



March 6, 2007: XIV:8  
TOUCH OF EVIL (112 minutes) 1958



**Director** Orson Welles  
**Script** Paul Monash and Orson Welles, based on Whit Masterson's novel *Badge of Evil*  
**Producer** Albert Zug Smith  
**Original music** Henry Mancini  
**Cinematographer** Russell Metty (uncredited director of reshoots—Harry Keller)  
**Film Editor** Edward Curtiss, Walter Murch (director's cut), Aaron Stell, Virgil W. Vogel

Orson Welles...Hank Quinlan  
 Marlene Dietrich...Tanya  
 Charlton Heston... Ramon Miguel 'Mike' Vargas  
 Dennis Weaver...Motel Manager  
 Janet Leigh...Susan Vargas  
 Mercedes McCambridge...Leader of the gang  
 Joseph Calleia...Pete Menzies  
 Zsa Zsa Gabor...Nightclub Owner  
 Akim Tamiroff..."Uncle Joe" Grandi  
 Joseph Cotton...Police surgeon  
 Joanna Cook Moore...Marcia Linnekar  
 Keenan Wynn...Bit Part (uncredited)

**ORSON WELLES** (George Orson Welles, 6 May 1915, Kenosha, Wisconsin— 10 October 1985, Hollywood, sometimes credited as O.W. Jeeves and G.O. Spelvin) did it all: actor, director, writer, producer, editor, cinematographer, shill for Gallo Wines. In his later years he played himself, but he got to do that only because the self he created was so interesting. His bio lists 133 acting credits, beginning as Death in the 1934 film *Hearts of Death*. Many of those credits were as “narrator”: he was the offscreen voice of the narrator in “Shogun” and Robin Masters “Magnum P.I.” He played some of history’s great characters: Cardinal Wolsey in *A Man for All Seasons* 1966, Falstaff in *Chimes at Midnight* 1965, Harry Lime in *Third Man* 1949, Cesare Borgia in *Prince of Foxes* 1949, and *Macbeth* 1948. Not one of the 28 films he directed is uninteresting and several are masterpieces, among them *It's All True* (1933), *The Lady from Shanghai* (1948), *Macbeth* (1948), *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1942), and *Citizen Kane* (1941). He won a lifetime achievement academy award 1971, was nominated for *The Magnificent Ambersons* 1942, won for best writing original screenplay for *Citizen Kane* (1941).



**CHARLTON HESTON** (John Charlton Carter 4 October 1924, Evanston, Illinois) played Long John Silver and had a voice people liked enough to hire him as narrator for commercials and films long

after he'd stopped being of interest as an actor. There the similarities end. Heston appeared in more than 100 films, among them *Wayne's World 2* (1993), *Earthquake* (1974), *Airport 1975* (1974), *Soylent Green* (1973), *The Omega Man* (1971), *Will Penny* (1968), *Planet of the Apes* (1968), *Khartoum* (1966), *The Agony and the Ecstasy* (1965), *Major Dundee* (1965), *El Cid* (1961), *Ben-Hur* (1959), *The Ten Commandments* (1956), *Ruby Gentry* (1952), and *Peer Gynt* (1941). In 1960 Huston won a best actor Oscar for *Ben-Hur* and in 1978 he won the Academy's Gene Hersholt Humanitarian Award. That was pre-NRA. He was responsible for Welles's getting the director job in *Touch of Evil*.

**JANET LEIGH** (Jeanette Helen Morrison, 6 July 1927, Merced, California) was in *Harper* (1966), *Bye Bye Birdie* (1963), *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962), *Psycho* (1960), *How to Smuggle a Hernia Across the Border* (1949), *The Romance of Rosy Ridge* (1947) and 59 other films.



