Bordwell, David
Thompson, Kristen
Film Art
(New York:
McGraw Hill,
2008)
pp. 96-106
309-215

chains with a final effect. We usually learn the fate of each character, the answer to each mystery, and the outcome of each conflict.

Again, none of these features is necessary to narrative form in general. There is nothing to prevent a filmmaker from presenting the dead time, or narratively unmotivated intervals between more significant events. (François Truffaut, Jean-Luc Godard, Carl Dreyer, and Andy Warhol do this frequently, in different ways.) The filmmaker's plot can also reorder story chronology to make the causal chain *more* perplexing. For example, Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet's *Not Reconciled* moves back and forth among three widely different time periods without clearly signaling the shifts. Dušan Makavejev's *Love Affair, or the Case of the Missing Switchboard Operator* uses flash-forwards interspersed with the main plot action; only gradually do we come to understand the causal relations of these flash-forwards to the present-time events. More recently, puzzle films tease the audience to find clues to enigmatic narration or story events.

The filmmaker can also include material that is unmotivated by narrative cause and effect, such as the chance meetings in Truffaut's films, the political monologues and interviews in Godard's films, the intellectual montage sequences in Eisenstein's films, and the transitional shots in Ozu's work. Narration may be completely subjective, as in *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari,* or it may hover ambiguously between objectivity and subjectivity, as in *Last Year at Marienbad.* Finally, the filmmaker need not resolve all of the action at the close; films made outside the classical tradition sometimes have quite open endings.

We'll see in Chapter 6 how the classical Hollywood mode also makes cinematic space serve causality by means of continuity editing. For now we can simply note that the classical mode tends to treat narrative elements and narrational processes in specific and distinctive ways. For all of its effectiveness, the classical Hollywood mode remains only one system among many that can be used for constructing narrative films.

Narrative Form in *Citizen Kane*

With its unusual organizational style, *Citizen Kane* invites us to analyze how principles of narrative form operate across an entire film. *Kane*'s investigation plot carries us toward analyzing how causality and goal-oriented characters may operate in narratives. The film's manipulations of our knowledge shed light on the story–plot distinction. *Kane* also shows how ambiguity may arise when certain elements aren't clearly motivated. Furthermore, the comparison of *Kane*'s beginning with its ending indicates how a film may deviate from the patterns of classical Hollywood narrative construction. Finally, *Kane* clearly shows how our experience can be shaped by the way that narration governs the flow of story information.

Overall Narrative Expectations in *Citizen Kane*

We saw in Chapter 2 that our experience of a film depends heavily on the expectations we bring to it and the extent to which the film confirms them. Before you saw *Citizen Kane,* you may have known only that it is regarded as a film classic. Such an evaluation would not give you a very specific set of expectations. A 1941 audience would have had a keener sense of anticipation. For one thing, the film was rumored to be a disguised version of the life of the newspaper publisher William Randolph Hearst. Spectators would thus be looking for events and references keyed to Hearst's life.

Several minutes into the film itself, the viewer can form more specific expectations about pertinent genre conventions. The early "News on the March" sequence suggests that this film may be a fictional biography, and this hint is

confirmed once the reporter, Thompson, begins his inquiry into Kane's life. The film does indeed follow the conventional outline of the fictional biography, which typically covers an individual's whole life and dramatizes certain episodes in the period. Examples of this genre would be *Anthony Adverse* (1936) and *The Power and the Glory* (1933). (The latter film is often cited as an influence on *Citizen Kane* because of its complex use of flashbacks.)

The viewer can also quickly identify the film's use of conventions of the newspaper reporter genre. Thompson's colleagues resemble the wisecracking reporters in *Five Star Final* (1931), *Picture Snatcher* (1933), and *His Girl Friday* (1940). In this genre, the action usually depends on a reporter's dogged pursuit of a story against great odds. We are therefore prepared to expect not only Thompson's investigation but also his triumphant discovery of the truth. In the scenes devoted to Susan, there are also some conventions typical of the musical film: frantic rehearsals, backstage preparations, and, most specifically, the montage of her opera career, which parodies the conventional montage of singing success in films like *Maytime* (1937). More broadly, the film evidently owes something to the detective genre, since Thompson is aiming to solve a mystery (What is Rosebud?), and his interviews resemble those of a detective questioning suspects in search of clues.

Note, however, that *Kane*'s use of genre conventions is somewhat equivocal. Unlike many biographical films, *Kane* is more concerned with psychological states and relationships than with the hero's public deeds or adventures. As a newspaper film, *Kane* is unusual in that the reporter fails to get his story. And *Kane* is not exactly a standard mystery, since it answers some questions but leaves others unanswered. *Citizen Kane* is a good example of a film that relies on genre conventions but often thwarts the expectations they arouse.

The same sort of equivocal qualities can be found in *Kane*'s relation to the classical Hollywood cinema. Even without specific prior knowledge about this film, we expect that, as an American studio product of 1941, it will obey norms and rules of that tradition. In most ways, it does. We'll see that desire propels the narrative, causality is defined around traits and goals, conflicts lead to consequences, time is motivated by plot necessity, and narration is objective, mixing restricted and unrestricted passages. We'll also see some ways in which *Citizen Kane* is more ambiguous than most films in this tradition. Desires, traits, and goals are not always spelled out; the conflicts sometimes have an uncertain outcome; at the end, the narration's omniscience is emphasized to a rare degree. The ending in particular doesn't provide the degree of closure we would expect in a classical film. Our analysis will show how *Citizen Kane* draws on Hollywood narrative conventions but also violates some of the expectations that we bring to a Hollywood film.

Plot and Story in *Citizen Kane*

In analyzing a film, it's helpful to begin by segmenting it into sequences. Sequences are often demarcated by cinematic devices (fades, dissolves, cuts, black screens, and so on). In a narrative film, the sequences constitute the parts of the plot.

Most sequences in a narrative film are called *scenes*. The term is used in its theatrical sense, to refer to distinct phases of the action occurring within a relatively unified space and time. Our segmentation of *Citizen Kane* appears below. In this outline, numerals refer to major parts, some of which are only one scene long. In most cases, however, the major parts consist of several scenes, and each of these is identified by a lower-case letter. Many of these segments could be further divided, but this segmentation suits our immediate purposes.

Our segmentation lets us see at a glance the major divisions of the plot and how scenes are organized within them. The outline also helps us notice how the plot organizes story causality and story time. Let's look at these factors more closely.

CITIZEN KANE: PLOT SEGMENTATION

C. Credit title

1. Xanadu: Kane dies

2. Projection room:

- **a.** "News on the March"
- **b.** Reporters discuss "Rosebud"

3. El Rancho nightclub: Thompson tries to interview Susan

4. Thatcher library:

First flashback

- **a.** Thompson enters and reads Thatcher's manuscript
- **b.** Kane's mother sends the boy off with Thatcher
- **c.** Kane grows up and buys the *Inquirer*
- **d.** Kane launches the *Inquirer's* attack on big business
- **e.** The Depression: Kane sells Thatcher his newspaper chain
- **f.** Thompson leaves the library

5. Bernstein's office:

Second flashback

- **a.** Thompson visits Bernstein
- **b.** Kane takes over the *Inquirer*
- **c.** Montage: the *Inquirer's* growth
- **d.** Party: the *Inquirer* celebrates getting the *Chronicle* staff
- **e.** Leland and Bernstein discuss Kane's trip abroad
- **f.** Kane returns with his fiancée Emily
- **g.** Bernstein concludes his reminiscence

6. Nursing home:

Third flashback

- **a.** Thompson talks with Leland
- **b.** Breakfast table montage: Kane's marriage deteriorates
- **c.** Leland continues his recollections

Third flashback (cont.)

