Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1988 Volume IV: Responding to American Words and Images

America in Film and Fiction

Curriculum Unit 88.04.04
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Introduction

The Cooperative High School offers a broad-based arts-humanities curriculum to students. This curriculum includes courses in theatre, music, and the visual arts as well as the more traditional offerings of English, history, math, and science. At the Co-op teachers of history and English, especially but not exclusively, have been working on curriculum projects which enable students to see connections between the new "arts" courses and the traditional "humanities" courses—and also among the humanities courses themselves. Thus the history teacher, for example, often provides time for a study of the art and architecture of a particular culture, and the English teacher encourages students to see literature as a reflection of the society which produced it. "America in Film and Fiction" is designed to fit into a course I teach at the Co-op called "Visual Art and Literature." This course enables students to see the many similarities between visual and written art. It includes comparative studies of painting and poetry, photography and poetry, and painting and the short story. Students are taught a method of analysis—appropriate for use with the visual and the written—which in turn facilitates cultural discovery. Students seem to emerge from this comparative study with a truer appreciation of all art forms as well as a newly-found awareness of history and its significance.

Last summer I worked on a unit which attempted to uncover the social concerns of 1930s Britain as delineated in two initially regarded disparate novels, The *ABC Murders* by Agatha Christie and Down *and Out in Paris and London by* George Orwell. My students enjoyed comparing the middle-brow and high-brow novels immensely. They were detectives who relished the discovery of thematic similarities in the two works. They were also astute critics who noted and questioned the notions of style and audience. Two-thirds of the way through the work on this unit I decided to include as well two examples of film produced in 1930s Britain. This visual study served to underscore and further explicate our thematic discoveries. Moreover, I quickly realized that film study could and should, be a component of the course, "Visual Art and Literature,"

This year I plan to tie all of the threads together, as it were, in order to devise a unit which will include an adaptation of the method of analysis for film study as well as a comparative study of a variety of fiction. This unit will be a natural sequel to last year's work, for we will consider pre-World War II American works which might then be compared with the previously studied British works. Yet, this unit will take film study a step further. Film will not be seen as part of a culminating activity, but rather will be seen up-front as the primary focus of the unit, and film will also be seen as another art form worthy of careful analysis.

Overview

The first section of this unit comprises' a mini-course in film study. Sobochack and Sobochack's excellent book, An Introduction to Film, provides an impressive blue-print for the study of the architecture of film. We will deal with two broad topics: film space and film sound. These topics encompass such elements of film as composition, movement, viewpoints, and background music. An awareness of these device will prompt student appreciation of the twentieth century art-form and/or will enable students to replace a passive and superficial acceptance of film with an active and sophisticate appraisal of its meaning. Citizen Kane has long been regarded as a technically *superior film.* I have chosen Kane as the subject for film analysis, and thus the focus of the second section of the unit, for two reasons: 1.) it was produced prior to World War II and thus fits the historical specifications mentioned previously and 2.) it is an artistically rich film which provides many examples of a variety of film devices and elements recognized by its astute creator, Orson Welles. In short, its very self-conscious depiction of what film could do renders it an archetype particularly appropriate for careful analysis.

The final section of the unit encourages students to engage in a comparative study of *Citizen Kane* and a variety of fiction. I believe that we will discover a similarity of theme among these works which might serve to indicate pre-World War II American concerns. Thus we will approach film and fiction with a historical bent—noting that art forms invariably mirror the societies which produce them. Yet, it is likely as well that this comparative study will enable us to discover various interpretations or transformations of theme; these transformations in turn might serve to indicate the individual insight (and genius) of each of the creators. Thus we will also approach film and fiction with a critical bent—noting that art-forms also mirror the minds and heart of the individual artists.

Section One: Elements of Film

An awareness of poetic devices enables the student to better-appreciate poetry. So it is too with film. This section of the unit provides students with a film vocabulary and examples of such a vocabulary at work. It is a condensed version of several chapters of Sobochack and Sobochack's text which will be duplicated and shared with students. Teachers who may wish to use this unit are advised to read Sobochack's chapters in their entirety, for this will enable them to provide additional insight and specific examples when reviewing the hand-out with students. Prior to writing this unit I gave the teaching of film and *Citizen Kane* a trial run. My students had previously viewed Hitchcock's *The 39 Steps* and *Sabotage* in connection with the reading of Agatha Christie's The ABC Murders and George Orwell's *Down and Out in Paris and London* . (See 1987 curriculum unit.) They discovered in all of these works similar themes and/or the articulation of concerns about the class system and, in particular, delineations of the resultant isolation and manipulation of the lower classes. The use of film in this previous unit thus served to convince students that film is not simply a vehicle for entertainment, but, like literature, reflects the concerns of the society which produce it. Though teachers may not wish to use *The 39 Steps* or my previous unit prior to teaching this unit, it might be useful to provide students with a similar introductory exposure to film

