ORSON WELLES LIS 413 Assignment 3

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PART 1.

Introduction to the bibliography

Orson Welles began life as a 'boy genius' who seemed to meet with success in every endeavor; he finished it a singular, if faded, legendary figure of American radio, theater, and film who had created masterpieces in each medium while steadfastly rejecting the conventional, and who had in turn been largely rejected by the American filmmaking industry.

Throughout his life, Welles was a captivating storyteller. He often wove fact with fiction to present a vision of himself tailored to his audience, crafting a theatrical or cinematic version of the truth in which everyone was perfectly cast to play the appropriate supporting role and in which everything that befell him was augmented or cut, adapted and revised – in a word, *edited* – until it fit his vision of what would best command his audience's attention.

The delight that Welles took in such story making, of course, reflects the joy he brought to filmmaking and his other endeavors; but it also results in a number of challenges to the bibliographer. First, should certain works containing Welles's own accounts – interviews and other quotations – be omitted because of concerns with their truthfulness? Second, are there works of biography and criticism that should be emphasized for their accuracy and others to be shunned for their errors? Finally, should the bibliographer even be making these determinations, or are such choices best left to students of Welles's life and work to make for themselves?

The approach chosen for this bibliography is to be, as far as possible, liberal; inclusive rather than judgmental; to worry less about including materials that might have inaccuracies and misrepresentations than about overlooking a work that presents an important – if flawed – view of Welles and his works.

Other challenges for the bibliographer include the problem of addressing Welles's career as an actor and work for radio, which he felt to be among his best work and which has been largely neglected – excepting, of course, his panic-inducing *War of the worlds*.

Biographical overview

Orson Welles was born on May 6, 1915 into an upper middle class family in Kenosha, Wisconsin. His father, Richard ("Dick") Welles, was an inventor and a bit of a dandy: a carefree spirit, a heavy drinker and *raconteur* who preferred a grand, exciting – but comfortable – life. Orson's mother, the former Beatrice Ives, was a woman of great talent and remarkable beauty, a singer and gifted pianist who gave up a promising career to devote herself to her family. Beatrice read to the young Orson, taught him to read at a very early age, and gave him an abiding interest in Shakespeare. Welles later credited much of his early success to the unrelenting praise and encouragement he received from his parents and their friends in his early life; he was, he claimed, brought up in ignorance of any shortcomings he might have and consequently thought that everything he attempted would succeed – and, for a time, it did.

Welles's mother died when he was nine; for the next seven years, Orson moved among several homes, living sometimes with his father, who had been separated from his mother for several years and whose alcoholism was an increasing problem. In the times they were together, the two alternated world travels in high style with life in a large hotel in the Midwest that Dick Welles owned and managed – and in which Orson later claimed to have been introduced by a troupe of resident vaudevillians to the magic of show business.

An early published account of Welles's multifaceted talents appeared in the form of an article titled "Cartoonist, actor, poet and only ten" in the February 26, 1926 issue of the *Madison Journal*. According to Rosenbaum (1992, p. 326), the article "describes some of [Orson Welles's] activities during this period, which include readings, performances, and editing and illustrating the *Indianola Trail*, a camp newspaper."

Educated primarily at home, Orson spent a short time in a public school, which he hated intensely. As a result, he performed poorly and was sent at the age of eleven to the Todd School in Woodstock, Illinois, a private boys' boarding school with a reputation for firmness. To Orson's delight, this turned out to be largely a fiction manufactured for the consumption of wealthy parents, and he soon became active in the school's theater, acting, writing, directing, and designing scenery and costumes.

Orson's father died when he was fifteen, and the next year he reluctantly left the Todd School. To avoid further schooling, he convinced his guardian to send him on a painting tour of Ireland; once there, he settled into a life of leisure, spending freely and hiring a donkey and cart to transport him. Consequently, he soon ran out of money and, unable to convince his guardian to send him more, set out to search for work in the theater.

