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ORSON WELLES'S
Citizen Kane

♦ ♦ ♦

A C A S E B O O K

Edited by
James Naremore

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6. Quoted in Frank Brady, *Citizen Welles: A Biography of Orson Welles* (New York: Scribner's, 1989), p. 285.
7. See James Naremore, "The Trial: Orson Welles vs. the FBI," *Film Comment* (January-February 1991): 22-27.
8. Peter Bogdanovich, "The Kane Mutiny," *Esquire*, October 1972, pp. 99-105, 180-90.

Interview with Orson Welles

PETER BOGDANOVICH



PETER BOGDANOVICH: What was your initial reaction to the Hearst blacklist on *Citizen Kane*?

ORSON WELLES: We expected it before it happened. What we *didn't* expect was that the film might be destroyed. And that was nip and tuck; it was very close.

PB: To the negative being burned?

OW: Yes. It was only *not* burned because I dropped a rosary.

PB: What?

OW: There was a screening for Joe Breen, who was the head of censorship then, to decide whether it would be burned or not. Because there was tremendous payola from all the other studios to get it burned.

PB: All because of Hearst's people?

OW: Yes. Everybody said, "Don't make trouble, burn it up, who cares? Let them take their losses." And I got a rosary, put it in my pocket, and when the running was over, in front of Joe Breen, a good Irish Catholic, I stood up and dropped my rosary on the floor and said, "Oh, excuse me," and picked it up and

put it back in my pocket. If I hadn't done that, there would be no *Citizen Kane*.

Guaymas, Mexico. Orson is there acting in Mike Nichols's movie of *Catch-22*, and they've given him the day off, so we've settled ourselves outside a spacious hotel overlooking the bay. It's hot, and Orson has brought only winter clothes, so he is still wearing the lightweight army uniform that is his costume for the film. Yesterday we tried to talk about *Citizen Kane* and got sidetracked—I suppose purposely—so I'm trying again, and Orson isn't too happy about it.

PB: You act as though it's painful for you to remember any of these things.

OW: Oh, everything. Just awful.

PB: Are you up to trying *Kane*?

OW: Oh Christ! All right—let's get it over with. I can't be awfully good on the subject, because I haven't seen the picture since I ran the last finished print in an empty theater in downtown Los Angeles, about six months before it was released.

PB: Wait a minute—you went to the premiere.

OW: I went to the premiere and went right out the side door when it started, the way I always do. Because it makes me nervous not to be able to *change* anything. It comes from being in the theater—you used to go to the opening, then go backstage and change things. When I've got a play running, I go on changing it until the last day of the show. And it's awful to have it all locked up in a can forever. That's why I don't go to see them.

PB: I guess it's like some painters. My father's like that. And Cézanne who kept going into people's houses after he sold the painting—

OW: Yes! They'd smell wet paint and know Cézanne had been in! That's just the way I feel. I'd like to go to the projection booth and start snipping away.

PB: Griffith did—all during the run of *Birth of a Nation*, he'd be up in the booth making changes.

OW: Well, it was easier then. Silent picture—no damn sound to worry about.

PB: So when Hearst intervened . . .

OW: Hearst didn't really intervene—they intervened on his behalf. It began badly, because Louella Parsons had been on the set and had written a wonderful article about this lovely picture I was making. And it was Hedda Hopper, her old enemy, who blew the whistle. Think of the weapon that gave to the competition! After that it was the Hearst hatchet men who were after me, more than the old man himself.

PB: But wasn't Hedda Hopper supposedly your friend?

OW: Sure—but what a break for her as a newspaperwoman. Couldn't blame her. Imagine what that did to Louella!

PB: After *Kane*, you once said, "Someday, if Mr. Hearst isn't frightfully careful, I'm going to make a film that's really based on his life."

OW: Well, you know, the real story of Hearst is quite different from Kane's. And Hearst himself—as a *man*, I *man*—was very different. There's all that stuff about [Robert] McCormick and the opera. I drew a lot from that, from my Chicago days. And Samuel Insull. As for Marion [Davies], she was an extraordinary woman—nothing like the character Dorothy Comingore played in the movie. I always felt he had the right to be upset about that.

PB: Davies was actually quite a good actress—

OW: And a fine woman. She pawned all her jewels for the old man when he was broke. Or broke enough to need a lot of cash. She gave him everything, stayed by him—just the opposite of Susan. *That* was the libel. In other words, Kane was better than Hearst, and Marion was much better than Susan—whom people wrongly equated with her.

PB: You once said that Kane would have enjoyed seeing a film based on his life, but not Hearst.

OW: Well, that's what I said to Hearst.

PB: When?

OW: I found myself alone with him in an elevator in the Fairmont Hotel on the night *Kane* was opening in San Francisco. He and my father had been chums, so I introduced myself and asked him if he'd like to come to the opening of the picture.

He didn't answer. And as he was getting off at his floor, I said, "Charles Foster Kane would have *accepted*." No reply.... And Kane *would* have, you know. That was his style—just as he finished Jed Leland's bad review of Susan as an opera singer.

PB: Where did Kane's trait of acquiring possessions come from?

OW: *That* comes directly from Hearst. And it's very curious—a man who spends his entire life paying cash for objects he never looked at. I know of no other man in history exactly like that. This jackdaw kind of mind. Because he never made any money, you know; his great chain of newspapers basically lost money. He was in every sense a failure. He just acquired things, most of which were never opened, remained in boxes. It's really a quite accurate picture of Hearst to that extent.

PB: There's only one moment in *Kane* where I thought your acting was self-conscious—

OW: Tell me. I'll tell you the bad moment for me—in the first scene with Susan, the close-up when I had the mud on my face. That's a real phony movie moment. Look at it again—it really is. I haven't seen it since I made it, but—

PB: It's not so bad as—

OW: Not so bad, but it's a real movie actor with mud on his face. What's yours?

PB: The close-up smile in the newspaper office when Cotten asks to keep the Declaration of Principles you wrote—

OW: Oh, but that's *supposed* to be a forced smile. It's because I don't think the document should be kept—I don't believe in it.

PB: Really?

OW: Of course.

PB: You mean Kane didn't mean what he'd written even as he wrote it?

OW: No.

PB: I didn't realize that.

OW: No. You weren't supposed to believe that smile. He's horrified that somebody wants to keep that as a document. It's going too far.

PB: [*laughs*] All right, then I take it back—it's a great moment!

OW: [*laughing*] Anyway, it's not supposed to be a real smile, but the smile of somebody deeply embarrassed, being caught out. There's a point to that moment. Nobody signals it, but that's what I meant. Because I always believed that Kane doesn't mean all that. He only wants to convince the two fellows. He wants them to believe it because he wants them to be his slaves. But he doesn't believe in anything. He's a damned man, you know. He's one of those damned people that I like to play and make movies about.

PB: There's a film written by Preston Sturges called *The Power and the Glory* [1933] which has been said to have influenced you in the flashback style of *Kane*. Is that true?

OW: No. I never saw it. I've heard that it has strong similarities; it's one of those coincidences. I'm a great fan of Sturges and I'm grateful I didn't see it. He never accused me of it—we were great chums—but I just never saw it. I saw only his comedies. But I would be honored to lift anything from Sturges, because I have very high admiration for him.

PB: You were friends.

OW: Right up till the end of his life [in 1959]. And I knew him before I went to Hollywood; in fact, I first met him when I was about thirteen and going to school at Todd. Wonderful fellow, and I think a great filmmaker, as it turned out.

PB: Yes, and he wrote marvelous dialogue.

OW: Started in a hospital. He was a businessman until he was about forty. He got very sick and lay in the hospital and decided to write a play, *Strictly Dishonorable*, which ran eight years or something on Broadway. And that made him a writer. Then later he became a director. He had never thought of it before.

PB: What happened to him in Europe in the 1950s? He only made one film.

OW: He was just trying to raise money for a picture. Nobody would give him a job. Simple as that.

PB: The idea for the famous breakfast scene between Kane and his first wife [the nine-year deterioration of their marriage is told through one continuing conversation over five flash-pans]—

OW: —was stolen from *The Long Christmas Dinner* of Thornton Wilder! It's a one-act play, which is a long Christmas dinner that takes you through something like sixty years of a family's life—

PB: All at dinner—

OW: Yes, they're all sitting at dinner, and they get old—people wheel baby carriages by, and coffins and everything. That they never leave the table and that life goes on was the idea of this play. I did the breakfast scene thinking I'd invented it. It wasn't in the script originally. And when I was almost finished with it, I suddenly realized that I'd unconsciously stolen it from Thornton and I called him up and admitted to it.

PB: What was his reaction?

OW: He was pleased.

PB: Is he still a good friend?

OW: Yes. Wonderful writer. I haven't seen him in a long time, but his newest novel, *The Eighth Day*, is marvelous.

PB: Did the idea literally come to you on the set?

OW: Well, there were going to be several breakfast scenes—you can see how it would have been written in the script—many scenes with transitions. And my idea was simply to photograph it as a continuous breakfast scene without dissolves, just whipping back and forth. Some of the conversation was written before; a lot of it was invented on the set and two or three days before, during rehearsal.

PB: Just how important was [Herman J.] Mankiewicz in relation to the script?

OW: Mankiewicz's contribution? It was enormous.

PB: You want to talk about him?

OW: I'd love to. I loved him. People did. He was much admired, you know.

PB: Except for his part in the writing of *Kane*. . . . Well, I've read the list of his other credits. . . .

OW: Oh, the hell with lists—a lot of bad writers have wonderful credits.

PB: Can you explain that?

OW: Luck. The lucky bad writers got good directors who could write. Some of these, like Hawks and McCarey, wrote very well indeed. Screenwriters didn't like that at all. Think of those old pros in the film factories. They had to punch in every morning, and sit all day in front of their typewriters in those terrible "writers' buildings." The way they saw it, the director was even worse than the producer, because in the end what really mattered in moving pictures, of course, was the man actually making the pictures. The big-studio system often made writers feel like second-class citizens, no matter how good the money was. They laughed it off, of course, and provided a good deal of the best fun—when Hollywood, you understand, was still a funny place. But basically, you know, a lot of them were pretty bitter and miserable. And nobody was *more* miserable, *more* bitter, and *funnier* than Mank. . . . a perfect monument of self-destruction. But, you know, when the bitterness wasn't focused straight onto you, he was the best company in the world.

