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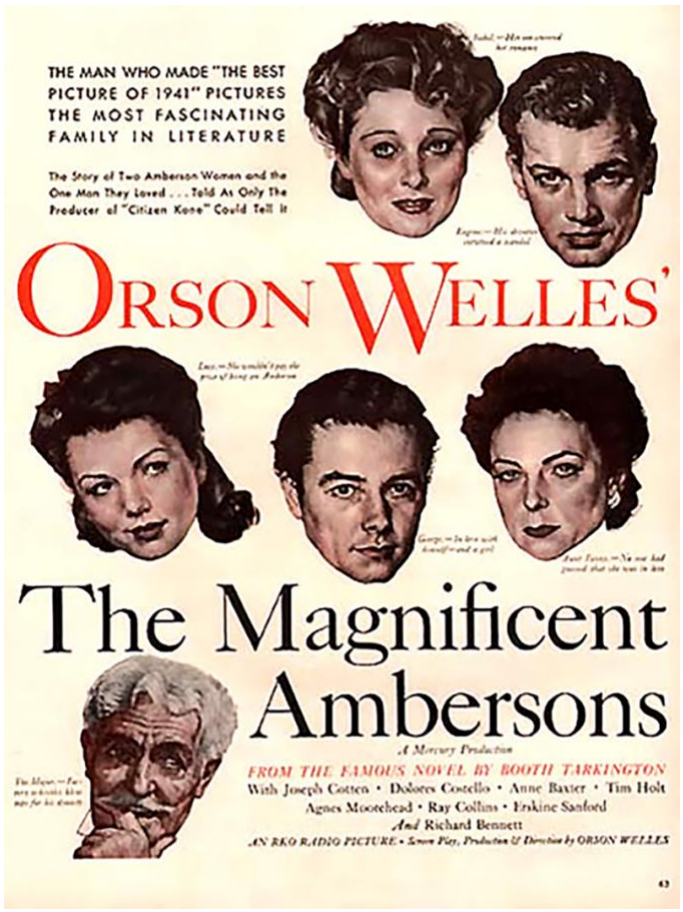



[Vimeo link for **ALL** of Bruce Jackson's and Diane Christian's film introductions and post-film discussions in the virtual BFS]

**[Vimeo link for our introduction to *The Magnificent Ambersons*]**

**[Zoom link for *all* Fall 2021 BFS Tuesday 7:00 PM post-screening discussions:]**
Meeting ID: 925 3527 4384 Passcode: 820766

***The Magnificent Ambersons* (1942)**

**Director** Orson Welles (with additional uncredited sequences by Fred Fleck and Robert Wise)
**Writing** Orson Welles (with uncredited additional scenes by Joseph Cotten and Jack Moss) adapted the script from a novel by Booth Tarkington.
**Producer** Orson Welles
**Cinematography** Stanley Cortez (photography) and Orson Welles
**Music** Bernard Herrmann
**Editing** Robert Wise

The film was nominated for 4 Oscars in 1943 and was selected for the National Film Registry by the National Film Preservation Board, USA, in 1991.

**Cast**
Joseph Cotten...Eugene Morgan
Dolores Costello...Isabel Amberson Minafer
Anne Baxter...Lucy Morgan
Tim Holt…George Minafer
Agnes Moorehead...Fanny Minafer
Ray Collins...Jack Amberson
Erskine Sanford...Roger Bronson
Richard Bennett...Major Amberson
Orson Welles...Narrator (voice)

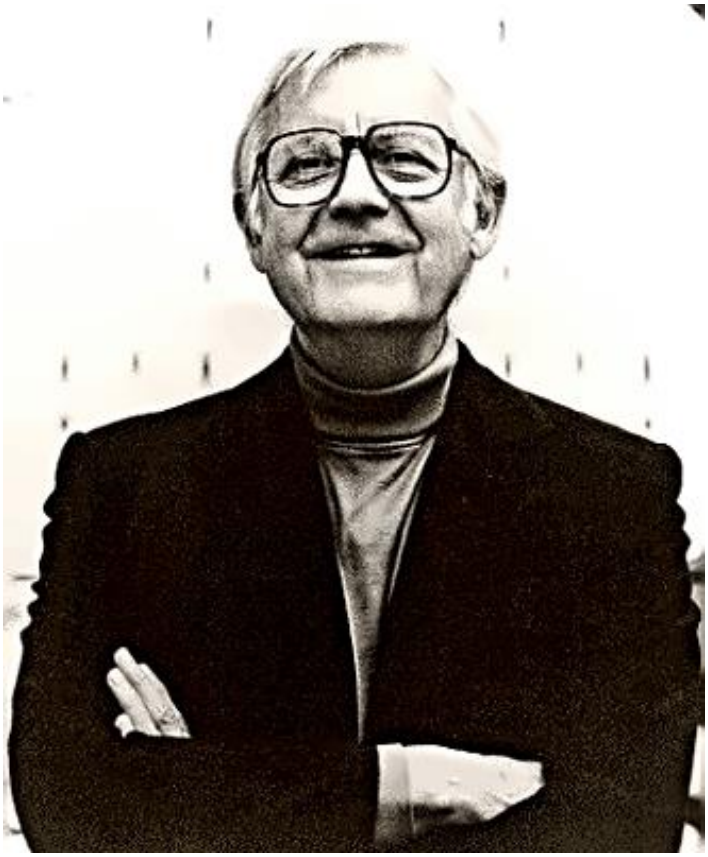
**Orson Welles** (b. George Orson Welles on May 6, 1915 in Kenosha, Wisconsin—d. October 10, 1985, age 70, Hollywood, California) did it all: actor, director, writer, producer, editor, cinematographer, shill for Gallo Wines. His 1938 radio adaptation of H.G. Wells "War of the Worlds" panicked thousands of listeners. His made his first film *Citizen Kane* (1941), which tops nearly all lists of the world's greatest films, when he was only 25. Despite his reputation as an actor and master filmmaker, he maintained his memberships in the International Brotherhood of Magicians and the Society of American and regularly practiced sleight-of-hand magic in case his career came to an abrupt end. Welles occasionally performed at the annual

conventions of each organization, and was considered by fellow magicians to be extremely accomplished. Laurence Olivier had wanted to cast him as Buckingham in *Richard III* (1955), his film of William Shakespeare's play "Richard III", but gave the role to Ralph Richardson, his oldest friend, because Richardson wanted it. In his autobiography, Olivier says he wishes he had disappointed Richardson and cast Welles instead, as he would have brought an extra element to the screen, an intelligence that would have gone well with the plot element of conspiracy. His bio lists more than 160 acting credits, beginning as Death in the 1934 film *Hearts of Death*. Many of those credits were as "narrator": he was the off-screen voices of the narrator in "Shogun" and Robin Masters in "Magnum P.I." He played some of history's great characters: Cardinal Wolsey in *A Man for All Seasons* (1966), Falstaff in *Chimes at Midnight* (1965), Harry Lime in *The Third Man* (1949), Cesare Borgia in *Prince of Foxes* (1949), and the title role in *Macbeth* (1948). Not one of the 14 films he completed is uninteresting and several are masterpieces including *Citizen Kane* (1941), *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1942), *The Stranger* (1946), *The Lady from Shanghai* (1948), *Macbeth* (1948), *Othello* (1952), *Mr. Arkadin* (1955), *Touch of Evil* (1958), *The Trial* (1962), *Chimes at Midnight* (1965), *The Immortal Story* (1968), *F for Fake* (1973), and *Filming 'Othello'* (1978), He won a lifetime achievement Academy Award 1971, was nominated for *The Magnificent Ambersons* and *Citizen Kane* in 1941 and 1942, won for best writing original screenplay for *Citizen Kane*. The American Film Institute gave him its Life Achievement Award in 1975. Has the distinction of appearing in both the American Film Institute and British Film Institute's #1 movie. For AFI, it was *Citizen Kane* (1941). For BFI, it was *The Third Man* (1949). Welles shares this distinction with Joseph Cotten, who also starred in both movies. One of only six actors to receive an Academy Award nomination for Best Actor for his first screen appearance. The other five actors are: Paul Muni, Lawrence Tibbett, Alan Arkin, James Dean and Montgomery Clift.

