

civilized man whose tragedy it is that he has so far suppressed his most human feelings and continued to serve Mars. He has missed all my main points about the contradictions within Vere and within the marble form of war. Indeed, none of my main themes came through to him. I don't believe it was the fault of my presentation, which is, unlike Melville's in *Billy Budd*, direct and simple. I hope Shanker will reread my essay with more openness to understanding what it actually does say.

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### *Citizen Kane*

To the Editor:

Because Robert L. Carringer's emphasis in his excellent article "Rosebud, Dead or Alive: Narrative and Symbolic Structure in *Citizen Kane*" (PMLA, 91, 1975, 185–93) is thematic, he skirts some of the essential issues raised by the film's relation to modernist narrative organizations which evoke characters or events "through a succession of testimonies" (p. 185). In particular, he fails to account for the remarkable rhetorical function of Rosebud and the closing shots of the film.

The need for a rhetorically complex ending is implicit in the narrative materials. *Citizen Kane*, like other self-conscious narratives that question their own investigative premises, poses a twofold artistic problem. On the one hand, to maintain a thematic coherence for the film, the viewer must always *know* the incompleteness of the inquiry. Yet, on the other hand, to achieve the esthetic satisfaction of a realized whole—and *Citizen Kane* is extraordinarily satisfying—the viewer must *feel* that the film is appropriately over. Naturally, our knowledge at the end is predicated upon what we have felt before. But it is precisely a failure to recognize the final disjunction of feeling and knowledge in the work that has led to the great confusion over its ending.

Thus, the culminating image of knowledge that the weight of the film's structure endorses is Thompson and his fellow journalists wandering among the collected artifacts of Xanadu: a visual metaphor for the ultimate problem of sorting things out. Importantly, though, in its visuals and dialogue, the scene is underplayed. Kane's collection, which, earlier in the film, the March of Time newsreel calls "so big it can never be catalogued or appraised," gains metaphoric resonance, yet the information is imparted with none of the flamboyance or punctuation of the newsreel. However, flamboyance and punctuation enter again as soon as Thompson and his friends leave. With a series of lap dissolves and tracks Welles's camera

moves in to reveal that Kane's old sled is Rosebud. The action is conspicuously exciting for at least three reasons. First, Welles dissolves and tracks with increasing speed. Second, the music increases in intensity and volume. And third, the point of view is no longer that of Thompson or one of the narrators. In short, we get direct, privileged information underscored by its manner of presentation. Thus, although we—along with Thompson—may know that the sled as Rosebud explains very little, that, as Carringer observes, Rosebud is a "red herring," "MacGuffin," and "diversionary tactic" (p. 192), we—now, without Thompson—cannot help feeling satisfaction at the fact that we are the only ones who know enough to discard Rosebud as evidence before it is destroyed. The information imparted in this sequence may be, as Carringer suggests, "allusion through symbolic imagery to the dramatic action" (p. 186). But the important point for our sense of the appropriateness of the ending is not *what* the information is, but *how* it makes us feel. In other words, the significance of Rosebud is not as a symbol or "symbolic imagery," but as a rhetorical ploy to provide a sense of closure for a narrative generated upon epistemological concepts of incompleteness.

The discovery of Rosebud as Kane's sled helps close the narrative structure by resolving the instability upon which the narrative was presumably—but only presumably—based. The final shots also add to the film's shaping, but in a different manner. As for this sequence, Carringer is excellent in pointing out how the closing shots reiterate much of the film's meaning: "return to an exterior view of Xanadu, smoke rising from the chimney, and back down again to the starting point, the fence surrounding Kane's estate and a closeup of a 'No Trespassing' sign. The object of our pursuit dissolves into smoke, its essence unalterably lost with Kane" (p. 191). But these shots do something more important. For, insofar as they only reiterate meaning, they seem baroque, excessive, and needlessly "stylized." What these shots do by reversing the sequence from the beginning of the film is provide a closural frame for the film without undermining its essential ambiguity and incompleteness.

