

# SHAKESPEARE THROUGH THE LENS OF ORSON WELLES

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That William Shakespeare occupies a place in literary and dramatic history which will never be equaled is no longer a disputable point. Shakespeare has been described as "the world's most often-produced playwright, the greatest writer who ever lived, a literary genius, a brilliant poet, a great storyteller" and so on (Bevington 3). Three and one half centuries later, a young man by the name of Orson Welles began to be described with similarly impressive superlatives. By his mid twenties, Welles achieved a place in show business that will likely never be surpassed. As James Naramore puts it:

He had been the New York Federal Theatre's most dynamic showman; he had co-founded and directed the most critically acclaimed repertory company in America; he had been chiefly responsible for the most sensational radio broadcast in history; he had gone to Hollywood with one of the most generous contracts ever offered by the film factories; he had co-written, produced, directed, and starred in and starred in what is still regarded as the most important American movie since the birth of talkies. (7)

Though separated chronologically by a wide expanse of time, the work of these two geniuses came together in the mid-twentieth century with stunning results. Welles' visually rich and symbolic Shakespeare adaptations offer new insights to Shakespeare's work and explore thematic possibilities which make the plays relevant to a new audience.

Orson Welles' career adapting the work of William Shakespeare began well before his first forays as a film-maker. As a young child, Welles was described by some as one of those "irritating" infant prodigies, a fact that was acknowledged by Welles himself. He "was presenting his own versions of Shakespeare before he knew his ABC's" (Anderegg 9). Although Welles will never be remembered or honored as primarily Shakespearean (his most celebrated works, *Citizen Kane*, *Lady From Shanghai*, *Touch of Evil*, fall outside that genre), his contributions to this field are enormous. Welles utilized many of the incredible techniques he pioneered on films like *Citizen Kane* to create visually stunning Shakespearean screen adaptations, rich with vibrant imagery and symbolism. Although bringing Shakespeare successfully to the screen can be a daunting, if not impossible, task, Welles' filmed versions of *Macbeth*, *Othello*, and *Chimes at Midnight*, stand as lasting tributes to a man who hoped to pry Shakespeare from the clutches of elitist high-society and to deliver Shakespeare into the arms of ordinary people.

As a lover of Shakespeare, Welles knew that these plays contained timeless themes, universal human truths and which, if presented properly, should remain relevant for all time. Even before he began his film career, Welles adapted Shakespeare with a thoughtful eye toward his intended audience. He made bold choices and never considered his material to be like a metaphorical sacred cow, unable to be chopped, sliced, diced, or cooked for the enjoyment of his guests. There were his famous stage adaptations, which "were highly publicized and have subsequently received a good

deal of attention: the 'voodoo' *Macbeth* for the Ford Theatre in 1936, [and] the 'fascist' *Julius Caesar* on Broadway in 1937" (Anderegg 17).

*Macbeth* was staged in Harlem with an all Black cast, and produced by The Federal Theatre Project, which "was an offshoot of Roosevelt's second New Deal program... a scheme for unemployed theatre workers" (Callow 216). For Welles, the most intriguing part of the program was called the Negro Theatre Unit; this was run by Welles' longtime associate John Houseman, who aimed to create two categories of productions: "1. Plays by blacks, for blacks, with blacks. 2. Classical plays, performed by black artists 'without concession or reference to color'" (Callow 221). Houseman invited the young Orson Welles to direct plays for this second category.

This project appealed to Welles on many levels and the results illustrate Welles' desire and willingness to reinterpret, manipulate, and recreate Shakespeare, if necessary, in order to make it relevant to a new audience. Welles was not at all interested in polite, paint by numbers, approaches and this new project populated with inexperienced actors gave him the freedom to create a new presentation to suit his radical vision. "His abhorrence of the polite approach to Shakespeare was absolute" and he was also aware that what was needed was not "tutorials in iambic pentameter but leadership of a galvanizing, inspirational kind" (Callow 222). As for the selection of material, Welles had equally strong opinions:

Houseman reports being roused at 2 a.m. by a telephone call from Welles passionately eager to convey that... they must do *Macbeth*, and set it at the court of the early nineteenth-century Haitian Emperor Henri Christophe... the gigantic Grenadian slave who had become emperor. (Callow 222)

Christophe had famously led an insurrection and was elected president, but after a civil war, crowned himself emperor. His reign was cruel and his subjects revolted, cornering Christophe, who shot himself. "For Welles the element in the transposition that really attracted him was that Haiti's voodoo culture enabled him to make supernatural scenes a credible center of the play" (Callow 222). Welles' stylistic production presaged his film explorations, blending light, shadow, set design, and music to create an atmospheric presentation. "Accompanied by the sound of drums and the chanting of an actual *griot*, or bard, voodoo witches were constantly visible on stage, steering the action to its bloody finale" (Bevington 810). Some argued that the effect of this, though "theatrically fascinating, undercut the tragic dimension of the play and reduced *Macbeth* (Jack Carter) to a puppet controlled by evil spirits" (Bevington 810). However, the "breakthrough production established him as a major theatrical figure just as he turned twenty-one" (Bevington 699). Like Kurosawa after him, Welles wished to take a fresh look at Shakespeare, and playing with character, setting, and even the language would never be off limits. "In practice Welles felt compelled to use shock tactics to restore the immediacy of the texts" (Callow 223). This was not the last time that Welles applied "concept" to Shakespearean works in order to gain attention and restore immediacy.

The following year, Houseman, Welles, and The Federal Theatre Project produced *The Cradle Will Rock*, a leftist production that was feared by conservatives and

Republicans. This labor opera was their "only venture into truly proletarian theatre, which was summarily closed by federal agents and forced into a stunning improvised performance down the street in the aisles of the Venice Theatre. Welles immediately resigned his job with the New Deal and Houseman was fired" (Naremore 17). The two immediately formed their own repertory company outside the government owned system and called it *Mercury Theatre Project*, a title stolen from a *Mercury* magazine "lying in the corner of an empty fireplace in Welles home"(Naremore 17).

This ambitious theater company soon went to work on an updating of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*. Welles aimed to make the play relevant to his audience and world politics at the time. This production stands as an important milestone, "one of the earliest examples of re-contextualizing a Shakespeare play to underscore thematic points: Shakespeare's tragedy of assassination and retribution became an indictment of totalitarianism" (Bevington 699). The production was staged on the heels of Hitler's rise to power in Germany and Mussolini's rise in Italy. Welles boldly exchanged "Roman togas for Italian black-shirts... turning Caesar into a Fascist leader" (Bevington 699).

*Julius Caesar*, along with *Macbeth*, shows the young Welles, still in his early twenties, unafraid to create Shakespearean productions relevant for their times. Welles' unapologetic rethinking of the classics, here and in his films, paved the way for future directors and film-makers like Lurhman and Kurosawa. Each understood that the plays should remain vital, living, breathing, adaptable creations, or else run the risk of withering into obsolescence. Not all critics were so forward thinking. Mary McCarthy wrote,

Mr. Welles has the idea that an Elizabethan play is a liability which only by the most strenuous showmanship, by cutting, doctoring, and modernizing, can be converted an asset. Mr. Welles' method is to find a modern formula into which a classic can somehow be squeezed. (Callow 223)

In addition to adapting the text to a modern setting, Welles cut the text liberally; "he continued cutting and rearranging; this process only stopped by Press Night" (Callow 323). Though Welles certainly did not pioneer the act of cutting Shakespearean text for presentation purposes, modern directors, no doubt, point to Welles as a means to excuse their own liberties.

Welles' production focused on the character of Brutus as its central figure. Welles admitted,

*Julius Caesar* is really about Brutus... Brutus is the classical picture of the eternal, impotent, ineffectual, fumbling liberal; the reformer who wants to do something about things but doesn't know how and gets it in the neck in the end. He's dead right all the time, and dead at the final curtain. (Callow 323)

Welles' interpretation is clearly an indictment of fascism, and features Caesar as a modern day Hitler or Mussolini becoming far too dangerous as he consolidates power. The liberal, sympathetic Brutus understands the dangers of a too powerful totalitarian leader and intervenes to save his society. However, the play leaves ambiguous the

question of whether the fight against fascism can be won. Whatever the effect, the play was an enormous hit and confirmed to Welles that his bold approach was the right path.