**Booth Tarkington** (b. Newton Booth Tarkington, July 29, 1869, Indianapolis, Indiana—d. May 19, 1946, Indianapolis, Indiana) was an American novelist and dramatist best known for his novels *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1918) and *Alice Adams* (1921). He is one of only four novelists to win the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction more than once, along with William Faulkner, John Updike, and Colson Whitehead.

**Stanley Cortez** (b. November 4, 1908 in New York City, New York—d. December 23, 1997 (age 89) in Hollywood, California) was an American cinematographer (86 credits) who was twice nominated for Oscars. These are some of the films he worked on: *Four Days Wonder* (1936), *Armored Car* (1937), *The Wildcatter* (1937), *I Cover the War!* (1937), *The Lady in the Morgue* (1938), *Personal Secretary* (1938), *Exposed* (1938), *Risky Business* (1939), *They Asked for It* (1939), *The Forgotten Woman* (1939), *Laugh It Off* (1939), *Margie* (1940), *The Black Cat* (1941), *San Antonio Rose* (1941), *A Dangerous Game* (1941), *Badlands of Dakota* (1941), *Moonlight in Hawaii* (1941), *Sealed Lips* (1942), *Eagle Squadron* (1942), *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1942), *The Powers Girl* (1943), *Since You Went Away* (1944), *Let There Be Light* (Documentary) (1946), *Smart Woman* (1948), *The Man on the Eiffel Tower* (1949), *The Admiral Was a Lady* (1950), *Abbott and Costello Meet Captain Kidd* (1952), *Shark River* (1953), *The Diamond Queen* (1953), *Yesterday and Today* (1953), *Dragon's Gold* (1954), *Black Tuesday* (1954), *The Night of the Hunter* (1955), *Man from Del Rio* (1956), *The Three Faces of Eve* (1957), *Thunder in the Sun* (1959), *Dinosaurus!* (1960), *Back Street* (1961), *Shock Corridor* (1963), *The Naked Kiss* (1964), *The Candidate* (1964), *Nightmare in the Sun* (1965), *Young Dillinger* (1965), *The Ghost in the Invisible Bikini* (1966), *Blue* (1968), *The Bridge at*

*Remagen* (1969), *Doomsday Machine* (1972), and *Another Man, Another Chance* (1977).



**Robert Earl Wise** (b. September 10, 1914 in Winchester, IN—d. September 14, 2005, age 91, in Los Angeles, CA) was an American film director, producer, and editor. He won Academy Awards for Best Director and Best Picture for both *West Side Story* (1961) and *The Sound of Music* (1965). He was also nominated for Best Film Editing for *Citizen Kane* (1941) and directed and produced *The Sand Pebbles* (1966), which was nominated for Best Picture. Among his other films are *The Body Snatcher* (1945), *Born to Kill* (1947), *The Set-Up* (1949), *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951), *Destination Gobi* (1953), *This Could Be The Night* (1957), *Run Silent, Run Deep* (1958), *I Want to Live!* (1958), *The Haunting* (1963), *The Andromeda Strain* (1971), *The Hindenburg* (1975) and *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* (1979).

**Bernard Herrmann** (b. June 29, 1911 in New York City, NY—d. December 24, 1975, age 64, in Hollywood, CA) won two Academy Awards in 1977 for Best Music, Original Score (*Taxi Driver*, 1976) and in 1942 for Best Music, Scoring of a Dramatic Picture (*All That Money Can Buy*, 1941). He was also nominated for 3 Academy Awards including, 1977's Best Music—Original Score (*Obsession*, 1976), 1947's Best Music, Scoring of a Dramatic or Comedy Picture (*Anna and the King of Siam*, 1946), and 1942's Best Music, Scoring of a Dramatic Picture (*Citizen Kane*, 1941). He was also nominated for a Grammy in 1977 for Best Album of Original Score Written for a Motion Picture or Television Special (*Taxi Driver*, 1976). Hermann composed for 85 films and TV shows including, 2013 *The Audition* (Short), 2012 *The Man in the Silo*, 1998 *Psycho*, 1976 *Obsession*, 1976 *Taxi Driver*, 1974 *It's Alive*, 1973 *Sisters*, 1968 *The Bride Wore Black*, 1966 *Fahrenheit 451*, 1965 Convoy (TV Series), 1964 *Marnie*, 1959-1963 *The Twilight Zone*, 1963 *Jason and the Argonauts*, 1962 *Cape Fear*, 1962 *Tender Is the Night*, 1961 *Gunsmoke* (TV Series), 1960 *Psycho*, 1959 *Journey to the Center of the Earth*, 1959 *North by Northwest*, 1958 *The 7th Voyage of Sinbad*, 1958 *The Naked and the Dead*, 1958 *Vertigo*, 1957 *A Hatful of Rain*, 1956 *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, 1956 *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*, 1955 *Prince of Players*, 1954 *The Egyptian*, *1953 King of the Khyber Rifles*, 1953 *Beneath the 12-Mile Reef*, 1952 *The Snows of Kilimanjaro*, 1952 *5 Fingers*, 1951 *On Dangerous Ground*, 1951 *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, 1947 *The Ghost and Mrs. Muir*, 1946 *Anna and the King of Siam*,1943 *Jane Eyre*, 1942 *The Magnificent Ambersons*, 1941 *The Devil and Daniel Webster*, 1941 *Citizen Kane.*

**Joseph Cotten** (15 May 1905, Petersburg, Virginia—6 February 1994, Westwood, California, pneumonia) first gained worldwide fame in three Orson Welles films: *Citizen Kane* (1941), *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1942), and *Journey into Fear* (1943), for which Cotten was also credited with the screenplay. He went on to become one of the leading Hollywood actors of the 1940s, appearing in films such as *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943), *Love Letters* (1945), *Duel in the Sun* (1946), *Portrait of Jennie* (1948), *The Third Man* (1949) and *Niagara* (1953). One of his final films was Michael Cimino's *Heaven's Gate* (1980).

**Dolores Costello** (September 17, 1903, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania--March 1, 1979, Fallbrook, California) was an American film actress who achieved her greatest success during the era of silent movies. She

was nicknamed "The Goddess of the Silent Screen." In 1926, following small parts in feature films, she was selected by John Barrymore to star opposite him in *The Sea Beast*, a loose adaptation of Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*. In 1927, she was re-teamed with John Barrymore in *When a Man Loves*, an adaptation of *Manon Lescaut*. In 1928, she co-starred with George O'Brien in *Noah's Ark*, a part-talkie epic directed by Michael Curtiz. Costello spoke with a lisp and found it difficult to make the transition to talking pictures, but after two years of voice coaching she was comfortable speaking before a microphone. One of her early sound film appearances was with her sister Helene in Warner Bros.'s all-star extravaganza, *The Show of Shows* (1929). After taking a break from acting after beginning a family, she resumed her career with films such as *Little Lord Fauntleroy* (1936) and *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1942). She retired permanently from acting following her appearance in *This is the Army* (1943), again under the direction of Michael Curtiz.