- **d.** Kane meets Susan and goes to her room
- **e.** Kane's political campaign culminates in his speech
- **f.** Kane confronts Gettys, Emily, and Susan
- **g.** Kane loses the election, and Leland asks to be transferred
- **h.** Kane marries Susan
- **i.** Susan has her opera premiere
- **j.** Because Leland is drunk, Kane finishes Leland's review
- **k.** Leland concludes his reminiscence

7. El Rancho nightclub:

Fourth flashback

- **a.** Thompson talks with Susan
- **b.** Susan rehearses her singing
- **c.** Susan has her opera premiere
- **d.** Kane insists that Susan go on singing
- **e.** Montage: Susan's opera career
- **f.** Susan attempts suicide and Kane promises she can quit singing
- **g.** Xanadu: Susan is bored
- **h.** Montage: Susan plays with jigsaw puzzles
- **i.** Xanadu: Kane proposes a picnic
- **j.** Picnic: Kane slaps Susan
- **k.** Xanadu: Susan leaves Kane
- **l.** Susan concludes her reminiscence

8. Xanadu:

Fifth flashback

- **a.** Thompson talks with Raymond
- **b.** Kane destroys Susan's room and picks up a paperweight, murmuring "Rosebud"
- **c.** Raymond concludes his reminiscence; Thompson talks with the other reporters; all leave
- **d.** Survey of Kane's possessions leads to a revelation of Rosebud; exterior of gate and of castle; the end

E. End credits

Citizen Kane's Causality

In *Citizen Kane,* two distinct sets of characters cause events to happen. On the one hand, a group of reporters seeks information about Kane. On the other hand, Kane and the characters who know him provide the subject of the reporters' investigations.

The initial causal connection between the two groups is Kane's death, which leads the reporters to make a newsreel summing up his career. But the newsreel is already finished when the plot introduces the reporters. The boss, Rawlston, supplies the cause that initiates the investigation of Kane's life. Thompson's newsreel fails to satisfy him. Rawlston's desire for an angle for the newsreel gets the search for Rosebud under way. Thompson thus gains a goal, which sets him delving into Kane's past. His investigation constitutes one main line of the plot.

Another line of action, Kane's life, has already taken place in the past. There, too, a group of characters has caused actions to occur. Many years before, a poverty-stricken boarder at Kane's mother's boardinghouse has paid her with a deed to a silver mine. The wealth provided by this mine causes Mrs. Kane to appoint Thatcher as young Charles's guardian. Thatcher's guardianship results (in somewhat unspecified ways) in Kane's growing up into a spoiled, rebellious young man.

Citizen Kane is an unusual film in that the object of the investigator's search is not an object but a set of character traits. Thompson seeks to know what aspects of Kane's personality led him to say "Rosebud" on his deathbed. This mystery motivates Thompson's detective-like investigation. Kane, a very complex character, has many traits that influence the other characters' actions. As we shall see, however, *Citizen Kane*'s narrative does not ultimately define all of Kane's character traits.

Kane himself has a goal; he, too, seems to be searching for something related to Rosebud. At several points, characters speculate that Rosebud was something that Kane lost or was never able to get. Again, the fact that Kane's goal remains so vague makes this an unusual narrative.

Other characters in Kane's life provide causal material for the narrative. The presence of several characters who knew Kane well makes Thompson's investigation possible, even though Kane has died. Significantly, the characters provide a range of information that spans Kane's entire life. This is important if we are to be able to reconstruct the progression of story events in the film. Thatcher knew Kane as a child; Bernstein, his manager, knew his business dealings; his best friend, Leland, knew of his personal life (his first marriage in particular); Susan Alexander, his second wife, knew him in middle age; and the butler, Raymond, managed Kane's affairs during his last years. Each of these characters has a causal role in Kane's life, as well as in Thompson's investigation. Note that Kane's wife Emily does not tell a story, since Emily's story would largely duplicate Leland's and would contribute no additional information to the present-day part of the narrative, the investigation. Hence the plot simply eliminates her (via a car accident).

Time in *Citizen Kane*

The order, duration, and frequency of events in the story differ greatly from the way the plot of *Citizen Kane* presents those events. Much of the film's power to engage our interest arises from the complex ways in which the plot cues us to construct the story.

To understand this story in its chronological order and assumed duration and frequency, the spectator must follow an intricate tapestry of plot events. For example, in the first flashback, Thatcher's diary tells of a scene in which Kane loses control of his newspapers during the Depression (4e). By this time, Kane is a middle-aged man. Yet in the second flashback, Bernstein describes young Kane's arrival at the *Inquirer* and his engagement to Emily (5b, 5f). We mentally sort these plot events into a correct chronological story order, then continue to rearrange other events as we learn of them.

Similarly, the earliest *story* event about which we learn is Mrs. Kane's acquisition of a deed to a valuable mine. We get this information during the newsreel, in the second sequence. But the first event in the *plot* is Kane's death. Just to illustrate the maneuvers we must execute to construct the film's story, let's assume that Kane's life consists of these phases:

Boyhood

Youthful newspaper editing

Life as a newlywed

Middle age

Old age

Significantly, the early portions of the plot tend to roam over many phases of Kane's life, while later portions tend to concentrate more on particular periods. The "News on the March" sequence (2a) gives us glimpses of all periods, and Thatcher's manuscript (4) shows us Kane in boyhood, youth, and middle age. Then the flashbacks become primarily chronological. Bernstein's recounting (5) concentrates on episodes showing Kane as newspaper editor and fiancé of Emily. Leland's recollections (6) run from newlywed life to middle age. Susan (7) tells of Kane as a middle-aged and an old man. Raymond's perfunctory anecdote (8b) concentrates on Kane in old age.

The plot becomes more linear in its ordering as it goes along, and this aids the viewer's effort to understand the story. If every character's flashback skipped around Kane's life as much as the newsreel and Thatcher's account do, the story would be much harder to reconstruct. As it is, the early portions of the plot show us the results of events we have not seen, while the later portions confirm or modify the expectations that we formed earlier.

By arranging story events out of order, the plot cues us to form specific anticipations. In the beginning, with Kane's death and the newsreel version of his life, the plot creates strong curiosity about two issues. What does "Rosebud" mean? And what could have happened to make so powerful a man so solitary at the end of his life?

There is also a degree of suspense. When the plot goes back to the past, we already have quite firm knowledge. We know that neither of Kane's marriages will last and that his friends will drift away. The plot encourages us to focus our interest on *how and when* a particular thing will happen. Thus many scenes function to delay an outcome that we already know is certain. For example, we know that Susan will abandon Kane at some point, so we are constantly expecting her to do so each time he bullies her. For several scenes (7b–7j), she comes close to leaving him, though after her suicide attempt he mollifies her. The plot could have shown her walking out (7k) much earlier, but then the ups and downs of their relations would have been less vivid, and there would have been no suspense.