**MARLENE DIETRICH** (Marie Magdelene Dietrich, 27 December 1901, Berlin-Schöneberg, Germany— 6 May 1992, Paris) liked to deny she'd ever been in silents. If that's true, then *Madame wünscht keine Kinder* (1926), *Tänzerin* (1926), *Der Münch von Santaren* (1924), *So sind die Männer* (1922), and *Im Schatten des Glücks* (1919) have soundtracks no mortal ear has ever heard. No matter. She's great when she did get around to talking, whenever it was. Some of her other films are *Judgment at Nuremberg* (1961), *Witness for the Prosecution* (1957), *Around the World in Eighty Days* (1956), *Rancho Notorious* (1952), *Destry Rides Again* (1939), and *Der Blaue Engel* (1930).



**WALTER MURCH** got Welles' 58 pages of notes and is responsible for us seeing the film Welles was trying to make. Some of the films Murch edited are *Jarhead* (2005), *Cold Mountain* (2003), *The Talented Mr. Ripley* (1999), *The English Patient* (1996), *The Godfather Trilogy: 1901-1980* (1992), *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (1988), *Apocalypse Now* (1979), and *Julia* (1977). He edited sound for *The English Patient*, *Apocalypse Now*, *The Conversation* (1974), *The Godfather: Part II* (1974), *American Graffiti* (1973), *THX 1138* (1970), and *The Rain People* (1969). He was nominated for nine editing Academy Awards and won three of them: *The English Patient* (editing and sound) and *Apocalypse Now* (sound).

*Welles, (George) Orson from World Film Directors, V. I. Ed John Wakeman. The H.W. Wilson Co. NY 1987. Entry by Philip Kemp*

Born—to his lasting chagrin—in Kenosha, Wisconsin. (Having been conceived in Paris and named in Rio de Janeiro, he felt that Kenosha lacked, as a birthplace, a certain éclat) Wisconsin happened to be where his father, Richard Head Welles, who hailed from Virginia, owned two factories. A dilettante engineer and idiosyncratic inventor, sixty-four years old when Orson Welles was born, his preferred occupations were travel and gambling; “a wandering *bon viveur*” was his son's description. Welles' mother, Beatrice Ives Welles, was an accomplished concert pianist whose acquaintances included Ravel and Stravinsky; she was also exceptionally beautiful, a crack rifle shot, and a political radical who had once been imprisoned as a suffragist. Welles adored both his parents. “[My father] was a gentle, sensitive soul.... To him I owe the advantage of not having had a formal education until I was ten years old. From him I inherited the love of travel which has become ingrained within me. From my mother I inherited a real and lasting love of music and the spoken word.”

Welles was the second and youngest child. (His brother Richard, ten years his senior, is said to have been a quietly eccentric character. At one point he joined a monastery in California from which he was later ejected.) Orson Welles was treated virtually as an adult from infancy. Tales of his precocity have passed into legend. At two, he spoke “fluent and considered English” and rejected Lamb's

*Tales From Shakespeare*, which his mother was reading to him, demanding “the real thing.” At three, he was reading Shakespeare for himself, starting with *Midsummer's Night's Dream*. He made his public stage debut the same year in *Madame Butterfly*, as the heroine's infant son. At four, he was writing, designing, and presenting his own stage plays in a miniature theatre given him by Dr. Maurice Bernstein, a Kenosha physician and family friend who was fascinated by his prodigious talents. At eight, Welles said “I was a *Wunderkind* of music. I played the violin, piano, and I conducted.” He could also draw, paint, and perform conjuring tricks with professional facility, and had written a well-researched paper on “The Universal History of the Drama.”

His parents separated when he was six, and he went to live with his mother, mainly in Chicago. Two years later Beatrice Welles died, and the boy passed from a world of international high culture into one that involved (according to John Houseman) “long, wild nights... with his father, in the red-light districts of the Mediterranean, Hong Kong and Singapore.” Welles seems to have found both environments equally stimulating. A term at the Washington School in Madison, Wisconsin when he was nine, was not a success; a year later, at the suggestion of Dr. Bernstein, he was sent to Roger Hill's progressive Todd School for Boys at Woodstock, Illinois. Among the school's assets was a well-equipped theatre, where Welles promptly staged *Androcles and the Lion*, not only directing but playing both title roles. During his five years at Todd he mounted some thirty productions, including a widely acclaimed *Julius Caesar* in which he played Antony, Cassius, and the Soothsayer. He

also coauthored with Roger Hill a popular textbook entitled *Everybody's Shakespeare*, which sold twenty thousand copies.