**Jaime N. Christley: "Welles, Orson" (*Senses of Cinema*, 2003)**

**Orson Welles: An Incomplete Education**

Here is a man, a great director and a great man, whose obituary has yet to be written, for once and for all. If the old stories are true about ghosts and lost souls hanging around the living for the sake of some unfinished business, Orson Welles might still be with us, rattling chains and wailing for two reasons: because so many of us have misperceptions or an inadequate understanding of the trajectory of his movie career, and because so much of his work—including films that some have said are among his very best—is tied up in a depressing legal quagmire that resulted from a dispute over Welles' estate.

Ghosts don't exist, but there's plenty of wailing to be done in the interest of coming to a better understanding of Welles' legacy—and not just wailing. The importance of campaigning for the release, in any form, of Welles' unseen (1) films cannot be overestimated. As seen in the invaluable documentary, *Orson Welles: The One Man Band* (Vassili Silovic, 1996), there exists an enormous number of fragmented and completed works in the vaults, garages, and closets of Welles' estate. Some seem more fascinating than others, most are informed by the "Welles" we've come to know as cinema-author, while others are unusual in ways that could potentially lead to the modification of our understanding of his career and his image. Just as it would be ridiculous to evaluate the authorship of Jean-Luc Godard or Howard Hawks by focusing strictly on the films that are relevant only to our so-called "official" cultural indicators, like box office receipts, Academy Awards, and festival attendances, so too is it only sensible to realize that informed judgments cannot be made on the shapes, textures, and meanings of Welles' career, if all we have is a very limited pool of evidence.

Here is a limited account of the "unseen cinema" of Orson Welles:

*The Other Side of the Wind* : Welles showed two clips for this at a 1975 American Film Institute gala tribute to him and his most recognizable film work, and there is a third one in the *One Man Band* documentary. It tells the story of a famous, aging Hollywood director named Jake Hannaford (John Huston, then approaching 70) trying to make an ambitious, personal, and complex art film, despite old age, the stifling adulation and skepticism of the press, and the intractable Hollywood apparatus. (One may easily perceive some autobiographical elements in the movie.) This extremely ambitious production, a labor of love comparable to Sergei Eisenstein's unfinished triptych of *Ivan the Terrible* (1945/1958), Jacques

Tati's *Playtime* (1967), Samuel Fuller's *The Big Red One* (1980), or even Welles' own *Don Quixote*, was shot between 1970 and 1976. The available excerpts suggest a bizarre, stunning, and formally radical piece of work, the intricacy of which is hinted at with the fractured editing and overall tenor of *F for Fake* (1973). To what extent Welles was able to edit or arrange his footage, only a few individuals know with any certainty—close friends like Gary Graver and Peter Bogdanovich have made assurances that the work is in nearly presentable form. According to filmmaker Curtis Harrington, also an actor in the movie, "It's all shot, it just needs final editing, sound effects, the final music and the whole production will be finished." Among his unreleased films, this is probably the most eagerly anticipated.

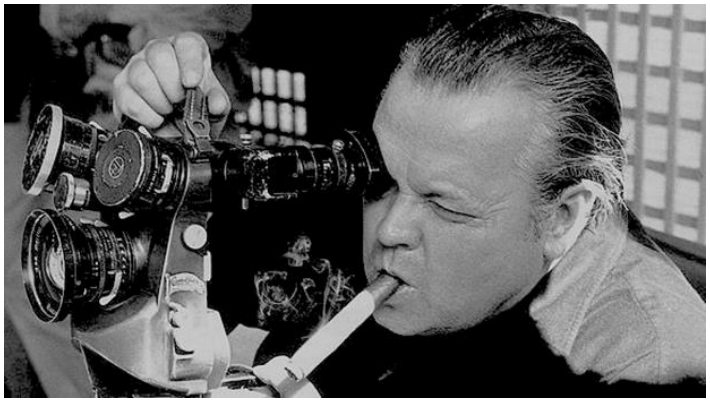
*Filming 'The Trial'*: Welles enjoyed the experience of making *Filming 'Othello'* (1978; for all intents and purposes, his last completed and released feature film) so much that he wanted to continue in the same vein with a similar project focusing on his 1962 Kafka adaptation. Using a 16-millimeter camera and color reversal stock, Graver shot footage of Welles speaking to an audience at the University of Southern California in 1981. The project remained uncompleted when Welles passed away in 1985. The footage of the university talk, cobbled together and attached to the original trailer for *The Trial*, was presented at the Filmmuseum Munich, for a listed running time of 82 minutes.

*The Deep*: The plot of this film, from a novel by Charles Williams, was used for the thriller *Dead Calm* (Phillip Noyce, 1989); a stranger, claiming to have survived a sinking boat, joins a couple on their yacht, but when the husband investigates the visitor's story and discovers the truth, his wife is kidnapped and he's saddled with another survivor, possibly as dangerous as the first. Welles' enthusiasm for the project—one of his few explicitly commercial (while unquestionably independent) ventures—was said to have been on the wane by the time his star, Laurence Harvey, succumbed to stomach cancer in 1973. It's a good bet that Welles foresaw profits from *The Deep* becoming useful in the production of *The Other Side of the Wind*; like that film, *The Deep* is in an almost-complete form which might limit its release prospects, except in the revival and repertory circuits , where incomplete works have a chance to find an audience.

*The Dreamers*: Welles adored Isak Dinesen, whose memoirs would become the basis for the Oscar-winning *Out of Africa* (Sydney Pollack, 1985), and whose novel he adapted as *The Immortal Story* (1968); and he filmed portions of *The Dreamers* piecemeal over three years in the early 1980s. The prevailing interpretation is that Welles shot the scenes (20 minutes in all) as test footage with the thought of re-shooting later, with a better budget. Without more of a context, or having read the story, the fragments remain incoherent as narrative, although they are of interest not only for Welles completists, but also as an example of Welles' talent for generating vivid emotional textures with minimal production values.

*The Merchant of Venice*: This is the strange case. Welles' 1969 movie, his fourth adaptation of Shakespeare's work, was actually completed (for inclusion with the television project, *Orson's Bag*), but two reels of the soundtrack—out of three—were stolen, and have not been recovered. Welles would later film the famous "hath not a Jew eyes" speech with no makeup or staging—this performance, which is spellbinding, along with shards of the original *Merchant*, are featured in the *One Man Band* documentary.

*Don Quixote*: Another strange case, in that this is the only item on the list that has received a theatrical and home video release. But it may as well still be "lost," more lost, perhaps, than the projects we have yet to see. *Don Quixote* probably exceeds *The Other Side of the Wind* as the project to which Welles devoted the most time, love, and passion. He began shooting in 1955 (2) and was still making plans for it in 1985, shortly before his death. The story behind the attempted restoration of *Don Quixote* is as convoluted as the production story of the movie itself—suffice to say that, barring a miracle, we will never have anything remotely approximating the *Don Quixote* that Welles wanted, but, until then, there was in 1992 a repulsive and inept edit carried out by the Spanish filmmaker Jesus (Jess) Franco.