This process of mentally rearranging plot events into story order might be quite difficult in *Citizen Kane* were it not for the presence of the "News on the March" newsreel. The very first sequence in Xanadu disorients us, for it shows the death of a character about whom we so far know almost nothing. But the newsreel gives us a great deal of information quickly. Moreover, the newsreel's own structure uses parallels with the main film to supply a miniature introduction to the film's overall plot:

A. Shots of Xanadu

B. Funeral; headlines announcing Kane's death

C. Growth of financial empire

D. Silver mine and Mrs. Kane's boardinghouse

E. Thatcher testimony at congressional committee

F. Political career

G. Private life; weddings, divorces

H. Opera house and Xanadu

I. Political campaign

J. The Depression

K. 1935: Kane's old age

L. Isolation of Xanadu

M. Death announced

A comparison of this outline with the one for the whole film shows some striking similarities. "News on the March" begins by emphasizing Kane as "Xanadu's Landlord"; a short segment (A) presents shots of the house, its grounds, and its contents. This is a variation on the opening of the whole film (1), which consisted of a series of shots of the grounds, moving progressively closer to the house. That opening sequence had ended with Kane's death; now the newsreel follows the shots of the house with Kane's funeral (B). Next comes a series of newspaper headlines announcing Kane's death. In a comparison with the plot diagram of *Citizen Kane,* these headlines occupy the approximate formal position of the whole newsreel itself (2a). Even the title card that follows the headlines ("To forty-four million U.S. news buyers, more newsworthy than the names in his own headlines was Kane himself. . . .") is a brief parallel to the scene in the projection room, in which the reporters decide that Thompson should continue to investigate Kane's "newsworthy" life.

The order of the newsreel's presentation of Kane's life roughly parallels the order of scenes in the flashbacks related to Thompson. "News on the March" moves from Kane's death to a summary of the building of Kane's newspaper empire (C), with a description of the boardinghouse deed and the silver mine (including an old photograph of Charles with his mother, as well as the first mention of the sled). Similarly, the first flashback (4) tells how Thatcher took over the young Kane's guardianship from his mother and how Kane first attempted to run the *Inquirer.* The rough parallels continue: The newsreel tells of Kane's political ambitions (F), his marriages (G), his building of the opera house (H), his political campaign (I), and so on. In the main plot, Thatcher's flashback describes his own clashes with Kane on political matters. Leland's flashback (6) covers the first marriage, the affair with Susan, the political campaign, and the premiere of the opera *Salammbo.*

These are not all of the similarities between the newsreel and the overall film. You can tease out many more by comparing the two closely. The crucial point is that the newsreel provides us with a map for the investigation of Kane's life. As we see the various scenes of the flashbacks, we already expect certain events and have a rough chronological basis for fitting them into our story reconstruction.

Kane's many flashbacks allow us to see past events directly, and in these portions story and plot duration are close to the same. We know that Kane is 75 years old at his death, and the earliest scene shows him at perhaps 10. Thus the plot covers roughly 65 years of his life, plus the week of Thompson's investigation. The single earlier story event of which we only hear is Mrs. Kane's acquisition of the mine deed, which we can infer took place a short time before she turned her son over to Thatcher. So the story runs a bit longer than the plot—perhaps closer to 70 years. This time span is presented in a screen duration of almost 120 minutes.

Like most films, *Citizen Kane* uses ellipses. The plot skips over years of story time, as well as many hours of Thompson's week of investigations. But plot duration also compresses time through montage sequences, such as those showing the *Inquirer*'s campaign against big business (4d), the growth of the paper's circulation (5c), Susan's opera career (7e), and Susan's bored playing with jigsaw puzzles (7h). Here long passages of story time are condensed into brief summaries quite different from ordinary narrative scenes. We will discuss montage sequences in more

detail in Chapter 8, but we can already see the value of such segments in condensing story duration in a comprehensible way.

Citizen Kane also provides a clear demonstration of how events that occur only once in the story may appear several times in the plot. In their respective flashbacks, both Leland and Susan describe the latter's debut in the Chicago premiere of *Salammbo.* Watching Leland's account (6i), we see the performance from the front; we witness the audience reacting with distaste. Susan's version (7c) shows us the performance from behind and on the stage, to suggest her humiliation. This repeated presentation of Susan's debut in the plot doesn't confuse us, for we understand the two scenes as depicting the same story event. ("News on the March" has also referred to Susan's opera career, in parts G and H.) By repeating scenes of her embarrassment, the plot makes vivid the pain that Kane forces her to undergo.

Overall, *Citizen Kane*'s narrative dramatizes Thompson's search by means of flashbacks that encourage us to seek the sources of Kane's failure and to try to identify "Rosebud." As in a detective film, we must locate missing causes and arrange events into a coherent story pattern. Through manipulations of order, duration, and frequency, the plot both assists our search and complicates it in order to provoke curiosity and suspense.

Motivation in *Citizen Kane*

Some critics have argued that Welles's use of the search for "Rosebud" is a flaw in *Citizen Kane,* because the identification of the word proves it to be a trivial gimmick. If indeed we assume that the whole point of *Citizen Kane* is really to identify Rosebud, this charge might be valid. But in fact, Rosebud serves a very important motivating function in the film. It creates Thompson's goal and thus focuses our attention on his delving into the lives of Kane and his associates. *Citizen Kane* becomes a mystery story; but instead of investigating a crime, the reporter investigates a character. So the Rosebud clues provide the basic motivation necessary for the plot to progress. (Of course, the Rosebud device serves other functions as well; for instance, the little sled provides a transition from the boardinghouse scene to the cheerless Christmas when Thatcher gives Charles a new sled.)

Citizen Kane's narrative revolves around an investigation into traits of character. As a result, these traits provide many of the motivations for events. (In this respect, the film obeys principles of the classical Hollywood narrative.) Kane's desire to prove that Susan is really a singer and not just his mistress motivates his manipulation of her opera career. His mother's overly protective desire to remove her son from what she considers to be a bad environment motivates her appointment of Thatcher as the boy's guardian. Dozens of actions are motivated by character traits and goals.

At the end of the film, Thompson gives up his search for the meaning of Rosebud, saying he doesn't think "any word can explain a man's life." Up to a point Thompson's statement motivates his acceptance of his failure. But if we as spectators are to accept this idea that no key can unlock the secrets of a life, we need further motivation. The film provides it. In the scene in the newsreel projection room, Rawlston suggests that "maybe he told us all about himself on his deathbed." Immediately, one of the reporters says, "Yeah, and maybe he didn't." Already the suggestion is planted that Rosebud may not provide any adequate answers about Kane. Later Leland scornfully dismisses the Rosebud issue and goes on to talk of other things. These brief references to Rosebud help justify Thompson's pessimistic attitude in the final sequence.

The presence of the scene in which Thompson first visits Susan at the El Rancho nightclub (3) might seem puzzling at first. Unlike the other scenes in which he visits people, no flashback occurs here. Thompson learns from the waiter that Susan knows nothing about Rosebud; he could easily learn this on his later visit to her. So why should the plot include the scene at all? One reason is that it evokes curiosity and deepens the mystery around Kane. Moreover, Susan's story, when she does tell it, covers events relatively late in Kane's career. As we've seen, the

flashbacks go through Kane's life roughly in order. If Susan had told her story first, we would not have all of the material necessary to understand it. But it is plausible that Thompson should start his search with Kane's ex-wife, presumably the surviving person closest to him. In Thompson's first visit, Susan's drunken refusal to speak to him motivates the fact that her flashback comes later. By that point, Bernstein and Leland have filled in enough of Kane's personal life to prepare the way for Susan's flashback. This first scene functions partly to justify postponing Susan's flashback until a later part of the plot.

Motivation makes us take things for granted in narratives. Mrs. Kane's desire for her son to be rich and successful motivates her decision to entrust him to Thatcher, a powerful banker, as his guardian. We may just take it for granted that Thatcher is a rich businessman. Yet on closer inspection, this feature is necessary to motivate other events. It motivates Thatcher's presence in the newsreel; he is powerful enough to have been asked to testify at a congressional hearing. More important, Thatcher's success motivates the fact that he has kept a journal now on deposit at a memorial library that Thompson visits. This, in turn, justifies the fact that Thompson can uncover information from a source who knew Kane as a child.