PB: How did the story of *Kane* begin?

OW: I'd been nursing an old notion—the idea of telling the same thing several times—and showing exactly the same scene from wholly different points of view. Basically, the idea *Rashomon* used later on. Mank liked it, so we started searching for the man it was going to be about. Some big American figure—couldn't be a politician, because you'd have to pinpoint him. Howard Hughes was the first idea. But we got pretty quickly to the press lords.

PB: The first drafts were in separate versions, so when was the whole construction of the script—the intricate flashback pattern—worked out between you?

OW: The actual writing came only after lots of talk, naturally. . . . just the two of us, yelling at each other—not too angrily.

PB: What about the *Rashomon* idea? It's still there to a degree.

OW: It withered away from what was originally intended. I wanted the man to seem a very different person depending on who was talking about him. "Rosebud" was Mank's, and the many-sided gimmick was mine. Rosebud remained, because it

was the only way we could find to get off, as they used to say in vaudeville. It manages to work, but I'm still not too keen about it, and I don't think that he was, either. The whole shtick is the sort of thing that can finally date, in some funny way.

PB: Toward the close, you have the reporter say that it doesn't matter what it means—

OW: We did everything we could to take the mickey out of it.

PB: The reporter says at the end, "Charles Foster Kane was a man who got everything he wanted, and then lost it. Maybe Rosebud was something he couldn't get or something he lost, but it wouldn't have explained anything...."

OW: I guess you might call that a disclaimer—a bit corny, too. More than a bit. And it's mine, I'm afraid.

PB: I read the script that went into production.... There were so many things you changed on the set, or, anyway, after you'd started shooting. From the point of view of Kane's character, one of the most interesting is the scene where you're remaking the front page for about the twentieth time. In the script, Kane is arrogant and rather nasty to the typesetter. In the movie, he's very nice, even rather sweet. How did that evolve?

OW: Well, all he *had* was charm—besides the money. He was one of those amiable, rather likable monsters who are able to command people's allegiance for a time without giving too much in return. Certainly not love; he was raised by a bank, remember. He uses charm the way such people often do. So when he changes the first page, of course it's done on the basis of a sort of charm rather than real conviction.... Charlie Kane was a man-eater.

PB: Well, why was it in the script the other way?

OW: I found out more about the character as I went along.

PB: And what were the reactions of Mankiewicz to these changes?

OW: Well, he only came once to the set for a visit. Or, just maybe, it was twice....

Here is a memo, dated August 26, 1940, which I [PB] came across after this conversation, from Herbert Drake, Mercury Productions' press agent:

RE: ... TELEPHONE CONVERSATION WITH HERMAN J. MANKIEWICZ RE CUT STUFF HE SAW ...

1. In Bernstein's office with Bill Alland: Everett Sloane is an unsympathetic looking man, and anyway you shouldn't have two Jews in one scene.
2. Dorothy Comingore [as Susan Alexander Kane] looks much better now so Mr. M. suggests you re-shoot the Atlantic City cabaret scene. [Miss Comingore had been carefully made up to look as bad as possible.]
3. There are not enough standard movie conventions being observed including too few closeups and very little evidence of action. It is too much like a play, says Mr. M.

PB: Before shooting began, how were differences about the script worked out between you?

OW: That's why I left him on his own finally, because we'd started to waste too much time haggling. So, after mutual agreements on story line and character, Mank went off with Houseman and did his version, while I stayed in Hollywood and wrote mine. At the end, naturally, I was the one who was making the picture, after all—who had to make the decisions. I used what I wanted of Mank's and, rightly or wrongly, kept what I liked of my own.

PB: As you know, Houseman has repeatedly claimed that the script, including the conception and structure, was essentially Mankiewicz's.

OW: It's very funny that he does that, because he deserves some credit himself. It's very perverse, because actually he was a junior writer on it, and made some very important contributions. But for some curious reason he's never wanted to take that bow. It gives him more pleasure just to say I didn't write it.

PB: I have the impression, somehow—well, let's put it this way: do you believe John Houseman is an enemy?

OW: To rewrite an old Hungarian joke: if you've got him for a

friend, you don't need an enemy.... The truth is, you know, that I cling to the pathetic delusion that I don't have such things as enemies. But Jack is the one who makes this sort of Christian Science a bit difficult.

PB: How did your partnership work in the Mercury?

OW: For the radio shows, he acted as super editor over all the writers; he produced all the first drafts. And that, in a way, was his function with Mank for that six or eight weeks of their separate preparation for *Kane*. In the theater, he was the business, and also, you might say, the political, boss. That last was important, particularly in the WPA. Without his gifts as a bureaucratic finagler, the shows just wouldn't have got on. I owe him much. Leave it at that... It's a story I don't think I want to tell.

PB [*after a pause*]: There's a scene in which Susan is singing for you the first time in her apartment, and that dissolves to her singing for you in an entirely different, much-better-decorated apartment—

OW: —which Kane set up for her, yes.

PB: And you applaud in that scene, which goes to a group of people applauding Cotten, who is making a speech saying that Kane "entered this campaign"—cut to you finishing the sentence, "with one purpose only," in another campaign speech. Was a thing like that done in the preparatory stages?

OW: Yes, but the last preparatory stages—we were already rehearsing.

PB: It has the beautiful economy of segue-ing on a radio show.

OW: Yes, in a way, except faster than you could on radio.

PB: What about something like the woman screaming offscreen during your fight with Susan in the picnic tent?

OW: That was invented after we shot it. I thought, looking at the rushes, that's what we needed.

PB: As a counterpoint?

OW: Yes, and the song that went with it ["This Can't Be Love"]. I'd heard Nat King Cole and his trio do in a little bar. I kind of based the whole scene around that song.

PB: There's a shot of a black singer at one point—

OW: It isn't him, but the music is by Nat Cole—it's his trio. He doesn't sing it—he's too legitimate. We got some kind of low-down New Orleans voice—but it was his number and his trio.

PB: How did you work with Bernard Herrmann on the score?

OW: Very intimately, as I always did for many years on radio. Almost note for note. Benny Herrmann was an intimate member of the family. I think his score was marvelous for the opera in the film, *Salaambo*. It was a delightful pastiche.

From a telegram sent by Welles to Herrmann on July 18, 1940, just a few days before shooting began on Kane:

Opera sequence is early in shooting, so must have fully orchestrated recorded track before shooting. Susie sings as curtain goes up in the first act, and I believe there is no opera of importance where soprano leads with chin like this. Therefore suggest it be original... by you—parody on typical Mary Garden vehicle.... Suggest *Salaambo* [sic] which gives us phony production scene of ancient Rome and Carthage, and Susie can dress like grand opera neoclassic courtesan.... Here is a chance for you to do something witty and amusing—and now is the time for you to do it. I love you dearly.

OW: There's some music in the film Herrmann didn't write, like that tune for "Oh, Mr. Kane." That's a Mexican march I heard once down here in the north someplace.

PB: When we go to Mrs. Kane's boardinghouse, the snow is falling, and the music is lovely, very lyrical; then the snowball hits the house and the music just stops, right in the middle of a phrase.

OW: Typical radio device. We used to do that all the time. That music is very good right there.

PB: What about the idea of the light bulb spluttering out when Susan's voice falls and fades? Was a thing like that in the script?

OW: No. It was worked out later, of course.

PB: How did that shot evolve where the camera went all the way

from Susan singing to two stagehands in the flies—and then one holds his nose?

OW: The idea for the way it ended was contributed by our prop man. His name was Red. We were just going to go up to them looking disgusted or something. Anyway, it was a big contribution.

PB: You've told me that everyone felt free to contribute—that was part of the atmosphere on the set.

OW: That's true—it was wonderful. We had a couple of spies on the set, as I told you, but everyone else hated them, so they were completely in quarantine. Of course, the first two weeks of the film were done without the studio knowing we were shooting a picture. We said we were making tests, because I had never directed a picture. That began part of the big legend: "Imagine, he's been fourteen days on camera tests with extras and actors in costume!" But we were shooting the *picture*. Because we wanted to get started and be already into it before anybody knew about it.

PB: So there wouldn't be pressure on you.

OW: Yes, that's right. It was Perry Ferguson's idea, the art director.

PB: Do you agree with André Bazin that deep-focus camera setups increase the ambiguity of a movie, because the director doesn't make choices for the audience—they can decide who or what they want to look at in the frame?

OW: That's right. In fact, I did a lot of talking about that in the early days of my life as a filmmaker—when I was more shameless and used to sound off on theory. I talked a lot about that "giving the audience the choice" business. It strikes me as pretty obvious now; I don't know why I came on so strong about it.

PB: I don't think it's so obvious; and it certainly wasn't twenty-five years ago. What about a shot like the one after Susan has tried to commit suicide? There's a bottle in the foreground, and we see you break through the door in the background. Did you have to use an outsized bottle in order to hold focus?

OW: No, it was just an ordinary, standard size.

PB: It must have been very difficult to get a dark scene that still had enough light to hold focus.

OW: You bet. It was a very dark scene until the door opens and I come in—and *then* you see this ID bracelet I had on by accident because I had a girlfriend who made me wear it. Every time I think of that scene, I think of my reaching down and you see this awful love charm—nothing at all to do with Kane. That's all I really remember about that scene.

PB: I never noticed it. You must have cursed yourself watching the rushes.

OW: Yes, when I saw it I said, "Shall we go back, do it again?" "No." "Maybe he could have such—" "He never would have it." "They won't see it." And whenever I think of seeing this picture, the reason I don't want to is because I don't want to see that goddamn bracelet come down.

PB: I guess one always remembers the little things that nobody in the world would notice.

OW: Well, you'll notice it the next time you see it.

PB: That's true.

OW: It glitters on the screen!

PB: Some people have said that the look of *Kane* is a result of

Gregg Toland's photography, but all your pictures have the same visual signature, and you only worked with Toland once.

