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Hollywood

ART



ORSON WELLES'

Magnificent Shadows



Magnificent Shadows

The disappearance of legacy in Orson Welles

by Nick Zegorac

"I've wasted the greater part of my life looking for money and trying to get money; trying to make my work on this terribly expensive bait box which is a movie. And I've spent too much energy on things that have nothing to do with making a movie. It's about 2% movie making and 98% hustling. It's no way to spend a life."

– Orson Welles

Arguably, the career of Orson Welles is best summarized as a maniac impetus shattered by willful precision in self-destructiveness. No other aspiring filmmaker arriving at the golden foothills of Hollywood circa 1940 was so widely embraced or publicly revered and no other was as pilloried as a failure just a few scant years later.

Initially celebrated with all the fervor of the second coming at RKO, and billed as 'lightning in a bottle,' Welles' meteoric rise to prominence was perhaps doomed to an equally cataclysmic demise. At least, such is the discretion of critical reflections bestowed on Welles' legacy since by film scholars and historians through the luxury of hindsight.

"The word genius was whispered into my ear, the first thing I ever heard, while I was still mewling in my crib," Welles would later explain, ***"So it never occurred to me that I wasn't until middle age."***

As diverse as Welles talents were (actor, director, producer, star) his was a legacy systematically and deliberately dismantled behind the scenes almost from the moment he crossed that threshold into the land of make believe. Within a few short years of his arrival in Hollywood, Welles would be discredited as a fake whose ego was much larger than his talent.





(Previous page: Welles' poses in two costume tests for outfits he briefly wears in Citizen Kane 1941. Above: in a publicity still for Citizen Kane, drawing immediate parallels between Charles Foster Kane and the great 'yellow journalist' William Randolph Hearst. Even though many of the central foibles of Charles Foster Kane were not based on the life of Hearst but rather an amalgam of various figures of political power and wealth, there was enough of Hearst in Kane to warrant the full wrath of the media mogul.)

To what extent Welles contributed his own downfall remains a topic open for discussion. Although there can be little doubt about his imminent foresight and vision for uniqueness and quality on film, when it came to networking the Hollywood community to his advantage, Welles was perhaps ill prepared to deal with the pecking order of moguls. Welles was, after all that has been written and said about the man, a person used to getting things done his own way.

He was born to affluence as George Orson Welles in Kenosha, Wisconsin on May 6, 1915. His father Richard Head Welles was a successful inventor; his mother a skilled concert pianist. Groomed as a child protégée on par with the geniuses of Mozart, Einstein and Proust, Welles' youth became the repository of rumors that quickly filtered into truths within a child's fertile imagination. However, at the age of nine Orson lost his most ardent admirer when his mother died. For the next few years he became a world traveler – a cook's tour that ended at the age of 15 when his father died of acute alcoholism.

Becoming the young charge of prominent Chicago physician Dr. Maurice Bernstein in 1931, the rest of Welles' youth remains something of a sporadic mystery in events. He graduated from The Todd School in Woodstock, Illinois, but little is known about his boyhood friends or burgeoning relationships with young women. His early life of privilege was rumored to have included an education on the art of magic from no less an authority than Harry Houdini and an ambitious masterwork that Welles penned on the history of live theater. Yet, formal education seemed to bore him. ***"They teach anything in universities these days,"*** Welles reflected, ***"You can major in mud pies."***

Welles rejected various offers to attend college, choosing instead to take a trip to Ireland. If his mind was intellectually fastidious, his heart and spirit could not be tamed to any one pursuit. After several failed attempts at carving out an acting career on either the London or New York stage, Orson traveled to Morocco - then Spain where he briefly toyed with aspirations of becoming a bull fighter.

On the recommendation of playwrights Thornton Wilder and Alexander Woollcott, Katherine Cornell's prestigious repertory road company agreed to cast Welles in a minor role for his New York debut as **Tybalt** (1934). But Welles' greatest personal triumph from this early period was his involvement with the Federal Theater Project; a depression era work program that was part of the WPA.

Assuming the reigns of an all-black production of Shakespeare's **Macbeth** at the Lafayette Theater in Harlem, Welles inadvertently fell under repeated criticism from William Randolph Hearst's media network for his gauche attempts to impose high brow entertainment on the low brow masses.