I used the teaching of *The Turn of the Screw* and its movie counterpart, The Innocents, next in order to 1.) raise the topic of literary works and film adaptations and 2.) provide students with another exposure to film prior to tackling film elements and *Citizen Kane* . Students were provided with two professional criticisms of *The Innocents* to read and respond to. The critics' views as to the success of the adaptation of *The Innocents*

varied,yet, both discussed the uses of lighting, film stock, and other elements of film during the course of their arguments. Students were asked to summarize these criticisms by articulating the main ideas expressed by the critics, and the-y were also asked to choose the one they thought was the best and to explain why they made the choice thy did. The reading of professional film criticism provided students with an introduction to the elements of film. The writing assignment—in addition to providing practice with summary writing and argument—served to underscore the seriousness of film study. Again, though teachers may wish to use different films, it is suggested that they introduce students to film criticism through examples prior to providing students with the following hand-out of film elements Such an exercise will result in student "readiness" and/or will serve to articulate the purpose of technical awareness.

When we turned to film vocabulary, I simply passed out notes which I had taken from Sobochack and Sobochack's text. I believe the following summary of the text will work equally as well or better with students. Because the summary is so dense, teachers will have to read it aloud to students (as they follow in their own copies) and stop frequently to further explain ideas and provide salient examples. I found that students were able to provide examples of their own when asked so that the lecture format was tempered somewhat. I do not apologize for the lecture format in the least; I believe it is important to ask students occasionally to listen in order to digest new material. Yet, pressing students for their own examples insures that students remain receptive and involved in this relatively passive classroom activity.

Teachers might wish to devise follow-up-'activities for use after the lecture-discussion which would call for student feed back. For example, a short writing exercise might be assigned; Suggested question—(What did you learn which was most interesting to you? Why? If possible, provide an example from your own viewing which has to do with this topic.) Additional ideas for student activities which will further explicate the elements of film follow the discussion of the Sobochack text.

I. Film Space

The topic, film space, essentially describes the visual component of film which helps to underscore the tone of the work. *Tone* is the "mood or atmosphere of a film [for example: ironic, comic, tragic] created by the sum of the film's cinematic techniques." [1] Five elements of *film space* are described below; they are *film stock, lighting, composition, viewpoints,* and *movement.*

Film Stock

Film Stock refers to the type of film used in a given movie. Though movies are usually filmed in their entirety in black and white or in color, instances of the use of a variety of film stocks in a single movie are not especially rare. The use of sepia-toned segments in the otherwise all-color *Murder on the Orient Express* provides an apt example. These segments indicate the past by reminding the audience of old photographs or yellowed newsprint and thus-signal use of flashbacks which deal with the kidnapping and murder of a famous child. The use of the sepia stock also helps to isolate and thus underscores the horrific quality of the crime depicted.

Black and white film stock is often used in serious films. In fact, a whole genre of film of the '40s and '50s called "film noir" dealt with the themes of urban decay and/or corruption. Certainly the use of black and white stock puts forth a drab or decaying quality. Black and white film may also indicate conflict as a result of its oppositional quality. In fact, the choices afforded the film-maker within the black and white frame work allow various emotional response to emerge.

Fast (black and white) *film* has a grainy, high-contrast quality. Sometimes such stock is used to signify or underscore the notion of reality as it reminds us, if not of newsreels, then of newsprint and thus evokes the documentary. However, fast film may also represent the dream; when compared with *low-contrast film* which is exact—that is, not fuzzy or grainy—the possibilities of representing illusion emerge. In fact, both types of stock may be used in a single film to create a variety of effects. A change of stock in a single film may also signify a change of time or place, and thus helps the viewer to grasp meaning and/or follow the film's plot.

Of course, color film is the preferred choice of our latest film makers. Perhaps a generation of color TV watchers dictate that this be the case. In any event, film makers no longer relegate color solely to glitzy musicals or biblical epics. Various techniques are used within the color frame work to evoke a serious tone or indeed to make a thematic statement. For example, film characters might be clothed in drab costumes and then filmed against brightly-colored machinery: such a technique would emphasize the notion of a dehumanizing technological society.

