

Citizen kane critical study



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Texts continue to be valued long after their composition by virtue of their exploration of contextually pertinent universal concerns. The timelessness of Orson Welles' 1941 feature film *Citizen Kane* lies in its treatment of enduring human flaws, rendering the text worthy of ongoing critical study. By delving into the influences of an erratic persona, love and socioeconomic forces on the complex human psyche, *Citizen Kane* maintains its textual integrity across contexts.

The ideals presented in *Citizen Kane* resonate over time as it explores the complex and chaotic nature of human existence through Kane's fragmented identity. The superficial insistence in the projection room sequence that "Rosebud" is the simple answer to Kane's multifaceted psyche serves as a "thinly-guised satire of Hollywood" (Ebert, 1998) by satirising the emerging prevalence of procedural noir films in the 1940s. Indeed, the reporter Thomson himself "[doesn't] think there's one word that can describe a man's life", with this irony amplifying Kane's contradictory nature as both "a Communist" and "a fascist" in the newsreel by establishing internal conflict as an integral part of human existence. Welles similarly employs an omniscient point of view camera to provide an objective delineation between Kane's private and public lives, thereby highlighting the subjectivity of truth where Thomson's investigations fail to uncover the "private greatness... he kept to himself". As such, the recurring motif of a jigsaw puzzle supports the fragmented insights given by other characters into Kane's enigmatic persona in its reflection of the multidimensional human psyche. Further, the lack of Kane's physical presence as the camera captures his infinitely projected mirror image exposes the extent to which individuality is sacrificed when

striving for social acceptance through conformity. The contradictory perspectives of Kane's true machinations presented by Bernstein and Leland, who respectively describe Kane as "an honest man" and egotistical with "[no] conviction except [himself]", allow audiences to form their own interpretations, and they are thus driven to question the complexity of their own identity.

Citizen Kane further ensures its universal relevance by elucidating the importance of love and acceptance as intrinsic human needs. In the initial childhood scene, the deep focus on a window in the background acts as a barrier to amplify Kane's isolation from his parents, and it is later shut by Mr. Kane to symbolize the permanent untethering of familial bonds in a materialistic, post-depression socioeconomic context. Kane's disassociation extends to his discordant first marriage with Emily despite being "married for love", as is evident in the montage of six scenes at their breakfast table accompanied by waltz music that becomes progressively more dissonant to mirror their disintegrating relationship. Their initial intimate two-shot of a loving couple captured shoulder-to-shoulder deteriorates to them being at two extremes of a long table covered in an expansive tablecloth, with this mis-en-scene emphasizing the disconnection which emerges from materialism. Further, Kane's looming figure as he strikes his kneeling second wife Susan highlights his absolute control over her, with Welles using a parallel scene of a band cheerfully playing "It can't be love" to ironically portray the missing love Kane yet again desires but is unable to retain due to his focus on monetary motives. Kane's disregard of the innate human desire for companionship is explicated where in response to Leland's exclamation

that he “ just didn’t have any [love] to give”, Carringer (1976) affirms that “[Kane] has concentrated on material values to the exclusion of human relationships”. Similarly, Kane’s authoritative tone whilst exclaiming “... you can’t do this to me” as Susan leaves him encapsulates his limited ability to express emotion, with this characterization allowing postmodern audiences to appreciate the significance of the enduring bonds required to sustain meaningful relationships.

In its reassertion of humanity’s innate desire for acceptance, Citizen Kane also reveals the corruption evoked by economic pressures in a context of increasing industrialization following the Great Depression. Through Kane’s corruption from his unyielding pursuit of wealth and power to satisfy the American Dream as “ America’s Kublai Khan”, Welles metaphorically cautions us against the self-destruction that may accompany a lust for social conformity. As such, Kane’s sarcastic description of the “ Declaration of Principles” as “ an antique” prior to ripping it up stresses how his development of ‘ yellow journalism’ corrodes the credibility of his earlier trustworthiness, with the implications seen in our present society where a culture of sensationalism has been fostered. Further, when Kane is at the peak of his power in ‘ The Inquirer’ office, a low camera angle shot alongside the intentionally low ceiling of the room stages Kane as “ very imposing, almost godlike” from the perspective of critic Bryan Kennedy (2008), “ to amplify the extensive social influence of the media”. As he undergoes a transformation from the idealistic “ champion of the underprivileged” to a corrupt and powerless old man, his increasingly diminished presence portrays the emotional decline which may stem from the excessive lust for

financial fulfillment. This initially strong salience is reduced significantly in the frame composition within the cavernous Xanadu, where he appears dwarfed by the sheer depth of a gaping fireplace to reflect a diminished sense of self as a further consequence of such pursuits. Moreover, Kane compensates for his emotional void through an obsessive collection of statues, with a transitioned oblique pan-over shot of this “the loot of the world” showcasing the extent to which his life becomes defined by these possessions at the expense of companionship. Welles thereby exposes the psychological ramifications of succumbing to economic pressures, establishing a timeless criticism of opulent pursuits and the corruptive influence of power.

The critical study of Citizen Kane has provided me with an enriched insight into human flaws that arise from the pursuit of self-fulfillment, unilateral love and economic influences. By examining universal values which transcend milieux and reflect the multidimensional nature of the human condition, Citizen Kane has asserted how it continues to challenge the audience's perspectives on these fundamental concerns across contexts.