Despite its reliance on psychological motivation, *Citizen Kane* also departs somewhat from the usual practice of the classical Hollywood narrative by leaving some motivations ambiguous. The ambiguities relate primarily to Kane's character. The other characters who tell Thompson their stories all have definite opinions of Kane, but these do not always tally. Bernstein still looks on Kane with sympathy and affection, whereas Leland is cynical about his own relationship with Kane. The reasons for some of Kane's actions remain unclear. Does he send Leland the $25,000 check in firing him because of a lingering sentiment over their old friendship or from a proud desire to prove himself more generous than Leland? Why does he insist on stuffing Xanadu with hundreds of artworks that he never even unpacks? By leaving these questions open, the film invites us to speculate on various facets of Kane's personality.

Citizen Kane's Parallelism

Parallelism doesn't provide a major principle of development in *Citizen Kane*'s narrative form, but it crops up more locally. We've already seen important formal parallels between the newsreel and the film's plot as a whole. We've also noticed a parallel between the two major lines of action: Kane's life and Thompson's search. In different sense, both men are searching for Rosebud. Rosebud serves as a summary of the things Kane strives for through his adult life. We see him repeatedly fail to find love and friendship, living alone at Xanadu in the end. His inability to find happiness parallels Thompson's failure to locate the significance of the word "Rosebud." This parallel doesn't imply that Kane and Thompson share similar character traits. Rather, it allows both lines of action to develop simultaneously in similar directions.

Another narrative parallel juxtaposes Kane's campaign for the governorship with his attempt to build up Susan's career as an opera star. In each case, he seeks to inflate his reputation by influencing public opinion. In trying to achieve success for Susan, Kane forces his newspaper employees to write favorable reviews of her performances. This parallels the moment when he loses the election and the *Inquirer* automatically proclaims a fraud at the polls. In both cases, Kane fails to realize that his power over the public is not great enough to hide the flaws in his projects: first his affair with Susan, which ruins his campaign, then her lack of singing ability, which Kane refuses to admit. The parallels show that Kane continues to make the same kinds of mistakes throughout his life.

Patterns of Plot Development in *Citizen Kane*

The order of Thompson's visits to Kane's acquaintances allows the series of flashbacks to have a clear pattern of progression. Thompson moves from people who knew

Kane early in his life to those who knew him as an old man. Moreover, each flashback contains a distinct type of information about Kane. Thatcher establishes Kane's political stance; Bernstein gives an account of the business dealings of the newspaper. These provide the background to Kane's early success and lead into Leland's stories of Kane's personal life, where we get the first real indications of Kane's failure. Susan continues the description of his decline with her account of how he manipulated her life. Finally, in Raymond's flashback, Kane becomes a pitiable old man.

Thus, even though the order of events in the story varies greatly from that given in the plot, *Citizen Kane* presents Kane's life through a steady pattern of development. The present-day portions of the narrative—Thompson's scenes—also follow their own pattern of a search. By the ending, this search has failed, as Kane's own search for happiness or personal success had also failed.

Because of Thompson's failure, the ending of *Citizen Kane* remains somewhat more open than was the rule in Hollywood in 1941. True, Thompson does resolve the question of Rosebud for himself by saying that it would not have explained Kane's life. To this extent, we have the common pattern of action leading to greater knowledge. Thompson has come to understand that a life cannot be summed up in one word. Still, in most classical narrative films, the main character reaches his or her initial goal, and Thompson is the main character of this line of action.

The line of action involving Kane himself has even less closure. Not only does Kane apparently not reach his goal, but the film never specifies what that goal is to start with. Most classical narratives create a situation of conflict. The character must struggle with a problem and solve it by the ending. Kane begins his adult life in a highly successful position (happily running the *Inquirer*), then gradually falls into a barren solitude. We are invited to speculate about exactly what, if anything, would make Kane happy. *Citizen Kane*'s lack of closure in this line of action made it a very unusual narrative for its day.

The search for Rosebud does lead to a certain resolution at the end. We the audience discover what Rosebud was. The ending of the film, which follows this discovery, strongly echoes the beginning. The beginning moved past fences toward the mansion. Now a series of shots takes us away from the house and back outside the fences, with the "No Trespassing" sign and large K insignia.

"Kane, we are told, loved only his mother—only his newspaper—only his second wife—only himself. Maybe he loved all of these, or none. It is for the audience to judge. Kane was selfish and selfless, an idealist, a scoundrel, a very big man and a very little one. It depends on who's talking about him. He is never judged with the objectivity of an author, and the point of the picture is not so much the solution of the problem as its presentation."

— Orson Welles, director

But even at this point, when we learn the answer to Thompson's question, a degree of uncertainty remains. Just because we have learned what Kane's dying word referred to, do we now have the key to his entire character? Or is Thompson's final statement *correct*—that no one word can explain a person's life? Perhaps the "No Trespassing" sign hints that neither Thompson nor we should have expected to explore Kane's mind. It is tempting to declare that all of Kane's problems arose from the loss of his sled and his childhood home life, but the film also suggests that this is too easy a solution. It is the kind of solution that the slick editor Rawlston would pounce on as an angle for his newsreel.

For years critics have debated whether the Rosebud solution does give us a key that resolves the entire narrative. This debate itself suggests the ambiguity at work in *Citizen Kane.* The film provides much evidence for both views and hence avoids complete closure. You might contrast this slightly open ending with the tightly closed narratives of *His Girl Friday* and *North by Northwest* in Chapter 11. You might also compare *Citizen Kane*'s narrative with that of another somewhat open-ended film, *Do The Right Thing,* also discussed in Chapter 11.

Narration in *Citizen Kane*

In analyzing how *Kane*'s plot manipulates the flow of story information, it's useful to consider a remarkable fact: The only time we see Kane directly and in the present is when he dies. On all other occasions, he is presented at one remove—in the newsreel or in various characters' memories. This unusual treatment makes the film something of a portrait, a study of a man seen from different perspectives.

The film employs five narrators, the people whom Thompson tracks down: Thatcher (whose account is in writing), Bernstein, Leland, Susan, and the butler, Raymond. The plot thus motivates a series of views of Kane that are more or less restricted in their range of knowledge. In Thatcher's account (4b–4e), we see only scenes at which he is present. Even Kane's newspaper crusade is rendered as Thatcher learns of it, through buying copies of the *Inquirer.* In Bernstein's flashback (5b–5f), there is some deviation from what Bernstein witnesses, but in general his range of knowledge is respected. At the *Inquirer* party, for example, we follow Bernstein and Leland's conversation while Kane dances in the background. Similarly, we never see Kane in Europe; we merely hear the contents of Kane's telegram, which Bernstein delivers to Leland.

Leland's flashbacks (6b, 6d–6j) deviate most markedly from the narrator's range of knowledge. Here we see Kane and Emily at a series of morning breakfasts, Kane's meeting with Susan, and the confrontation of Kane with Boss Gettys at Susan's apartment. In scene 6j, Leland is present but in a drunken stupor most of the time. (The plot motivates Leland's knowledge of Kane's affair with Susan by having Leland suggest that Kane told him about it, but the scenes present detailed knowledge that Leland is unlikely to possess.) By the time we get to Susan's flashback (7b–7k), however, the range of knowledge again fits the character more snugly. (There remains one scene, 7f, in which Susan is unconscious for part of the action.) The last flashback (8b) is recounted by Raymond and plausibly accords with his range of knowledge; he is standing in the hallway as Kane wrecks Susan's room.