"I want to give the audience a hint of a scene," Orson explained, ***"Give them too much and they won't contribute anything themselves. Give them just a suggestion and you get them working with you. That's what gives the theater meaning: when it becomes a social act."***

(Top: denouncing his rival Jim Gettys (Ray Collins) from the political pulpit, Charles Foster Kane (Welles) seems all set to take over the presidency of the United States. Unfortunately, his affair with Susan Alexander (Dorothy Comingore) is about to be made public by his arch rival. Middle: having to playfully contend with an exasperated Walter Thatcher (George Coulouris). Bottom: silently admitting the demise of his second marriage, a failure magnified and reflected over and over again in Xanadu's hall of mirrors.)





Despite open and relentless criticism – and a physical assault on his person one night after rehearsals – Welles’ off Broadway debut of the ‘voodoo’ **Macbeth** achieved a level of notoriety and critical praise that shocked even his most ardent detractors.

Delving head first into his new found professional success and popularity, Welles was often a tyrannical presence in his pursuit of perfectionism. **“I don’t say we all ought to misbehave,”** Welles would later recollect, **“But we ought to look as though we could.”**

His personal life was quite another matter. A fledgling first marriage to Virginia Nicholson was already crumbling by this point. When Welles was not rehearsing a new play or appearing on the radio (as the voice of **The Shadow** and countless other characters for CBS and NBC), or realizing his first dream; the establishment of his own repertory company ‘*The Mercury Players*’ (in 1937), the young zeitgeist drank, ate and womanized to excess.

By most accounts Welles was untamed – with a relentless drive and desire to advance his stature, whatever the emotional, physical or psychological toll. However, at the crux of his debaucheries remained a curious anomaly; that despite Welles’ zest for engaging in conflict with whatever force of nature dared get in his way, he always managed to escape the maelstrom unscathed and, in fact, more celebrated than ever. When asked by his detractors to justify his ego, Welles would simply reply that, **“Nobody who takes on anything big and tough can afford to be modest.”**

In 1938, the second monumental hiccup in Welles’ career catapulted him to instant stardom in a town he had yet to set foot inside. Debuting his version of H.G. Wells’ **War of the Worlds** – ingeniously disguised as legitimate news on his nightly ‘*The Mercury Theatre On The Air*’ radio program, Welles managed to cajole, then terrorize his listening audience under the aegis that the fictionalized events being enacted were actually taking place.

(Top: Welles plans a scene with cinematographer Gregg Tolland near by on the massive Xanadu grand hall set. Middle: framed in a pane of glass with fellow Mercury Players, Joseph Cotten as columnist Jedediah Leland and Everett Sloane (Mr. Bernstein).



Bottom: drafting ‘The Inquirer’s’ set of principles which include bringing the daily news to the people with honesty and integrity. Jedediah keeps Kane’s original draft saying that someday it might be worth something. In the intervening decades, both Kane and the paper he has founded will veer wildly from these high moral ideals and platitudes.)





(Top left and right: Welles hard at work on the set of *The Magnificent Ambersons* 1942. Left: with the cast and crew of the film, shooting the winter confrontation between Isabel (Dolores Costello) and George (Tim Holt).



Bottom: a dejected Fanny (Agnes Moorehead) isolates herself from the rest of the family.)

Despite incredulous testimony and a retraction that Welles was forced to offer the press in an interview, he had known fifteen minutes into the broadcast that his words had generated minor mayhem across the country – and he had relished every minute of that affixed giddy excitement. **“Everybody else who tried that was thrown in jail,”** Orson later mused, **“I got a contract.”**



At the age of 25, Welles was offered unprecedented amenities at RKO Studios, including complete autonomy and free reign to choose any project his heart desired. However, like most deals that seem too good to be true at the start, Welles’ signing with RKO proved to be just that. Dubbed the **“would-be genius”** by gossip columnist (and Hearst stooge) Louella Parsons, Welles initial proposal for an avant garde retelling of Joseph Conrad’s **Heart of Darkness** (as seen entirely from the protagonist’s point of view) was met with indifference first, then outright rejection from studio heads. Welles next suggested **Smiler**

ORSON WELLES'

THE PRODUCER OF
'CITIZEN KANE' TOPS 'THE BEST
PICTURE OF 1941' WITH THE
GREATEST ROMANCE OF 1942!