OW: It's impossible to say how much I owe to Gregg. He was superb. You know how I happened to get to work with Gregg? He was, just then, the number-one cameraman in the world, and I found him sitting out in the waiting room of my office. "My name's Toland," he said, "and I want you to use me on your picture." I asked him why, and he said he'd seen some of our plays in New York. He asked me who did the lighting. I told him in the theater most directors have a lot to do with it (and they used to, back then), and he said, "Well, fine. I want to work with somebody who never made a movie." Now, partly because of that, I somehow assumed that movie lighting was supervised by movie *directors*. And, like a damned fool, for the first few days of *Kane* I "supervised" like crazy. Behind me, of course, Gregg was balancing the lights and telling everybody

to shut their faces. He was angry when somebody finally came to me and said, "You know, that's really supposed to be Mr. Toland's job."

PB: You mean he was protecting you?

OW: Yes! He was quietly fixing it so as many of my notions as possible would work. Later he told me, "That's the only way to learn anything—from somebody who doesn't know anything." And, by the way, Gregg was also the *fastest* cameraman who ever lived, and used fewer lights. And he had this extraordinary crew—his own men. You never heard a sound on a Toland set, except what came from the actors or the director. There was never a voice raised, only signs given. Almost Germanic, it was so hushed. Everybody wore neckties. Sounds depressing, but we had a jazz combo to keep our spirits up.

PB: Toland didn't mind that?

OW: Not so you'd notice. With all his discipline, he was easygoing, and quite a swinger off the set.

PB: How did you get along with him after you found out that lighting was his job?

OW: Wonderfully. I started asking for lots of strange, new things—depth-of-focus and so on....

PB: An elementary question: why did you *want* so much depth-of-focus?

OW: Well, in life you see everything in focus at the same time, so why not in the movies? We used split-screen sometimes, but mostly a wide-angle lens, lots of juice, and stopped way the hell down. We called it "pan focus" in some idiot interview—just for the fun of it—

PB: Didn't mean anything?

OW: Of course not. But for quite a while that word kept turning up in books and highbrow articles—as though there really was something you could do called "pan focusing!" ... Christ, he was the greatest gift any director—young or old—could ever, ever have. And he never tried to impress us that he was doing any miracles. He just went ahead and performed them. *Fast*. I was calling for things only a beginner would have been ig-

norant enough to think anybody could ever do, and there he was, *doing* them. His whole point was, "There's no mystery to it." He said, "You can be a cameraman, too—in a couple of days I can teach you everything that matters." So we spent the next weekend together and he showed me the inside of that bag of tricks, and, like all good magic, the secrets are ridiculously simple. Well, that was Gregg for you—that was how big he was. Can you imagine somebody they now call a "director of photography" coming right out and admitting you can bone up on the basic technical side of it all in a weekend? Like magic again: the secret of the trick is nothing; what counts is not the mechanics, but how you can make 'em work.

PB: You gave Toland credit on the same card as yourself, which Ford had done, too, on *The Long Voyage Home*.

OW: Up till then, cameramen were listed with about eight other names. Nobody those days—only the stars, the director, and the producer—got separate cards. Gregg deserved it, didn't he?

PB: What made you put on so many ceilings?

OW: The simple thing is that movies still go on telling lies. First of all, they pretend there isn't a fourth wall—as in the theater—that *has* to be because the camera is there. But then they pretend there's no ceiling—a big lie in order to get all those terrible lights up there. You can hardly go into a room without seeing a ceiling, and I believe the camera ought to show what the eyes see normally looking at something. That's all it was. Not because I thought the ceiling in itself had anything beautiful to say. It just seemed to me it was clearly a bad theatrical convention to pretend it wasn't there.

PB: Well, you also used a lot of low-angle shots that couldn't avoid seeing the ceiling. In fact, you're still fond of shots like that.

OW: I don't know why. I suppose it's because I think the picture looks better down there. Just that. I suppose I had more low angles in *Kane* just because I became fascinated with the way it looked—and I do it less now because it's become less surprising. But there are an awful lot of dull interiors—*Kane* is

full of them—which are by their nature not very interesting and which look better when the camera is low. I think I overdid it.

PB: In the big scene between Kane and Leland after Kane loses the election, the whole thing is from an extreme low angle.

OW: Well, there's a purpose in that one—that was deliberate and wasn't just because the set looked better.

PB: What was the purpose?

OW: Oh, I don't know—I think if it doesn't explain itself, I can't explain it. There's this fallen giant. . . . I think that really called for the camera being there. And, of course, it was very low. We had to dig a hole, and they had to drill into the concrete floor for us to get down that low. And I'd sprained my ankle, so if you look carefully in that scene, you can see the steel brace I was wearing on my heel. I had fallen down the stairs in the scene where I threw Gettys out, and I was limping around in a steel brace. It took nerve to shoot from down there, with that steel brace right in front of the camera, but I thought rightly that at that point they'd be looking at Leland and not at me. Anyway, I wanted it like a big, kind of mythical encounter between the two. And also I wanted it to look oversized, because what they're saying is so prosaic, yet has reverberations—I had some such highfalutin idea. It still seems justified to me as I look back on it. But I don't have a general theory about low angles.

PB: How do you decide where you're going to put the camera?

OW: I don't make a conscious decision—I know instantly where it goes. There's never a moment of doubt. And I never use a viewfinder any more.

PB: You look through the camera when it's set up?

OW: No. I place my hand where the camera goes and that's it. It never moves—I know exactly where it's going to be.

PB: But don't you then look at the set-up?

OW: Then. And that's where it should be, and I'm right. For my money. I don't fish for it—or very seldom, only when I'm in real trouble. And then the fishing leads me nowhere and it's

better if I go home or go to another scene. Because if I'm fishing it means I don't know, something's wrong.

PB: It's really instinctive rather than—

OW: Oh, it always is. I think I share with Hitchcock the ability to say what lens goes in the camera and where it stands without consulting a finder or looking through the camera. He does that, too, I believe.

PB: He sometimes draws a little sketch for the cameraman.

OW: Oh, I don't do that. I just walk over and say, "There it is." I may be dead wrong, but I'm so certain that nothing can shake it. It's the only thing I'm certain of. I'm never certain of a performance—my own or the other actors'—or the script or anything. I'm ready to change, move anything. But to me it seems there's only one place in the world the camera can be, and the decision usually comes immediately. If it doesn't come immediately, it's because I have no idea about the scene, or I'm wrong about the scene to begin with. It's a good sign, a kind of litmus paper for me. If I start to fish, something is wrong.

PB: Then it must be inconceivable to you, the idea of covering a scene from many different angles, as many directors do.

OW: That's right. Inconceivable. I don't know what they're fishing around for—they don't know what they're doing in the scene. Though I think the absolutely solid camera sense is *not* a sign of a great director. It's just something you have or you don't have. I think you can be a very great director and have only a very vague notion of what the camera does at all. I happen to think I have total mastery of the camera. That may be just megalomania, but I'm absolutely certain of that area. And everything *else* is doubtful to me. I never consult the operator or anything. There it is.

PB: Was it that way on *Kane*, too?

OW: Yes.

PB: Right away?

OW: Right away.

PB: It's instinctive.

OW: Yes, kind of instinctive, if you will—an arrogance that I have about where it's going to be seen from.

PB: I know it's difficult to dissect the creative process—

OW: Well, it's not even creative, because it is an instinctive thing, like a question of pitch for a singer. Where the camera goes. If you're absolutely sure, you may be wrong but at least it's one thing you can hang on to. Because I'm filled with doubts all the time about a movie: that the whole tone is wrong, that the level of it is wrong, that all the text, the performances, the emphasis, what they say, what it should be about—I'm constantly reaching and fishing and hoping and trying and improvising and changing. But the one thing I'm rocklike about is where it's seen from, by what lens and so on. That to me doesn't seem to be open to discussion. And it's something I must be grateful for: even if I'm wrong, I don't have that worry. But I always find scenes in a movie—I did in *Kane* and I have ever since—that I don't know how to photograph, and it's always because I haven't really conceived of it fully enough.

PB: Do you let those go until you're ready?

OW: Well, on *Kane*, I walked away once early in the morning—just quit for the day—and went home. Made a big scandal. I just had no idea what to do. Came back the next day.

PB: What was the scene?

OW: In Susan's apartment, the big confrontation, when Gettys [Ray Collins] comes in. He was named, by the way, after the father of the wife of Roger Hill, my teacher at Todd. That's another in-joke. But that was just a scene in a room, and it seemed to me so boring, I didn't know what to do. And I just went away.

PB: When you came back, it worked?

OW: Yeah. And I didn't figure it out on paper. But I think that scene is a little overstated, visually. It's a little overemphasized. It shows some kind of insecurity, I think, visually. I can see it now. It came from that moment of doubt. And I think it's like lion taming or being the conductor of an orchestra—you have to come in and know where the camera is, or there are all

sorts of evil demons who will attack you, and the doubts will show on the screen and in everything. You have to be absolutely on top of it. Or pay no attention to it. One of the two.

PB: By the way, in shooting that drunk scene with Cotten, I understand he was so tired that he accidentally said the line "dramatic crimitism" that way, instead of "criticism," and you left it in.

OW: It happened that way in rehearsal and then it was performed. He was that tired because he had to go to New York to join the road tour of *The Philadelphia Story*, which he originated on the stage. And we all worked something like twenty-four hours, around the clock, with nobody going to bed, to get him finished.

PB: Would you agree, in general, that *Kane* is more self-conscious directorially than any of your other films?

OW: Yes. There are more conscious shots—for the sake of shots—in *Kane* than in anything I've done since. It has things like that shot where they're all posed around that trophy which is just a "let's see if we can make that shot" kind of shot. I'm not that pleased with it, looking back.

PB: No, it's studied.

OW: Yeah. I've tried to avoid that kind of thing since then.

PB: Well, *Ambersons* is much more relaxed.

OW: Much.

PB: Perhaps that's something one feels making one's first picture.

A sort of inhibition—which you combated by being daring to the point of self-consciousness at the time. Whereas *Othello* is very second-nature—as is everything you've done since.