His expectations were high – and why not, given the praise that had been lavished on him at home and at the Todd School? – and he set his sights first on the renowned Gate Theatre in Dublin. Arriving unannounced, Orson lied about his age and claimed experience in the New York theater. The theater's managers saw through the young American's exaggerated claims but were greatly impressed by his presence and, especially, by his deep, resonating voice. Orson was hired on the spot to be an actor in their company, where he met with some critical success over the next several months, but departed after a falling out with the management. He traveled for a time in Morocco and Spain – earning a tidy sum of money as a pulp writer and making a brief attempt at bullfighting (or so the story goes) – before returning to the Midwest, where a chance encounter with Thornton Wilder in the fall of 1933 led rapidly to a nine-month job with a touring repertory company run by director Guthrie McClintic and his wife, the actress Katharine Cornell. The young producer John Houseman – now remembered primarily for his unforgettable role as a severe law professor in the film and television series *The Paper Chase* – was

impressed by Welles's Tybalt in Romeo and Juliet, and the two struck up a friendship that would lead to a series of collaborations over the coming years.

In early 1936, Houseman brought Welles on board the WPA's Federal Theatre program, which the government had established to provide much-needed employment to actors, playwrights, and technicians thrown out of work by the depression. Houseman had been asked to produce a play for the Federal Theatre's Negro Theatre project, and he and Welles chose *Macbeth* to fit the purpose. Given the task of directing and of adapting the play for an all-Black – and almost entirely amateur – cast, Welles transported the story from Scotland to the wilds of Haiti, turned Shakespeare's witches into practitioners of voodoo, and created a moody, suspenseful nightmare filled with the insistent rhythms of drumbeats, punctuated by violence: a spectacle of evil that shocked, frightened, and delighted its Harlem audience. The play's critical response was mixed – most critics responding more to the social and political implications of an all-Black *Macbeth* than to the production's artistic merits – but it established Welles's name in the New York theater.

After two more successes, Welles and Houseman broke with the Federal Theatre Project to found The Mercury Theatre, which they announced in a prominent 'declaration of principles' in the *New York Times* (Welles and Houseman, 1937). Their first production would be a major achievement in American theater: turning once more to Shakespeare, Welles developed a modern-dress *Julius Caesar* that portrayed Caesar as a fascist dictator and Brutus – played by Welles – as a well-intentioned but ineffectual reformer. On a nearly bare stage, with actors clad in military uniforms, Welles used vertical columns of light to evoke the awesome, terrifying spectacle of the ascendant Nazi party's Nuremberg rallies. Critical reaction to the play was effusive: Welles was proclaimed a genius and the Mercury Theatre hailed as a place "where enthusiasm for acting and boldness in production are to be generously indulged with young actors with minds of their own" (Atkinson, 1937).

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Meanwhile, Welles had already achieved widespread popular acclaim in his role as the title character in the radio mystery series *The shadom*, in which he acted for twelve months from 1937 to 1938. His success in radio led to the creation of the Mercury Theatre of the Air, with which Welles produced two years of important work as a director and actor at CBS Radio beginning in July 1938 with *First Person Singular*, a weekly dramatic series directed and narrated by Welles. In this series, as in his later work in radio, Welles rejected the overreliance on music and sound effects that was then favored, choosing instead to emphasize narrative and freeing listeners' imaginations in the process. The success of this venture led to the acquiring of a sponsor, after which the series became known as the *Campbell Playhouse*.

Imaginations certainly ran wild on October 30, 1938, during the *Campbell Playhouse* production of H. G. Wells's *War of the worlds*. The broadcast – which Welles framed as a series of news reports interrupting a program of dance music – caused panic across the nation and brought Welles even further into the spotlight; his newly earned notoriety led him straight to Hollywood.

Welles's first film, *Citizen Kane* – which he made at twenty-six under a studio contract that gave him unheard of control over the film's final form – is often cited as the greatest of American films – or, indeed, of all films. Because of his reputation as a 'boy genius' – a label that Welles had already come to despise – Welles had been able to sign a contract with RKO giving him complete authorial control over the film, something unheard of in the Hollywood of that time (or any since), when most films made in the studio system were collaborative 'team efforts' and grand authorial visions were frowned upon.

