer would accept. Among the pictures I have made I can only accept full responsibility for one: Citizen Kane. In all the others I have been more or less muzzled and the narrative line of my stories was ruined by commercially-minded people.92

It seems that the industry that had asked for Welles expected of him a one-man show and yet denied him the freedom of controlling it himself when he attained one. He never again, for instance, had the opportunity of choosing as co-workers the people who had enhanced and in many cases made practicable the diverse accomplishments he displayed in Kane. The paradox is that Welles needs containment to a certain extent, like a picture that
needs a frame; but he must be free to choose his frame and to create his kind of art within it.

*Citizen Kane's* final importance, as would be expected from its controversial history, is debatable. It is important to consider that opinions are gradually changing, as illustrated by Arthur Knight's comment:

> When in 1952 the British film magazine *Sight and Sound* published the results of an international poll to discover 'the ten best films of all time,' Orson Welles's *Citizen Kane* fell just short of the magic number, tying... for the eleventh position. In a similar poll ten years later sent to substantially the same group of film critics and historians, *Citizen Kane* was the clear-cut victor--'the best film of all time'....

The movie was quite easily ten or fifteen years ahead of its time in photography, though probably no more than this. The technique is not new, and Toland's influences "disappeared with the onset of CinemaScope." What the photography does accomplish that is of lasting value is the singular style with which the effects are combined, the pattern and structure that belong just to Kane. Near his death Toland called Kane the "most exciting" film he ever shot; and the sheer excitement of Toland and the entire crew clearly comes through, just in the way the film is put together.

There is a plausible position in calling the story of *Citizen Kane* "a popular melodrama--Freud plus scandal, a comic strip about Hearst." But if it is a simple, shallow story, it is also true that there are connections, some accidental, that make the story more complex. The close relationship of Kane to Hearst is more than a harmless comic strip; it borders on libel, except
for the stubborn denial by Welles. And there is a growing interest in connecting Kane's story to Welles' own biography; one critic makes an interesting comparison:

Welles was taken from home at an early age and was brought up on culture by intellect. The same thing happened to Kane, and Welles is obviously very sympathetic—he regrets his background, and the whole story of "Rosebud" is most likely Welles's and not Kane's—Welles seeking his way back to the maternal bosom.98

If Kane is not important for the story it contains, it is still important for the puzzles it presents.

There are mysteries in Citizen Kane, mysteries presented not through action, but through characterization. There is excitement; no matter how bad the reviews are, the adjectives applied to Kane remain "adventurous," "independent," "risky," and "unconventional." If Welles came up with a show that is huge and "Gothic," it seems to be only what was expected of him. And, as Pauline Kael suggests, "It's the Gothic atmosphere...that inflates Citizen Kane and puts it in a different tradition from the newspaper comedies and the big bios of the thirties. Citizen Kane is, in some ways, a freak of art...."99

Perhaps Kael gives the elusive reason for the continued interest in Citizen Kane when she says, "Kane does something so well, and with such spirit, that the fullness and completeness of it continue to satisfy us."100
FOOTNOTES


5. Sarris, in Bellone, Renaissance, p. 63.


8. Quoted by Juan Cobos, Miguel Rubio, and J.A. Pruneda, in "A Trip to Don Quixoteland: Conversations with Orson Welles," rpt. in Gottesman, Focus, p. 18.


11. Fowler, in Gottesman, Focus, p. 79.

12. Fowler, in Gottesman, Focus, p. 81.


15. Quoted by Cobos, Rubio, and Pruneda, in Gottesman, Focus, p. 21.
33. Quoted by Johnson, in Gottesman, *Focus*, p. 27.
34. Johnson, in Gottesman, *Focus*, p. 28.
38. Bordwell, in *Film Comment*, p. 42.


43. Kael, p. 269.

44. Kael, p. 201.


47. Sarris, in Bellone, *Renaissance of the Film*, p. 64. Sarris' defense of Welles' technique can be explained by his announced sympathy for directors who use technical innovation.


52. Toland, in Gottesman, *Focus*, p. 75.


56. Toland, in Gottesman, *Focus*, p. 75.


58. Toland, in Gottesman, *Focus*, p. 75.


60. Quoted by Roy Fowler, in Gottesman, *Focus*, p. 85.
64. Kael, pp. 375-376.
65. Bordwell, in *Film Comment*, p. 42.
68. Sarris, in Bellone, p. 65.
77. Fowler, in Gottesman, *Focus*, p. 98.
78. Fowler, in Gottesman, *Focus*, p. 98.
80. Kael, p. 44.
81. Kael, p. 44.
82. Kael, pp. 44-46.
83. Fowler, in Gottesman, *Focus*, p. 100.
84. Fowler, in Gottesman, *Focus*, p. 100.
87. Kael, *Citizen Kane Book*, p. 84.
88. Quoted by Kael, p. 84.
90. Kael, p. 84.
94. Arthur Knight, "Citizen Kane Revisited," *Action Magazine*, 1969, rpt. in Gottesman, *Focus*, p. 120.
96. Kael, *Citizen Kane Book*, p. 76.
98. Quoted by Ronald Gottesman, *Focus*, p. 3.
99. Kael, p. 79.
100. Kael, p. 4.
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