There's a great deal more. The Silovic documentary contains comic performances from a television program called *Orson's Bag*: Welles in a sketch about arrogant British tailors, another one in which he plays multiple roles: a London policeman singing about the "one-man band," the actual one-man band, an ugly stereotype of a Chinese proprietor of a striptease club, and an old woman selling violets and dirty postcards. Welles impersonates Winston Churchill, and rehearses *Moby Dick*. Welles also hosted his own, very short-lived talk show (among his guests: the Muppets, Burt Reynolds, Angie Dickinson). Welles' unrealized, incomplete, unreleased, aborted or otherwise cancelled film projects span the entirety of his motion picture career—even before the first frame of film for *Citizen Kane* (1941) was exposed, even before the infamous *War of the Worlds* radio broadcast, his recorded narration for *The Spanish Earth* (Joris Ivens, 1937) was rejected in favor of one by Ernest Hemingway. Other uncompleted and unrealized works include an ambitious adaptation of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, films of a dozen major literary works, from Shakespeare to *Catch-22* to *Crime and Punishment*, a tale called *The Landru Story* that would eventually be filmed by Chaplin (with a story credit for Welles) as the masterful *Monsieur Verdoux* (1947), and a number of other properties.

In 2002, Showtime, an American cable network, joined forces with Oja Kodar, Welles' companion in the latter part of his life, and performer in many of his films, and Graver, Welles' friend and frequent cinematographer throughout the 1970s and 80s, to get *The Other Side of the Wind* completed and shown. As of August, Beatrice Welles-Smith, Orson's daughter, blocked the effort, brandishing the kind of legal tenacity that plays on the fear that large commercial entities (3) have of long and costly court battles, and smothers the efforts of individuals who don't have the power or the money to wage battles of any kind.

Thankfully, one aspect of his career in movies is satisfactorily documented: the movies he completed, in America or abroad. I could easily regurgitate the well-known stories behind the genesis, production, and reception of *Citizen Kane*, and the disheartening tragedy of the corruption of *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1942), (4) but I would rather assume the reader is at least faintly aware of the place *Kane* has assumed in cinema and cultural history, and concentrate on a few of his less-heralded but often comparable, sometimes superior, later films.

*The Lady from Shanghai* (1948): This macabre, pulpy, and hugely entertaining thriller, a project which Welles took on in the hopes of counterbalancing the failure of the Mercury production of *Around the World* (from the Jules Verne novel), was mangled by Columbia executives who, after bad previews, turned the editing over to Viola Lawrence, in an attempt to "save" the story. The picture is riddled with evidence of studio meddling: artfully composed shots and sequences are interrupted by bizarre close-ups, undoubtedly squeezing the last nickel from each star visage (Rita Hayworth, and also Welles), process shots, and studio fakery. James Naremore, in his description of the film's production and Columbia's alterations, has suggested that a trained eye may easily discern which shots are of Welles' design, and which are "deliberate kitsch." (5) In addition to these changes, the movie

was taken out of Welles' hands before a proper soundtrack could be added, so in place of the temp track, Columbia's composer-for-hire Heinz Roemheld wrote a score which, going by Welles complaints (in the form of a memo to Columbia), did not suit the picture very well. Despite interference, however, the viewer can still count this as 75 percent Welles, as opposed *Ambersons*, which might be 40-50 percent, at best.

*Othello* (1952): Few filmmakers idolized Shakespeare as much as Welles, but he was the first major filmmaker to question the conventions of "faithful" adaptation; (6) his radical attitude towards the Bard's work helped to pave the way for such exciting, recent adaptations/meditations as *King Lear* (Jean-Luc Godard, 1987), *Titus*(Julie Taymor, 1999), and *Hamlet* (Michael Almereyda, 2000). The production of *Othello*—shot, for the most part, "on the fly," over a period of several years, primarily in Morocco and Italy, often only a bit at a time—is indicative of the kind of filmmaking that would characterize all of Welles' work outside the American studio apparatus: making do with nothing, or next to nothing, and still managing to make cinema. Therein, perhaps, lies one facet of Welles' genius: that he could make two of America's greatest films (*Citizen Kane*, *The Magnificent Ambersons*) with an entire Hollywood studio at his disposal, and, as an encore, make several of the world's greatest films with practically no money, very little in the way of sets, and a change of crew with each new continent.

*Mr. Arkadin* (1955; better known to some as *Confidential Report*): Welles' international-jaunt/thriller is a mess, but a brilliant one. Those willing to question *Arkadin*'s footnote status and research the circumstances of the film's history (7) will discover that what's "wrong" with the movie—it is bizarre, fragmented, tawdry, often seemingly the result of incompetence in sound recording, casting, and cutting—is divided into two parts: what isn't really wrong (8) and what isn't really Welles. And to complicate matters further, there are several different versions of the movie in circulation, each different in ways that could significantly affect viewer interpretation.

*The Trial* (1962): This one was derided by François Truffaut, who felt that Welles was doing "a Kafka" in the same rather cold, reverent spirit with which a theater company might do "a Shakespeare." Naremore and Joseph McBride have suggested that Alfred Hitchcock's *The Wrong Man*, which is based on a true story, is a closer "filmic approximation" of Franz Kafka's novel than Welles' direct adaptation. As with Shakespeare, the idea of "faithfulness" might be set to one side, that we might examine the work as it stands, rather than as what we'd like it to be. (Surely this is a necessary step in the evolution of the medium.) *The Trial* remains, for me, among the most pleasurable of Welles' films, perhaps because it is one of the few that can be seen, today, in its original form. The classic expressionist nightmare is given an effective center by Anthony Perkins, an unorthodox Welles hero but a perfect victim for the relentless machine that pursues K. Welles balances long takes and long shots with as many claustrophobic close-ups and rapid, uneasy cuts, imbuing the story with a feeling of loss, isolation, and perhaps freedom, as K's murder becomes imminent.

*Chimes at Midnight* (1966): I neglect to mention Welles' 1948 *Macbeth*, a lesser work (but still fascinating and effective), in favor of one of his greatest works, a daring blend of Shakespeare's *Henry IV* parts one and two, *Richard III*, *Henry V*, and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, and using one of Shakespeare's key sources for the history plays, Holinshed's *Chronicles*. Of primary interest, apart from the film's stunning visual poetry, Welles performance of Falstaff, and the climactic battle sequence, is that it never seemed Welles' intention to be stodgily "faithful" to the text, eliminating his own voice from the creation. *Chimes at Midnight*, like *Othello*, is all about Shakespeare, and all about Welles, simultaneously. His efforts to render Shakespeare's work in filmic terms was considerably more imaginative (9) than Olivier's, whose attempts at

cinema, which are generally favored in mainstream canons, seem limited to "I think Shakespeare would have a close-up here," or the like. Branagh's *Henry V* (1989) is unmistakably influenced by *Chimes at Midnight*, particularly in the mud-encrusted battle scenes, but his subsequent efforts—*Hamlet* (1996) and *Love's Labour Lost* (2000)—reflect the mind of a filmmaker who has chosen either to avoid experimentation, or to mock the efforts of others in the same direction. It's probably unnecessary, here, to mention the countless, anonymous, utilitarian, television productions of Shakespeare's work. *Chimes at Midnight* is everything these films are not: brutish, earthy, messy (not counting Branagh's *Henry V*, which is certainly "earthy," but via Welles, not via Shakespeare), and also fraught with emotion. It may be that what Shakespeare buffs fear most is exactly what Welles accomplishes so beautifully with *Chimes*: he has the effrontery to imagine the Bard's work in a medium other than text, or theatre.