The story of the life of Charles Foster Kane – a self-made newspaper magnate who abuses his power, loses his friends, and ends his life alone and full of regret – had been based in part on the life of William Randolph Hearst. Learning of the film's story, the powerful Hearst forbade his newspapers to mention the film and nearly succeeded in preventing the film's release. In the end, pressure from Hearst limited the film's release and – although some reviews were wildly enthusiastic – the film was not the great success that the studio had expected from its new star actor and director.

Welles's follow-up to *Citizen Kane* was an adaptation of Booth Tarkington's novel *The magnificent Ambersons*, a uniquely American tale of the passing of the horse and buggy era and the rise of crass industrialism. For Welles, this was a tale of the lost illusions of a 'golden' age and the self-destruction of a great family. For all the care that Welles and his collaborators put into it, the film suffered when, immediately after shooting was completed, Welles left for Brazil to produce a series of films for the U.S. government that were intended to promote official friendship with South American governments at a time when the nation's involvement in World War II was imminent. Welles – fully occupied in filming in Rio de Janeiro – was unable to supervise the editing of the film himself. Instead, the studio – mystified by a hasty preliminary cut of the film and unsatisfied with the detailed editing instructions that Welles cabled them – introduced new footage that included an entirely incongruous happy ending.

The debacle of *The magnificent Ambersons*, which to Welles was to have been a greater masterpiece than *Citizen Kane*, led to the rapid decline of his career – though not of his artistry. In the years that followed, he would produce three lesser masterpieces – *Othello, Touch of evil,* and *Chimes at midnight* – and a handful of other films. To obtain funding for his many movie projects – and to sustain the extravagant living to which he had long been accustomed – he would lend his acting talents to the production of commercials and largely mediocre movies.

Orson Welles died on October 10, 1985, leaving the legacy of a handful of masterpieces and the lost promise of his many unrealized visions.

References

[[]Author unknown]. (1926), Cartoonist, actor, poet and only ten. *Madison Journal*, February 26, 1926.

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Welles, Orson, & Houseman, John. (1937). Plan for a new theatre. *New York Times,* August 29, 1937, drama section p. 1.

PART 2.

This section consists primarily of selected works directed by Welles for radio, theater, and film.

Except as otherwise noted, Welles also wrote the script or screenplay. Acting credits are omitted,

as are his many unfinished projects and works in which he was an uncredited co-writer or co-

director. Credits for producer are omitted except where this responsibility was undertaken by

Welles.

Radio

- 1938 First person singular [series]. Welles served variously as director, producer, actor, and narrator.
- 1938 *Mercury theatre of the air: War of the worlds.* Adapted by Welles from the novel by H. G. Welles. Produced and narrated by Welles.

Theater

- 1936 *Macbeth*. Lafayette and Adelphi Theaters, New York. Adapted by Welles from the Shakespeare play.
- 1937 *The tragical history of Doctor Faustus.* Maxine Elliott Theatre, New York. Adapted by Welles from the Christopher Marlowe play.
- 1937 *The cradle will rock*. Staged in its original form at the Maxine Elliott Venice Theatre, New York. Produced and directed by Welles.
- 1937 Julius Caesar. Mercury Theatre, New York. Adapted by Welles from the Shakespeare play.

Film

- 1941 *Citizen Kane*. Written by Herman Mankiewicz and Welles. Produced by Welles. Distributed by RKO.
- 1942 *The magnificent Ambersons*. Adapted by Welles from the novel by Booth Tarkington. Produced by Welles. Distributed by RKO.

- 1946 *The lady from Shanghai*. Adapted by Welles from the novel *If I die before I wake* by Sherwood King. Distributed by Columbia.
- 1948 *Macbeth*. Adapted by Welles from the Shakespeare play. Produced by Welles. Distributed by Republic.
- 1952 Othello. Adapted by Welles from the Shakespeare play. Produced by Welles. Distributed by United Artists.
- 1955 Mr. Arkadin. Released in the UK as Confidential report. Distributed by Dan Talbot (US), Warner Brothers (UK).
- 1958 *Touch of evil.* Adapted by Welles from the novel *Badge of evil* by Whit Masterson. Distributed by Universal (US), Rank (GB).
- 1962 The trial. Adapted by Welles from the novel Der Prozeß by Franz Kafka. Distributed by Astor (US), BLC/British Lion (UK).
- 1966 Chimes at midnight. Adapted by Welles from the Shakespeare plays Richard II, Henry IV Part I, Henry IV Part II, Henry V, and The merry wives of Windsor. Commentary adapted by Welles from The chronicles of England by Raphael Holinshed. Distributed by Peppercorn-Wormser (US), Planet (UK).