The following year, *The Mercury Theater* was to enter a new medium: radio. Here, Welles would increase his talents of spoken word, score music, sound effects, and overlapping dialogue, which would serve him so well in later films including his Shakespeare adaptations. The Columbia Broadcast System wished to capitalize on the buzz surrounding the young genius, Orson Welles, and offered him nine weekly radio programs entitled *First person Singular*. "Welles was to be featured as its quadruple threat creator; 'written, directed, produced, and performed by Orson Welles' was to be its epigraph" (Callow 370). Welles' incredible personal baritone voice was put to great use during these productions, which included *Treasure Island*, *Dracula*, *Macbeth* and even *Julius Caesar*. But it was the Halloween broadcast of H.G. Wells' *War of the Worlds* that catapulted Welles from theater and radio showman to Hollywood stardom. The science fiction story was re-written and set in New Jersey and included multiple false news broadcasts from remote locations reporting on a Martian invasion. Though the broadcast was interrupted three times with a disclaimer that the story was a dramatization, the result was public hysteria as small groups of people from coast to coast were driven to panic by Welles' credible imparting of the horrific news. "In Harlem, a black congregation fell to its knees; in Indianapolis a woman ran screaming into a church where evening service was being held and shouted 'New York has been destroyed. It's the end of the world. Go home and prepare to die'" (Callow 403). Premature births, panic stricken residents falling down stairs, an exodus of frightened listeners from many population centers ensued, and the CBS switchboard jammed with callers looking for verification. News reached the studio:

Having uttered the last scripted lines of Professor Pierson, a slightly shaky Welles announced 'out of character,' as he said, the program had 'no further significance than the holiday offering it was intended to be. ...if your doorbell rings and there's no one there, that there was no Martian... it's Halloween.' (Callow 404)

Headlines of a jealous print media flashed the next day criticizing Welles and CBS, but the buzz would catapult Welles and *Mercury* to Hollywood.

"JUST SIGNED!" screamed RKO's ad in the trade press. 'Orson Welles... brilliant actor and director, to make one picture a year... and WHAT a picture is planned for his first!" (Callow, 457). *Citizen Kane*, though not the commercial success that RKO had hoped for, was a critical success. The story of fictitious newspaper tycoon Charles Foster Kane, a barely disguised William Randolph Hearst, certainly lies outside the Shakespearean genre, however it is important to note its historic significance and the fact that most of the techniques employed on the later Shakespeare productions *Macbeth*, *Othello*, and *Chimes at Midnight* were first developed while making this great film.

[*Citizen Kane*] has been hailed as a paragon of filmmaking—by most measures, the greatest motion picture ever made. The spellbinding photography, brilliant script, and superb direction seem all the more

astounding because the film was the achievement of a twenty-five-year-old newcomer to Hollywood who was producing, directing, co-writing and starring in his first motion picture. (Lebo inside cover)

A jealous Hollywood establishment irked at the youngster's unprecedented contract and control hoped for a Welles failure. Dailey Variety wrote, "A genius is a crackpot on a tightrope. Hollywood is watching Orson Welles, wondering if his foot will slip" (Lebo 3). When *Kane* failed to produce big box office returns and *The Magnificent Ambersons* ran into costly delays, the vultures at RKO (including a new studio chief) had their way and cancelled Welles's contract. Welles' plans to bring Shakespeare to the big screen had hit a roadblock.

Welles had hoped to employ the same bold approach he used for the Broadway production of *Julius Caesar* when adapting Shakespeare to the screen; a plan designed to bring Shakespeare to the masses. However, convincing major studios to invest in such a project proved to be more difficult than the filming itself. The track record for Shakespearean screen adaptations was not profitable. Warner Brother's lavish production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in 1935 and MGM's production of *Romeo and Juliet* the following year suffered the same pale box office returns. "Neither film enjoyed the kind of commercial success that would encourage further experiments along the same line, and Hollywood pretty much ignored Shakespeare for the next decade or so" (Anderegg 60). Welles' problem was further exacerbated by the fact that he had gained an unfair reputation as one who could not deliver a film on time or on budget.