During his vacations Welles continued globetrotting with his father. Richard Welles took his son to most of the great cities of Europe and the Far East and made him at ease in a world of actors, circus folk, and conjurers. "My father loved magic; that's what bound us together." In 1928 Richard Welles killed himself in a Chicago hotel, flat broke. His son became the ward of Dr. Bernstein, of whom he later said, "I have never known a person of more real kindness, nor with a greater capacity for love and friendship."

Welles left Todd in 1930 and studied for a time at the Chicago Art Institute. At sixteen he was supposed to enter Harvard. Instead he took off to Ireland, where he bought a donkey and cart and traveled round the country painting. By the time he reached Dublin, his money had run out. "I guess I could have gotten an honest job, as a dishwasher or gardener, but I became an actor."...

Back in America in 1933, he was hired by Katherine Cornell, on the recommendation of Thornton Wilder and Alexander Woollcott, to join her national repertory company of *Candida* and *Romeo and Juliet*. ...Around this time Welles directed his first film. *The Hearts of Age* (1934) was a four-minute surrealist spoof, satirizing such avant-garde works as Cocteau's *Le Sang d'un poete*.... Filmmaking, at this stage in Welles' career, was a lighthearted diversion. The theatre was where he planned to make his mark. He first did so in the spring of 1936, when he and John Houseman staged their all-black "*Voodoo Macbeth*" for the Federal Theatre Project in Harlem. It was the sensation of the season....In 1937 he and Houseman formed their own company, the Mercury Theatre, which rapidly became one of the most influential companies in the history of Broadway....

Much of the funding for Mercury productions was provided by Welles' prolific radio work. His rich, commanding baritone voice, once described by Kenneth Tynan as "bottled thunder," suited him ideally for the medium, and while producing and acting on stage he was also providing voices for, among others, The Shadow ("Who knows what evil lurks in the hearts of men" The Shadow knows...."), Emperor Haile Selassie, and a chocolate pudding. Starting in July 1938, he persuaded CBS to employ the Mercury Company in a weekly dramatization of a literary classic, initially under the title of *First Person Singular*, and later as *The Mercury Theatre of the Air*. On the evening of October 30, 1938. The chosen work was H.G. Wells' *The War of the Worlds*.

Account of mass hysteria, fleeing multitudes, packed congregations weeping in churches, panic calls to police and army, and even suicides were undoubtedly exaggerated by a gloating press. Nonetheless, as astounding number of people, hoodwinked by Welles' narrative method of simulated newsflashes, evidently did believe that Martians had landed at Grovers Mill, New Jersey, intent on annihilating the human race. By the next morning a highbrow radio show had become the most famous program in broadcasting history. Editorials thundered of criminal irresponsibility; writs and

lawsuits were threatened; CBS groveled in apology; and Welles, delighted beyond measure, expressed his heartfelt contrition. *Macbeth* and *Julius Caesar* had made him famous among the intelligentsia, but with *War of the Worlds* he had become, at twenty-three, a household name....

Of all the major Hollywood studios, RKO had the most trouble in establishing a consistent identity for itself—partly thanks to frequent changes of ownership, invariably followed by management reshuffles. Lacking the long-term leadership—for good or bad—of a Mayer, Zukor, or Cohn, the studio had veered indecisively from prestige ventures to cut-price programmers and back again. The current studio head, George Shaefer, was hoping to establish a reputation for progressive, sophisticated filmmaking, an aim backed by the more highbrow board members such as Nelson Rockefeller and NBC chief David Sarnoff. Hence the offer to Welles.