Using different narrators to transmit story information fulfills several functions. It offers itself as a plausible depiction of the process of investigation, since we expect any reporter to hunt down information through a series of inquiries. More deeply, the plot's portrayal of Kane himself becomes more complex by showing somewhat different sides of him, depending on who's talking about him. Moreover, the use of multiple narrators makes the film like one of Susan's jigsaw puzzles. We must put things together piece by piece. The pattern of gradual revelation enhances curiosity—what is it in Kane's past that he associates with Rosebud?—and suspense—how will he lose his friends and his wives?

This strategy has important implications for film form. While Thompson uses the various narrators to gather data, the plot uses them both to furnish us with story information and to *conceal* information. The narration can motivate gaps in knowledge about Kane by appealing to the fact that no informant can know everything about anyone. If we were able to enter Kane's consciousness, we might discover the meaning of Rosebud much sooner—but Kane is dead. The multiple-narrator format appeals to expectations we derive from real life in order to motivate the bit-by-bit transmission of story information, the withholding of key pieces of information, and the arousing of curiosity and suspense.

Although each narrator's account is mostly restricted to his or her range of knowledge, the plot doesn't treat each flashback in much subjective depth. Most of the flashbacks are rendered objectively. Some transitions from the framing episodes use a voice-over commentary to lead us into the flashbacks, but these don't represent the narrators' subjective states. Only in Susan's flashbacks are there some attempts to render subjectivity. In scene 7c, we see Leland as if from her optical point of view on stage, and the phantasmagoric montage of her career (7e) suggests some mental subjectivity that renders her fatigue and frustration.

Against the five character narrators, the film's plot sets another purveyor of knowledge, the "News on the March" short. We've already seen the crucial function of the newsreel in introducing us both to *Kane*'s story and to its plot construction, with the newsreel's sections previewing the parts of the film as a whole. The newsreel also gives us a broad sketch of Kane's life and death that will be filled in by the more restricted behind-the-scenes accounts offered by the narrators. The newsreel is also highly objective, even more so than the rest of the film; it reveals

nothing about Kane's inner life. Rawlston acknowledges this: "It isn't enough to tell us what a man did, you've got to tell us who he was." In effect, Thompson's aim is to add depth to the newsreel's superficial version of Kane's life.

Yet we still aren't through with the narrational manipulations in this complex and daring film. For one thing, all the localized sources of knowledge—"News on the March" and the five narrators—are linked together by the shadowy reporter Thompson. To some extent, he is our surrogate in the film, gathering and assembling the puzzle pieces.

Note, too, that Thompson is barely characterized; we can't even identify his face. This, as usual, has a function. If we saw him clearly, if the plot gave him more traits or a background or a past, he would become the protagonist. But *Citizen Kane* is less about Thompson than about his *search.* The plot's handling of Thompson makes him a neutral conduit for the story information that he gathers (though his conclusion at the end—"I don't think any word can explain a man's life"—suggests that he has been changed by his investigation).

Thompson is not, however, a perfect surrogate for us because the film's narration inserts the newsreel, the narrators, and Thompson within a still broader range of knowledge. The flashback portions are predominantly restricted, but there are other passages that reveal an overall narrational omniscience.

3.25 The elusive image of the paperweight in *Citizen Kane.*

From the very start, we are given a god's-eye-view of the action. We move into a mysterious setting that we will later learn is Kane's estate, Xanadu. We might have learned about this locale through a character's journey, the way we acquaint ourselves with Oz by means of Dorothy's adventures there. Here, however, an omniscient narration conducts the tour. Eventually, we enter a darkened bedroom. A hand holds a paperweight, and over this is superimposed a flurry of snow (**3.25**).

The image teases us. Is the narration making a lyrical comment, or is the image subjective, a glimpse into the dying man's mind or vision? In either case, the narration reveals its ability to command a great deal of story information. Our sense of omniscience is enhanced when, after the man dies, a nurse strides into the room. Apparently, no character knows what we know.

At other points in the film, the omniscient narration calls attention to itself, as when, during Susan's opera debut in Leland's flashback (6i), we see stagehands high above reacting to her performance. (Such omniscient asides tend to be associated with camera movements, as we shall see in Chapter 8.) Most vivid, however, is the omniscient narration at the end of the film. Thompson and the other reporters leave, never having learned the meaning of Rosebud. But we linger in the vast storeroom of Xanadu. And, thanks to the narration, we learn that Rosebud is the name of Kane's childhood sled (see 8.13). We can now associate the opening's emphasis on the paperweight with the closing scene's revelation of the sled.

This narration is truly omniscient. It withheld a key piece of story information at the outset, teased us with hints (the snow, the tiny cottage in the paperweight), and finally revealed at least part of the answer to the question posed at the outset. A return to the "No Trespassing" sign reminds us of our point of entry into the film. Like *The Road Warrior,* then, the film derives its unity not only from principles of causality and time but also from a patterned narration that arouses curiosity and suspense and yields a surprise at the very end.

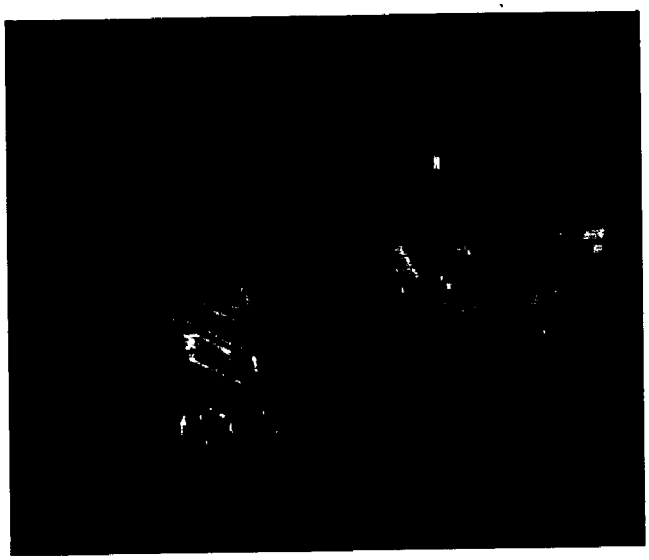
would vary: Instead of a simultaneous presentation that lets our attention shuttle to and fro, we would have a more "programmed" pattern of building up the gags and paying them off. Or, suppose that John Huston had handled the opening scene of *The Maltese Falcon* as a single take with camera movement. How would he then have drawn our attention to Brigid O'Shaughnessy's and Sam Spade's facial reactions, and how would this have affected our expectations? By focusing on effects and imagining alternatives to the technical choices that were made, the analyst can gain a sharp sense of the particular functions of style in the given film.

The rest of this chapter provides an illustration of how we can analyze film style. Our example is the film whose narrative system we analyzed in Chapters 3–5: *Citizen Kane.* Here we follow all four steps in stylistic analysis. Since Chapter 3 discussed *Citizen Kane*'s organizational structures, we will concentrate here on identifying salient techniques, locating patterns, and proposing some functions for style in each case.

Style in *Citizen Kane*

In analyzing *Citizen Kane*'s narrative, we discovered that the film is organized as a search; a detective-like figure, the reporter Thompson, tries to find the significance of Kane's last word, "Rosebud." But even before Thompson appears as a character, we, the spectators, are invited to ask questions about Kane and to seek the answers.