*A Startlingly Real,
Richly Human Story of the Most
Fascinating Family in Literature*

The Magnificent Ambersons



FROM THE FAMOUS NOVEL BY BOOTH TARKINGTON

With Joseph Cotten • Dolores Costello • Anne Baxter • Tim Holt
Agnes Moorehead • Ray Collins • Erskine Sanford
And Richard Bennett

A Mercury Production . . . Screen Play, Production and Direction by Orson Welles

With A Knife – a British thriller loosely based on Jack the Ripper. Once again, RKO balked at the idea.

Seemingly bored with his stalemate, Welles indulged himself in the superficial pursuits of a celebrity. He began courting Hollywood star, Dolores Del Rio but their romance was short lived. ***“We’re born alone,”*** Welles would later reflect, ***“We live alone. We die alone. Only through our love and friendship can we create the illusion for the moment that we’re not alone.”***

Far more lucrative (and ultimately destructive) was Welles association with screenwriter Herman Mankiewicz whom he had met at a party. The burly gambler/drinker complimented Welles’ own penchant for excess. But Mankiewicz’s thorough disgust for Hollywood bureaucracy in general increasingly exacerbated Welles own growing dissatisfaction with RKO.

Together, Welles and Mankiewicz generated the script that would ultimately become **Citizen Kane** (1941). Infusing their fiction with a thin veneer of truth derived from the life of William Randolph Hearst, Welles and Mankiewicz concocted a scathing portrait of a man crushed beneath the weight of his own appetites. Enscorced in Xanadu, the film’s fictional version of Hearst’s own pleasure palace San Simeon, Kane is a reclusive destructive and shattered individual – a man so lost in his own state of embittered loneliness that he possesses no sense of reality beyond his own finger tips.

That many of the film’s sequences bore little resemblance to Hearst’s actual life circumstances was a moot point. There was enough of Hearst in Kane to infuriate the baron of yellow-journalism to distraction. Mankiewicz’s motives for giving a copy of Kane’s script to actor Charles Lederer, the nephew of Marion Davies, the woman who shared Hearst’s life, remains unclear. There can be little to suggest that he could not have foreseen the impending boycott of the film that was to follow.

(Top: William Randolph Hearst. When asked whether or not the Spanish/American conflict would ever get off the ground, Hearst replied ***“You provide the pictures. I’ll provide the war!”*** Welles paraphrased the line in *Citizen Kane*. Middle left: Hearst gossip columnist Louella Parsons and (middle right) her arch rival, Hedda Hopper. The jealousy, it seems, stemmed directly from the fact that Hopper had had a modestly successful acting career while Parsons had been ensconced by Hearst as a columnist because she tended to share in his enjoyment of blackballing of the rich and famous.

Bottom: Marion Davies became Hearst’s mistress to suit her own acting ambitions. Hearst was connected with virtually all of the movie moguls. MGM eventually bought Davies contract.)





Particularly in Mankiewicz's reconstituted portrait of Davies, *Citizen Kane* created a heartless and dim-witted flaxen alcoholic as Davies' screen substitute – wholly incendiary and far removed from the real life of the woman. Mankiewicz even found room in the script to insert a reference to 'Rosebud,' the affectionate nickname Hearst is rumored to have labeled Davies' private parts. In the film, Rosebud is a sleigh glimpsed at the start of the story, representing the singular object Kane values more than all his worldly riches. The sleigh resurfaces at the end of the film, as auctioneers rummage through Xanadu's treasures and wantonly toss it into an incinerator – presumably, because it seems to have no monetary value.



RKO green lit **Citizen Kane** for approximately \$687,000 – a grand sum for its time. Together with cinematographer, Gregg Tolland, Welles set about envisioning a most ambitious departure in style and design. Even today, the film's deep focus cinematography and stark use of lighting, coupled with minimalist sets, evoke a quiet mood of stark isolation that is unlike anything seen on the screen.

Welles ensured complete secrecy by operating on a closed set. But when Louella Parson's rival gossip queen, Hedda Hopper received the privilege of pre-screening **Kane** (and declared it a masterwork) Parson's demanded like treatment. Her response hardly echoed that of her competitor. Instead, Parson's frantically wired Hearst that he must stop **Kane's** general release at any and all costs.