The terms of the contract were unprecedented. Welles was to make one picture a year for three years, receiving for each \$150,000 plus 25 percent of the gross. He could produce, direct, write, and/or star as he wished. He could choose his own subjects, cast whomever he liked, and no studio executive had the right to interfere in any way before or during filming, nor even to ask to see what had been shot until the film was complete. Hollywood was full of veterans who had been struggling for years to achieve a fraction of the autonomy that was being handed to "the boy wonder."...

For his first Hollywood movie, Welles announced an adaptation of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* with himself as Kurtz, and Marlowe, the narrator, to be represented by a subjective camera. But months passed and nothing was filmed except a few tests. Welles spent much of his time watching movies, especially those of Lang, Clair, Capra, Vidor—and Ford, whose *Stagecoach* he screened over forty times....It was a full year after his arrival in Hollywood that Welles began shooting his first feature film.

More has been written about *Citizen Kane* (1941) than about any other film ever made. Acclaimed on its release as a work of striking originality, it has since attained an unassailable position as a landmark in American filmmaking and the most influential film in the history of the cinema....

In a contemporary review (*The Clipper*, May 1941), Cedric Belfrage noted that "of all the delectable flavours that linger on the palate after seeing *Kane*, the use of sound is the strongest." Though Welles was a novice—albeit a staggeringly gifted one—at filmmaking, he could bring to bear more knowledge of radio techniques than anyone else in Hollywood. The soundtrack of *Kane*—as of his other American films, *Macbeth* excepted—is of a complexity and subtlety unprecedented at the time. Dialogue overlaps, cuts across spatial and temporal dissolves; sounds are dislocated, distorted, deployed non-naturalistically to comment on or counterpoint the visuals; voices alter in timbre according to distance, placing or physical surroundings; music and sound are used across transitions, to effect narrative ellipses....

By the time *Macbeth* was released, Welles had quit Hollywood in disgust, setting out on the restless, peripatetic

career he followed to the end of his life. Increasingly, acting in other people's films began to occupy his time, to the exclusion of directing his own; though he always insisted that he only acted in order to finance his own films....

*Touch of Evil* (1958), freely adapted from a pulp novel by Whit Masterson, was Welles' finest film since *The Magnificent Ambersons*—even, in the opinion of some critics, since *Kane*. Set in a squalid, peeling township straddling the US-Mexican border (for which the sleazy California resort town of Venice stood in admirably), it centers around the clash between an upright Mexican narcotics investigator, Mike Vargas (Heston) and a bloated, corrupt American cop, Quinlan (a sweaty and mountainously padded Welles). When a local magnate is killed by a bomb, Quinlan follows usual practices, plants evidence on the likeliest suspect. To prevent Vargas exposing him, he then arranges to have the Mexican's young American wife framed in compromising circumstances, Vargas manages to convince Quinlan's deputy, Menzies, of his boss' crooked methods, and Menzies helps to trick Quinlan into a taped confession.

Welles was a lifelong sufferer from insomnia, and many of his films suggest an insomniac's vision of the world—shadowed and ominous, shot through with a heightened, unreal clarity. In *Touch of Evil*, wrote Terry Comito (*Film Comment*, Summer 1971), “any place a character may for an instant inhabit is only the edge of the depth that opens dizzily behind him.... Menace lurches suddenly forward, and chases disappear down long perspectives....By opening the vertiginous ambiguities of space [Welles denies us] the safety of the frame of reference through which we habitually contemplate the world.” Frequent use of an anamorphic lens exacerbates this sense of a distorted, nightmare universe where spatial dimensions cannot be trusted. *Touch of Evil* generates a miasma of total instability, both moral and physical—anything may give. Corruption oozes from walls and furniture like a palpable presence; the very buildings become emanations of Quinlan's bulbous, looming person. When, in the film's final moments, his vast cadaver sinks slowly into a canal turgid with oil-slicked garbage, it seems an inevitable symbiosis, a reabsorption into the constituent elements.