The very beginning of the film sets up a mystery. After a fade-in reveals a "No Trespassing" sign, in a series of craning movements upward, the camera travels over a set of fences, all matched graphically in the slow dissolves that link the shots. There follows a series of shots of a huge estate, always with the great house in the distance (**8.7**). (This sequence depends largely on special effects; the house itself is a series of paintings, combined through matte work with three-dimensional miniatures in the foreground.) The gloomy lighting, the deserted setting, and the ominous music give the opening of the film the eerie uncertainty that we associate with mystery stories. These opening shots are connected by dissolves, making the camera seem to draw closer to the house although there is no forward camera movement. From shot to shot, the foreground changes, yet the lighted window remains in almost exactly the same position on the screen. Graphically matching the window from shot to shot already focuses our attention on it; we assume (rightly) that whatever is in that room will be important in initiating the story.



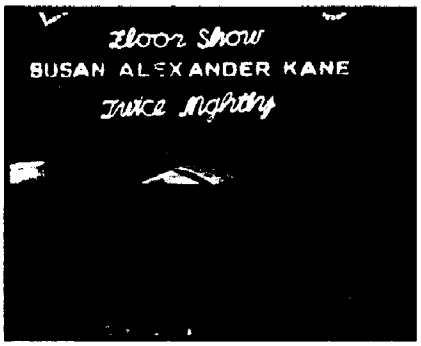
8.7 The opening of *Citizen Kane.*

This pattern of our penetration into the space of a scene returns at other points in the film. Again and again, the camera moves toward things that might reveal the secrets of Kane's character, as in the spectacular crane up the side of a nightclub to a skylight as Thompson goes to interview Susan Alexander (**8.8–8.11**). As the camera reaches the skylight, a dissolve and a crack of lightning shift the scene inside to another craning movement down to Susan's table. (Actually, some of what seem to be camera movements were created in the laboratory using special effects; see "Where to Go from Here" at the end of the chapter.)

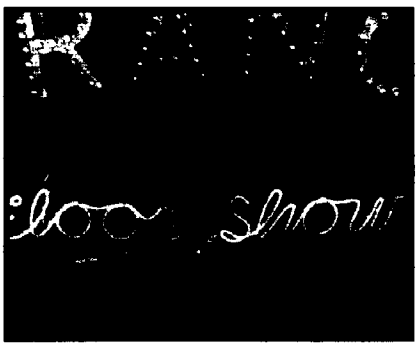
The opening scene and the introduction to El Rancho have some striking similarities. Each begins with a sign ("No Trespassing" and the publicity poster), and each moves us into a building to reveal a new character. The first scene uses a series of shots, whereas the second depends more on camera movement, but these different techniques are working to create a consistent pattern that becomes part of the film's style. Later, Thompson's second visit to Susan repeats the crane shots of the first. The second flashback of Jed Leland's story begins with another movement into a scene. The camera is initially pointed at wet cobblestones. Then it tilts up and tracks in toward Susan coming out of a drugstore. Only then does the camera pan right to reveal Kane standing, splashed with mud, on the curb. This pattern of gradual movement into the story space not only suits the narrative's search pattern but also uses film technique to create curiosity and suspense.

As we have seen, films' endings often contain variations of their beginnings. Toward the end of *Citizen Kane,* Thompson gives up his search for Rosebud. But after the reporters leave the huge storeroom of Xanadu, the camera begins to move over the great expanse of Kane's collections. It cranes forward high above the crates

8.8 As this scene of *Citizen Kane* begins, the camera frames a poster of Susan Alexander on an outside wall of the nightclub . . .



8.9 . . . then moves up the wall to the roof . . .



8.10 . . . forward and through the "El Rancho" sign . . .

8.11 . . . and over to the skylight.

8.12 A crane shot near the end of *Citizen Kane* . . .

8.13 . . . moves down to center on Kane's sled.

and piles of objects (**8.12**), then moves down to center on the sled from Kane's childhood (**8.13**). Then there is a cut to the furnace, and the camera again moves in on the sled as it is tossed into the fire. At last we are able to read the word "Rosebud" on the sled (**8.14**). The ending continues the pattern set up at the beginning; the film techniques create a penetration into the story space, probing the mystery of the central character.

After our glimpse of the sled, however, the film reverses the pattern. A series of shots linked by dissolves leads us back outside Xanadu, the camera travels down to the "No Trespassing" sign again, and we are left to wonder whether this discovery really provides a resolution to the mystery about Kane's character. Now the beginning and the ending echo each other explicitly.

Our study of *Citizen Kane*'s organization in Chapter 3 also showed that Thompson's search was, from the standpoint of narration, a complex one. At one level, our knowledge is restricted principally to what Kane's acquaintances know. Within the flashbacks, the style reinforces this restriction by avoiding crosscutting or other techniques that would move toward a more unrestricted range of knowledge. Many of the flashback scenes are shot in fairly static long takes, strictly confining us to what participants in the scene could witness. When the youthful Kane confronts Thatcher during the *Inquirer* crusade, Welles could have cut away to the reporter in Cuba sending Kane a telegram or could have shown a montage sequence of a day in the life of the paper. Instead, because this is Thatcher's tale, Welles handles the scene in a long take showing Kane and Thatcher in a face-to-face standoff, which is then capped by a close-up of Kane's cocky response.

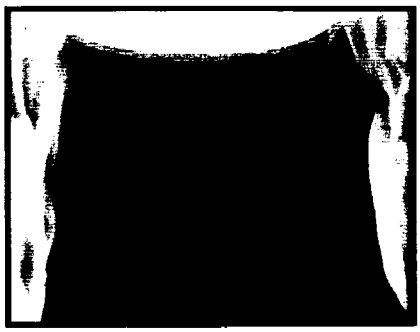
We have also seen that the film's narrative requires us to take each narrator's version as objective within his or her limited knowledge. Welles reinforces this by avoiding shots that suggest optical or mental subjectivity. (Contrast Hitchcock's optical point-of-view angles in *The Birds* and *Rear Window,* pages 219–221 and 240–241.)

Welles also uses deep-focus cinematography that yields an external perspective on the action. The shot in which Kane's mother signs her son over to Thatcher is a good example. Several shots precede this one, introducing the young Kane. Then there is a cut to what at first seems a simple long shot of the boy (**8.15**). But the camera tracks back to reveal a window, with Kane's mother appearing at the left and calling to him (**8.16**). Then the camera continues to track back, following the adults as they walk to another room (**8.17**). Mrs. Kane and Thatcher sit at a table in the foreground to sign the papers, while Kane's father remains standing farther away at the left, and the boy plays in the distance (**8.18**).

Welles eliminates cutting here. The shot becomes a complex unit unto itself, like the opening of *Touch of Evil* discussed in Chapter 5. Most Hollywood directors would have handled this scene in shot/reverse shot, but Welles keeps all of the implications of the action simultaneously before us. The boy, who is the subject of the discussion, remains framed in the distant window through the whole scene; his game leads us to believe that he is unaware of what his mother is doing.

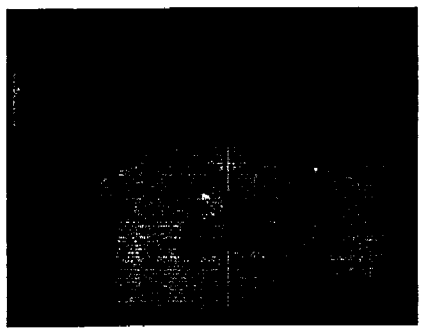
The tensions between the father and the mother are conveyed not only by the fact that she excludes him from the discussion at the table but also by the overlapping sound. His objections to signing his son away to a guardian mix in with the dialogue in the foreground, and even the boy's shouts (ironically, "The Union Forever!") can be heard in the distance. The framing also emphasizes the mother in much of the scene. This is her only appearance in the film. Her severity and tightly controlled emotions help motivate the many events that follow from her action here. We have had little introduction to the situation prior to this scene, but the combination of sound, cinematography, and mise-en-scene conveys the complicated action with an overall objectivity.