*F for Fake*: This is the Welles movie that people seem to discover on their own, perhaps by accident, and after the discovery, they cannot contain their enthusiasm. A friend of mine recently saw it for the first time, and declared it: "Cinema, Cinema, Cinema!" The project originated as a François Reichenbach documentary on the great art forger Elmyr de Hory, who was being profiled for a biography by Clifford Irving. When an unexpected turn of events revealed that Irving was as much of a trickster as Elmyr (whose name becomes a mantra throughout the film), Welles, who was on the Spanish island of Ibiza at the time, took over the project (10) and created a rather intricate model of the film-essay. The subject, ostensibly, is fakery, but the French title (*Vérités et mensonges*, which in English means "Truths and lies") might dissuade one from approaching the work as being merely a sensationalistic exposé of forgers and charlatans; what emerges is a thoughtful, sometimes sad, sometimes hilarious meditation not just on that subject but also on Welles' life, his career, and the cinema.

*Filming 'Othello'*: Any reply to the accusation that *Filming 'Othello'* is merely a recorded lecture on his 1952 masterpiece must begin with, "Oh, but *what* a lecture." Welles' immense, baritone voice had, through age and endless cigars, begun to sound coarse and gravelly, but his formidable storytelling skills, as well as his insights into the production, and his feelings about his work (and Shakespeare: "Among all dramatists the first. The greatest poet, in terms of sheer accomplishment, very possibly our greatest man. So where does that leave a mere moviemaker? Nowhere.") make this essay-commentary essential viewing. *Filming 'Othello'* could also be counted among Welles' "lost" works, since the estate has repressed all public showings, including a video release.

The greatness of Welles and the "Welles" image, as well as any misgivings we may have about him, seems inseparable from notions of a grand, epic quality in all things: an outsized personality with a voice like a cartoon giant (albeit one capable of subtler textures than most would guess), given to larger-than-life acting roles and grand, theatrical gestures. Stupendous and superlative achievements. Great risks and bold experimentation. Leave it to the hack poet journalist to equate his enormous girth with enormity in self-image, excess in dreaming and plans with no follow-through. He did not suffer from an excess of money, or we might have a few more finished works. It's difficult to imagine that, like Kane, his lasting dream would have been to acquire a warehouse full of great artworks—and the available evidence would seem to hint at the possibility for a few—for no one to look at.

**Luc Sante: "*The Magnificent Ambersons*": Surfaces and Depths" (Criterion Essays, 2018)**

Booth Tarkington's 1918 novel *The Magnificent Ambersons* follows a template established by Honoré de Balzac nearly a century earlier. That is to say, it presents itself explicitly as a case study illustrating a broad socioeconomic phenomenon. Its first chapter, accordingly, is an essay that slides the

story's individual human subjects in sideways. The Ambersons may have been the first family of their town, it argues, but that by no means exempted them from social trends. To the contrary, and despite their lofty pretensions, they were creatures of such trends at least as much as they were creators of them. Orson Welles's 1942 adaptation, remarkably faithful to the novel for most of its course, begins with a cinematic essay that sets the scene in exactly the same way, incorporating large, verbatim chunks of Tarkington's chapter. Such was Welles's confidence—that he could make the film entirely his own even while hewing closely to its source, and that he could extend a literary work audiovisually without betraying its sensibility. He won the bet.

That opening sequence is narrated by Welles in his lightly insinuating, conversational voice, often seeming to suppress a sigh, sometimes murmuring the prose and sometimes pronouncing it, like an epitaph. Vignettes illustrating his points roll by—conveyances come and go ("The faster we're carried, the less time we have to spare"); Joseph Cotten as Eugene Morgan appears in a mirror sporting various hats and coats—and now and then the narration gives way to commentary by local citizens, shot from a low angle, often against a blank sky like heroic proletarians in a photo by Aleksandr Rodchenko. Their remarks, also taken directly from the book, merge into Welles's narration as if they were italicized passages. Welles's hypnotic voice and the lightly ironic distance of Tarkington's prose impart gravity to the ostensible nostalgia and dignity to the rare burst of low comedy. Together, they become the voice of time itself, shepherding viewers through the irregular procession of years.

Time is also expressed by means of a number of other rhetorical devices, whether literary—the stiff wind (which is not in the book) that accompanies revelers through the doors of the Amberson mansion on the night of the grand ball, "the last of the great, long-remembered dances that everybody talked about"—or purely cinematic. The most ostentatious of these is the iris-out that concludes the sequence in which the Amberson sleigh is bested by the Morgan automobile. The iris having by unspoken accord been relegated to the silent cinema, in particular that of D. W. Griffith, its native function as an ellipsis is here less usurped than enhanced by its association with a specific historical period—the decade or two before the First World War, shimmering like a prelapsarian dream by the time of the Second. Welles employs the device in much the same way that he has the characters in that scene sing "The Man Who Broke the Bank at Monte Carlo," a British music-hall number from 1892, in contrast to the novel's use of "The Star-Spangled Banner," which, among other things, lacks period specificity. The matte paintings of the Amberson mansion also function this way. In the scene in which George Minafer, dressed as Bonnie Prince Charlie, is called before his reproving mother and amused grandfather, the obviously two-dimensional house behind them appears as if it were a backdrop in a photographer's studio, an apt setting for Georgie's theatrical poses.

But the film offers a lesson to anyone undertaking to make a period picture: the historical signifiers should be lightly deployed, lest costuming and set dressing squeeze the life out of the movie, leaving a beautiful surface with a hollow core, as has happened many times with even the best-intentioned motion pictures. In *The Magnificent Ambersons,* by contrast, what you primarily recall are the faces. The most significant matters seem to largely occur in the faces of those experiencing them. Isabel's tragic sacrifice is written in Dolores Costello's countenance, Fanny's festering heartbreak in Agnes Moorehead's, Eugene's forbearance and irony in Cotten's, George's arrogance and eventual comeuppance in Tim Holt's—and, of course, Major Amberson's decline takes place in Richard Bennett's face, flickering in the firelight, as you watch. Welles here as elsewhere seldom isolates his faces but likes to display them in theatrical

context, often positioned in front of the camera while the business of life carries on behind them.

The film approaches but doesn't quite equal the deep-focus magic f *Citizen Kane.* Gregg Toland, the earlier film's nonpareil cinematographer, was under contract to MGM, so the shooting of *The Magnificent Ambersons* was done primarily by Stanley Cortez, who was certainly able enough, although Welles's later verdict was that he was "so slow that we took longer to shoot than any picture I've ever done." The picture itself isn't slow, but it is deliberately paced; it is, after all, about the crushing relentlessness of time in its passing. The story takes place within the intersections among a collection of personalities, some of whom are more connected to actuality than others. It presents itself as an objective record of a reality that is largely subjective, although the world outside eventually crashes through. It can feel as if an Edwardian photo album has come to life, page after page of faces and decorous amusements that pretend all is well while bleeding subtext—and then it all goes to hell at the end, as the beautifully printed cartes de visite give way to tawdry fairground snapshots and photo-booth strips.

