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ENGL 3365 S10
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6 February, 2024

Crumbling Man and Marriage in Citizen Kane:

A Cinematic Analysis of the 'Breakfast Montage' Scene

Introduction

Eighty-three years after it was first released, *Citizen Kane* remains, in many estimations, the greatest film ever made. Orson Welles' masterpiece, released in 1941, remains a cornerstone in film study for its creative storytelling and technical cinematography. “Welles dove into moviemaking with reckless abandon – as far as he was concerned, nothing was impossible, and he wasn’t well versed enough in the practical realities of the craft to know better. As a result, he and his key collaborator – veteran cinematographer Gregg Toland – broke all the rules” (Orson Welles: Citizen Kane 19) The film primarily follows the life and death of Charles Foster Kane (Orson Welles). Exploring the complexities of ambition and the alienation that follows those corrupted by absolute power. In order to accurately analyze a film, introspection on the formal elements of cinematography is required, as they work in congruence to achieve a desired outcome, namely mise-en-scene, editing, lighting and sound. This essay focuses on the 'Breakfast Montage' scene. This scene represents the film's central themes and demonstrates Welles' use of editing to narrate the course of the protagonist's relationship with his first wife, Emily (Ruth Warrick). In this scene, we witness a subtle deterioration in Charles Foster Kane's humanism, love and belonging over the much more significant shift in appearance, wealth and success. This scene is an appropriate representation of the central theme of the entire film, where we see a transformation of a man's relationships and ideals.

A Summary

"Right from the start of movies, it was a convention that the rich were vulgarly acquisitive but were lonely and miserable and were incapable of receiving love." (Kael 70) Soothing and consoling the public with the theme that the rich can buy everything except what counts. *Citizen Kane* is a story told non-linearly through flashbacks, scenes and montages, forming our view of the protagonist and his life story. The central mystery concerns a reporter's quest to decipher Kane's dying word, "Rosebud." Throughout the film, we watch other characters give their interpretations of who Kane was. This journey through Kane's life exposes his relentless thirst for power, its corruption of his ideals, his deep desire for love and his inability to love appropriately because he does not know how. He ultimately dies a lonely and heartbroken man.

The Breakfast Montage

The 'Breakfast Montage' scene perfectly represents the entire film. The scene in which the marriage of Charles Foster Kane and Emily is distilled into a few brief breakfast exchanges spanning years. According to the shooting script by Herman J. Mankiewicz and Orson Welles, what occurs in the breakfast room covers a period of 9 years – are played in the same set with only changes in lighting, special effects outside the window, and wardrobe (Kael 195). It particularly highlights the theme of Kane's relentless thirst for power and the impact this behaviour has on his relationships. Many scenes in the film are exemplary of Welles' cinematic prowess. However, this scene is more straightforward in that there is a distinct use of dialogue and marked silence, editing with spinning transitions, and the overall cinematography to depict this man's fall into isolation, deteriorating marriage, and, more broadly, his ideals.

Significance

The scene begins early in Kane's career and marriage. Welles compresses several years into a few moments, showing Kane and Emily becoming increasingly distant over time. Initially, the couple is exceptionally loving and are shown to be very interested in intimacy. Exchanging banter, affections and Kane professing his love for her intensely, but as time passes, they are shown to be discussing only of Kane's work and grow apart both physically and emotionally, not holding the same common ideals as they once did. Emily even mentions how she might prefer a rival of flesh and blood, proposing that she feels she competes with and is inferior to 'the newspaper.' There is dialogue showing how even the nursery in his house is infested with offers from 'the newspaper,' which represents the extent to which he allows his work to interfere with his personal life regardless of his wife's opinion. He is shown to pick work over human affection progressively.

This scene is significant in metaphorically representing Kane's journey throughout the film. His initial ideals and affection fade and give way to more extreme pursuits of power and control, which are detrimental to his personal life by the growing aloofness in his marriage. This scene marks the beginning of Kane's downfall.

Use of Mise-En-Scene, Cinematography, Editing and Sound

Welles' overall use of cinematography and editing in this movie is groundbreaking. The entire film has aspects of his inspiration, intelligence, creativity and courage. The 'Breakfast Montage' scene consists of a series of dissolves in the form of spinning transitions, perhaps hinting that the earth has spun many times since the last moment. A subtle change in the mise-

en-scene marks each jump in time. The physical manifestation of their emotional distance is by their seats that seem to get further and further until they are at opposite ends of the table, denoting the distance that has occurred physically, emotionally and psychologically. Even showing his wife reading the rival newspaper shows her resentment for his business and what the newspaper has done to her husband and their marriage.

The change in costumes, table setting, and body language shows time passing and the advancing apathy they have formed for each other. Kane looks far more stressed and even has wrinkles and a grimace. Meanwhile, concern and diminishing hope linger on Emily's. This is a dialogue-heavy scene, and the conversation transitions from affectionate to snappy and disinterested. The use of sound, or rather the lack of it, is telling. The scene has lively dialogue initially, but as they grow apart, the silences grow longer and more tense. It is evident that, by the end of the scene, Kane has become more engrossed in his work and has little time and patience for human connection.

Conclusion

Leland, the narrator of this scene, could not possibly have known everything that went on in Kane's marriage, but developing this story through what is known as the "Roshomon Effect' is a revolutionary technical aspect for the 1940s. Back then, it was all new; it was not an ancient industry. Welles presents complex ideas and intangible sentiments through his unique way of filming. His use of 'The Breakfast Montage' scene to depict a crumbling marriage, character and tycoon exemplifies his prodigy.

Only the viewers are shown the one piece of information essential to understanding why Kane did all that he did, with his business, his marriages, his Xanadu, and the meaning of

Rosebud. Rosebud will forever stand at the opposite end of ambition on the spectrum. The cost of materialistic success is portrayed in the "Breakfast Montage" scene.

Works Cited

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