Lighting

Lighting provides the film.-maker with a powerful evocative tool. The following serve as illustrative samples of the myriad uses of lighting. Pin-points of light focused on the eyes of Dracula produces a hypnotic effect and thus underscores the eerie mood of that movie. Light may.also be filtered to produce a romantic or ghostly effect. Such is the case of the film version of *The Turn of the Screw* . An over-exposure of light often creates 3d image of heat; thus the visual experience of film is able to evoke another sensory experience Harsh lighting produces a stark or forbidding image, while soft lighting often renders the idyllic. *Citizen Kane* provides a classic example of the use of light and shadow. A youthful idealistic Kane is bathed in light while the older corrupt Kane is more often filmed in shadows.

Composition

Composition is simply the arrangement oP people within the frame of the movie screen. The frame might be filled in a balanced way, for example, to indicate harmony;or the frame might be deliberately filmed as unbalanced so as to indicate discord. Often the frame is spontaneously or randomly filmed as an expression of reality. Various types of camera shots affect the composition and thus the tone of a given scene. For example, *long shots* may serve to dwarf characters within the context of a given environment. *Close-ups* may enable the viewer to feel an intimacy with a given character, but often protracted close-ups evoke a feeling of claustrophobia or disorientation as the viewer is denied a surrounding environment.

As film provides foreground, middle ground, and background, people and objects may be filmed to provide spatial relationships; this provides visual clues as to the relative importance of various components of a scene. .For example, in *The Lady Vanishes* Hitchcock creates chilling suspense and the foreshadowing of a poisoning by placing poisoned drink props in the foreground of a shot while placing the unsuspecting (and blithely conversing) victims in the middle-ground.

Viewpoints

By and large films are filmed from an objective viewpoint That is, the audience sees the actions of characters through its own eyes and not through the eyes of a character. In other words, an omniscient point of view is suggested. Occasionally the subjective viewpoint is used to underscore a character's experience. A James Bond movie might momentarily shift from the objective to the subjective viewpoint in order that we might vicariously experience the protagonist's slalom down a ski-slope, for example. Films that seek to illustrate psychotic states, too, often briefly employ the subjective viewpoint in order to articulate a hallucinatory

experience, for instance. Such usage of viewpoint serves to stimulate an audience's emotional involvement with character or situation. The frame-work of the movie's conventional objective viewpoint does allow any number of variances. For example, the audience can be forced to look down on a subject or up to a subject according to the angle from which the subject is shot. The *high-angle shot* serves to diminish a character through foreshortening while the *low-angle shot* enlarges the subject. Thus these camera techniques can be used to indicate a subject's vulnerability or strength.

The use of various lenses also serves to diminish or enlarge characters, A man seen running toward the camera equipped with a *telephoto lens* appears to be running on a tread mill; that is, little distance appears to be covered, and therefore the man appears to be dwarfed by his environment A *wide-angle lens* , on the other-hand, initially indicates that the subject is far away, but his movement toward the camera causes his size to increase quickly, and the subject then seems to dominate his landscape.

The camera itself can be tilted to show entire scenes at an angle. Such a view creates a sense of disequilibrium.

Movement

There are two types of movement in film: camera movement and subject movement. Subject movement essentially shows the relationship between a given character and his environment or the relationship between the character and another character. The discussion of the use of various lenses in the preceding section provides an.apt example of subject movement. Camera movement provides an interesting tool for delineating character and suggesting a mood. For example, a receding movement may serve to diminish the subject being filmed while forward movement may serve to underscore his importance or his strength.

The use of a slow pan shot when the camera slowly moves across a landscape affords the audience a feeling of omniscience. A change of speed in a pan will produce a variety of effects. For example, a *fast pan* will cause the audience to feel dizzy or out-of-control. A combination of speeds will produce various rhythms which may be either comforting or disconcerting.

In general, the use of slow motion is relegated to lyrical or romantic scenes, though it may be used as well simply to prolong a scene which may be grisly in nature. *Fast motion* has a comedic quality. A combination of speeds might indicate life out of balance.

II. Film Sound

Though we might think of film as an essentially visual experience, we really cannot afford to underestimate the importance of film sound. A meaningful sound track is often as complicated as the image on the screen. The entire sound track is comprised of three essential ingredients: the human voice, sound effects, and music. These three tracks must be mixed and balanced so as to produce the necessary emphases which in turn create desired effects. Topics which essentially refer to the three previously mentioned tracks are discussed below. They include *dialogue* , *synchronous* and *asynchronous sound* , and *music* .