Yet, as Truffaut observed, “we are brought somehow to shed real tears over the corpse of the magnificent monster.” At one point Quinlan encounters the local madam, Tanya (Marlene Dietrich); she first fails to recognize him, then comments laconically, “You're a mess, honey. You better lay off those candy bars.” Quinlan grunts disconsolately, surveying his own decrepit bulk; the moment conveys unexpected pathos. Even this truculent, crooked cop, we realize, has a lost innocence to look back on. Welles always acknowledged, in regard to Quinlan, Kane, Arkadin and the rest of his overreaching villains, a feeling of “human sympathy for these different characters that I have created, though morally I find them detestable.” Around his own central performance Welles deploys a vivid range of supporting roles: “Uncle” Joe Gandi, the local gang boss (Akim Tamiroff at his most greasily repellent); Mercedes McCambridge as a butch hoodlum in black leather; Dennis

Weaver's twitching, giggling motel clerk, described by Welles as “the complete Shakespearean clown...a real Pierrot Lunaire; and Dietrich's Sternbergian Tanya, left to speak Quinlan's off-hand epitaph, “He was some kind of a man....What does it matter what you say about people?”

The unbroken three-minute take that opens *Touch of Evil* has become deservedly famous. Starting on a close-up of a hand placing a time bomb in a car, the camera pulls back to show a dark figure vanishing round a corner as a couple enter, get in the car, and drive off; then cranes up, over a building, and down to follow the couple as they drive slowly along a busy street alongside another couple on foot (Vargas and his wife), stop at the border post to swap casual banter with the customs officer, and drive on into the desert; finally holds on Vargas and his wife kissing in close-up as, deep-focus in the background, the car explodes in a sheet of flame. Even the producer's inane decision to run the credits over this shot could do little to detract from its masterly buildup of tension.

Universal, who had intended a run-of-the-mill thriller, were bewildered to find an offbeat masterpiece on their hands—not that *Touch of Evil* (“What a silly title,” said Welles) was acknowledged as such at the time, except in France. Inevitably, the studio tampered with the film, calling in a hack director (Harry Keller) for additional scenes to “explain” the action. The essence of Welles' conception nevertheless survived intact. His temporary return to Hollywood was received by most American reviewers with contempt or indifference (“Pure Orson Welles and impure balderdash, which may be the same thing,” sneered Gerald Weales in the *Reporter*) and flopped at the box office. Europe, as usual, proved rather more receptive; the film was praised at Cannes, won an award at Brussels, and played for months to packed houses in Paris.

**Orson Welles Interviews. Ed. Mark W. Estrin. University of Mississippi. Jackson, 2002.**

*Andre Bazin and Charles Bitsch 1958*

Welles: But for my style, for my vision of film, editing is not an aspect, *it is the aspect*. Directing is an invention of people like you. It's not an art, it's at most an art for one minute per day. This minute is terribly crucial, but it happens only rarely. One can only take control of a film during the editing. Well, in the editing room I work very slowly, which always enrages the producers who tear the film from my hands. I don't know why it takes me so long. I could work for an eternity editing a film. As far as I'm concerned, the ribbon of film is played like a musical score, and this performance is determined by the way it is edited. Just as one conductor interprets a musical phrase *rubato*, another will play it very dryly and academically, a third romantically, etc. The images alone are insufficient. They are very important but they are only images. The essential thing is how long each image



lasts, what follows each image. All of the eloquence of film is created in the editing room.

*What we would like to extract is the quintessential character who runs through all your films. Is he the one referred to by Truffaut in Arts when talking about Touch of Evil: the genius who cannot help doing wrong, or should one see in him a certain ambiguity?*

Welles: It's a mistake to think that I approve of Quinlan at all. To me, he's hateful: there is no ambiguity in his character. He's not a genius; he's a master in his own field, but as a man he's detestable. The personal element in the film is the hatred I feel for the way the police abuse their power.