OW: I think that's absolutely true. I stopped trying after *Kane*. There's a kind of unjustified visual strain at times in *Kane*, which just came from the exuberance of discovering the medium. And once you get used to it and learn how to swim, then you don't have to flex so many muscles. Now let's talk about something else.

PB: Well, we've barely scratched the surface of *Kane*.

OW: I'm sure—but I'm expiring.

PB: Well, OK. Let's talk about your name. Why'd you choose to

be called by your middle name, Orson, instead of your first name, George?

OW: There wasn't any choice involved. I've been Orson all my life. I first learned my name was George when I was nine years old. It came as a terrible shock. Children started screaming, "George, Porgie, puddin' and pie, kissed the girls and made them cry." This enraged me. I kicked out at my little playmates and got black eyes for it. How wrong I was. What a name to be born with and not use—George Orson Welles!

PB: All of it? You trust people with three names.

OW: With a name like George Orson Welles I wouldn't need to be trusted—I'd be Emperor of the World!

PB: Were you named after someone?

OW: George Ade, the great American humorist. Orson is a family name—descending (so the legend goes) from the Orsinis. Also because, by a bewildering and rather tiresome coincidence, my mother and father were on holiday in Rio—with George Ade and a man whose name was Orson Wells, without the "e," but with \$30 million. I'd have those millions now if only I'd gone to visit my godfather. I hesitated, fearing old Mr. Wells would suspect my motives. I'd go *now*—on my knees. But as a twelve-year-old I had my pride. And then the news came that he'd gone to dwell with the morning stars.

PB: Was your father a great influence in your life—being an inventor?

OW: He didn't do much inventing in the years I knew him. I admired and loved him, but he was bitterly opposed to my interest in music and painting and everything like that. As far as he was concerned, if I was going to be an artist, it'd be better to be a cartoonist, like his friend George McManus, who drew "Jiggs and Maggie," otherwise known as "Bringing Up Father"—that's where the money was.

PB: But your mother was—

OW: The artist—the musician. Because of her I was a sort of *Wunderkind* of music: a child conductor, violinist, pianist. Then, when I was nine, she died. I've never done anything in music since.

PB: What was the influence of your guardian, Dr. Bernstein? And why did you give that name to the character in *Kane*?

OW: You're sneaking in *Kane* again.

PB: Sorry.

OW: [laughs] That was a family joke. He was nothing like the character in the movie. I used to call people "Bernstein" on the radio all the time, too—just to make him laugh. . . . I sketched out the character in our preliminary sessions—Mank did all the best writing for Bernstein. I'd call that *the* most valuable thing he gave us. . . .

PB: Where did Jed Leland [Joseph Cotten] come from?

OW: Jed was really based on a close childhood friend of mine—George Stevens's uncle Ashton Stevens. He was practically my uncle, too.

PB: Did you tell Stevens the character was based on him?

OW: Oh God, he could see it—I didn't have to *tell* him. I sent him the script before we began, of course, and while he was visiting me on the coast, I brought him on the set during shooting. Later he saw the movie and thought the old man would be thrilled by it. As it turned out, after *Kane* was released, Ashton was forbidden by his Hearst editors to even mention my name. . . . What I knew about Hearst came even more from him than from my father—though my father did know him well: there was a long story about putting a chamber pot on a flagpole, things like that, but I didn't get too much from *that* source. My father and Hearst were only close as young swingers. But Ashton had taught Hearst to play the banjo, which is how he first got to be a drama critic, and, you know, Ashton really was one of the great ones. The last of the dandies—he worked for Hearst for some fifty years or so, and adored him. A gentleman. . . . very much like Jed.

PB: Jed Leland is really not all that endearing a character—I mean, you like him, but one's sympathies somehow are with Kane in the scene where he attacks Kane so strongly.

OW: Well, you know—when a man takes a stand on some question of principle at the expense of a personal friendship, the

sympathy has to go to the victim of the righteousness, now, doesn't it?

PB: Getting back to your guardian, Dr. Bernstein—did he have any influence on your creative life?

OW: Well, he was an enormously important *element* in my life. But we seldom had the same tastes in anything. I'd say the biggest influence was Roger Hill, who became headmaster of the school to which I went for three years, and with whom I later wrote four textbooks on Shakespeare. He's still a great, a valued, friend.

Roger Hill's *introduction to Everybody's Shakespeare (1934; later, The Mercury Shakespeare, 1939), which he edited with Welles, begins like this:*

ON STUDYING SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

Don't!

Read them. Enjoy them. Act them.

Shakespeare might not be surprised to know that his plays are still bringing money to producers and fame to actors throughout the world. He would be greatly surprised, however, to know that they are studied (by compulsion) in the classroom; that they are conned by scholars, dissected by pedants, and fed in synthetic and minute and quite distasteful doses to students, much in the same manner as are capsules of Cicero's Letters and pellets of Euclid's Geometry. . . . Put Shakespeare where he belongs—on the stage.

OW: Roger is now eighty-something, runs a chartering service in Florida, and he helped me with the boats on *The Deep* when I shot in the Bahamas. He's always been a great boat fellow—he was called "Skipper" at school.

PB: Todd School?

OW: Yes. He was the son of the owner. When I was there, he was the athletics coach. He only became the headmaster after I left. But he was a great influence in that school.

PB: How old were you?

OW: Well, I went there three years, and my last year I was fourteen.

PB: And he?

OW: Must have been twenty-eight, thirty—I really don't know. I can't imagine life without him, and I go ten years without seeing him but it doesn't seem like ten years, because I think of him all the time. He was a great direct influence in my life—the biggest by all odds. I wanted to be like him. Everything he thought, I wanted to think, and that wasn't true of Dr. Bernstein.

PB: Or your father?

OW: Or my father. My father was a very strange man. Fascinating. Great wit and great raconteur.

PB: Did you take up painting right after—

OW: I painted, always, from the minute I could walk.

PB: Is it true that you still can't add or subtract very well?

OW: What would make you think I'd learn at this advanced age? I can't do it at all.

PB: Really?

OW: No. I got through school because I paid a boy called Guggenheim to take that sort of drudgery off my shoulders. For a fee, Guggenheim did most of the paperwork on Latin de-
clensions and geometry. I graduated *magna cum laude*.

PB: I read in the Alva Johnston pieces in the *Saturday Evening Post* [January 20, 27, February 3, 1940] that you never wanted to be a child—that you wanted to escape childhood.

OW: That's true.

PB: Have you ever wanted to return?

OW: To childhood? I've been back there ever since I left.

PB: I read that you dislike *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

OW: Because it was my reading primer. You'll have to try it—just read the first scene of *Midsummer Night's Dream* and imagine it's the first thing you've ever had to spell out.

PB: Well, since you were two years old, it's hard to imagine it anyway.

OW: Johnston wrote that I was. In fact, I believe I achieved literacy somewhat later on in life. He got that, I suppose, from

Dr. Bernstein, who gilded the lily pretty thickly. I don't think I was very advanced in that way. I was a musician, all right, but as to book learning, I think I was rather backward.

PB: Were you really a bad student in school?

OW: All three years of it. I attacked the textbooks rather than mastered them. I led student revolutions—comic ones.

PB: You acted in and directed some school plays. Did you have a particular love of makeup even then?

OW: Yes, I used to when I was younger, and it was impossible for me to play any part that didn't look like a juvenile killer. Getting older, I discover I don't have to paint those lines under my eyes, and it's nice.

PB: But *Kane* is a masterpiece of makeup.

OW: There you go again—you had that whole chain of thought planned. God, you're crafty.... *Kane* had to be. Look at all those ages.

PB: Well, movies that have somebody age in them are usually quite bad.

OW: Yes, but you have no idea what work there was to that, because it was long ago; we didn't have sophisticated things for makeup which made it easy. In those days—you don't know what it was—I came to work many days on *Kane* at two-thirty in the morning, to be made up to start work at nine. It took that long, with the spraying and building. Maurice Seiderman was one of the two or three great makeup men of our time, and he's never really been allowed to do anything in the industry.

PB: Because he's too good?

OW: Yeah. How he worked! Two-thirty in the morning was normal all the time. With the contact lenses I wore, which in those days drove you mad with pain. Because I was a baby; you know, it's very hard to be seventy years old and make it believable. But the thing that's never been printed is the truth about me as a young man in that film. I was then twenty-five, twenty-six—I've forgotten how old I was—but I had my face lifted up with fish skin and wore corsets for the scenes as a young man.

PB: Why? Were you heavier than you looked?

OW: Of course. Not only heavier, but I always had that terrible round moon face and it was all faked up with fish skins and tucked under the hair. Everything. Just as though I were some terrible old leading man at the end of his day. [laughs] So I was just as heavily made up as a young man as I was as an old man! I could hardly move for the corsets and the fish skin and everything else. I read once—Norman Mailer wrote something or other—that, when I was young, I was the most beautiful man anybody had ever seen. Yes! Made up for *Citizen Kane*! And only for five days!

PB: You mean you never looked like that?

OW: Never! I wish I had! On the other hand, Everett Sloane, who aged with me, never wore any makeup at all! We just shaved his head and put the white around it. And he couldn't have been more than twenty-one. It had a profound effect on him. Because he thought, "How can I represent a seventy-five-year-old man without makeup? It must be that my nose is too big." And he began bobbing it. He must have had twenty operations before he killed himself. He must have thought, "If I could ever bob my nose right, then I'll be a leading man."

PB: But that's incredible.

OW: Terrible story, yes.

PB: He was brilliant in *Kane*.

OW: Yes. Much better than in *The Lady from Shanghai*. He'd already begun to go to pieces. And he became a very bad actor in the last ten years of his life. But in *Kane* he was wonderful.

PB: Yes, that scene with the reporter [William Alland]—

OW: That was *all* Mank, by the way—it's my favorite scene.

PB: And the story about the girl: "One day, back in 1896, I was crossing over to Jersey on the ferry.... There was another ferry pulling in, and... a girl waiting to get off. A white dress she had on.... I only saw her for a second... but I'll bet a month hasn't gone by since, that I haven't thought of that girl."

OW: It goes longer than that.