Help for Welles came from an unlikely source. Incredibly,

Welles finally reached agreement with Herbert Yates, President of Republic Pictures, to finance the low budget movie. Republic, was one the "Poverty Row" studios, known largely as home of a series of "B" westerns starring Roy Rogers, although occasionally a major production would appear starring John Wayne. (Howard 93)

Yates and Republic agreed to let Welles produce a screen version of *Macbeth* in 1948. Welles promised to shoot the entire film in just 21 days and for just \$800,000. He delivered.

Starring Welles himself as Macbeth and Jeanette Nolan as a particularly evil Lady Macbeth, the film is an incredible achievement. While Welles cuts much of the play's dialogue, he utilizes his directorial vision to deliver a film rich with symbolism and imagery. Stylistically, the film feels like film noir. Shot on inexpensive soundstages, Welles manages to create a visually rich feel, by using fog, intentionally claustrophobic sets, unique camera angles, and symbolic costumes. Welles shoots himself from low angles to make his character appear to grow in power as the film progresses. The not too subtle crowns worn by the Macbeth and Lady Macbeth appear to have devilish horns. To highlight religious themes, Welles creates "a Holy Man who hovers about the action and even witnesses the killing of the grooms attending Duncan" (Bevington 811). His film seems influenced by his own stage production of the "voodoo" *Macbeth*, including stylistic, noir-ish lighting design, a primitive looking castle that looks as though it was carved out of cold, hard rock, complete with bare-chested slaves

ominously beating drums announcing a barbaric execution. Hardly the Shakespearean vision Duncan and Banquo describe:

DUNCAN: This castle hath a pleasant seat, the air  
nimble recommends itself  
unto our gentle senses

BANQUO: This guest of summer,  
The temple-haunting martlet, does approve  
by his loving mansionry that the heaven's breath  
Smells wooingly here. No jutting frieze,  
Buttress, nor coign of vantage but this bird  
Hath made his pendent bed and procreant cradle.  
Where they most breed and haunt, I have observed  
The air is delicate. (1.6 1-9)

Welles merely omits this dialogue, which fails to coincide with his darker vision.

Welles applies his auditory expertise, perhaps perfected at CBS radio, to *Macbeth* with great success. In Act 1, Scene 5, Lady Macbeth delivers a very sinister soliloquy in voice over:

The raven himself is hoarse  
That croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan  
Under my battlements. Come, you spirits  
That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here  
And fill me from the crown to the toe-top full  
Of direst cruelty! Make thick my blood;  
Stop th' access and passage to remorse,  
That no compunctious visitings of nature  
Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between  
Th' effect and it! Come to my woman's breasts  
And take my milk for gall, you murd'ring ministers,  
Wherever in your sightless substances  
You wait on nature's mischief! Come, thick night,  
And pall thee in the dunest smoke of hell,  
That my keen knife see not the wound it makes,  
Nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark  
To cry "Hold, hold!" (39-54)

Jeanette Nolan delivers this soliloquy in her bed chamber and with heaving breasts, declares her evil intentions. The result of Nolan's portrayal of Lady Macbeth as an embodiment of evil, with over-reaching, unbounded ambition, is that it tends to lessen Macbeth's responsibility for the murderous actions. In the film's early stages, Welles seems to scapegoat Lady Macbeth. It is Lady Macbeth's pushing and prodding, which causes her reluctant husband to murder his king. Later in the film, this misogynistic flavor is corrected, as the power hungry Macbeth no longer needs any persuasion for his misdeeds.