And that stands to reason: it's more interesting to discuss the ways in which the police abuse their power when you are dealing with a man of a certain stature—not only physically, but in terms of character—



than it is with a little ordinary cop. So Quinlan is more than a little ordinary cop but that does not stop him being hateful. There is no ambiguity about that. But it is always possible to feel sympathy for a swine, because sympathy is a natural human attribute. Hence my tenderness for people who I make no secret of considering repellent. This feeling doesn't arise from the fact that they are gifted, but from the fact of their being human beings. Quinlan is sympathetic because of his humanity, not his ideas: there is not the least spark of genius in him; if there does seem to be one, I've made a mistake. Technically, he's good at his job, he's an authority. But because he has a certain breadth of ideas, because he has a heart, you can't stop yourself feeling a certain sympathy for him; in spite of everything he's human. I think Kane is a detestable man, but I have a great deal of sympathy for him as a human being....

*Isn't the feeling of ambiguity reinforced at the end of the film, when it is discovered that Quinlan was right all the same, since the young Mexican is guilty?*

Welles: He was wrong in spite of everything: it's pure chance. Who cares whether he's right or not?

*Isn't it important?*

Welles: That depends on your point of view. I personally believe what the Heston character says. The things said by Vargas are what I would say myself. He talks like a man brought up in the classic liberal tradition, which is absolutely my attitude. So that's the angle the film should be seen from; everything Vargas says, I say. Also, is it better to see a murderer go unpunished, or the police being authorised to abuse their power? If one had to choose, I'd rather see crime going unpunished. That is my point of view. Let's consider

the fact of the young Mexican being really guilty: what exactly is his guilt? That's no business of ours. The subject of the film is elsewhere. That man is only a name in a newspaper; nobody cares a damn whether he's guilty or not. It's a pure accident of the plot; the real guilty one is Quinlan. And when Andre Bazin writes that Quinlan is a great man etc. it's because Menzies, Quinlan's friend, says he's a great man. Nobody else says it. And Menzies says it because he sincerely believes it, but that tells you something about Menzies's personality, not Quinlan's. Quinlan is his god. And as Menzies adores him the real theme of the script is betrayal; the terrible necessity for Menzies to betray his friend. And that's where there is ambiguity, because I don't know whether he should have betrayed him or not. No, I really don't know. I force Menzies to betray him, but the decision does not come from him, and frankly, in his place, I would not have done it!

*While we are talking about Menzies and Quinlan, there was one thing we did not quite understand; when Quinlan is dying, by the recording machine, he says this is the second bullet which he got because of Menzies.*

Welles: That's why he limps. He saved Menzies' life once in the past, and in the process got a bullet in his leg. Menzies tells Vargas's wife about it when he takes her away in the car....

*And so are we to understand that your sympathy for Quinlan is purely human, and has nothing to do with his moral attitude.*



Welles: Certainly not. My sympathy is with Menzies, and above all with Vargas. But in that case, it is not human sympathy. Vargas isn't all that human. How could he be? He's the hero of a melodrama. And in a melodrama, the human sympathy goes, of necessity, to the villain. I want to be clear about my intentions. What I want to say in this film is this: that in the modern world we have to choose between the law's morality, and the morality of simple justice, that is to say between lynching someone and letting him go free. I prefer a murderer to go free, than to have the police arrest him by mistake. Quinlan doesn't so much want to bring the guilty to justice, as to murder them in the name of the law, and that's a fascist argument, a totalitarian argument contrary to the tradition of human law and justice such as I understand it. So, for me, Quinlan is the incarnation of everything I'm fighting against, politically and morally speaking. I'm against Quinlan because he takes the right to judge into his own hands, and that's something I hate more than anything else, people who want to be the judge on all their own. I believe one only has the right to judge if one does it according to the principles of a religion or a law or both; otherwise, if people simply decide personally whether someone is guilty or innocent, good or bad, the door is open to people who lynch