Hearst's publishing empire then dominated circulation across the United States. He had already made the Hollywood moguls cower with the prospect of making or breaking careers on a whim, using whatever means of intimidation suited him best. A man of finite determination and iron will, Hearst's reputation for getting what he wanted had been well established by the time Parson's edict became his law against **Citizen Kane**. Upon rallying the elite in the film industry to his cause, Hearst demanded that RKO destroy every known print of **Citizen Kane**. MGM's L.B. Mayer reportedly offered the studio \$800,000 for the original camera negative.



(Following the back to back failures of *Citizen Kane* and *The Magnificent Ambersons*, Welles was relegated to acting roles that he willingly accepted while working behind the scenes to put together other film projects. Sadly, most never went beyond the drawing board phase. Top: as Prof. Charles Rankin in *The Stranger* 1946. Middle: one of the last publicity stills taken of Welles at RKO. The studio promptly dispelled Welles' greatness as a myth. Bottom: giving it his all during one of many CBS broadcasts of 'The Shadow.' Welles was blessed with an expansive vocal range.)

Aware of the fervor and gaining momentum in controversy, RKO studio executives held an emergency meeting in New York where Welles vehemently defended his project. Publicly, RKO concurred with Welles and sent the film into general release. Privately, however, the FBI opened a file on Welles' at the behest of Hearst. His newspapers daily condemned the genius of Welles; first as a suspected communist, then as a possible homosexual and sodomite; thoroughly unfounded allegations that nevertheless made RKO wary by association.

Even though **Citizen Kane** was released to acclaim from the New York critics, its circulation was limited thanks to Hearst's pursuant litany of hollow threats to pursue legal action against any theater brave enough to show the film. Nominated for nine Oscars, the film was denied virtually all except one: a win for Best Original Screenplay. The Academy's snub, coupled with RKO's negative losses of \$150,000 confirmed **Citizen Kane** as a commercial failure. The studio quietly withdrew it from circulation. It remained buried and forgotten for nearly a decade.

Disheartened by the film's financial debacle and the way RKO had unceremoniously yanked Kane from circulation without a fight, but still owing the studio another project, Welles' dove headstrong into **The Magnificent Ambersons** (1942) – a \$1 million sordid tale of incestuous familial relations at the turn of the century. An adaptation of Booth Tarkington's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, the film was widely perceived as a 'safe' follow-up to recoup losses incurred by Kane.

The story concerns a handsome though somewhat unpredictable Eugene Morgan (Joseph Cotten) who desires marriage to Isabel Amberson (Dolores Costello); a daughter born to affluence, but who marries stuffy and safe millionaire Wilbur Minafer (Don Dillaway) instead.

(Top: with Joan Fontaine, as the memorable Mr. Rochester in 20th Century-Fox's *Jane Eyre* 1944. Right: as the scheming Cesare Borgia in *The Prince of Foxes* 1949. Despite being blacklisted from directing, Welles was offered a diverse palette of acting opportunities at the various studios. These acting jobs kept him busy but they also frustrated Welles to no end.)





(Above: as the unscrupulous Harry Lime in Carol Reed's *The Third Man* 1949. Despite rumors that Welles had co-directed the movie, the truth was that Welles only worked on the film for a few weeks, behaved like a gentlemen throughout, and allowed Reed to direct him through his performance. The one notable exception and noted contribution that Welles provided for the film was for the speech Harry delivers to his friend, Holly Martins (Joseph Cotten) in which he explains that only struggle and conflict produces greatness, while peace and brotherly love are responsible for 'the cuckoo clock.' Reed encouraged Welles to come up with something memorable for this exchange and he did.)

Their only child, George (Tim Holt), develops into a compulsively obsessive manipulator. Upon Wilbur's death, the mature and now financially successful, Eugene returns to ask for Isabel's hand once again. Resenting their burgeoning romance, George and his Aunt Fanny (Agnes Moorehead) thwart the relationship before tragedy befalls the clan.

The novel had been a haunting sprawling saga peppered in private secrets and public debauchery. However, during postproduction, and at the behest of Nelson Rockefeller, Welles left the United States to begin shooting a documentary for the United States war effort entitled '**It's All True**' with the understanding that all editorial decisions regarding **The Magnificent Ambersons** would be made with his complicity via telegram.