Welles makes other important choices, which result in deeper meaning, or give a particular flavor to an episode. In a brief prologue, which was curiously cut when the film was restored in 1980, "Welles announces that the film is an allegory about the battle between 'Christian law and order [and] the agents of chaos, priests of hell and magic'" (Bevington 811). Late in the film, Macbeth's stone fortress begins to empty of allies. Macbeth, here the agent of chaos and wearing his armor, awaits Macduff's forces of good. Macbeth wears a heavy crown, which suggests giant thorns or horns. This was later roundly criticized as being his "statue of liberty" costume. Macduff's forces symbolically wear crosses on their helmets and carry long crosses. This part of the film is reminiscent of Hitler's final days in his bunker with Eva Braun. Here, Welles draws upon images of the present to make Shakespeare relevant to his time. In keeping with the times, war was seen as a positive struggle of good triumphing over evil. At the film's conclusion a victorious Malcolm raises Macbeth's bloody, severed head above his head for his eager troops. Heroic score music and holy symbols combine to complete the effect. However, Welles also adds a brief epilogue with the previously seen witches watching the castle; "the tableau serves as a reminder that we must be vigilant, because evil, though momentarily defeated, still lurks about us" (Bevington 774).

Ultimately, the film was neither a commercial success nor even a critical success in its time. It seems that the film suffered by comparison to Lawrence Olivier's *Hamlet*, which was released the same year. Olivier's film was well financed and had extensive publicity backing its release. *Life Magazine* had an exclusive deal to publish photos of *Hamlet* prior to its release:

The language of praise suggests the kind of yardstick against which Welles would, fatally, be measured. *Life* actually devoted no less than three stories to Olivier's *Hamlet*—in addition to the March 15, 1948 photo essay. . . . (Anderegg 75)

*Macbeth*, on the other hand, was roundly criticized with *Life* leading the charge. "MURDER," was the headline and the review read, "Orson Welles doth foully slaughter Shakespeare in a dialect version of his 'Tragedy of Macbeth'" (Anderegg 76).

Ultimately, the negative press caused Republic to edit the film, removing some scenes entirely. The film was rescored with a redubbed dialogue track to remove some of the Scottish accents, which were blamed for the incomprehensible language. Although, the film has been largely restored and has come to be widely appreciated world-wide, its critical and commercial failure meant that Welles would be forced to operate outside the studio system for future Shakespearean films.

In 1949, Welles began production of a filmed version of *Othello*. Although his original financing deal fell through, Welles decided to move ahead on his own:

His film version of *Othello* was to be financed from other Welles acting jobs. In this way, he was certain that he would at last be able to maintain complete control over his movie, having been let down by Hollywood studios once too often. (Howard 110)

The film was directed by and starred Welles in the title role as the Moor who is manipulated by the vengeful Iago into a blind and desperate jealousy that ultimately leads to his innocent wife's, as well as his own, destruction.

Once again, Welles employs his directorial power and vision to bring a visually stunning and deeply symbolic film to the public. Welles is unafraid to make the kinds of bold choices, which caused such a critical backlash against *Macbeth*. *Othello* opens with a foreshadowing of the tragedy about to occur. Welles shows us the unfortunate Moor's funeral procession, and most satisfying, he shows us the scheming Iago's imprisonment hanging in a cage above the castle. The scene is typical of Welles' technique. He blends haunting choral voices with heavily contrasted visuals. Welles shows forced prospective shots, shoots on multiple planes, and from unique camera angles to set the tone for the incredibly stylistic film to come.

Although the film suffers, by today's standards, from the choice of a white actor (Welles) playing the part of the jealous Moor, Welles' decision to downplay the effects of make-up is a good one. Welles plays Othello as a lighter skinned man than Olivier's unfortunate Othello a decade later. The latter film, which relies heavily on Olivier's performance, is hard to watch. The make-up is so distracting that one never forgets that the Moor is being played by an older English actor. The Welles film does not have this problem, and unlike the Olivier film, which is visually unappealing and has the look of daytime drama, Welles' film is a visual masterpiece.

Welles' *Othello* succeeds despite its severely handicapped production. The film took three years to produce, and Welles, who financed the film on his own, was forced to leave the production to act in other films.