their fellow-men, to gangsters who walk the streets doing what they like, it's the law of the jungle. But of course there's one thing I gave Quinlan, which I must love him for: that is, that he did love Marlene Dietrich, and that he did get that bullet in the place of his friend, the fact that he has a heart. But his beliefs are detestable. The possible ambiguity is not in Quinlan's character, it is in Menzies's betrayal of Quinlan. Kane, too, abuses the power of the popular press and challenges the authority of the law, contrary to all the liberal traditions of civilization. He also has very little respect for what I consider to be civilization, and tries to become the king of his universe, a little like Quinlan in his frontier town. It's on that level that these people resemble each other, similarly Harry Lime, who'd like to make himself king of a world which has no law. All these people have this in common, and they all express, in their different ways, the things I most detest. But I love, and I understand, I have human sympathy for these different characters that I have created, though morally I find them detestable. Goering, for example, was a detestable man, but nevertheless one has a certain sympathy for him; there was something so human about him, even during the trial....

**Cahiers du cinema, 1964**

*Cahiers: Was it really Charlton Heston who proposed you as director of Touch of Evil?*

Welles: What happened is even more amusing. The scenario was proposed to Charlton Heston who was told that it was by Orson Welles; at the other end of the line, Heston understood that I was to direct the film, in which case he was ready to shoot anything at all, no matter what, with me. Those at Universal did not clear up the misunderstanding; they hung up and automatically telephoned me and asked me to direct it. The truth is that Heston said, textually, this: "I will work in any film at all directed by Orson Welles." When they proposed that I direct the film I set only one condition: to write my own scenario! And I directed and wrote the film without getting a penny for it, since I was being paid as an actor.

*Cahiers: In relation to the original novel, you made many changes...*

Welles: My God! I never read the novel; I only read Universal's scenario. Perhaps the novel made sense, but the scenario was ridiculous. It all took place in San Diego, not on the Mexican border, which completely changes the situation. I made Vargas a Mexican for political reasons, I wanted to show how Tiajuana and the border towns are corrupted by all sorts of mish-mash, publicity more or less about American relations; that's the only reason.

**Leslie Megahey, 1982:**

*LM: There's always for the viewer anyway, a kind of moral ambiguity about the characters...and Quinlan's character, that although he's sort of...*

Welles: Well, you know what Renoir said? He said, "Everyone has his reasons." And that really sums it up, you know. There's no villain who doesn't have his reasons. And the bigger the villain, the more interesting it becomes...the further you explain his villainy—not psychiatrically, not because mama didn't love him, but because you humanize him. The more human you make the monster, the more interesting the story must be, it seems to me.

"Most people aren't afraid of death when it comes," Welles said to *L'Avant-Scène Cinéma* interviewers in 1982. "They fear pain, age solitude, being abandoned. Death is only real for a few poets in the world. For the others, it isn't real. Because if death really meant something to human sensibility, we wouldn't have the atomic bomb, because the bomb is, quite simply, death."

W: Really for me, Montaigne is the greatest writer of any time, anywhere. I literally read him every week like some people read the Bible, not very much at a time; I open my Montaigne, I read a page or two, at least once a week, just because I like it so much. There is nothing I like more.

—In French, or

W: In French, for the pleasure of his company. Not so much for what he says, but it's a bit like meeting a friend, you know. It's something very dear to me, something marvellous. Montaigne is a friend for whom I have a great affection. And he has some things in common with Shakespeare, too. Not the violence of course.

—So you're a self-made cameraman, if one can put it like that?