Dialogue

Dialogue authenticates the speaker as an individual or a real person rather than the imaginary creation of a story teller. As is the case with stage drama, dialogue serves to tell the story and expresses feelings and motivations of characters as well. Often with film characterization the audience perceives little or no difference between the character and the actor. Thus, for example, Humphrey Bogart is Sam Spade; film

personality and life personality seem to merge. Perhaps this is the case because the very texture of a performer's voice supplies an element of character. When voice texture fits the performer's physiognomy and gestures, a whole and very realistic persona emerges. The viewer sees not an actor working at his craft, but another human being struggling with life. It is interesting to note that how dialogue is used and the very amount of dialogue used varies widely among films. For example, in the film *2001* little dialogue was evident, and most of what was used was banal. In this way the filmmaker was able to portray the "inadequacy of human responses when compared with the magnificent technology created by man] and the visual beauties of the universe." [2] The comedy, *Bringing Up Baby* , on the other hand, presents practically non-stop dialogue delivered at break-neck speed. This use of dialogue underscores not only the dizzy quality of the character played by Katharine Hepburn, but also the absurd quality of the film itself and thus its humor. The audience is bounced from gag to gag and conversation to conversation; there is no time for audience reflection. The audience is caught up in a whirlwind of activity in simply managing to follow the plot. This film presents pure escapism—largely due to its frenetic dialogue.

Synchronous and Asynchronous Sound Effects

Synchronous sound effects are those sounds which are synchronized or matched with what is viewed. For example, if the film portrays a character playing the piano, the sounds of the piano are projected. Synchronous sounds contribute to the realism of film and also help to create a particular atmosphere. For example, the "click" of a door being opened may simply serve to convince the audience that the image portrayed is real, and the audience-may only subconsciously note the expected sound. However, if the "click" of an opening door is part of an ominous action such as a burglary, the sound mixer may call attention to the "click" with an increase in volume; this helps to engage the audience in a moment of suspense. *Asynchronous sound effects* are not matched with a visible source of the sound on screen. Such sounds are included so as to provide an appropriate emotional nuance, and they may also add to the realism of the film. For example, a film maker might opt to include the background sound of an ambulance's siren while the foreground sound and image portrays an arguing couple. The asynchronous ambulance siren underscores the psychic injury incurred in the argument; at the same time the noise of the siren adds to the realism of the film by acknowledging the film's (avowed) city setting.

Music

Background music is used to add emotion and rhythm to a film. Usually not meant to be noticeable, it often provides a tone or an emotional attitude toward the story and/or the characters depicted. In addition, background music often foreshadows a change in mood. For example, dissonant music may be used in film to indicate an approaching (but not yet visible) menace or disaster. Background music may aid viewer understanding by linking scenes. For example, a particular musical theme associated with an individual character or situation may be repeated at various points in a film in order to remind the audience of salient motifs or ideas. Film sound is comprised of conventions and innovations. We have come to expect an acceleration of music during car chases and creaky doors in horror films. Yet, it is important to note as well that sound is often brilliantly conceived. The effects of sound are often largely subtle and often are noted by only our subconscious minds. Yet, it behooves us to foster an awareness of film sound as well as film space so as to truly appreciate a twentieth century art form, the modern film.

Ideas for Student Activities: *Elements of Film*

1. A. Re-read a short story which has been previously discussed in class. (Thus students will be familiar with the story's plot and theme. We will be using "The Rocking-Horse Winner" by D.H. Lawrence. See 1985 curriculum unit: "A Study of Twentieth Century British Culture Through Art and Literature."

    B. Provide a brief summary of the plot.

    C. Articulate the theme.

    D. Translate the story to film. Choose three film elements to discuss. For example, how would you use *lighting, movement, background music* to support the theme? You may choose any of the film elements for discussion.

    Example:

    Scene: climax of story ("The Rocking-Horse Winner") Paul rides his rocking-horse furiously, envisions the next winner of the Derby, dies.

    Lighting: Harsh? Soft? Use of shadows? Subject (Paul) back-lit? Pin points of light used? etc. Explain choices.

    Composition: Balanced? Unbalanced? Close-ups? Long-shots?

    Would you make use of foreground, middle-ground, background space? Explain.

    Movement: How would you underscore the relationship between Paul and his mother through subject movement?

    Camera movement: Would you use a pan shot? Slow motion? Explain.