*Othello* quickly found its crew, assembled by Welles with his salary from *Prince of Foxes*. Orson then left them almost immediately to appear in *The Black Rose*. . . he even at one point is said to have "borrowed" some of the equipment used on *The Black Rose*, shooting *Othello* at night before returning the apparatus to the other film's set in the morning! (Howard 111)

Welles was made to make other financially driven choices as well.

With new Italian backers promptly going bankrupt, the crew found itself stranded in Morocco. Costumes being impounded, the killing of Roderigo was immediately rewritten by Welles to take place in a Turkish bath, where the actors would need only to wear towels. (Howard 111)

Critics agree that this financially driven compromise actually works to the film's advantage. "Paradoxically, the scene benefits from the confined space as the steam hovers eerily about the villain and his dupe" (Bevington 693). The finished product is visually stunning, but not without some problems. The audio engineers, who originally worked on the film, were from the Italian film industry and they did a poor job of synching the dialogue. However, the 1992 restored edition finally rights this problem.

Welles chops dialogue, reduces scenes to their bare essentials, and even uses "non Shakespearean voice-overs to account for abridgements" (Bevington 693). Welles' visual



metaphors double for Shakespearean language. The original 92-minute running time has the effect of speeding to the conclusion and “makes Othello’s fall from greatness to ignominy all the more disturbing” (Bevington 693). Welles’ vision also includes a characterization of the villainous Iago as a repressed homosexual jealous of Othello’s love for his beautiful and fair wife, Desdemona. In fact, the character of Iago portrayed authentically as a detestable, wretched, sniveling figure makes Othello’s duping all the more infuriating. Another dramatic Wellesian addition occurs as Othello kills Desdemona. A tormented Othello cries, “It is too late” (5.2.88). Here, Shakespeare has Othello smother Desdemona with a pillow, but Welles, playing Othello, strangles his wife (Lea Padavani) with the famous handkerchief; the instrument used as proof of Desdemona’s infidelity becomes the very instrument of her death.

Critically, the film fared better than *Macbeth*, winning the Grand Prize at the Venice Film Festival. Unfortunately, this did not translate into major studio support or a major distribution deal. Thus, the film was only sporadically shown throughout the United States and Europe. The critics’ responses were mixed with several unable to overlook audio technical problems. Others were more generous:

Mr. Welles’ stature, gesture, tones make the crumbling of reason, the blind, deaf rage believable. When I think of the Moor now, this is the Moor I imagine... I feel that what I have seen is large, noble, and tragic.  
— Dilys Powell Sunday Times. (Howard 114)

Many reviews applaud Welles acting ability, which is often overlooked, due to his directorial genius. However, Welles’ acting is incredibly powerful and owes much of its strength of performance to his voice. “She loved me for the dangers I had passed, / and I loved her that she did pity them” (1.3.169-170). When Welles delivers these lines, one has no doubt that what he speaks is true. It is completely plausible when he easily wins over the Senators to his side, if not Desdemona’s bitter father.

The final Shakespearean play material that Welles adapted for the screen is *Chimes at Midnight*. It is sometimes known as *Falstaff* and even by its Spanish production title, *Campanadas A Medianoche*. This film is actually parts of several Shakespearean plays. Welles incorporates “material from *Henry IV* plays, *Henry V*, *Richard II*, and adds a few lines from *The Merry Wives of Windsor*” (Andregg 127). This film centers on the characters of Sir John Falstaff, a lovable scoundrel, who spends his time drinking and whoring in the countryside of merry old England, and Prince Hal, the new King’s son who prefers the mentoring skills of Falstaff to that of his own father, (John Geilgud) the new King of England. Prince Hal spends his days drinking and in other kinds of debauchery with John Falstaff. However, when Henry’s reign as king is questioned and he is blamed for the death of Richard II, a rebel force is gathered under Henry Percy to fight against the forces of the new king. In a kind of coming of age story, Hal is forced to choose what kind of life he will lead. He chooses to fight and even kills Percy by his own hand, but Falstaff takes the credit and King Henry once again is disappointed in his son. Hal is torn by his love for Falstaff and a life of leisure, and by his duty to his father and country. In the end, Henry IV dies with Hal at his side and Hal chooses to become a worthy king. The new King Henry V decides to cast off his previous

life. When Falstaff arrives at the castle at the coronation, he is rejected by his former friend; he shuffles away, his heart broken, and dies.