W: I've only been influenced by somebody once: prior to making *Citizen Kane* I saw *Stagecoach* forty times. I didn't need to learn from somebody who had something to say, but from somebody who had something to say, but from somebody who would show me how to say what I had in mind; and John Ford is perfect for that. I took Gregg Toland as cameraman because he came and said he would like to work with me. In the first ten days I did the lighting myself, because I thought the directors should do everything, even the lights. Gregg Toland said nothing but discreetly put things right behind my back. I finally realized, and apologized. At the time, apart from John Ford, I admired Eisenstein—but not the other Russians—and Griffith, Chaplin, Clair, and Pagnol, especially *La Femme du Boulanger*. Today I admire the Japanese cinema, Mizoguchi and Kurosawa, *Ugetsu Monogatori* and *Living*. I liked the cinema better before I began to do it. Now I can't stop myself hearing the clappers

at the beginning of each shot; all the magic is destroyed. This is how I'd classify the arts, in order of the pleasure they gave me: literature first, then music, then painting, then the theatre. In the theatre there is an unpleasant impression that one gets; the people are looking at you, and for two hours you're a prisoner of the stage. But I am going to tell you a more terrible confidence; I don't like the cinema except when I'm shooting; then you have to know how not to be afraid of the camera, force it to deliver everything it has to give, because it's nothing but a machine. It's the poetry that counts.

*Huw Weldon: The thing that I noticed. . .which I don't think has been digested at all, is the notion of making a film with a team of actors who've been brought from one theatre.*

W: It's very interesting you should say that, because nobody's ever pointed it out as far as I know. The whole cast of that play, the entire cast, were a team from a theatre; we worked together for years. There was nobody who didn't belong to it except the second girl and the wife, but I mean the great body of the people were, and all of them were new to films—nobody had ever been in front of a camera before in the entire picture.

#### **From Filmsite.org:**

Film Noir (literally 'black film or cinema') was coined by

French film critics (first by Frank Nino in 1946) who noticed the trend of how 'dark', downbeat and black the looks and themes were of many American crime and detective films released in France following the war, such as *The Maltese Falcon* (1941), *Murder, My Sweet* (1944), *Double Indemnity* (1944) and *Laura* (1944).

It was a style of black and white American films that first evolved in the 1940s, became prominent in the post-war era, and lasted in a classic "Golden Age" period until about 1960 (marked by the 'last' film of the classic film noir era, Orson Welles' *Touch of Evil* (1958).

Important Note: Strictly speaking, film noir is not a genre, but rather the mood, style, point-of-view, or tone of a film. It is also helpful to realize that 'film noir' usually refers to a distinct historical period of film history - the decade of film-making after World War II, similar to the German Expressionism or the French New Wave periods. However, it was labeled as such only *after* the classic period - early noir film-makers didn't even use the film designation (as they would the labels "western" or "musical"), and were not conscious that their films would be labeled noirs.

Titles of many film noirs often reflect the nature or tone of the style and content itself: *Dark Passage* (1947), *The Naked City* (1948), *Fear in the Night* (1947), *Out of the Past* (1947), *Kiss Me Deadly* (1955), etc.

#### **COMING UP IN THE SPRING 2007 BUFFALO FILM SEMINARS (REDUX) XIV:**

March 13, no screening

March 20 David Lean, *Lawrence of Arabia* 1962

March 27 Jean-Luc Godard, *Contempt/Le Mépris* 1963

April 3 Stanley Kubrick, *Dr. Strangelove* 1964

April 10 Sergio Leone, *The Good the Bad and the Ugly/Il Buono, il brutto, il cattivo* 1966

April 17 Robert Altman, *Nashville* 1975

April 24 Stanley Donen and Gene Kelly, *Singin' in the Rain* 1952



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...for the series schedule, annotations, links and updates: <http://buffalofilmseminars.com>

...for the weekly email informational notes, send an email to either of us

...for cast and crew info on any film: <http://imdb.com/search.html>

The Buffalo Film Seminars are presented by the Market Arcade Film & Arts Center  
and State University of New York at Buffalo  
with support from the John R. Oishei Foundation and the Buffalo News