Instead, RKO relieved Welles' staff of the project and promptly installed Robert Wise, who excised over fifty minutes of footage. The final insult was a tack-on upbeat ending – reshot after Welles departure from the project that Welles categorically abhorred and admonished in a litany of memos. The film, incoherent



(Welles' pantheon of later roles capitalized on the brooding personality he made famous in *Citizen Kane*, now turned inward and made disreputable through a series of powerful and often disturbing roles. Above: as Gregory Arkadin in *Mr. Arkadin* 1955.



Right top: as Jonathan Wilk in *Compulsion* 1959. Middle: as the gregarious and demanding Will Varner in *The Long Hot Summer* 1958. Varner is the owner of a prosperous plantation in a backwoods southern community. The dialect Welles employed was so inaudible that director Henry King asked Welles to re-dub his lines after the film had finished shooting. Welles refused. There was no time to hire a voice double so Welles' curious southern grunts remained in tact in the finished film.



Bottom: arguably, of all Welles later film appearances, the one he is best remembered for is that of Harry Lime in *The Third Man* 1949 – a superior post-war thriller shot on location in Vienna and co-produced by David O. Selznick.)

with its re-shot and re-edited continuity was released to the general public without much fanfare. It quietly came and went, failing to recoup its production costs.

As for **'It's All True'**; RKO deemed Welles' rough assembly of silent footage as worthless and scrapped the project. This footage remained undiscovered in their vaults for nearly forty years, mislabeled as 'stock.'

However, not long before Welles' death 314 cans of film, virtually all of the surviving footage was rediscovered and released in 1991 under the same title. The footage provides tempting insight into one of many Welles' butchered masterpieces that might have been. ***"When you are down and out something always turns up"*** Welles would later muse, ***"and it is usually the noses of your friends."***





(Above: as the corrupt police captain, Hank Quinlan, with actors Charlton Heston, Valentin de Vargas and Joseph Calleia in *Touch of Evil* 1958. Right: with Edward G. Robinson and Loretta Young in *The Stranger* 1946.)

It is said of time, that it heals all wounds - perhaps. Certainly, in the case of critical respect for **Citizen Kane** and, to a lesser extent, **The Magnificent Ambersons**, time has revised and exonerated Orson Welles' creative zeal. But for their time, neither film seemed worthy of his preceding reputation as a genius. With back to back flops to his detriment, RKO – no longer interested in Welles' services as a film maker - unceremoniously let it be known throughout the industry that they considered their ex 'boy wonder' a terrible risk.

The snub might have ended any other career, but not Welles'. Although he did suffer under scrutiny from the studio system as an independent film maker from the tarnishing of his reputation, as an actor, Welles was very much in demand.





(Above: happy times on the set of *The Lady from Shanghai* 1947. Left: Star and director switch chairs a moment. In the years following the film's failure in America rumors surfaced that Welles had forced Rita Hayworth to cut and dye her hair as a sort of sadomasochistic revenge on her for their already crumbling marriage. In fact it was Rita who suggested the change. Welles concurred. Known for her featherweight musical/comedy roles, Hayworth's turn as the diabolically wicked Elsa Bannister required a startling new look. It was Columbia Studio boss, Harry Cohn who was outraged by the change. Hayworth – with her trademark red tresses – was the studio's biggest asset of the period. Top right: in Mexico where a lot of the location work was filmed. Worried over the film's escalating budget, Cohn recalled everyone back to the Gower Street studio, forcing Welles and technical effects wizard Rudy Matte to employ process screen work to finish the film.)

20th Century-Fox exploited Welles as the embittered Rochester in their production of **Jane Eyre** (1942) which Welles also co-directed, though he received no credit for his efforts behind the camera. Welles also appeared to reasonably good effect, alongside his Mercury Theater troop in **Journey Into Fear** (1943); a thriller he produced and co-wrote with Joseph Cotten. Although Welles would emphatically deny that he co-directed the film, certain sequences bear his ambitious hallmark for expressionism. A modest hit, Welles eventually dismissed **Journey Into Fear** as merely passable entertainment.

If Welles professional career was mired in various levels of mediocrity, his personal life appeared to be on the upswing. He became smitten with resident love goddess, Rita Hayworth. Welles ambitiously courted Hayworth under the watchful eye of Columbia Studios chief Harry Cohn, who broached their union with minimal trepidation in the hopes that it would fast fizzle. Instead, Welles and Hayworth married on September 7, 1943.