Books

Hill, Roger, & Welles, Orson. (1934). Everybody's Shakespeare. Woodstock, IL: Todd Press.

Plays adapted for use in secondary school productions. Welles contributed stage directions, illustrations, and an introduction.

Archives

Indiana University, Lilly Library. Bloomington, IN. (See http://www.indiana.edu/~liblilly/ for more information about the archive as a whole.)

The Lilly Library is the location of the major Welles archives, housing three collections of primary source material: the Welles Manuscripts Collection, consisting of roughly 20,000 items pertaining to his radio, theater, and film activities and to his personal and political life; the Fanto Manuscripts Collection, containing documents pertaining to the work of Welles and his cameraman George Fanto; and the Weissberger Manuscripts Collection, consisting of legal papers and correspondence of Welles and the Mercury Theatre. Researchers should begin by consulting the overarching *Guide to the Orson Welles Materials in the Lilly Library* – available online at

http://www.indiana.edu/~liblilly/guides/welles/orsonwelles.html – which provides further details on these three collections and refers the reader to other collections at the Lilly Library containing documents related to Welles.

Wisconsin Historical Society Archives. Madison, WI. Welles, Orson (1915-). 3 items.

Boston University, Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center. Boston, MA. Welles, Orson (1915–). 1 linear ft.

Institute on the Federal Theatre Project. Fairfax, VA. *Federal Theatre Project.* 1935–1939. 1100 linear feet (about 250,000 items).

Other archival sources include the John Houseman collection at UCLA, the Gate Theatre collection at Northwestern University, the Museum of Radio and Television in New York, the British Film Institute in London, and the Bibliothèque nationale in Paris.

Scholarly editions

- Carringer, Robert L. (1993). The magnificent Ambersons: a reconstruction. Berkeley: University of California Press. 307p.
- Comito, Terry (Ed.). Touch of evil. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press. 280p.
- France, Richard. (1990). Orson Welles on Shakespeare: the W.P.A. and Mercury Theatre playscripts. New York: Greenwood Press. 297p.
- Holmsten, Brian (Ed.). (2001). The complete War of the worlds: Mars's invasion of Earth from H. G. Wells to Orson Welles. Naperville, IL: Sourcebooks MediaFusion. 201 pages plus audio CD.
- Lyons, Bridget Gellert (Ed.). *Chimes at midnight*. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press. 340p.
- Mankiewicz, Herman J., & Welles, Orson. (1971). Citizen Kane: the shooting script and cutting continuity of the completed film. In Pauline Kael, et al., The Citizen Kane book. Boston: Little, Brown.

Web sites

These sites contain downloadable copies of primary source material.

The Mercury Theatre on the air (http://www.mercurytheatre.info/)

Provides downloads of recordings (in MP3 and/or RealAudio format) of 17 complete surviving episodes of *The Mercury Theatre on the air*, including the *War of the worlds* broadcast; 44 episodes of its successor (*The Campbell playhouse*); the seven-part 1937 adaptation of *Les Misérables* written and directed by Welles and featuring many of the Mercury Theatre cast; and a video excerpt from the 1936 production of *Macbeth*.

The New Deal stage: selections from the Federal Theatre Project, 1935–1939. http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/fedtp/fthome.html

Part of the Library of Congress's American Memory collections. Includes seven playscripts (in the form of scanned images) from Welles's Lafayette Theater production of *Macbeth*. Background information on the Federal Theatre is provided, along with administrative records. A finding aid is included, but additional software is required to read it since it is in EAD (Encoded Archival Description) format.

PART 3.

Biography

Brady, Frank. (1989). Citizen Welles. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 653p.