2. A. View a television drama of one hour's duration.

    B. Take notes of the use of *background music* and *synchronous* and *asynchronous sound.*

    C. Write a summary based on your notes. D. Discuss how uses of film sound supported the work.

    D. Discuss ways in which film sound worked to aid viewer understanding of the material at hand. (Were *synchronous sound effects* used to create suspense? Were *asynchronous sound effects* used to emphasize a mood or an idea? Explain. Was the *background music* varied? Why?/Why not?)

Section Two: Citizen Kane

Thematic Analysis

Perhaps *Citizen Kane* depicts the corruption of the American dream. More likely, it asks us to question the very premise of the American dream, for in *Citizen Kane* the dream of prosperity and influence, the American version of success, is inexorably linked with the demise of interpersonal relationships and personal values. When the public persona of Charles Kane emerges, the private persona is diminished proportionately, and thus it appears that public success and private success are mutually exclusive. It is ironic that a newspaper reporter interviews those closest to Kane in hopes of finding the man behind the public image, for "the man" had ceased to exist—or perhaps never truly existed. Kane's dying word, "rosebud", signifies not only a longing for the values of a lost childhood, but also the realization that true adulthood was never experienced, The child never developed into a man capable of love, friendship, or even (ironically) communication. The public power-wielding man manipulated people as a child manipulates toy soldiers. In fact, Kane saw no difference between people and objects; both were mere extensions of his egocentric personality.

Though one might hold Kane's mother responsible for Kane's arrested development—noting that her misguided decision to separate Kane from the family at an impressionable age was devastating—one must also note that the emerging public man was deemed successful by society, and/or that his egocentric behavior was not only condoned (by society at large), but often applauded.

Kane's pursuit of happiness resulted in his deadening isolation, and though this is tragic in itself, the essential tragedy of *Citizen Kane* concerns the destruction of those myriad others caught in the devastating web of false values and lost idealism. In short, Kane's loss of idealism symbolizes America's loss of idealism and/or the essential flaw of the American dream.

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Because *Citizen Kane* is technically rich, it is suggested that the film be shown to students over a period of three days. Students should be encouraged to jot down examples of the usage of various film elements previously discussed as they view the film. These notes can then be shared in discussion during the last portion of each class period. Individual students will invariably make note of different examples of the variety of film elements. Thus with a minimum of teacher in-put a full-blown discussion will emerge. To insure that most,if not all, of the elements of film are discussed, it is suggested that teachers provide students with note-taking sheets complete with headings for each element. These will not be used during the viewing of the movie. Rather, students will copy their notes on these sheets subsequently. This activity will help to organize the follow-up discussion which will move through the elements of film. The additional time provided for students for copying their notes may also enable them to fill in blank (film element) spots from the memory of their recent viewing of *Citizen Kane.*

In fact, I asked my students to try note-talking and discussion as a first response to *Citizen Kane.* My particular class had no difficulties with this, and we enjoyed some interesting discussions. It was particularly interesting to note that a variety of examples of film elements was seen by students. Since essentially every frame of *Citizen Kane* makes use of some technique derived from film elements, perhaps this was not so surprising. Nevertheless, we learned something from one another, and the spirit of sharing was enjoyed by all.

The following paragraphs provide the teacher of this unit with brief delineations of the elements of film

discussed earlier as they relate to *Citizen Kane* . Some of the information provided must be credited to Sobochack and Sobochack and to Robert L. Carringer, the author of *The Making of Citizen* Kane. By and large such information appears in direct quotes. Many of the remaining ideas emerged from class discussions, and thus my students are to be credited as well. It must be stated that many of the examples of the use of film sound came from the secondary sources Sound is often noted subliminally, and my students and I were much less successful at observing sound techniques. Thus teachers of this unit might expect to have to share at least this portion of the analysis (derived from secondary sources) with their own students.

Film Stock

Citizen Kane has been called "an archetype of film noir [and claimed] an enormous influence on the development of that genre." [3] The use of high-contrast black and white film reminds us of newsprint which is especially appropriate in a film delineating the life of a newspaper tycoon. The oppositional and/or conflict-indicating quality of this black and white film is often mirrored in choices of costuming in Citizen Kane. For example, an older troubled Kane is often dressed in stark white shirts and black suits while those around him are clad in less oppositional grey clothes. In this way Kane's internal power struggle (of the public versus the private man) is indicated; at the same time Kane's dynamic demeanor is contrasted with the mundane appearances of other characters. Internal and external conflicts are subtly illustrated, and we realize that both the personal and public repercussions of such conflicts may be enormous.