Every director directs our attention, but Welles does so in unusual ways. *Citizen Kane* offers a good example of how a director chooses between alternatives. In the scenes that give up cutting, Welles cues our attention by using deep-space



8.14 Another forward camera movement brings the sled into close-up.

8.15 A progressively deeper shot in *Citizen Kane* begins as a long shot of the young Kane . . .



8.16 . . . becomes an interior view as the camera reveals a window . . .

8.17 . . . and moves backward with Mrs. Kane . . .

8.18 . . . keeping the boy in extreme long shot throughout the rest of the scene.

8.19 Depth and centering in *Citizen Kane.*

mise-en-scene (figure behavior, lighting, placement in space) and sound. We can watch expressions because the actors play frontally (8.18). In addition, the framing emphasizes certain figures by putting them in the foreground or in dead center (**8.19**). And, of course, our attention bounces from one character to another as they speak lines. Even if Welles avoids the classical Hollywood shot/reverse shot in such scenes, he still uses film techniques to prompt us to make the correct assumptions and inferences about the story's progression.

Citizen Kane's narration also embeds the narrators' objective but restricted versions within broader contexts. Thompson's investigation links the various tales, so we learn substantially what he learns. Yet he must not become the protagonist of the film, for that would remove Kane from the center of interest. Welles makes a crucial stylistic choice here. By the use of low-key selective lighting and patterns of staging and framing, Thompson is made virtually unidentifiable. His back is to us, he is tucked into the corner of the frame, and he is usually in darkness. The stylistic handling makes him the neutral investigator, less a character than a channel for information.

More broadly still, we have seen that the film encloses Thompson's search within a more omniscient narration. Our discussion of the opening shots of Xanadu is relevant here: film style is used to convey a high degree of non-character-centered knowledge. But when we enter Kane's death chamber, the style also suggests the narration's ability to plumb characters' minds. We see shots of snow covering the frame (for example, **8.20**), which hint at a subjective vision. Later in the film, the camera movements occasionally remind us of the broader range of narrational knowledge, as in the first version of Susan's opera premiere, shown during Leland's story in segment 6. There the camera moves to reveal something neither Leland nor Susan could know about (**8.21–8.23**). The final sequence, which at least partially solves the mystery of "Rosebud," also uses a vast camera movement to give us an omniscient perspective. The camera cranes over objects from Kane's collection, moving forward in space but backward through Kane's life to concentrate on his earliest memento, the sled. A salient technique again conforms to pattern by giving us knowledge no character will ever possess.

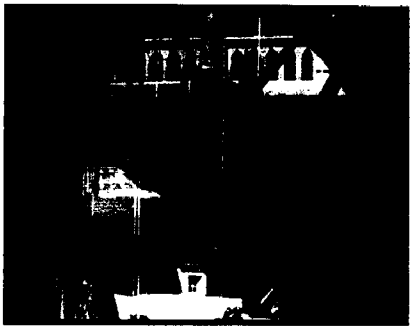
In looking at the development of the narrative form of *Citizen Kane,* we saw how Kane changes from an idealistic young man to a friendless recluse. The film sets up a contrast between Kane's early life as a newspaper publisher and his later withdrawal from public life after Susan's opera career fails. This contrast is most readily apparent in the mise-en-scene, particularly the settings of the *Inquirer* office and Xanadu. The *Inquirer* office is initially an efficient but cluttered place. When Kane takes over, he creates a casual atmosphere by moving in his furniture and living in his office. The low camera angles tend to emphasize the office's thin pillars and low ceilings, which are white and evenly, brightly lit. Eventually, Kane's collection of crated antiquities clutters his little office. Xanadu, on the other hand, is huge and sparsely furnished. The ceilings are too high to be seen in most shots, and the few furnishings stand far apart. The lighting often strikes figures strongly from the back or side, creating a few patches of hard light in the midst of general darkness. The expanded collection of antiquities and mementoes now is housed in cavernous storerooms.

The contrast between the *Inquirer* office and Xanadu is also created by the sound techniques associated with each locale. Several scenes at the newspaper office (Kane's initial arrival and his return from Europe) involve a dense sound mix with a babble of overlapping voices. Yet the cramped space is suggested by the relative lack of resonance in timbre. In Xanadu, however, the conversations sound very different. Kane and Susan speak their lines to each other slowly, with pauses between. Moreover, their voices have an echo effect that combines with the setting and lighting to convey a sense of huge, empty space.

The transition from Kane's life at the *Inquirer* to his eventual seclusion at Xanadu is suggested by a change in the mise-en-scene at the *Inquirer.* As we have just seen, while Kane is in Europe, the statues he sends back begin to fill up his

8.20 *Citizen Kane:* snow inside and outside the glass ball.

8.21 In *Citizen Kane*'s first opera scene, the camera cranes up from the stage . . .



8.22 . . . through the rigging above . . .

little office. This hints at Kane's growing ambitions and declining interest in working personally on his newspaper. This change culminates in the last scene in the *Inquirer* office—Leland's confrontation with Kane. The office is being used as a campaign headquarters. With the desks pushed aside and the employees gone, the room looks larger and emptier than it had in earlier scenes. Welles emphasizes this by placing the camera at floor level and shooting from a low angle (5.107). The Chicago *Inquirer* office, with its vast, shadowy spaces, also picks up this pattern **(8.24)**, as do later conversation scenes in the huge rooms of Xanadu (8.19).

Contrast these scenes with one near the end of the film. The reporters invade Kane's museumlike storeroom at Xanadu **(8.25)**. Although the echoing inside Xanadu conveys its cavernous quality, the reporters transform the setting briefly by the same sort of dense, overlapping dialogue that characterized the early *Inquirer* scenes and the scene after the newsreel. By bringing together these reporters and Kane's final surroundings, the film creates another contrasting parallel emphasizing the changes in the protagonist.

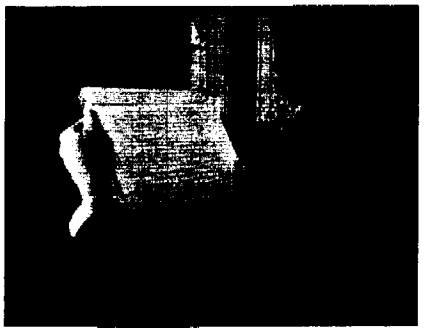
Parallelism is an important feature throughout *Citizen Kane,* and most of the salient techniques work to create parallels in the ways we've already seen. For example, the use of deep focus and deep space to pack many characters into the frame can create significant similarities and contrasts. Late in Thatcher's account (segment 4), a scene presents Kane's financial losses in the Depression. He is forced to sign over his newspaper to Thatcher's bank. The scene opens with a close-up of Kane's manager, Bernstein, reading the contract **(8.26)**. He lowers the paper to reveal Thatcher, now much older, seated opposite him. We hear Kane's voice offscreen, and Bernstein moves his head slightly, the camera reframing a little. Now we see Kane pacing beyond them in a huge office or boardroom **(8.27)**. The scene is a single take in which the dramatic situation is created by the arrangement of the figures and the image's depth of field. The lowering of the contract recalls the previous scene, in which we first get a real look at the adult Kane as Thatcher puts down the newspaper that has concealed him **(8.28, 8.29)**. There Thatcher had been annoyed, but Kane could defy him. Years later in the story, Thatcher has gained control and Kane paces restlessly, still defiant, but stripped of his power over the *Inquirer* chain. The use of a similar device to open these two scenes sets up a contrasting parallel between them.