MGM offered Welles an opportunity to direct and costar as the spurious man of mystery in **The Stranger** (1946), typecasting that would stick with similar parts in **Tomorrow Is Forever** (1946) and later, Carol Reed's **The Third Man** (1949). Determined to deliver a commercially viable film on time and under budget, *The Stranger* proved to be Welles' only profitable project. Yet, it is an artistically unsatisfying addition to his film canon and, in hindsight, lacks Welles' inimitable savvy for inventive staging.

At this junction in his career, Welles began dividing his time between Hollywood and New York. His latest Broadway venture was an expensively mounted co-production with producer/showman Michael Todd: **Around the World in Eighty Days**. Unfortunately for the pair, midway through the planning stages Todd ran out of money. Enter Harry Cohn with an offer to secure Welles' services for another thriller along the lines of **The Stranger**. Welles reportedly gambled with Cohn to secure money needed to complete his



(Above: “I told you, you know nothing about wickedness,” Elsa says to Michael in the hall of mirrors finale of *The Lady from Shanghai*. The sequence was meant to cap off a ‘funhouse’ excursion that ends in anything but. Instead, Cohn cut the sequence down to this final showdown in which Elsa and her husband Arthur (Everett Sloane) shoot one another. Welles wanted the sequence to contain only the sound of shattering glass as the bullets ricocheted, but Cohn employed a composer to write sappy music over the final cut. Welles would forever claim that the film was ruined for him in the editing room.)

venture with Todd. In return, Welles agreed to produce, direct and star in ***The Lady from Shanghai*** (1947); a macabre thriller based on the novel *‘If I Die Before I Wake.’* The project began in earnest and mutual respect, but quietly degenerated into confusion and debacle behind the scenes.

Rita Hayworth was cast as Elsa Rosalie Bannister against Welles objections. He had conceived the film as a low budget thriller. However, Hayworth’s participation ensured two criteria – first; that the film would have to be mounted on a more ambitious scale, and – second; that the plot would need to conform to the public’s expectations from a Hayworth Grade-A movie.

On the home front, Hayworth and Welles’ stormy marriage had quietly disintegrated prior to pre-production. Hayworth had hoped that working together would reunite them romantically. To this end, she even allowed Welles to cut and dye her trademark red tresses blonde. When Harry Cohn discovered this alteration he was furious, openly grumbling ***“I’ll never do this again. What’s the point of allowing a man to be director, star and producer? I might as well be janitor!”***

However, Cohn lavished more concern over the film’s spiraling budget and what he perceived to be Welles over indulgences on insignificant aspects of the production. For example, Welles had originally conceived an elaborate funhouse sequence to round out the film’s climactic confrontation between Elsa and Michael (his character). The sequence incorporated some very bizarre visual elements, including a

room entirely constructed of dangling arms and a half decapitated skull with a blonde wig and cigarette vaguely resembling Hayworth's face. These details were supplied by Welles, who actually devised and painted portions of the funhouse set himself. Cohn thought the added expense extremely wasteful.

Welles' rough cut of **The Lady from Shanghai** ran nearly two and a half hours – a last straw in excess that Harry Cohn would simply not tolerate. Relieving Welles of his directorial duties, Cohn had his own editor hack into the film with ruthless indecision, reducing the film's running time to barely 98 minutes and cropping the aforementioned funhouse sequence to a brief 'hall of mirrors' finale. **The Lady from Shanghai** was released to tepid box office response and ruthless reviews. Yet, the legend and myth surrounding **The Lady from Shanghai**, that it *“cost a fortune, lost a fortune and ended Welles' career at any of the major studios”* is quite false.