Lighting

Lighting has an immense presence in Citizen Kane. It serves a variety of functions such as setting the tone of various scenes, foreshadowing the demise of the idealism of Kane, and delineating the effect of Kane's personality on a variety of characters. It is important to note at the outset that in the depictions of Kane's early life the quality of the light used is natural. That is, the "crisp daylight style predominates in the parts dealing with Kane's rise to prominence, Here Kane is seen as a self-starter, an idealist, a reformer, a traditional type—the hope of the future embodied in a genuine American titan. By contrast, most of the harshly expressionistic scenes [those filmed in low levels of illumination] involve the later part of Kane's story after he has become a petty and ruthless tyrant " [4] The opening scene of *Citizen Kane* provides an apt example of the use of lighting in projecting tone. Kane's castle, Xanadu, is filmed at night. A lighted window and the illuminating effects of fog provide the only means of articulating the structure of Xanadu. It is an eerie scene which depicts loneliness and isolation, and prompts a viewer mood of uneasiness or sadness.

The interplay of light and shadow is very often employed in Citizen Kane. Perhaps the most famous example of this occurs when Kane's face is shadowed s he signs his "Declaration of Principles" prior to printing it in his newly-organized newspaper. An idealistic Kane is depicted here; his principles have to do with printing the truth and fighting for the underdog. Yet, these principles are immediately and essentially overshadowed. The shadowed face of Kane depicts his inability to live by his principles, and/or foreshadows the demise of his idealism. [5] As Kane's power increases so does his ability to "cast shadows" on the lives of others. Thus the film maker often depicts other characters literally in Kane's shadow so as to illustrate the enormous influence of Kane's personality—and the destructive quality of his presence. [6]

Composition

Perhaps the most striking example of the effectiveness of a long-shot occurs in the political rally scene in *Citizen Kane* . Charles Foster Kane is filmed from some distance and thus is dwarfed—though he stands in front of a vast poster reproduction of himself. The immense contrast between the actual man and the image

once again illustrates the public man's emergence and the private man's demise. Kane's power over others is often Underscored in scenes where he dominates the foreground while other characters are relegated to the middle.ground. Kane is thus perceived as physically superior to-the others and/or as menacing. [7]

"The way in which deep: focus or extended depth of field can show relationships between background and foreground planes is particularly evident in the scene where Kane's mother signs the guardianship of her son over to Mr. Thatcher (in the foreground). Charles' father hovers ineffectually in the middle distance while young Charles is visible through the window playing innocently in the snow. Thus the free spirited boy is present in the viewer's consciousness as we see his mother -put into motion the series of event which will deprive him of his innocence and freedom." [8]

Viewpoints

Kane is often filmed in low-angle shots which emphasize the power of his personality. For example, because of the employment of the low-angle shot, in a post-election scene Kane looms large even though he has lost his bid for the governorship. Conversely, other characters are often filmed with a high-angle shot and thus appear diminished in relation to Kane. Such is the case with Susan Alexander "who appear small even though she is yelling aggressively at Kane." [9] Only once in the film is Kane viewed through a high-angle shot. This example is imbedded in the newsreel segment of "the film with the film." Here an elderly wheel-bound Kane is filmed from above. A hat obscures his face and he is essentially unrecognizable—his powerful demeanor effectively reduced and/or destroyed.

Occasionally in *Citizen Kane* the camera is tilted in order to show entire scenes at an angle. The resultant disequilibrium illustrates a world gone askew. When Kane takes over *The Enquirer* , the newspaper office is depicted at an angle in order to foreshadow Kane's subsequent loss of dignity and integrity. Susan's cluttered room is also shot at an angle; this employment of the device serves to further emphasize Susan's confusion and unhappiness.

Movement

The most obvious example of subject movement in *Citizen Kane* has to do with the use of the wide-angle lens. Time and again Kane is filmed from a distance, and yet is allowed to traverse that distance with a minimum of steps. [10] Thus Kane is viewed as the master of his environment or as domineering and strong. The most interesting use of a pan shot occurs near the film's conclusion. Kane's possessions are shot from above in a slow pan. The many boxes of objects are initially unrecognizable as such, and in their entirety, resemble an entire city shot from the air. Thus the filmmaker is able to broaden the theme of *Citizen Kane* and/or indicate that Kane's empty values are mirrored in American society at large.