If the outside world can seem like a fragile construct, the Amberson house's interior is massively physical. For all its Victorian fripperies—flocked velvet wallpaper, stained glass, bronze statuettes on plinths—the house is above all a gigantic armature, its bones the beams and pillars and the extraordinary three-story open staircase, all of it dark-stained hardwood, baronial to all appearances but seemingly inspired by industrial scaffolding. (It comes as no surprise to learn that the set was later employed for producer Val Lewton's horror movies.) The house is the inside of an enormous head—that of the Amberson family, which it represents better than any single human member, all of them weakened by their flaws. The house has no flaws; it is impregnable, until it isn't. The staircase, its central nervous system, is a conveyance to the private sanctums as well as the third-story grand ballroom, and it is also the setting for the contretemps between George and Fanny Minafer during which she employs her envy to fuel his catastrophic hubris. That is when the disease—his, but in a larger way the family's—metastasizes, leading to the eventual death of the house of Amberson.

The surrounding city of Indianapolis and its many changes over the decades appear as hints. The clapboard downtown, shot on RKO's Gower Street lot in Los Angeles, appears to fill out and become less rural, and then, when Isabel Amberson Minafer returns from Europe and is startled by the changes, we are given a fleeting glimpse of brick walls. The landscape becomes truly material only when George takes his final walk back to the Amberson house. The slums and factories we see then are incontrovertible: they were shot by Welles himself with a handheld camera in the streets of Los Angeles. The sequence, brief as it is, is a cold shower of social actuality—it suggests the sorts of urban subjects that Farm Security Administration photographers were shooting at the time the picture was being filmed—quite distinct from the view of life that has preceded it, filtered through the Ambersons' wealth. George can see this reality only when he has lost everything. We'll never be able to see exactly how Welles meant to employ this sudden reality in full context, since almost everything that follows it in the picture as we know it was shot by others, under orders from RKO management.

Given the protracted butchery to which the original film was subjected, the tacked-on final scene is appropriate in its own curdled way, since its happy march down a hospital corridor is redolent—in its lighting and decor no less than in its sentiments and their expression—of any number of B-movie finales

of the time; we've undoubtedly seen that corridor before.

Rather like a runner winning a race on a broken ankle, *The Magnificent Ambersons* has managed to achieve and retain the status of a classic despite its mutilation. Viewers may make it all the way through—and have done so—without knowing or noticing any of it, because Welles's rhythms are so powerful that they survive attempts at sabotage. By means of his deliberate pacing, his recurrent narration, his august surfaces, his extraordinary actors with their measured language and rigorous protocol, he situates the viewer in a time, a place, and a condition of life, managing the kind of deep immersion that is more often accomplished by the slow accretion of prose than by the staccato dynamism of cinema. He steeps us in a culture—beyond our reach but subcutaneously familiar—out of which a story arises, and each illuminates the other. It is "The Fall of the House of Usher," with its gothic effects sublimated into set dressing, as if recounted by Anne Baxter's Lucy Morgan with her mysterious smile, at once wise and feline.

**Geoffrey O'Brien: "Echoes of Tarkington" (Criterion Essays, 2018)**

**I**n his interviews with Peter Bogdanovich published as *This Is Orson Welles,* Welles speaks nostalgically of the time he spent with his father in a tranquil enclave of 1920s Illinois, comparing it to "a childhood back in the 1870s. No electric light, horse-drawn buggies—a completely anachronistic, old-fashioned, early-Tarkington, rural kind of life." "Anachronistic" was the right word. When Welles was an infant, Booth Tarkington had already memorialized the disappearance of that old-fashioned world in a 1918 novel, *The Magnificent Ambersons,* that was also a simmering polemic against the forces of industry and greed that had befouled the one he grew up in.

In 1918, Tarkington came as close as anyone to being America's preeminent writer, a copiously productive novelist and playwright who was both a beloved entertainer and a respected national figure. His nostalgic sketches of an Indiana boyhood in *Penrod* (1914) instantly became part of the culture. As a literary voice of the Midwest, he embodied a newly ascendant regionalism. With *The Turmoil* (1915), the first part of a trilogy centered on the effects of technological change on the life of Indianapolis, he ventured into darker and more ambitious territory. *The Magnificent Ambersons,* its Pulitzer Prize–winning successor, a far superior work, struck an even more mournful note. The novel's force is in its ambivalence. Tarkington must acknowledge that the decline of the Ambersons has as much to do with their own arrogance and shortsightedness as with economic transformations beyond their control, but his sympathies are with them as he describes how their privileged domain at the heart of the city is defiled by the dirt and unbreathable air of industrial pollution, and implicitly by the cruder values of interlopers and immigrants.

In the novel's central drama—the successful effort of the spoiled young heir George Minafer to thwart his mother Isabel's remarriage, to the industrialist Eugene Morgan—youthful pride struggles self-destructively to preserve a world and a set of values that have already disappeared. George's blindness to the effects of his actions, Tarkington suggests, can be forgiven as the result of his upbringing; he is finally the victim of that magnificence he has been raised to revere. Much as the novelist regrets the changes that befall the family, he also recognizes their inevitability. If smoke is a token of industrial blight, it also provides Isabel with a metaphor in her early prescient observation that "the things that we have and that we think are so solid—they're like smoke, and time is like the sky that the smoke disappears into."

Welles omitted that lyrical passage from the screenplay for his 1942 adaptation of Tarkington's novel, but it expresses well the pervasive sorrowfulness that seeps into even the film's most casual moments. It is not hard to surmise that Welles's connection to the novel, which he had already adapted

for radio in 1939, was intensely personal. His father, Richard Welles, had been a friend of Tarkington's, and it was thought in the family that Richard—an inventor who according to Welles was the builder of some of America's earliest automobiles—was the model for the entrepreneur Eugene. In his previous films—*Citizen Kane*, and before that the footage shot to be incorporated into his stage production of *Too Much Johnson*—he had already been drawn to the era of his parents' youth, and in *The Magnificent Ambersons* he would attempt a full-scale re-creation of it.

The sturdy architecture of Tarkington's novel, a belated triumph of a nineteenth-century aesthetic just as a modernist generation of fiction writers was about to come to the fore, was itself one of those seemingly "solid things" vanishing into the smoke of time. To read *Ambersons* is to become acquainted with the spaces the family inhabits, in their initial splendid expansiveness and then in their gradual and inexorable erosion. It is a book about property and its ultimate emotional costs; the novel's enduring effectiveness lies in the precision with which each step of the downward trajectory is charted.

In crafting his adaptation, Welles did not tamper with the arc of that precision. Later, in bringing Shakespeare to the screen, he would work with a far freer hand. He thought nothing of adding a major character to *Macbeth* in 1948, drastically abbreviating and rearranging *Othello* in 1952, or, in *Chimes at Midnight* (1966), creating a new work from elements of five different plays. Likewise, he did not hesitate to tack on a nuclear mushroom cloud to the end of Kafka's *The Trial* in 1962. When it came to *Ambersons*, by contrast, he adhered with remarkable fidelity to his source. Such structural changes as he made (aside from his finally discarded reimagining of the book's ending) were largely a matter of necessary compression, such as leaving out the granular details of Aunt Fanny's unfortunate investments, and omitting a couple of Ambersons whose only real function was to speed along the decline of the family's fortunes.