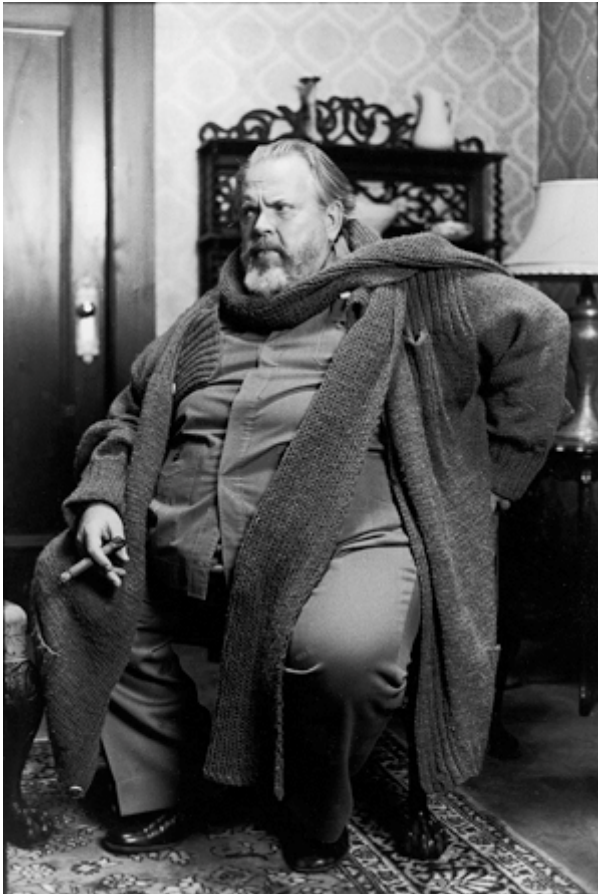
In reality, the film cost no more than any other Rita Hayworth film of the period. While it is true that *The Lady from Shanghai* was not a financial success, in Hollywood the failure did little to curb Welles' popularity as an actor. He appeared in **Othello** (1952), staged a low budget version of **King Lear** (1953) for television, appeared to good effect in the cult classic, **Mr. Arkadin** (1955) and even found time to host and star in an episode of television's **Ford Star Jubilee**.

What is undeniable about **The Lady from Shanghai** is that it proved the final undoing of the Welles/Hayworth union. The couple was divorced on December 1, 1948.

The film also marked the second to last time Welles would be allowed to direct, produce and star in a project of his own choice. In response to his dismissal from the film, Welles would later comment, *“movie directing is the perfect refuge for the mediocre.”*

(The Orson Welles of later years did not resemble the man in his prime, either in physical stature or in terms of the body of work he chose to commit his talents to. Though voice overs, cameos on television and in the movies, commercial endorsements and several long overdue 'life time' tributes were afforded him in his last years, those who knew Welles best recognized that he had sold himself short to keep himself afloat in the waning years of stardom.)





Welles final venture in front of and behind the camera was **Touch of Evil** (1958) for Universal Studios. Yet again, the plague of mediocrity fell upon him. Despite the fact that some of Hollywood's most popular talents (Charlton Heston, Janet Leigh, Akim Tamaroff, Marlene Dietrich and Zsa Zsa Gabor) rallied their considerable talent and time on the film, Welles' preceding reputation as a tyrannical force of nature eventually forced his dismissal during post production. The film was re-edited according the studio's likes and unceremoniously dumped on the market to abysmal public response. Welles Hollywood tenure had officially come to an end.

Appearing sporadically on television, most noticeably as a magician in **Hollywood's Magic Castle** and as a guest on **I Love Lucy**, Welles became something of a public recluse – his weight the brunt of jokes on **The Tonight Show**, his connoisseur's palette exploited for commercial endorsements. **"My doctor told me to stop having intimate dinners for four,"** Welles mused, **"Unless there are three other people."** Throughout the 1950s, Welles made several valiant attempts to launch into independent film production, including an adaptation of **Don Quixote**. But these were either scrapped midway through preproduction or outwardly rejected by the ever changing powers presiding over the front offices in Hollywood.