Dialogue

The use of dialogue in *Citizen Kane* further emphasizes the contrast between Kane's public and private lives. Scenes dealing with Kane's public side present rapid-fire dialogue often at loud levels. Such dialogue underscores Kane's bravado and insatiable desire for attention. In contrast, scenes dealing with Kane's private life are punctuated with many silences which signify his ineptitude in personal relationships while simultaneously high-lighting his essential loneliness and isolation. When dialogue is evident in these private scenes, it is invariably muted—and somewhat distorted as in his Xanadu scenes with Susan. This echoic distortion emphasizes the vast emptiness of Xanadu and/or Kane's distorted values. [11]

Synchronous and Asynchronous Sound Effects

An appropriate illustration of a synchronous sound effect which helps to create realism and at the same time suggests mood can be found early in the film. When the reporter who attempted to uncover the man behind Kane's public facade enters Thatcher's forbidding library, the echoic sound of a metal door opening and closing is heard. This sound adds to the realism of the scene by projecting appropriate sound for a metal door (which in fact as cardboard simply made to look metal) [12] More important, the sound, reminiscent of clanging prison doors, projects a cold and forbidding tone. An asychronous sound effect much later in the film emphasizes and foreshadows a Kane out of control. After Susan leaves Kane, the hideous squawking of a bird is heard. This sound projects both pain and violence, and is followed up in the subsequent scene by Kane's exhibition of frustration and pain in his trashing of Susan's room.

Background Music

The background music of *Citizen Kane* is made up of two motifs: "Power" and "Rosebud". Such themes "embody the contradiction of Kane—the clash between the ideal of childhood innocence and the corruption of [Kane's] adulthood. They are repeated, whole or in part, in a multitude of variations throughout the score, and these variations follow the story line. Melodically and orchestrically purer in the earlier parts of Kane's life, they become increasingly dark and dissonant as the film progresses." [13]

Ideas for Student Reactions to *Citizen Kane*

1. Suggest that students write paragraphs which articulate the *theme* of *Citizen Kane* . Share these writing in class.
2. Suggest that students choose a single film element used in *Citizen Kane* and explain how this element serves to explicate the film's theme.
   A. Try to insure that a variety of elements are chosen by students.
   B. Call for an oral presentation in class so that various ideas are shared.
   C. Provide time for a second viewing of the film—if students desire. Otherwise, students may refer to their previous notes.
3. Compare and contrast the British films of the same time period(see 1987 unit) with *Citizen Kane.* Comment on thematic similarities and differences.

Section Three: Short Fiction

This section of the unit provides a variety of short fiction which will be discussed in relation to *Citizen Kane* . Though I originally thought of pairing *Citizen Kane* and *The Great Gatsby* because of the many similarities between the two works, I eventually opted for a broader view of the particular time period which produced Kane; all of the stories considered were published between 1938 and 141. I felt that it was important to stick very closely to the time period of ane, for my assumption is that artists/writers must reflect a particular political and socia-l climate. Fitzgerald's Gatsby, published in 1925, reflects the Jazz Age. The stories discussed below mirror the state of America just prior to World War II. A search through many collections of short stories, in order to find appropriate works, resulted in what I think is an interesting array of fiction. Taken together, they speak of one concern—the loss of American idealism. Looked at individually, they speak of individual segments of American society; that is, each story illustrates the effect of the loss of American idealism on a particular class or group. The very existence of separate vehicles (stories or film) which deal with distinct social groups itself underscores a tremendous isolation which is born of a highly stratified society.

The paragraphs below provide the teacher of this unit with brief synopses of the stories along with the articulations of themes. In addition, brief examples of narrative strategies employed by the authors are presented. Thus students are encouraged to think generally about the elements of fiction—and in particular—about the techniques used to delineate character in the short story.

The discussion questions provided for students are meant to: 1.) encourage thematic comparison among the short stories and *Citizen Kane* and 2.) initiate discussion about the translation of fiction into film through a comparison of cinematic and written techniques.

"Clothe the Naked" by Dorothy Parker

"Clothe the Naked" emphasizes the wide abyss between the "haves" and the "have-nots" in American society. The main character, Big Lannie, lives in squalid poverty while her employers, Southern society women, live in luxurious comfort. The many contrasts delineated in the story serve to underscore the corruption of the wealthy and the necessary acquiescence of the poor in "Clothe the Naked".