The film is directed by and stars Welles as Falstaff, features John Geilgud as Henry IV, and Keith Baxter as Prince Hal. Margaret Rutherford stars as Mistress Quickly. Shot in Spain for economic reasons, the film required a unique shooting schedule. John Geilgud writes,

Orson Welles was splendid to work with, although usually in poor health... He engaged a fine company but he could not afford to keep us permanently employed. I went over for a week's shooting in Spain, then Margaret Rutherford went over for a week, then Jeanne Moreau, and Orson...had still not done any of his own scenes. (Howard 162-163)

Despite the unorthodox shooting schedule the film achieves much of what Welles had envisioned.

Shot in black and white, the film enjoys a quality of super-realism. "Welles' direction is not only fast moving and full of dazzling shots; it captures all of the dirt and squalor, the sweaty shirts and greasy hair of medieval England —Evening News" (Howard 168). Unlike the pro military feeling of *Macbeth*, this film features extremely brutal and realistic battles filled with blood, guts, and mud. The main battle scene is cut and edited brilliantly to make the audience believe that there are far more fighting men than Welles had at his disposal. The brutality of the hand-to-hand combat, along with the spurting blood, presages later films like *Saving Private Ryan*. These battle scenes include the "dehumanizing savagery of soldiers who repeatedly stab their victims with what appears to be passionate relish" (Bevington 439). The cartoonish violence is filled with tension and is scored with ironic religious music which adds to the audience's disturbance. Both animals and men are stabbed indiscriminately and soon it is impossible to tell which side is which in the civil broil" (Bevington 439). Welles makes the conscious decision to show the horror and disgust of war. One shot has two men writhing in the mud and filth, their legs intertwined as though in a sexual climax. This "undermines completely Hotspurs eloquent, poetic love of war," making Hotspurs heroic speeches sound absurd (Naremore 273). The mood of the film reflects the time it was made; during the growing conflict in Vietnam. There is a real sense of the loss of innocence or the "death of Merrie England" (Bevington 438).

Location is another important element of this film. Though the film was not shot in England, but in Madrid, Barcelona and other Spanish locations, the overall aesthetic look of the film is authentic. The environment feels real. One can see the breath of Henry IV as he sits upon his throne. The tavern scenes are filled with grime and one can almost smell the mixture of body odor, liquor, rotting food, and crackling fireplace. Outdoor locations, though the seasons may be confused, have the muddy, decaying quality, which suggests death; the death of a friendship, a king, a country, and an era. Welles was a stickler for having believable locations. "He said he wanted to avoid the feeling he had gotten from Olivier's *Henry V* where "people leave the castle... and suddenly they meet again on a golf course somewhere charging at one another" (Naremore, 275). *Chimes at Midnight's* choice of location adds a deeper meaning to the text, and never detracts from it.

Welles saves his most powerful direction for the final moments of the film. In the scene from *Henry IV part II*, Falstaff learns of his good friend Hal's ascension to the throne. He makes his way through the adoring crowd and completely fails to recognize the regal importance of the moment. He calls out to his friend "my boy." King Henry V, who has made the conscious decision to take his place in destiny as a respected king, turns to the hopeful Falstaff. Welles shoots King Henry from below to make his authority loom large and Falstaff from above to make him seem small. A stunned silence falls on the scene as everyone present, save the unfortunate Falstaff, appreciates the gravity of the occasion. The boy Prince has become the man. He quite nearly imitates his deceased father Henry IV as he delivers his famous rebuke to the hopeful Falstaff:

I know thee not, old man. Fall to thy prayers.  
How ill white hairs become a fool and jester!  
I have long dreamed of such a kind of man,  
So surfeit-swelled, so old, and so profane,  
But being awaked, I do despise my dream... (5.5.51-55)

A still unbelieving Falstaff attempts to move pathetically to his former friend, only to be rebuffed:

Presume not that I am the thing that I was,  
For God doth know, so shall the world perceive,  
That I have turned away my former self,  
So will I those that kept me company...  
"I banish thee on pain of death" says King Henry. (5.5.60-67)

A dejected and broken hearted Falstaff shuffles out of the palace. He speaks his final words, "I shall be sent for soon, by night." (5.5.95-96) These are words that not even he believes. The emotionally moving scene is shot in a large dark hall with a dejected Falstaff far from the camera and appearing extremely small, making his way towards an archway lit from within. Symbolically, Falstaff is moving towards his own death.