PB: Yes, but who wrote it?

OW: Mankiewicz, and it's the best thing in the movie. "A month

hasn't gone by that I haven't thought of that girl." That's Mankiewicz. I wish it was me.

PB: Great scene.

OW: If I were in hell and they gave me a day off and said, "What part of any movie you ever made do you want to see?" I'd see that scene of Mank's about Bernstein. All the rest could have been better, but that was just right.

PB: You wanted all the actors in *Kane* to be new faces, didn't you?

OW: That's true—but I was tricked. [laughs] My whole idea of having only new faces was ruined by the first day of shooting—which was, as I said, the first of several days when we pretended to be testing but were actually shooting the picture. The scene was in the nightclub with Susan when she's grown old. For the waiter in that nightclub, casting sent me a tubby little round-faced Italian [Gino Corrado] who is the waiter in every movie ever made! And I couldn't possibly send him away on the basis that he was too well known a face because I was claiming to be testing. So there he is—spoiling the whole master plan in one of the first shots that I made!

PB: And you couldn't even rationalize it as an *hommage* to Hollywood, since I know that's not the sort of thing you do.

OW: I don't believe in *hommage*. Of course, nobody knew about it in those days, thank Christ—in our innocence—and I am terribly against all forms of *hommage*.

PB: I'm beginning to agree with you.

OW: You don't have to say that.

PB: No, I am. What was the big advantage of having actors inexperienced in movies?

OW: They didn't have terrible movie habits.

PB: Was Dorothy Comingore really a discovery of Chaplin's?

OW: Yes, but he didn't use her.

PB: And you liked her—

OW: After testing a lot of strippers. I tested about ten, none of whom were any good. I tested a lot of people for that part.

PB: You wanted that kind of cheapness?

OW: Yeah.

PB: Had she ever acted before?

OW: I don't think so. And she was such a success in it. Everybody said she was so wonderful that she turned down every offer she got for three years. And then there were no more offers, and that was the end of it. She was waiting for another part like that one.

PB: Was she an intelligent actress?

OW: Yes. Of course, her old-age scenes were tremendously tricked up. We blew dangerous drugs in her eyes and sprayed her throat so she couldn't talk, and everything else. But she was still great. "Well, what do you know—it's morning already." That's another favorite moment.

PB: What's so uncanny is that she reminds me so much of performances Judy Holliday was to give years later.

OW: Yes. Judy began with our theater, you know. She was two years in the Mercury.

PB: I didn't know that. Perhaps she was influenced by Cominogore—

OW: No, I don't think so.

PB: Well, there's a marked similarity.

OW: Yes, very much. She didn't have the humor or richness of Judy, but there's a great big similarity.

PB: Did she sing her own things?

OW: No.

PB: You had to get a singer who could make it sound bad.

OW: That's right. That was big work—very well done by the girl. Worked a long time on that.

PB: How did you find Fortunio Bonanova, who played her singing teacher?

OW: I saw him as the leading man with Katharine Cornell in *The Green Hat* when I was about eight years old. I never forgot him.

He looked to me like a leading man in a dirty movie. Sent for him the minute I wrote that part. He was a great romantic leading man. When he was prompting her in the opera, he was so marvelous. God, he was funny.

PB: Had he ever done a picture before?

OW: Yes, I think so—he was living in Hollywood. But nothing much, you know. He was another one of the exceptions in the film.

PB: Why did you use that shrieking cockatoo?

OW: Wake 'em up.

PB: Literally?

OW: Yeah. Getting late in the evening, you know—time to brighten up anybody who might be nodding off. *[laughs]*

PB: It has no other purpose?

OW: Theatrical shock effect, if you want to be grand about it—you can say it's placed at a certain *musical* moment when I felt the need for something short and exclamatory. So it has a sort of purpose, but no *meaning*. What's fascinating, though, is that, because of some accident in the trick department, you can see right through the bird's eye into the scenery behind.

PB: I always thought that was intentional.

OW: We don't know why it happened. Some accident. . . . I'm very fond of parrots.

PB: There's one in *Mr. Arkadin*.

OW: Yeah. I have a wonderful one at home in Spain.

PB: How'd you do the scene just after the cockatoo, where Kane breaks up Susan's room?

OW: Just did it, with four cameras—broke up the whole set in one take. Tore my wrists and hands apart. I was bleeding like a pig when I was done with all that glass and everything.

PB: William Alland has been quoted as saying, "He came off exhilarated and said it was the first time he'd ever felt the emotion while acting a scene."

OW: Naw. I'm sure that's one of those memories after the event that are more creative than accurate. I came off with a bleeding wrist—that's what I came off with—and I don't enjoy bleeding. I'm not one of those. Five hours of makeup, and then get on and break it all up. Very rough. But the set was wonderfully done by Perry Ferguson. Marvelously dressed—made it very easy to play. My God, it was a wonderful set. I can see it now. He was just brilliant—I think Ferguson did a marvelous job.

PB: I agree. What did Van Nest Polglase do, who's also listed as art director?

OW: That shows your youth. In the days of the big studios, and the system of department heads, every picture carried a credit for art direction which went not to the man who really did the job, but to the head of the department. The man who actually did the work was always listed as assistant. Thus Cedric Gibbons was apparently the art director of every Metro picture, but he didn't even make a sketch. He and Van Polglase and the other art department chiefs were much too busy for any actual creative work.

PB: Then you had no contact with Van Polglase at all?

OW: Just in budget meetings, costing—that was the regulation set-up.

PB: Well, the set director, Darrell Silvera, told me that those ice sculptures of Ieland and Bernstein in the party scene were a last-minute idea.

OW: Yes. We got them from the Brown Derby or someplace like that. It took a long time to shoot that sequence—five days. I threw all the girls out and waited till we got prettier ones—and they were marvelous girls, finally.

PB: Did you yourself design sketches on *Kane*?

OW: I do on everything, and I almost always design shows for the theater. Let's go get another drink—I see this is going to be endless. . . .

An article could be devoted just to the "News on the March" digest that comes at the start of Kane. Apart from its perfection as an imitation news short, it is at the same time one of the most devilish parodies of vintage Time-style ever made: the inverted sentences, the taut fact-filled portentous reportage, the standard clichés.

OW *[with a new drink]*: I showed it to Luce. He was one of the first people to see the movie—in New York. He and Clare Luce loved it and roared with laughter at the digest.

PB: They saw the parody?

OW: They saw it as a parody and enjoyed it very much as such—I have to hand it to them. He saw it as a joke—or *she* saw it as a joke and he had to because she did.

PB: There's a "March of Time" sequence indicated in *Smiler with a Knife*.

OW: Yes, that's where the idea for it in *Kane* came from. Of course, I'd been years on the "March of Time" radio program. Every day. It was a marvelous show to do. Great fun, because, half an hour after something happened, we'd be acting it out with music and sound effects and actors. It was a super show—terribly entertaining.

PB: Did you write some of them?

OW: Never. I only acted. I began as an occasional performer, because they had a regular stock company, and then I was finally let in—one of the inner circle. And then I had the greatest thrill of my life—I don't know why it thrilled me (it does still, to think of it now), I guess because I thought "March of Time" was such a great thing to be on. One day they did as a news item on "March of Time" the opening of my production of the black *Macbeth*, and I played myself on it. And that to me was the apotheosis of my career—that I was on "March of Time" acting *and* as a news item. I've never felt since that I've had it made as much as I did that one afternoon.

PB: And did you use the *Time* announcer, Westbrook Van Voorhies, for *Kane*?

OW: Oh, no. That was William Alland who imitated him. Great imitation, but he's pretty easy to imitate. [*doing it*] "This week, as it must to all men—death came to Charles Foster Kane." We used to do that every day—five days a week! And, of course, there was a lot of "it must to all men" every week, and I used to play all these people. I played Zaharoff—it was one of my first parts on the show. As a matter of fact, I got the idea for the hidden-camera sequence in the *Kane* "news digest" from a scene I did on "March of Time" in which Zaharoff, this great munitions maker, was being moved around in his rose garden, just talking about the roses, in the last days

before he died. It was a radio show, but I remember the idea of an old tycoon being pushed around a rose garden.

PB: There's a wonderfully real sound cut during Thatcher's news conference in the "News" digest. A long shot of Thatcher sitting at the table with all these people around, but when you cut to a close-up of him as he starts to read his statement, the sound cuts a moment late, the way it often does in newsreels. I've always loved that touch.

OW: Yes, a slight mistake in the sound cutting. I'm glad you noticed it. You know how it was in those days—there was no tape, all the sound was on film. You can't imagine what mixing the sound was in those days—and what a cost in effort it was to get that little effect.

PB: Is it true that that news conference was reminiscent of a real J. P. Morgan news conference?

OW: No, but there *was* a famous J. P. Morgan news conference where a midget was put on his lap. I just know vaguely about it.

PB: Did you feel the newsreel was necessary so the juggling of time was possible?

OW: It was expository—to tell more about him than could be told in other ways.

PB: Were the shots for the "News" digest made depending on what makeup you were in?

OW: Yes, end of the day or during the day. There was a big back lot, and as we were moving from one place to another, we'd say, "Well, let's get on the back of the train and make me with Teddy Roosevelt," or whoever it was. It was all kind of half improvised—all the newsreel stuff. It was tremendous fun doing it. And did I tell you the reaction that sequence had in Italy when the film opened?

PB: No.

OW: They all stood up and hissed and booed because the quality of the film was so bad.

PB: They missed the point entirely.

OW: Yes! [*laughs*] You know, the total run in Rome in the entire life of *Citizen Kane* is three days—since it was made!

PB: That's about rock bottom, isn't it?

OW: Yeah. But I'm rock bottom in Italy. I've only started to come up in the last five or six years.

PB: Even among intellectuals?

OW: Oh, always low. Very low.

PB: Really?