Editing patterns can also suggest similarities between scenes, as when Welles compares two moments at which Kane seems to win public support. In the first scene, Kane is running for governor and makes a speech at a mammoth rally. This scene is principally organized around an editing pattern that shows one or two shots of Kane speaking, then one or two close shots of small groups of characters in the audience (Emily and their son, Leland, Bernstein, Gettys), then another shot of Kane. The cutting establishes the characters who are important for their views of Kane. Boss Gettys is the last to be shown in the scene, and we expect him to retaliate against Kane's denunciation.

8.23 . . . to reveal a stagehand indicating that Susan's singing stinks.

8.24 In *Citizen Kane,* deep-focus photography and rear projection exaggerate the depth of the *Inquirer* office, making the characters seem far apart.

8.25 *Citizen Kane:* deep focus in the final scene.



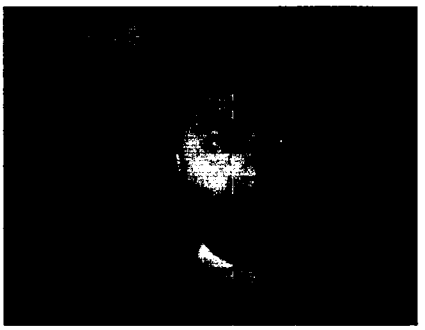
8.26 The contract scene in *Citizen Kane* . . .

8.27 . . . with Kane in the background of the shot . . .

8.28 . . . echoes this earlier scene's composition . . .

8.29 . . . and revelation of Kane.

8.30 *Citizen Kane:* Susan onstage in her opera debut . . .



8.31 . . . and Kane in the audience.

After his defeat, Kane sets out to make Susan an opera star and justify his interest in her to the public. In the scene that parallels Kane's election speech, Susan's debut, the organization of shots is similar to that of the political rally. Again the figure on the stage, Susan, serves as a pivot for the editing. One or two shots of her are followed by a few shots of the various listeners (Kane, Bernstein, Leland, the singing teacher), then back to Susan, and so on (**8.30, 8.31**). General narrative parallels and specific stylistic techniques articulate two stages of Kane's power quest: first on his own, then with Susan as his proxy.

As we've seen in Chapter 7, music can bring out parallels as well. For example, Susan's singing is causally central to the narrative. Her elaborate aria in the opera *Salammbo* contrasts sharply with the other main diegetic music, the little song about "Charlie Kane." In spite of the differences between the songs, there is a parallel between them, in that both relate to Kane's ambitions. The "Charlie Kane" ditty seems inconsequential, but its lyrics clearly show that Kane intends it as a political song, and it does turn up later as campaign music. In addition, the chorus girls who sing the song wear costumes with boots and Rough Rider hats, which they place on the heads of the men in the foreground (**8.32**). Thus Kane's desire for war with Spain has shown up even in this apparently simple farewell party for his departure to Europe. When Kane's political ambitions are dashed, he tries to create a public career for his wife instead, but she is incapable of singing grand opera. Again, the songs create narrative parallels between different actions in Kane's career.

As we saw in examining *Citizen Kane*'s narrative, the newsreel is a very important sequence, partly because it provides a map to the upcoming plot events. Because of its importance, Welles sets off the style of this sequence from the rest of the film by distinctive techniques that don't appear elsewhere in *Citizen Kane.* Also, we need to believe that this is a real newsreel in order to motivate Thompson's search for the key to Kane's life. The realistic newsreel sequence also helps establish Kane's power and wealth, which will be the basis of much of the upcoming action.

Welles uses several techniques to achieve the look and sound of a newsreel of the period. Some of these are fairly simple. The music recalls actual newsreels, and the insert titles, outmoded in fictional films, were still a convention in newsreels. But beyond this, Welles employs a number of subtle cinematographic techniques to achieve a documentary quality. Since some of the footage in the newsreel is supposed to have been taken in the silent period, he uses several different film stocks to make it appear that the different shots have been assembled from widely different sources. Some of the footage was printed so as to achieve the jerkiness of silent film run at sound speed. Welles also scratched and faded this footage to give it the look of old, worn film. This, combined with the makeup work, creates a remarkable impression of documentary footage of Kane with Teddy Roosevelt, Adolf Hitler (**8.33**), and other historical figures. In the latter scenes of Kane being wheeled around his estate, the hand-held camera, the slats and barriers (**8.34**), and the high

8.32 Costumes create a political reference in *Citizen Kane.*

8.33 In *Citizen Kane,* costume, makeup, and . . .

8.34 . . . cinematography simulate newsreel footage.

angle imitate the effects of a newsreel reporter secretly filming Kane. All of these documentary conventions are enhanced by the use of a narrator whose booming voice also mimics the commentary typical in newsreels of the day.

One of *Citizen Kane*'s outstanding formal features is the way its plot manipulates story time. As we have seen, this process is motivated by Thompson's inquiry and the order in which he interviews Kane's acquaintances. Various techniques assist in the manipulation of order and duration. The shift from a narrator's present recounting to a past event is often reinforced by a *shock cut.* A shock cut creates a jarring juxtaposition, usually by means of a sudden shift to a higher sound volume and a considerable graphic discontinuity. *Citizen Kane* offers several instances: the abrupt beginning of the newsreel after the deathbed shot, the shift from the quiet conversation in the newsreel projection room to the lightning and thunder outside the El Rancho, and the sudden appearance of a screeching cockatoo in the foreground as Raymond's flashback begins (**8.35**). Such transitions create surprise and sharply demarcate one portion of the plot from another.

8.35 A shock cut in *Citizen Kane.*

The transitions that skip over or drastically compress time are less abrupt. Recall, for instance, the languid images of Kane's sled being gradually covered by snow. A more extended example is the breakfast table montage (segment 6) that elliptically traces the decline of Kane's first marriage. Starting with the newlyweds' late supper, rendered in a track-in and a shot/reverse-shot series, the sequence moves through several brief episodes, consisting of shot/reverse-shot exchanges linked by whip pans. (A **whip pan** is a very rapid pan that creates a blurring sidewise motion across the screen. It is usually used as a transition between scenes.) In each episode, Kane and Emily become more sharply hostile. The segment ends by tracking away to show the surprising distance between them at the table.

The music reinforces the sequence's development as well. The initial late supper is accompanied by a lilting waltz. At each transition to a later time, the music changes. A comic variation of the waltz follows its initial statement and then a tense one; then horns and trumpets restate the Kane theme. The final portion of the scene, with a stony silence between the couple, is accompanied by a slow, eerie variation on the initial theme. The dissolution of the marriage is stressed by this theme-and-variations accompaniment. A similar sort of temporal compression and sonic elaboration can be found in the montage of Susan's opera career (segment 7).

Our brief examination of *Citizen Kane*'s style has pointed out only a few of the major patterns in the film. You can find others: the musical motif associated with Kane's power; the "K" motif appearing in Kane's costumes and in Xanadu's settings; the way the decor of Susan's room in Xanadu reveals Kane's attitude toward her; the changes in the acting of individuals as their characters age in the course of the story; and the playful photographic devices, such as the photos that become animated or the many superimpositions during montage sequences. Again and again in *Citizen Kane,* such stylistic patterns sustain and intensify the narrative development and shape the audience's experience in particular ways.