*Chimes at Midnight* is one of Welles' finest film achievements. Welles once again makes bold choices and is able to successfully blend elements from multiple Shakespearean history plays into one cohesive statement on humanity. By abandoning the history lesson and focusing instead on the character of Falstaff and his relationship with Prince Hal, Welles transcends the confines of the original works and delivers something far more appealing and memorable. This film "has gradually come to be recognized both as one of the most intelligent and imaginative of films adapted from Shakespeare and as one of Orson Welles's finest achievements, a film equal in energy and brilliance to *Citizen Kane* and *The Magnificent Ambersons*" (Andregg 125). Although some reviewers were quick to point out technical flaws, especially with the soundtrack, most gave it favorable reviews.

Orson Welles' career will not be defined by his work with Shakespeare, but he loved Shakespeare and he made important contributions to the field on the stage and especially with his film legacy. Welles successfully adapted Shakespeare for a new

audience and produced works relevant to their time. While purists and academics will often present BBC/Time life films as "far more faithful to the texts of Shakespeare than are any of the Welles films ... they are also, in their bland refusal to explore interpretive possibilities and to challenge theatrical orthodoxies, dead on arrival" (Andregg 69). By contrast, Welles's imaginative and innovative stage productions and filmed versions of *Macbeth*, *Othello*, and *Chimes at Midnight*, stand as lasting tributes to a man who hoped to deliver Shakespeare into the hearts and minds of ordinary people.

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### *Works Cited*

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Welles's retelling of Shakespeare's tale, a major intellectual achievement, brings Othello's isolation to the fore. Welles invested even the simplest of cinematic devices with a subtle but vastly affecting complexity. But with his choice of lenses and angles, the lighting and the rhythm of editing, the disposition of the actors in each composition and his control and direction of gestures and gazes, Welles suggests that two characters who are within arm's reach of each other are calling and crying to each other across a desolate and unbridgeable chasm. A short review of Orson Welles' three Shakespeare film adaptations, and some thoughts on each film. (they are placed in the order from best to not best (because none of these films deserve the word 'worst', so I will not use it. Sorry I guess.)) I feel anyone interested in watching these films should definitely follow up their viewing of Othello with Welles' "Filming Othello" as that film is very insightful on the play, the film, and the characters. An excellent post-game. I think if there is anyway a Shakespearean tragedy should look, it is the way these films capture it. The total grey, and drab, and desolate atmosphere is what all 3 of these films captivate, so excuse me for rambling on how wonderful each of these films look but it is what holds them with Olivier's films, despite them being abridged. A MONG THE FIRST Shakespeare plays introduced to him by his mother and the subject of one of his last telephone conversations, King Lear was seldom far from Orson Welles's thoughts. His radio adaptation of 1946 was broadcast by CBS on the "Mercury Summer Theater of the Air". The 1953 televised King Lear was presented during the second season of the prestige CBS program Omnibus. these Orson Welles quotes exists just do that. Orson Welles was conceived on May 6th in the year 1915. Orson Welles was born in Kenosha, Wisconsin. Bernstein saw Orson Welles's inventive abilities and selected him in the Todd School in Woodstock, Illinois, where he found his enthusiasm for the theater. Following the Todd School, Orson Welles left for Dublin, Ireland, paying his way with a little legacy he'd got. There, Orson Welles charmed crowds in creation of Jew Suss at the Gate Theater. Anybody can make movies with a pair of scissors and a two-inch lens. A man is not from where he is born, but where he chooses to die. A maverick may go his own way but he doesn't think that it's the only way or ever claim that it's the best one, except maybe for himself.