A conventional biography that describes Welles's life from beginning to end, focusing on the development of Welles's theatrical and cinematic works while steering clear of critical interpretations and speculation on Welles's 'psychology.' Notable for its details on the writing, casting, and production of Welles's finished – and unfinished – films; its treatment of Welles's technical innovations; and the public reception of his works. A chronological listing of selected works – including some unpublished works – is divided in two parts: Welles as director and Welles as actor; each section is further divided by medium (theater, radio, and film).

Higham, Charles. (1985). Orson Welles: the rise and fall of an American genius. New York: St. Martin's Press. 373p.

Presents a very different – but no less riveting – portrait of Welles than Barbara Leaming's bibliography, published later the same year. To Higham – who notably interviewed neighbors, friends, and colleagues of Welles from throughout his life – Welles was a magnificent failed hero, a great artist with a fear of completion who neglected or abandoned projects at the critical moment, a magician of a storyteller who amused and delighted – and cheerfully deceived – his audience. An appendix of unique value lists 57 recordings of Welles, including narrative works Welles performed specifically for the medium as well as recordings of his radio and theater productions. A lengthy bibliography covers works by Welles – including selected newspaper and magazine articles – and several dozen works about Welles and his works. An extensive index with helpful subentries completes the work.

Learning, Barbara. (1985). Orson Welles: a biography. New York: Viking. 578p.

A fascinating portrait of Welles's life and work, drawing heavily on interviews Welles granted. The friendship that developed between Welles and Learning, and the biographer's efforts to tease out details from his friends and colleagues, are playfully explored in prefatory notes to selected chapters. A delightful read for a general audience and a valuable source for scholars looking for Welles's own insights into his work.

- Naremore, James. (1978). *The magic world of Orson Welles*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 339p. A mix of biography and critical interpretation. Places Welles and his work in cultural and political context and analyzes his major films from cinematic, psychological, and philosophical points of view.
- Thomson, David. (1996). *Rosebud: the story of Orson Welles.* New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 460p. Portrays Welles as a brilliant conjurer, a spinner of yarns, betraying and betrayed by others, and ultimately an insecure, self-pitying, and self-destructive failed genius. Sprinkled with coy imagined dialogues between the biographer and his alter ego on Welles's films and life, the book raises important doubts about the truthfulness of many of Welles's anecdotes. Contains a large number of stills and other photographs. Concludes with a filmography, an extensive two-part bibliography of works by and about Welles, a detailed list of specific documents at the University of Indiana's Lilly Library noting pages on which they are quoted in the book, and a well-crafted, detailed index.

Criticism and interpretation

Bazin, André. (1978). Orson Welles: a critical view (Jonathan Rosenbaum, Trans.) New York: Harper & Row. (Original work published 1972.) 138p.

Translation of an updated edition of a book originally published in 1950. Begins with a 27-page introduction by François Truffaut, the important French director, and a

brief profile of Welles by the poet and fellow filmmaker Jean Cocteau. The articles by Bazin are representative of European critical views of Welles's art at a time when his critics in America were focused largely on his personality and the spectacle of his life.

Bogdanovich, Peter. (1961). *The cinema of Orson Welles*. New York: The Museum of Modern Art. 16p.

A very brief work that argues convincingly against the view of Welles, widely held at the time, as a self-destructive genius who, reaching the zenith of his art with *Citizen Kane,* fell into mediocrity and relied almost cynically on style and artifice.

France, Richard. (1977). *The theatre of Orson Welles*. Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press. 212p.

Draws parallels between Welles's work in theater with his films and work in radio, highlighting Welles's innovations in staging, lighting, and sound design. Notable for its detailed descriptions of Mercury Theatre productions – especially *Horse eats hat* – and discussions of how decisions in adapting existing work, and in staging and casting, were made by Welles. Concludes with a list of Welles's major works for theater with complete credits and a 13-page bibliography whose with an extensive listing of contemporaneous reviews.

Gottesman, Ronald (Ed.). (1971). Focus on Citizen Kane. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall. 178p.

A collection of reprinted articles, among them five noteworthy contemporaneous reviews of *Citizen Kane* including one by John O'Hara from *Newsweek* and others from *The New York Times* and *The New Republic*.

Gottesman, Ronald (Ed.). (1976). Focus on Orson Welles. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall. 218p.