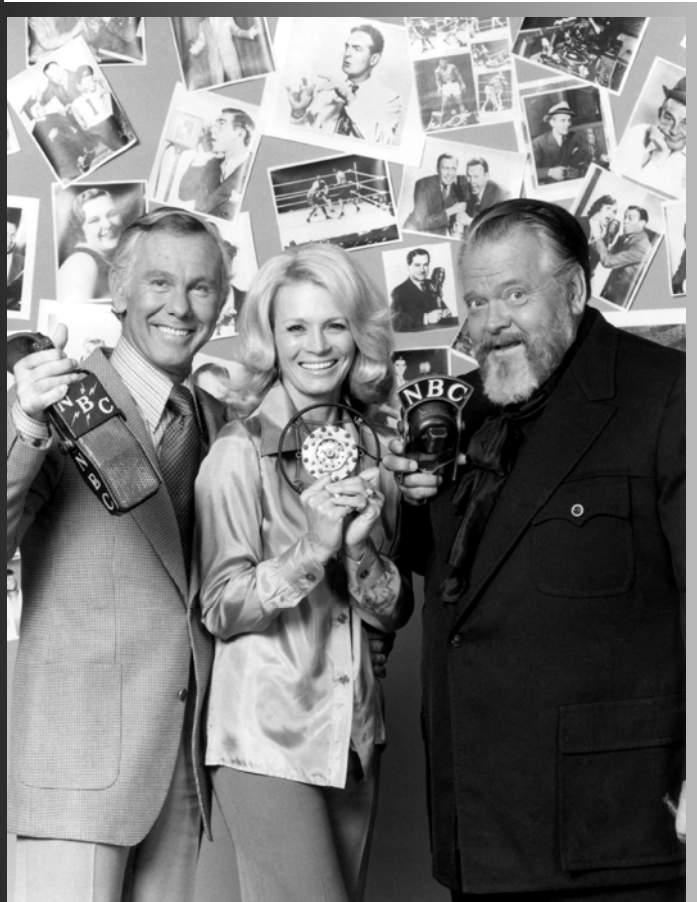
One of Welles last notable film appearances was as Cardinal Wolsey in Fred Zinnemann's Oscar winning, **A Man for All Seasons** (1966) – an all too brief but nevertheless brilliantly realized performance. In 1971 the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences bestowed an honorary Oscar on Welles for 'superlative artistry and versatility in the creation of motion pictures' – an epitaph bitterly at odds with Welles costarring status in Jim Henson's **The Muppet Movie** (1979). Reflecting on his award, Welles admitted, **"Now I am an old Christmas tree, the roots of which have died. They just come along and while the little needles fall off, replace them with medallions."**



In his final decade, Welles increasingly appeared as a narrator on television or as the self-deprecating wit of fine wine and any other product that required a Hollywood relic to endorse it. **"I have an early call tomorrow,"** Welles once told a reporter, **"For a commercial. Dog food, I think. No, I do not eat from the can on camera but I celebrate the contents. Yes, I have fallen that low."**

In his final years, Welles also became one of the first Hollywood alumni to be outspoken against the process of

colorizing black and white movies. **“Keep Ted Turner and his goddamn Crayolas away from my movies!”** he said. He died of a heart attack on October 10, 1985 at age 70.



The Parting Hour

“I passionately hate the idea of being with it. I think an artist has always to be out of step with his time.” – Orson Welles

Inevitably, the legacy of Orson Welles continues to focus on **Citizen Kane** – the film once criticized as too controversial but since praised regularly as the greatest American movie ever made. More recently, **The Magnificent Ambersons** has risen in critical estimation; and there has since been much written to recommend **The Lady from Shanghai** too. Yet, few pause to ponder Welles beyond his films or recall that his genius was further reaching than the art of motion pictures.

To be certain, after conquering the venues of live theater and radio, movies represented a logical extension for Welles' formidable talents in 1940. **“I started at the top,”** Welles would later explain, **“...and worked my way down.”** Kane is a grand experiment; a film truly ahead of its time. Yet, Welles ultimately became the embodiment of greater triumphs that sadly were not allowed to materialize.

In the final analysis, the character of Charles Foster Kane seems to foreshadow the life of Orson Welles more readily and with greater accuracy than it does that of William Randolph Hearst. Kane illustrates, perhaps with divine perversity, how greatness at varying levels of strength, conviction and blind determination can so easily be dismantled with one fell swoop of mediocrity's mighty hand.

“A film is never really any good...” Welles once said **“...unless the camera is an eye in the head of a poet.”** Welles illustrated that point with at least one definitive American film classic.



(Previous page: top – at his heaviest in 1984. Middle: with Tony Curtis and Janet Leigh at a party in 1951. Things don't seem to be going too well. Bottom: signing autographs to adoring Dutch fans in 1952. Welles films were always more popular in Europe than America – particularly with the French new wave movement. This page, top: mugging with the king of late night, Johnny Carson and actress Angie Dickinson in a 1981 tribute to NBC. Bottom: portrait for Macbeth 1948.)