What is most striking is Welles's faithfulness to the novel's language. The particularities of the way Tarkington's characters talk, as well as the cadences of the omniscient third-person narrator, were evidently essential to Welles's conception of the film. He preserves the slightly dated locutions like necessary evidence, the priceless patina of a lost time, of a piece with the lovingly recreated furniture and fashions and popular amusements. Even if the film dazzles in the first place with its visual audacity—the constantly evolving nuances and surprises in the way we are shown things, the accents of antiquarian style, the changes of frame and texture, the sustained labyrinthine camera movements and abrupt, jarring close-ups—from the start it's the language that is foregrounded. A black screen is the backdrop for Welles's unforgettably sonorous opening narration: "The magnificence of the Ambersons began in 1873. Their splendor lasted throughout all the years that saw their Midland town spread and darken into a city." Only after this, as if the visual were a secondary level, are we shown an American-gothic house and a horse-drawn carriage passing in front of it, which might be a tintype pasted into an album, image following word as if the film were to be an illustrated storybook.

It would be hard to overestimate how much of the film's power resides in its deployment of speech. In recollection, the voices play back indelibly. After enough viewings, they start to feel like part of your own family history: Joseph Cotten musing on the impact of automobiles ("It may be that they won't add to the beauty of the world or the life of men's souls"), Agnes Moorehead leaning back against the stone-cold boiler ("I wouldn't mind if it burned—I wouldn't mind if it burned me, George!"), Ray Collins's Uncle Jack reporting on his sister's health ("I found Isabel as well as usual. Only I'm afraid as usual isn't particularly well"), Richard Bennett as the dying Major Amberson muttering to himself about eternal

questions ("The earth came out of the sun, and we came out of the earth").

No doubt the lines stick in memory in part because of the pointed and beautifully recorded vocal performances of an extraordinary ensemble, but almost every word we hear in the film is by Tarkington. Much would of course be lost in RKO's edit, but even in its surviving form, the film is a stunning demonstration of Welles's genius for pinpointing the most expressive moments in the original text, while letting others go by. Tarkington was a masterful storyteller, but his presentation of character has a certain theatrical flatness; Welles's paring away has the effect of making the characters both more mysterious and more profoundly real. If the novel was already a meditation on a vanished time, the film stands at yet a further remove, probing the surfaces that Tarkington has salvaged to detect whatever further truth has been secreted there. For all his powerful nostalgia, Welles works in a questioning and conflicted spirit. He tells the same story as Tarkington, in the same words, but he ends—or would have ended, if the film had not been taken away from him—in a very different place.

The novel's ending is far from satisfying. It's as if Tarkington—having masterfully managed all the catastrophes of the plot and brought the critically injured George to a hospital room in "comeuppance" for his having shattered the happiness of Isabel and Eugene—wanted to wrap things up as quickly and painlessly as possible. He arranges a quasi-supernatural resolution in which Eugene consults a trance medium and receives an apparent message from Isabel begging him to forgive her son. On the final page, Eugene forgives the repentant George, and thinks once again of Isabel, whose "eyes would look wistful no more." Minus the medium, this comes close to the hasty, reshot scene that actually ended up in the film.

Welles's version of *The Magnificent Ambersons* closed with a melancholy epilogue—a skeptical Cotten described it as "more Chekhov than Tarkington"—that he thought the best thing in the film, in which Eugene visits Fanny in her boardinghouse. What he relates to her of his visit to George corresponds roughly to the narrative of both book and release version, but evidently this was staged in an entirely different mood, with other boarders shuffling about in the background, a raucous comedy record playing on a Victrola, Fanny looking away, lost in her own thoughts, and Eugene, having registered his inability to communicate with her, walking out alone and then driving off into the darkening city, now thick with traffic: a far cry from Tarkington's somewhat half-hearted gesture of redemptive uplift.

**Mike Thomas: "Robert Wise on the *Ambersons*" (the full essay is on line at Wise's site; "In Search of the Lost Ambersons"**

MT One of the surprising things in the Carringer book was his claim that Welles was ordering some drastic cuts of his own.

RW I don't know about that. He wasn't there, he was in Rio. He'd gone down at the request of the State Department to try and keep Brazil on our side during the war and he was happy to go down there and get out of the draft. He was draft age, remember, about 26, and he went down to make a film with the Brazilian filmmakers. And, according to the stories that came back, he was having some parties and a pretty good time.

MT You'd gone down to Miami with him?

RW I took the work print with me and spent three days and nights recording all his narration at the Max Fleischer animation studios. He left at dawn in an old flying boat and that was the last time I saw him for several years.

MT He left you in charge of post-production?

RW He left me and Jack Moss, who was his business manager, in charge. At a certain point the studio became concerned because they had a lot of money tied up in the picture, about a million dollars, which was a big budget in those days. So we went out for some previews with our work print. We'd usually

preview a picture in one of the local theatres that could play separate picture and sound tracks. We'd get a temp track and go out and do a sneak preview.

MT Did you preview "Kane"?

RW No, we didn't on "Kane." There were no previews. But it was standard practice to take a picture out and we took this one to Pomona and the preview was just a disaster. The audience disliked it, they walked out, they were laughing at Aggie Moorehead's character and it was an absolute disaster. So what were we going to do with it? We went back and cut out the scenes with Aggie Moorehead where they were laughing at her over-the-top performance. It was a long picture, as I recall.

MT Two hours and 12 minutes.

RW I thought it was longer. Well, we took it the next time to Pasadena and it played a little better but still not acceptable. We then cut some more and re-arranged things and the third time we took it to Inglewood but we had cut so much out we had continuity problems and needed some new scenes to bridge the gaps. They asked me to direct a scene between George and his mother and that was one of my first directing experiences, that scene between Dolores Costello and Tim Holt in her bedroom. We took it to Long Beach and they sat for it, they didn't walk out, they didn't laugh. And that's the way it went out. We had to get a version that would play for an audience.

MT It was Freddie Fleck who directed the new ending.

RW He was the production manager. The new ending was not that different in content, just staged differently.

MT Let's take a look at the film….Where did they shoot the picture?

RW Down at what we called the "Forty Acres" in Culver City, the RKO Pathe Studios.

MT Here's one of the first cuts. (The ballroom sequence)

RW Yes, this was a long shot, it took him a day or two to line up. It went round and round the ballroom and up the stairs and it just went on forever. People were coming and going and picking up other people's dialogue and it didn't hold, it just didn't work so we had to make some cuts and put in some dissolves over the cuts.

MT Welles called it " the greatest tour de force of my career." The complaint is that in cutting the long single take you destroyed the spatial relationship of the layout of the mansion.

RW All that's fine but the thing was very long. The pace dragged and we had to pick it up.

MT It was done in a horseshoe pattern, with the camera moving backwards?

RW It was going all over the ballroom in one take. It took him three days overall; a couple of days to get the lighting, the blocking, rehearsing the actors, getting the timing right, then one day of shooting.

MT These sets are amazing. Did you know the art direction was nominated for an Oscar? In fact, the film received four Oscar nominations, including Best Picture, Best Supporting Actress, and Best Cinematography.

RW The picture wasn't destroyed then, if it was nominated for Best Picture, was it? I have always said that despite what Orson said, since it has come down through the years as a classic in its own right , that means we didn't destroy it.

MT A lot of people actually prefer it to "Kane."