OW: Because I came and lived there. And, you don't know this, but in many countries you're only respected if you're not living there. They think there must be something wrong with you if you come and stay there. So I had a great week when I arrived for *Black Magic* with every intellectual in the world—and after that I became nobody because I lived there. "Who is he? Must be something wrong with him or he wouldn't be in Italy." [PB laughs] It's been true in an awful lot of countries—Ireland and Italy and Yugoslavia. I know a lot of smaller countries that never respect either their own countrymen until they leave, or a foreigner who lives there. In Yugoslavia, I'm beginning to lose a lot of face because I'm there too much. It's a very basic thing. I remember when we toured with Katharine Cornell—we were going to open up the theater again in America—a thrilling ten-month tour, playing all over in theaters where no play had been for twenty, thirty, forty years. There we were, bringing really good actors and a repertoire of three plays, and the people would say, "What's wrong with Katharine Cornell, that she's here? She must be slipping." In other words, if she's any good, she'd stay in New York. It's just like the Yugoslavs or the Italians. They want to know why you aren't back in Hollywood!

PB: That's similar to American critics putting down Westerns and other typically American films.

OW: Yes, it's only the foreigners who appreciate the Western as a serious form. And comedy. There are very few people anywhere who take comedy seriously.

PB: That's true.

OW: You know, not one serious film festival in the world has ever given a first prize to a comedy.

PB: The Oscars rarely do, either.

OW: It's so idiotic, because it's quite easy to show that maybe the best movies and plays are comedies—or certainly as good as any tragedy. It's so idiotic to think that it's some kind of second-class tourist kind of entertainment. But these solemn boobs who talk about movies or anything else just cannot believe that a comedy is serious.

PB: Yes. [picking up notes] Why did you do the projection-room scene in such darkness?

OW: Because most of the actors play different parts later on. They're all doubling, except the head fellow. We didn't dare turn on the lights.

PB: It's dramatic.

OW: Of course, you've got a big excuse for that strong single light. It was the first scene I shot in the movie.

PB: Really?

OW: Yes, and I was supposed to be testing, so in case it was good I wanted to save it, and I didn't want to hire a lot of actors if it wasn't good. So I used the whole Mercury cast, heavily disguised by darkness.

PB: And you shot it in a real projection room?

OW: Yes, because we didn't want to alert anybody to the fact that we were shooting. And there they all are—if you look carefully, you can see them. Everybody in the movie is in it.

PB: Not you, too?

OW: Yes, I'm there.

PB: Peter Noble's book indicates that the projection-room scene was influenced by a stage effect in a play you had acted in—Sidney Kingsley's *Ten Million Ghosts* [1936].

OW: That is one of the biggest pieces of *Schweinierei* I've ever heard in my life. In *Ten Million Ghosts*, there is a scene in which a home movie of war atrocities is run off in an apartment somewhere in Europe. I never saw the scene, because I was in my dressing room during it the six days the play ran, but the fact that a home movie is shown is the only possible connection with a projection room. Wow!

PB: Not having seen *Ten Million Ghosts*, I don't—

OW: Well, almost nobody did. I fell asleep on the stage on opening night, but that's another story. Next.

PB: Someone criticized the actor who did the editor, saying he was hammy, but I liked that—he was an editor, aware of the role he was playing.

OW: Yes, he's supposed to be a kind of a parody. That's the point.

PB: Is it true that Alan Ladd's in there somewhere?

OW: Not in that one. He's the leading reporter when all of them gather at Xanadu at the end. And you can't miss him—it was his first movie part, and there he is, wearing his hat the way he wore it for thirty pictures afterward.

PB: How did you find him?

OW: He was brought in by his agent, who was later his wife. He read for me and I thought he was very good.

PB: He had a good voice.

OW: Yes. And very effective and intelligent. He's one of the only people I didn't know who's in the picture. There were very few—only three or four. You know, you are boring me to death—

PB: OK, I'll change the subject—

OW: No, *you* talk for a while—

PB: Well, OK. There's a good story I heard about John Ford.

OW: Tell it.

PB: The producer came down on the set, and Ford immediately stopped shooting. He sat down and started talking to the producer. And the producer noticed that everybody else sort of stopped working, and after a while he said, "Don't you think you ought to, you know, go back to work, Jack? I mean—" And Ford said, "Oh no! Gee, that would be rude. I mean, if I came into *your* office you'd stop making phone calls, wouldn't you, or whatever you do? You wouldn't keep making phone calls and talking to people while I was in your office. You'd sit and talk to me, wouldn't you? Well, I'm just doing the same thing—"

OW: That's great.

PB: I heard you once did a similar thing by telling the cast on *Kane* to play baseball when—

OW: Yes, we did, but that was intended as a practical joke and was friendly. It was when George Schaefer [head of the studio] came with all the bankers from New York, and they'd all heard, you know, about crazy Welles. We thought it would be nice if they came down and found us hard at work—playing baseball.

PB: Did it go over as a joke?

OW: Yes—it was quite benevolent. Don't think I didn't notice how you sneaked *Kane* in again.

PB: [laughs] OK. You had a fifteen-week schedule.

OW: Yes, and that included all the trick shots and everything else. There were so many trick shots—it was a big fake, full of hanging miniatures and glass shots and everything. There was very little construction.

PB: Did you purposely work for economy in making the picture?

OW: Of course. I wanted to go on working in Hollywood. I'd spent a year there before I made it, and I'd found out how important economy was. More important in those days than now, because grosses weren't as big.

PB: The trick shots are very good—

OW: I hope so. My God, I was months and months and months turning down versions of them, day after day, until they got good enough. Trick work *can* be good enough, but you must be brutal about it. Just refuse it, refuse it, refuse it till it gets better.

PB: Trick work in color gets to be almost impossible; it immediately looks phony.

OW: Yes, it is impossible. You mustn't do it in color—color looks like trick work anyway. It's only for black-and-white.

PB: I like the way real night looks in color, if it's very black.

OW: I like fog and fire and smoke in color, and winter snow. But it's pretty limited.

PB: All the dissolves were very carefully designed, it seemed to me.

OW: They're done electrically instead of optically.

PB: Could you describe that?

OW: We actually dimmed down lights on the stage—leaving lit the one key thing you wanted to see longer—and brought up the lights the same way for the incoming scene. In other words, if the last thing you want to see is Susan, that's the last thing you see, because all the other lights are fading out around her by dimmer, just as you would do it in the theater. When you add the dissolve electrically, Susan lingers there, instead of the whole picture going out and another whole picture coming in. They were very carefully designed. All so that the dissolve would be more beautiful. And I still do it all the time.

PB: On the incoming shot, did you place the object you want to see in a different area on the screen?

OW: That's right, so it would complement the outgoing shot.

PB: I've never heard of anybody doing that before.

OW: No, nobody had. I thought that's the way they must do dissolves. After I had done several of them, Gregg broke it to me that it was not the way it's usually done. It just seemed to me from the theater that that's what you would do. Innocence led me to it. . . . And, of course, we sent *them* back to the lab over and over again until they were right.

PB: You once said about the editing of *Kane*, "There was nothing to cut." What did you mean?

OW: When I made *Kane*, I didn't know enough about movies, and I was constantly encouraged by Toland, who said, under the influence of Ford, "Carry everything in one shot—don't do anything else." In other words, play scenes through without cutting, and don't shoot any alternate version. That was Toland in my ear. And secondly, I didn't *know* how to have all kinds of choices. All I could think of to do was what was going to be on the screen in the final version. Also, I had a wonderful cast.

I only learned about cutting when I got to Europe and had people who didn't speak English—or people who weren't even actors in the roles, wearing wigs and standing with their backs

to the cameras—so that I had to fake things, and learn how to cut in order to cover troubles I was in. Now I'm in love with cutting. Transitions, yes—I knew about those instinctively for *Kane*, and they were written into the way we shot it, not discovered during cutting. But nothing was covered from other angles; there was no alternate to the master scene. Whenever I have a good enough cast, I never cover myself. So, of course, there wasn't anything to cut. It was just put together. There were hardly any close-ups—I think there are four in the whole picture. And they were the only four close-ups we made. And the only thing we deleted was a two-minute scene of me in a whorehouse, which was cut in its entirety very early in the cutting by general agreement, because we knew the censors wouldn't let it get by. It originally followed the dancing scene; I go off to a whorehouse—

PB: With the same women?

OW: No, with some other women. And it wasn't that good, so there was no reason to have it. That was the only *cut*; the picture was never previewed. There was never any alternate version of anything—it was simply put together as shot.

PB: Why did you decide not to have credits at the beginning of *Kane*? No one had ever done that before.

OW: The script dictated that. Look at all the other things that go on at the beginning, before the story starts: that strange dreamlike prologue, then "News on the March," and then the projection-room scene—it's a long time before anything starts. Now, supposing you'd added titles to all that. It would have been one thing too much to sit through. You wouldn't have know where you were in the picture.

PB: In that prologue you just mentioned, why does the light in his bedroom suddenly go off—and then come on again after a moment?

OW: To interest the audience. We'd been going on quite a while there with nothing happening. You see a light in the window—you keep coming nearer—and it better go off, or a shadow had better cross, or something had better happen. So I turned the light off—that's all.

PB: Then you cut inside.

OW: That's right. Maybe the nurse turned it off because it was getting in his eyes. Who knows? Who cares? The other answer is that it symbolized death. Got that? All right.

PB: We can use both answers—in different chapters.

OW: [laughs] Yes—use 'em both. In fact, that's really what was in my mind. He was supposed to die when the light went off, and then you go back a few minutes and see him alive again—if you really want a reason. The other, low-class reason was to keep the audience interested. And they're both valid.

PB: What did you mean by the mirrors at the end, when Kane walks by and you see his image reflected many times?

OW: I don't think a moviemaker should explain what he means. About anything. Leave it to the customers. Why spoil things for people who enjoy finding their own meanings?

PB: But you just explained the light going off—

OW: Next.

PB: The black smoke at the end has been said to symbolize the futility of his life. . . .

OW: I don't know—I hate symbolism.

PB: Fritz Lang said he dropped the use of symbols when he came to America because somebody at MGM said to him, "Americans don't like symbols."

OW: I'm one of those Americans. I never use it. If anybody finds it, it's for them to find. I never sit down and say how we're going to have a symbol for some character. They happen automatically, because life is full of symbols. So is art. You can't avoid them; but if you use them, you get into Stanley Kramer Town.