A set of articles on Welles and his films, ranging in length from 3 to 26 pages. Motivation for the collection is identified by the editor as homage; accordingly, authors include Peter Bogdanovich, Charlton Heston, and Welles biographers Joseph McBride James Naremore. Notable for two articles on Welles's film techniques – one on his use of light, shadow, space, and mirrors, the other on his use of sound (especially his fondness for overlapping dialogue). Somewhat dated by later scholarship on *The Magnificent Ambersons* and *Touch of evil.*

Heyer, Paul. (2005). *The medium and the magician: Orson Welles, the radio years, 1934–1952.* Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield. 253p.

This slender volume is a mostly chronological account of Welles's early career in radio, including his creation of the Mercury Theater of the Air – whose radio plays included the panic-inducing broadcast of *The War of the worlds* on the evening before Hallowe'en, 1938 – and his appearances in the title role of the popular series *The shadow*. Where other treatments of Welles's impact on radio begin and end with *The war of the worlds*, Heyer sees explores xxx. The book concludes with a selected list of most of Welles's work in radio and a five-page bibliography that also includes more general publications on Welles and his works.

Kael, Pauline. (1971). Raising Kane. In Pauline Kael, et al., *The Citizen Kane book*. Boston: Little, Brown.

Kael advances the theory that Herman Mankiewicz wrote *Citizen Kane* without any significant help from Welles. Though her views were later effectively rebutted by other scholars, the article is important for an understanding of the critical reaction at the time to Welles's work.

McBride, Joseph. (1996). Orson Welles. New York: Da Capo Press. 243p.

A revised, expanded version of McBride's important earlier work of the same title (London: British Film Institute, 1972). Begins with an overview of Welles's career and films, addressing his later, mostly unfinished work and explaining McBride's choice of *Chimes at midnight* as Welles's greatest film. The critical articles that follow treat each of his films in turn, developing a picture of Welles's work as a whole and a convincing refutation of the unfavorable criticism of Welles's post-*Kane* work. An exhaustive filmography includes unreleased and unfinished films, and a concise list of Welles's film performances and a four page selected bibliography complete the work. Readers will be frustrated by the lack of an index, but the division into 15 appropriately titled chapter titles mitigates this minor flaw in a concise, important critical work.

Interviews

Estrin, Mark W. (2002). Orson Welles: interviews. Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi. 228p.

This volume collects selected interviews with Welles and a number of contemporaneous newspaper and magazine articles, some with extended quotes from Welles. The works presented herein were published between 1938 and 1989, and range from 'How to raise a child: the education of Orson Welles, who didn't need it' – a *Saturday Evening Post* article from 1940 – to a 1989 reminiscence by Gore Vidal that appeared in *The New York Review of Books*. Most notable is a wide-ranging 42 page interview with André Bazin and Charles Bitsch previously published in two parts in a 1958 issue of *Cahiers du cinéma* in which Welles goes into the details of the production of his films, explaining how financial constraints affected his style of shooting and editing in later years when funding was difficult to obtain.

Rosenbaum, Jonathan (Ed.). (1992). *This is Orson Welles*. New York: HarperCollins. 533p. An invaluable wealth of detail on Welles's life and work consisting of edited transcripts of extensive, definitive interviews from the late 1960s and early 1970s by Peter Bogdanovich, a critic, collaborator, and friend of Welles who went on to make his own name as director of *Targets, Paper moon,* and *The last picture show*. Interview topics range far and wide, providing insights into Welles's intentions as a filmmaker and in-depth technical discussions of his craft. Interspersed with expository passages, script excerpts, photographs, and quotations relating to the topic being discussed. Rosenbaum has added a supremely useful and detailed 131 page chronology of Welles's life – chronicling most thoroughly the period from 1931 through the early 1970s – and a 34 page section detailing the cuts and other changes made by RKO to Welles's script of *The magnificent Ambersons* while he was in Brazil. A twelve page index, primarily of personal names and the titles of Welles's works, completes this important volume.

PART 4.

Adams, Jeffrey. (2002). Orson Welles's The trial: film noir and the Kafkaesque. *College Literature*, 29, 140–157.

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