RW They're out of their minds. But it is an outstanding film.

MT I find it has more heart than "Kane," there's an elegiac quality that is very touching.

RW I remember being so moved by the radio version of it on the Campbell's Soup Hour. We used to listen to it on Sunday nights on the radio, that was my first exposure to Orson. I was so moved by it, I was really excited when I learned that it was going to be the follow up to "Kane." I thought, this will show those people who thought "Kane" didn't have any heart, this will be Orson's chance to prove that he has heart. But he didn't get it in the film.

(Eugene and Isabel dance alone on a deserted ballroom floor)

MT This scene is one of the loveliest in the entire film, yet Welles' cable of March 27, 1942 proposed cutting it.

RW Really? I don't remember that.

MT He sure loved putting the camera on the floor, didn't he?

RW He got that from John Ford.

(The long scene in the upstairs hallway)

MT It must be easy for an editor when there are long takes like this. Did he ever have a second camera shoot back up?

RW Very rarely.

(The sleigh ride scene)

MT I read that you had to re-record all the sound on this on the roof of an RKO building.

RW This was all shot in a big freezer downtown, a refrigeration plant, real snow. But the sound was no good, it was hollow. So we got the actors on the roof of the recording building at RKO and I was downstairs watching the picture on the screen as they dubbed their lines.

MT Didn't he have all the actors originally pre-record all their dialogue onto records?

RW When he finished "Kane" I had to fight Orson like hell to get him in to re-record some of his lines. I thought, because of his radio background, he'd be marvelous, and he was. He was a master at it. Well, when it came time to do "Ambersons" he decided to get the whole cast together and record the dialogue and when it came time to shoot the picture he'd have the cast mouth their lines while the record played. Orson was such an extremist. He tried it one morning and it was chaos. But at least he had the advantage of rehearsing the whole picture.

MT I've wondered if he liked to go with these long takes because of his theatre background?

RW Not just theatre background. If you have a good scene for the actors to play you don't need to have a lot of cutting. Normally, you'd shoot some close-ups. He might have shot them and then decided he didn't need to use them.

MT Now, in this sequence, when George walks to the window , there's a dissolve. But originally, the scene continued as he runs outside as he realizes apartments are being built on the Amberson lot and starts arguing with Uncle Jack in the rain.

RW I never in all my years heard so many laughs in all the wrong places. Now, this scene in the automobile factory, we were shooting right after Pearl Harbor.

MT Now, here's the scene you directed...(George reads his mother's letter and visits her in the bedroom) and there's another scene on the porch that was cut .

RW Those porch scenes were long and didn't really add much.

MT I read that one of the reasons the first preview didn't play well is because they ran the film after a musical, "The Fleet's In."

RW I don't think that had anything to do with it. There were problems with the film.

MT I also read where the preview cards were something like 72 negative to 53 positive.

RW And those were from the people who stayed! A lot of them had already walked out of the picture by the time it was over. I've always maintained that in its original version, "Ambersons" may have been a greater work of art, but we had to get the film so it would hold people's attention.

(Major Amberson staring into the fireplace contemplating his death)

RW I shot this scene with this old guy. All I had to do was to get him to remember his lines. Orson lined it up and everything, and rehearsed it with him, but he couldn't remember the dialogue. Orson was standing off camera and whispering the lines to him and finally, he had to go away and do something, line up another shot or something, and he asked me to do the scene. It didn't take any direction. I just shot it when he finally remembered his lines.

MT It's one of the most haunted, moving scenes I've ever seen. Now, here in the train station scene which you trimmed, I understand there was a shot of George lending Uncle Jack money. I'm surprised you cut that, since it shows the decent side of George and softens his character.

RW They were originally sitting down as I recall...(Looks at still photo in Carringer book) I think we felt that we needed to pick it up and move it along.

MT Where'd they shoot it?

RW On the set. It's diminished perspective.

MT Now here's the boiler scene that was re-shot by Jack Moss.

RW I don't remember Jack Moss shooting anything. I re-shot the one scene and Freddie Fleck did the different ending but I don't recall Jack Moss ever shooting anything. He was Orson's business manager, he wasn't a filmmaker.

MT All I've read says Moss re-shot this scene because there was so much audience derision at Moorehead's hysterics.

RW That was true, she was over the top. And that's the director's responsibility to keep the actors from going overboard. And it just wasn't this scene but all the way through the film. Whenever she'd appear, they'd start laughing and making fun of her.

MT Now, we come to the walk home. I guess there was originally a long P.O.V. tracking shot through the deserted mansion.

RW Yes, there was. I remember, he spent quite a bit of time on it.

MT Now, of course comes the infamous re-shot ending. It's not fashionable to say so, but I actually think this scene works .

RW So do I.

MT It may not have the same visual style as Welles but the dialogue is straight out of the book, the radio show, and the original ending in the script.

RW Really?

MT That's what so fascinated me when I read the original ending in the Academy Library and discovered it was almost verbatim to the new ending, Eugene telling Fanny that he'd brought Isabel's boy "under shelter" and "that at last I'd been true to my own true love."

RW I've always said that "Kane" was the only project where Welles was truly focused. He always had so many things going, when he was doing "Ambersons," he was doing the Lady Esther radio show, he was producing and acting in "Journey Into Fear", and the getting ready to go to Rio. He simply had too much else going on. He was as much of a genius as anyone I've ever met, but he just didn't have much self-discipline.

MT Why did RKO destroy the footage?

RW It was standard practice that, after the previews, when you'd come back and take sequences out you'd put them in the vault. About six months after the films were released and if you didn't need to change the film, they'd sell the footage for the silver. But that was nothing particular with "Ambersons." It was just company practice. All this about how we destroyed and mutilated it is nonsense.

MT I've always wondered why there such a strong reaction to this version when it seems so lyrical and poignant.

RW If the film had come out a year before, it would have gotten a completely different reception but at this time people were gearing up to go to war, getting jobs in aircraft factories, the Arsenal of

Democracy and people didn't seem to have the patience to care about the problems of Georgie Amberson. And remember, back then the average picture was 90 minutes, if you had something that went over an hour and a half you were in trouble.

MT Well, like they say, timing is everything.

**Robert Carringer, in *Magnificent Ambersons Reconstructed* (1993) details the changes in the film after Welles left for South America.**

**The Cinephilia & Beyond entry on the film includes the script (with variations), storyboards, long video interviews with Welles and more: "'The Magnificent Ambersons': The Fascinating Story of Orson Welles' Studio-Tainted Masterpiece."**

**COMING UP IN BUFFALO FILM SEMINARS, SPRING 2021, SERIES 42**

**Feb 23 1947 Vittorio de Sica *The Bicycle Thieves***
**Feb 23 1959 Yasujiro Ozu *Floating Weeds***
**March 2 1960 Alfred Hitchcock *Psycho***
**Mach 16 1969 Éric Rohmer *My Night at Maud's***
**March 23 1972 Peter Medak *The Ruling Class***
**March 30 1978 Terrence Malick *Days of Heaven***
**April 6 1981 Karel Reisz *The French Lieutenant's Woman***
**April 13 1989 Spike Lee *Do The Right Thing***
**April 20 1993 Jane Campion *The Piano***
**April 27 2000 Joel and Ethan Coen *O Brother, Where Art Thou?***
**May 4 1982 Ingmar Bergman *Fanny and Alexander***

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