PB: I know you hate to think up titles—

OW: No! I love to think 'em up, but can't! *Citizen Kane* came from George Schaefer—the head of the studio, imagine that! It's a great title. We'd sat around for months trying to think of a name for it. Mankiewicz couldn't, I couldn't, none of the actors—we had a contest on. A secretary came up with one that was so bad I'll never forget it: *A Sea of Upturned Faces*.

PB: Can we talk about Leland's betrayal of Kane?

OW: He didn't betray Kane. Kane betrayed him.

PB: Really?

OW: Because he was not the man he pretended to be.

PB: Yes, but, in a sense, didn't Leland—

OW: I don't think so.

PB: I was going to say something else. Didn't Leland imagine that Kane was one thing and then was disappointed when he wasn't?

OW: Well, it comes to the same thing. If there was any betrayal, it was on Kane's part, because he signed a Declaration of Principles which he never kept.

PB: Then why is there a feeling that Leland is petty and mean to Kane in the scene when he gets drunk?

OW: Because *there* he is—only there, because he's defensive. It's not the big moment. The big moment is when he types the bad notice afterward. That's when he's faithful to himself and to Kane and to everything.

PB: I wonder if that's as simple as your answer is now, because if you were put in a position like that—

OW: I'm not his character. I'm a totally different kind of person from Jed Leland. I'm not a friend of the hero. And he's a born friend of the hero, and the hero turned out not to be one. He's the loyal companion of the great man—and Kane wasn't great; that's the story. So of course he's mean and petty when he's discovered that his great man is empty inside.

PB: Well, maybe one feels that Leland could have afforded to write a good review.

OW: Not and been a man of principle. That Declaration of Principles Kane signed is the key to it. Leland couldn't—no critic can. He's an honest man. Kane is corrupt. I don't think he betrays Kane in any way.

PB: Well, one has an emotional response to Kane in the picture, and I certainly felt that Leland betrays him—I felt that emotionally.

OW: No, he doesn't. You're using the word "betrayal" wrong. He's cruel to him, but he doesn't betray him.

PB: Well, he betrays their friendship, then.

OW: He doesn't. It's Kane who betrayed the friendship. The friendship was based on basic assumptions that Kane hadn't lived up to. I strongly and violently disagree with that. There is no betrayal of Kane. The betrayal is *by* Kane.

PB: Then why do I somewhat dislike Leland?

OW: Because he likes principles more than the man, and he doesn't have the size as a person to love Kane for his faults.

PB: Well, then, there you are.

OW: But that's not betrayal. "Betrayal" is a dead wrong word. He simply doesn't have the humanity, the generosity of spirit, to have been able to endure Kane—

PB: OK, he had a certain meanness of spirit.

OW: That's right. At that moment. He doesn't later, when he talks about him.

PB: He's not very nice about Kane to the reporter.

OW: Not very terrible.

PB: There are certainly ambiguous moments even there.

OW: Not to me. It's very clear how he feels about him. There's no ambiguity in my mind about it. He has an affectionate memory of a man who turned out to be an empty box. That's it. And it's not as bad as you think. Or, if it is, the effect is not what I intended. As author of the film, I regard Leland with enormous affection. I don't see him as a mean person—he's much superior to Bernstein.

PB: Well . . .

OW: He's the only true aristocrat. . . .

PB: In the story?

OW: Yeah. He's talking my language. With all his meanness, you see, he's essentially an aristocrat. I have deep sympathy for him.

PB: Do you think that Thompson, the reporter, is changed by going through the Kane story? Is he altered?

OW: He's not a person. He's a piece of machinery—

PB: To lead you through.

OW: Yes.

PB: Was there any mystery before the Rosebud element? I mean, did you try anything else?

OW: Yes. And there was a scene in a mausoleum that I wrote—it

was a quotation from a poem or something, I can't remember—and Mankiewicz made terrible fun of it. So I believed him and just said, "All right, it's no good." It *might* have been good—I don't remember it, because I was so ashamed from Mankiewicz's violent attack on it.

PB: Why did you begin and end with the No Trespassing sign?

OW: What do you think? Anybody's first guess has got to be right.

PB: A man's life is private.

OW: Is it? That should theoretically be the answer, but it turns out that maybe it is and maybe it isn't. . . .

PB: Is the name Kane a play on Cain?

OW: No, but Mankiewicz got furious when I used that name, because he said that's what people will think. We had a big fight about that.

PB: The original name was Craig.

OW: Yes. And I said I thought Kane was a better name—

PB: Just *because* it was a better name—

OW: Yes. And Mankiewicz made the other point: "They'll think you're punning on Cain" and all that, because we had a big murder scene in the original script. And I said they won't, and he said they will, and so on. I won.

The first report:

HEARST OBJECTS TO WELLES FILM

Mention of RKO in His Press Barred as the Withdrawal of "Citizen Kane" Is Demanded

Studio Head Unmoved

Schaefer Says "No Serious Consideration" Is Given—Actor Denies Biography Intent

—*New York Times*, January 11, 1941

The Hearst press is under strict orders to ignore Welles, except for a series of articles pointing out that he is a menace to American motherhood, freedom of speech and assembly, and the pursuit of happiness.

—*New Yorker*, May 10, 1941

OW: In the original script we had a scene based on a notorious thing Hearst had done which I still cannot repeat for publication. And I cut it out because I thought it hurt the film and wasn't in keeping with Kane's character. If I'd kept it in, I would have had no trouble from Hearst. He wouldn't have dared admit it was him.

PB: Did you shoot the scene?

OW: No, I didn't. I decided against it. If I'd kept it in, I would have bought silence for myself forever. They were really after me. Before *Kane* was released, I was lecturing—I think it was Pittsburgh, some town like that—and a detective came up to me as I was having supper with some friends after the lecture. He said, "Don't go back to your hotel. I'm from police headquarters. I won't give you my name." I said, "Why not?" He said, "I'm just giving you advice." I said, "What are you talking about?" He said, "They've got a fourteen-year-old girl in the closet and two cameramen waiting for you to come in." And of course I would have gone to jail. There would have been no way out of it.

I never went back to the hotel. I just waited till the train in the morning. I've often wondered what happened to the cameramen and the girl waiting all night for me to arrive. But that wasn't Hearst. That was a hatchet man from the local Hearst paper who thought he would advance himself by doing it.

PB: What was your personal reaction to the whole Hearst business?

OW: What do you mean, "personal reaction"?

PB: How did you feel?

OW: He was right! He was dead right. Why not fight? I expected that. I *didn't* expect that everyone would run as scared as they did. And, then, the mistake that Schaefer made was not to believe me when I made the best showmanship suggestion I've ever made, which was that *Citizen Kane* should be run in tents all over America, advertised as "This is the picture that can't run in your local movie house." If we'd done that, we would have made \$5 million with it. But he couldn't—I can see why

not. Still, I *know* that I would be a rich man today if they'd listened to me. Because it didn't play in any major movie houses. It never played in any chain. Ever. Anywhere. It was always in independent houses. And my idea was to make it sound worse and take it to big tents, and they would've come. It would have been great.

PB: Is it true you offered to buy *Kane* from RKO?

OW: Yes. When RKO wouldn't show it in tents, I was willing to. Because I could have made a fortune on it. If they'd only sold it to me—they would have got out from under, and I would have been independently wealthy for the rest of my life—everybody would have been happy. And they wouldn't do it. I could have raised the money easily to buy it. Everybody was willing to buy in on it.

PB: So you had reckoned on Hearst's anger, but you hadn't realized how effective it would be.

OW: Of course not. And I always thought that courageous showmanship could have turned it to good account. Also, I didn't conceal anything. RKO had read the script and they went ahead and put up the money for it. So they then should have been willing to go all the way, theoretically. Although I have no criticism of Schaefer, that's the basic situation. Nothing was slipped over on them.

PB: There was talk about reshooting some scenes, wasn't there?

OW: No, not that I ever heard of. Only to burn it.

PB: Was Schaefer really a partisan?

OW: Oh, he was great. Schaefer was a hero—an absolute hero. He was marvelous with me.

PB: But he got fired afterward.

OW: Not as a result of that. He was fired during *Ambersons*, but as a result of a whole program of pictures. He was basically a New York-based salesman and not a production head. Floyd Odium bought control of RKO and took over. But Schaefer stood by the picture finally; if he hadn't, it might never have opened.

PB: Do you think it was because of Hearst that the picture didn't really do the business it should have?

ground objects and ceilings and all those kind of compositions. Very few people had ever even used a wide-angle lens except for crowd scenes.

PB: But the effect wasn't in terms of story construction?

OW: No, the things that I *valued* didn't seem to have much effect on anybody. But the most obvious kind of visual things, everybody did right away.

PB: A quote from Andrew Sarris: "*Citizen Kane* is still the work that influenced the cinema more profoundly than any American film since the *Birth of a Nation*."

OW: I don't think that's true. Because *Birth of a Nation* had genuine innovations—the close-up, the moving shot, everything—the whole language of film is in it. And people could take that in a simple, direct way. I think *Citizen Kane* has influenced more movies in the last years than it did before. In the early days, all it did was put some ceilings on sets and some deep focus; it changed *set-ups*, which don't mean a thing. But the use of time and all that has only begun now. And it isn't direct, that influence.

I'm not a pro-innovation man. But I am supposed to be an innovator, and I have quietly given myself a few bows for all of these things that it turns out I didn't invent. I *did* invent, but my big inventions were in radio and the theater. Much more than in movies. Nobody knows that. I invented the use of narration in radio.

PB: Yeah.

OW: Which made [Norman] Corwin possible and all that. He never wrote till I started. I'm the man who took the gelatins out of lights in the theater.

PB: And made it just a white light?

OW: Yes. White light. That's the basis of all lighting. That I know I did. But in the movies I'd thought I'd done all these things and I find they've already been done. So it's a good argument in favor of my point that directors shouldn't look at too many pictures.

PB: But the important similarity between the two films is that *Birth of a Nation* summed up all the techniques that had come

OW: It *did* all the business it should have in the theaters it played in. It did capacity business. But it played in no chains, no major theaters.