This point can be clarified by a diagram suggested by Barbara Herrnstein Smith's theorizing in *Poetic Closure* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1968):

A B C D  D C B A

This diagram is purely formal inasmuch as its effect arises from the physical nature of the arrangement and not from the symbolic or denotative potential of its elements. Thus, no matter what the rectangle contains, we perceive the total configuration as

closure because a set of formal expectations has been satisfied. We understand that if after A comes B, then after B comes C, and so forth. Based on that perception, we further understand that if after C comes B, then after B comes A. Therefore, by the limits of the set with which we are dealing, there is no place else to go. Hence, closure. In a narrative that, by its nature, is not purely formal, such a formal closure device (here, the reversal of shots and movement) will gain credibility only insofar as it is perceived as related thematically to the rest of the work. To put it differently, our perception of the device's thematic relation to the work diminishes our perception of its "gimmickry." Thus, in *Citizen Kane*, it is important that the opening and closing shots suggest the plot's essential "No Trespassing" theme. But it is more important that in doing so these shots also shape our feeling about the film's structure.

Viewed rhetorically, then, the ending of *Citizen Kane* shows more complexity than Carringer's fine symbolic analysis suggests. In sum, it brilliantly embodies what another great modernist—Henry James—knew: "Really, universally, relations stop nowhere, and the exquisite problem of the artist is eternally but to draw, by a geometry of his own, the circle within which they shall happily appear to do so. He is in the perpetual predicament that the continuity of things is the whole matter, for him, of comedy and tragedy; that this continuity is never, by the space of an instant or an inch, broken, and that, to do anything at all, he has at once intensely to consult and intensely to ignore it" (*The Art of the Novel*, New York: Scribners, 1934, p. 5).

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To the Editor:

Robert L. Carringer's "Rosebud, Dead or Alive: Narrative and Symbolic Structure in *Citizen Kane*" (*PMLA*, 91, 1975, 185-93) is more than a little deceptive in its persistent tendency to ignore the obvious. Too often, the essay demonstrates complexity in the motion picture's structure by disregarding its simplicity.

Carringer's model takes viewers in the wrong direction. He associates the use of multiple points of view to tell a story with "the Modernist period's general preoccupation with the relativism of points of view" (p. 185) and with the idea "that all mediums of transmission are inherently distorting; that there is no such thing as an objective or definitive account of a personality or event; that all mediated (that is, narrated) information is suspect" (p. 186). As examples of works in this mode, he mentions *The Ring and the Book*, *The Sound and the Fury*, and *Rashomon*. His argument mixes one modern artistic

strain with a close cousin: He confuses a style of cubistic portraiture which attempts to manifest inner nature in a series of "objective" external fragments with a narrative mode whose emphasis is the relativity of human perspectives. To borrow some terms from Wylie Sypher's *Rococo to Cubism in Art and Literature*, Carringer would have us see Charles Foster Kane as merely a series of relationships, to observe in the reporter's search a disappearance of the object instead of a revelation of meaning.

While this may be the tendency of pure form in the movie, the content—the dogged literary development of the theme—bespeaks something quite different. In the middle of the picture, Jed Leland quite explicitly analyzes Kane's character: "Love . . . that's why he did everything. That's why he went into politics. . . . He wanted all the voters to love him, too. All he really wanted out of life was love. That's Charlie's story. How he lost it." The story idea has the quality of a cliché. Throughout the movie, Kane is the man who, because he was snatched from the bosom of his family at an early age, searches for some love relationship to take its place but fails to find the emotional understanding and acceptance he seeks. Though fragmenting the narrative, the structure consistently develops this theme. Much of the story concentrates on Kane's marriages and his friendship with Jed Leland—and, as Bernstein tells us, "There were plenty of girls in the early days." These relationships with individuals are complemented and complicated by Kane's relationship to what he likes to imagine as an adoring public. His newspaper career and his political adventure are orchestrations of his affair with his public and it is quite fitting that the happy days in this relationship are manifested in the song and dance number that features young Charlie and his musical fan club. Under Kane's aggressive management, *The Inquirer* cultivates a personal relationship to its readers, its impulses to a crusading honesty always confined within the context of Kane's emotional dramatics (as evidenced by Charlie's "noble gesture" of finishing Leland's negative review).

From the young boy's headline-like cry while sledding—"The Union Forever"—politics and patriotism (perhaps with a notion of togetherness) are part of the dream of being loved again. Thatcher, of course, represents the lovelessness characteristic of a capitalistic enemy of the people. (The cold indifference of the sterile images of his library and the emotionally neuter librarian are echoed ironically in the cavern emptiness of Xanadu.) As Leland discovers, Kane's crusading in politics is also personal in a childishly egotistical manner. Not much is made of his first wife's political association, but the reaction to the wedding announcement hints this may have been an obscure part of her attractiveness for Kane.