PB: In other words, it just didn't get the exposure.

OW: That's right. But wherever it played it did tremendous business. Not in England, where it was a disaster. Not in Italy. But in America it did very well wherever it was shown, because of my reputation on radio.

PB: But it couldn't get the bookings because of Hearst.

OW: Nobody would book it—they were scared. Nobody would put it in.

That fear often took devious shapes. Theaters would pay for the film to avoid blacklist suits, but refused actually to play it. This item appeared in the New York Times, September 7, 1941, over three months after Kane's premiere.

The controversial *Citizen Kane*... has been sold to the Fox-West Coast chain, a segment of the National Theatre organization, but it will not be displayed in any of the circuit's 515 theatres on the Pacific Coast, the Mountain States and through the Midwest although they will pay for it. The reason for National's generosity is obscure but whatever the motive, the deal has aroused Orson Welles to new heights of fury....

This week Welles's associates said that if the deal is consummated, the actor-producer will sue RKO, the distributors, and attempt to force the picture's exhibition. In many cities National controls all theatres and in others the picture will be relegated to back-street houses where it will have no standing because it has not been shown in the first run theatres. According to RKO, in the three cities in which it has been shown at popular prices—San Francisco, Denver and Omaha—the film's revenue on opening day exceeded that of *Kitty Foyle* [one of RKO's biggest money-makers].

PB: Did you notice an influence on Hollywood films from *Kane*?

OW: You couldn't mistake it. Everybody started having big fore-

before in silent films. It brought everything to a head, and *Kane* did that, too, for the sound film.

OW: Yes, it summed things up, to a point. But it's not the technical advances that I think are important about *Kane*, it's the use of time and the way people are handled—that kind of thing.

PB: From the technical point of view, the most important thing in *Kane* perhaps is the use of the sound track.

OW: Yeah, but nobody followed that. They can't. They don't know how. That's a particular trick, and it hasn't influenced anybody. They could learn to do it, but they don't. You can't just say, "Now let's do the overlapping thing." But it can be learned very easily. In movies, though, nobody asks anybody anything. In the great days of painters, they used to go and stay in the atelier and see how the man made that brush stroke. But now everybody sees a movie and says, "I can do it." Nobody really wants to learn—except in an academic way, on a theoretical basis.

PB: But in practice—

OW: In practice—just go and find out how Gregory La Cava got that joke across. You can go to him and he'll tell you. But nobody has the chutzpah to just do it.

PB: All right, how do you do it?

OW: It can be taught in about two hours. We need three very good actors and a little exercise in it. I can't explain it, we have to illustrate it.

PB: I made some stabs at it in *Targets*—

OW: And it worked.

PB: No, it was sloppy because you couldn't understand what was being said as well as—

OW: That's the thing—you have to drill them so that the right syllable comes at the right moment. It's exactly like conducting an orchestra. You have to say, "Can't comes in now. Once again." Because the operative word is "can't" and you come in under there. It's very, very mechanical. It's cold as hell, ice cold—exactly like conducting.

PB: When you first went to Hollywood, you were quoted as saying, "If they let me do a second picture, I'm lucky."

OW: I was so right.

PB: You knew that even before you went out there.

OW: Yes.

PB: You've always been aware of what you were getting yourself into.

OW: Damn right.

PB: You had an awareness of your own character.

OW: And of Hollywood.

PB: Well, I mean you within your circumstances. Like you and Hearst, and you and the "War of the Worlds" broadcast. You always seemed to know what you were getting into. That's much more interesting than if you didn't know.

OW: Much more fun. The surprises have been in degree, that's all.

PB: What did you think when you got the Oscar for the best original screenplay?

OW: You're a rat. I always deny that. I always pretend I never got an Oscar.

PB: Well, the picture was nominated in nine categories that year, for director and—

OW: Never mind. You're spoiling my fun.

Orson is not without justification in denying the Oscar he shared with Mankiewicz—it was almost an insult. The Academy Awards are notoriously influenced by sentiment. Welles was the outsider, and not a humble one, either, on whom sanction could be generously bestowed. Envy, jealousy, fear, whatever—the Hollywood majority just didn't like him. In every category, the award went to one of their own. (Even best screenplay was no doubt more a gesture to old-time producer Mankiewicz than an award to Welles.) Best picture was Darryl Zanuck's production of *How Green Was My Valley*, which also won best direction (John Ford's third Oscar), best art direction, and cinematography (Toland was a Hollywood man, but, tinged by Welles, his trend-setting photography was officially ignored). Best actor went to an old favorite, Gary Cooper, for *Howard Hawks's Sergeant York*. I'd [PB] be the last to say these pictures were without merit,

Ford and Hawks being two of my favorite directors; they were certainly at the forefront of the films of that year, but Kane was the film of a decade. The most telling Oscar was for music: Bernard Herrmann was nominated twice that year—for Kane and for *All That Money Can Buy* (another RKO release), and the academy gave him the award—for *All That Money Can Buy*.

When the Oscars were announced (February 26, 1942), Welles was in Rio shooting *It's All True*. On April 5, 1942, he sent his co-winner a belated note:

Dear Mankie:

Here's what I wanted to wire you after the Academy

Dinner:

"You can kiss my half."

I dare to send it through the mails only now I find it possible to enclose a ready-made retort. I don't presume to write your jokes for you, but you ought to like this:

"Dear Orson: You don't know your half from a whole in the ground."

Affectionately,

Orson

Even now, after thirty years, Citizen Kane is like watching a consummate artist grappling for the first time with the intoxication of his found vocation. All his passions—theater, magic, circus, radio, painting, literature—suddenly fused into one. This may explain why to so many people—even those who've seen Welles's other pictures (not so many have, actually)—Kane remains the favorite. It is not his best film—either stylistically or in the depth of its vision—but its aura is the most romantic: not just because he was twenty-five when he made it and strikingly handsome in it, not the content or thrust of the narrative that gives it romance, but the initial courtship of an artist with his art.

No other director discovering the medium was as ready or as mature. The signs were right. So were the circumstances, and they were never the same again: free choice of material, complete control before and during shooting, final word on the cutting, the full financial and technical resources of the best moviemaking facilities in the world. Orson never had all these elements combined on one movie again. (It's also the only film of his to receive, if not exactly decent distribution, at least national prominence and publicity.) Kane, therefore, is the only time

Orson Welles was able to put on the screen exactly what he wanted from every standpoint.

It was late in Guaymas. The sun was down, but there was still an orange glow on the bay. Welles was struck by the beauty of the scene, and we looked at it for some time without speaking. He seemed melancholy. Kane was his first film, and the fact that, despite all the fine work in movies he has done since, people still remember him mainly for that one is not a small source of unhappiness. It is a similar situation in radio. So many of his programs were far better, more inventive and beautiful than the "*War of the Worlds*," but that's the only one people want to talk about. And here we'd spent the whole day on Kane, the one film he least likes to discuss. Still, I chanced a final comment.

PB: It seemed to me that your memory of your mother is reflected in the scenes with Kane's mother.

OW: Not at all. She was so different, you know.

PB: I don't mean the character, but the affection of Kane—

OW: Really no comparison. My mother was very beautiful, very generous, and very tough. She was rather austere with me.

PB: Well, the mother in *Kane* was not a sentimental mother—

OW: It isn't that. There's just not any connection.

PB: It's not so much the mother herself but the emotion of remembering a mother. As in the scene where you meet Dorothy Comingore and tell her you're on a trip in search of your youth, and she has that line, "You know what mothers are like." And you say, in a sad, reflective tone, full of memories, "Yes." It's one of my favorite moments in the picture.

OW: No, Peter, I have no Rosebuds.

PB: But do you have a sentiment for that part of your past?

OW: No. . . . I have no wish to be back there. . . . Just one part of it, maybe. One place. My father lived sometimes in China, and partly in a tiny country hotel he'd bought in a village called Grand Detour, Illinois. It had a population of 130. Formerly it was ten thousand, but then the railroad didn't go through. And there was this hotel which had been built to service the covered wagons on their way west through southern Illinois (which is real Mark Twain country, you know, and people like

Booth Tarkington). My father spent a few months of his year there, entertaining a few friends. They never got a bill. And any legitimate hotel guests who tried to check in had a tough time even getting anyone to answer that bell you banged on the desk. Our servants were all retired or "resting" from show business. A gentleman called Rattlesnake-Oil Emery was handyman. One of the waitresses had done bird calls in a tent show. My father was very fond of people like that.

Well, where I do see some kind of Rosebud, perhaps, is in that world of Grand Detour. A childhood there was like a childhood back in the 1870s. No electric light, horse-drawn buggies—a completely anachronistic, old-fashioned, early-Tarkington, rural kind of life, with a country store that had above it a ballroom with an old dance floor with springs in it, so that folks would feel light on their feet. When I was little, nobody had danced up there for many years, but I used to sneak up at night and dance by moonlight with the dust rising from the floor. . . . Grand Detour was one of those lost worlds, one of those Edens that you get thrown out of. It really was kind of invented by my father. He's the one who kept out the cars and the electric lights. It was one of the "Merrie Englands." Imagine: he smoked his own sausages. You'd wake up in the morning to the sound of the folks in the bake house, and the smells. . . . I feel as though I've had a childhood in the last century from those short summers.

PB: It reminds me of *Ambersons*. You do have a fondness for things of the past, though—

OW: Oh yes. For that Eden people lose. . . . It's a theme that interests me. A nostalgia for the garden—it's a recurring theme in all our civilization.

PB: Kane lost his Eden when the bank took him from his home, and you lost yours—

OW: —in Grand Detour? It was called Grand Detour because the Rock River circles there—it's almost an island. I never even saw the ruins of my father's hotel. It really was a marvelous little corner in time, a kind of forgotten place. . . .

PB: How old were you in those years?

OW: I don't know exactly. It was just before and during my time at Todd. It burned down the year before he died, with all his jade collection in it. And he came out of the fire in his night-shirt after everybody thought that all was lost—came out of the flames with a bird cage and, under his arm, a framed picture of Trixi Friganza. She'd been one of his old girlfriends. . . . Can I go now?

PB: OK.

OW: Good night.