Big Lannie accepts the travails of life which include the loss of her husband and children with dignity and stoicism. She finds joy in raising her blind grandson—despite the ardship and fear this responsibility engenars. In contrast, her employers glide through life free from tragedy—ignorant of pain. Their responsibilities include "planting salvia around the cannon in front of the D.A.R. headquarters." [14] Their hardship (losing Lannie as a laundrss when Lannie's grandson is orphaned) is keenly flat and selfishly handled. "Each arrived at the conclusion that she had been too qood to Big Lannie, and had been imposed upon! [15] In fact,only one of Big Lannie's employers will have her back when Raymond is older and .more self-reliant; though this employer, Mrs. Ewing; prides herself on her kindness, the reader is cognizant of her real motive and of her patronizing attitude.

The climax of the story occurs when Raymond goes for a long-awaited walk wearing clothes grudgingly passed on to him by Mrs. Ewing. Instead of experiencing the simple joy of a walk, Raymond is viciously attacked. The author deliberately describes the attack in an ambiguous way, and thus encourages the readr to see the attack symbolically. Raymond is crushed by the uncaring world which Big Lannie has miraculously managed to survive. One wonders what will happen to Raymond once his protectress is gone.

"Clothe the Naked" is dispassionately told. There is little use of dialogue, and the events of the plot are simply related with no authorial comment. Characters are often revealed through the use of sentence structure. Thus short sentences describe Big Lannie's situations. The powerful simplicity and straight-forwardness of these sentences mirror Big Lannie's acceptance of fate and her inherent dignity and innocence. "She neither cursed her ills nor sought remedies for them. They happened to her; there they were." [16] Mrs. Ewin's character, on the other hand, is illustrated through complex sentence structure comprised of conditional phrases which mark her as an excuse-bound and essentially delwded character. In order to further contrast the characters of Big Lannie and Mrs. Ewing, Parker often juxtaposes the conflicting sentence styles associated with Big Lannie and Mrs. Ewing. In this way, Mrs. Ewing's false complexity and Big Lannie's elegant simplicity are underscored; "But Mrs. Ewing, admittedly soft-hearted certainly to a fault and possibly to a peril, kept her black laundress on. More than ever Big Lannie had reason to call her blessed." [17]

"Clothe the Naked" (story and title) describes a loss of idealism and a corruption of values in American society. "The Naked" are the poor who are trampled bL thos who worship materialism and power. "The Naked" are also the only surviving innocents in a corruDt Amrican landscape.

"Slipping Beauty" by Jerome Weidnan

"Slipping Beauty" is essentially a vehicle or.the immigrant's reaction to American values. In fact, two-thirds of the story is comprised of a seltzer salesman' monologue on American life. Mr. Yavner tlls of two daughters, Yettie and Jennie. Yettie, the older, worked hard learning how to coo and sew while attending business scool in order to procur a steady job (and a husband). Jennie, the younger, quit school in order to read magazines and smoke cigarettes by day, and run around with jobless boys by night. Much to Mr. Yavner's dismay, Yettie remains husband-less and work-bound while Jennie is arried to a "nice fellah Cwith3 a steady job by the city." [18]

Yavner reacts vehemently to te American scene where happiness res ults from the luck of the draw rather than from personal development. Yavner states that there is nothing to learn in America. When a parent's advice is followed there is no reward while the flouting of parental (old world) values results in "success." Thus the work ethic seems to result in more work while laziness is rewarded with a life of leisure. In short, the selfish doll is highly regarded in America where imae rather than substance is valued.

"Slipping Beauty" has the structure of the fairy tale or the fable. Mr. Yavner serves as an old-time story-teller of the oral tradition who simply relates the facts and ultimately the moral of the tale. The author provides a brief introductory material which serves as a doorway through which we may view the story teller of years gone by; that is, we are introduced to Mr. Yavner through a "contemporary" character who describes Yavner's dress, work style, and other idiosyncracies. In this way the author distances us from Mr. Yavner. Both the introductory framing device and the fairy-tale structure of the story serve to underscore the abyss between old world and new world lifestyles, and the reader is called upon to assess the value of the modern existence.

"Prelude" by Albert Halper

"Prelude" is a story of anti-semitism and the spectre of fascism. The immigrant family of father, son, and daughter, the Silversteins, is initially verbally taunted and then finally viciously attacked by a gang of unemployed youths.

The story emphasizes the failure of the melting-pot scheme and the illusiveness of the American dream. The members of the gang are alienated and frustrated, for there is no "American dream" for them. The

Silversteins live in isolation in a gentile neighborhood and cannot count or their neighbors for help when thy ar attacked.
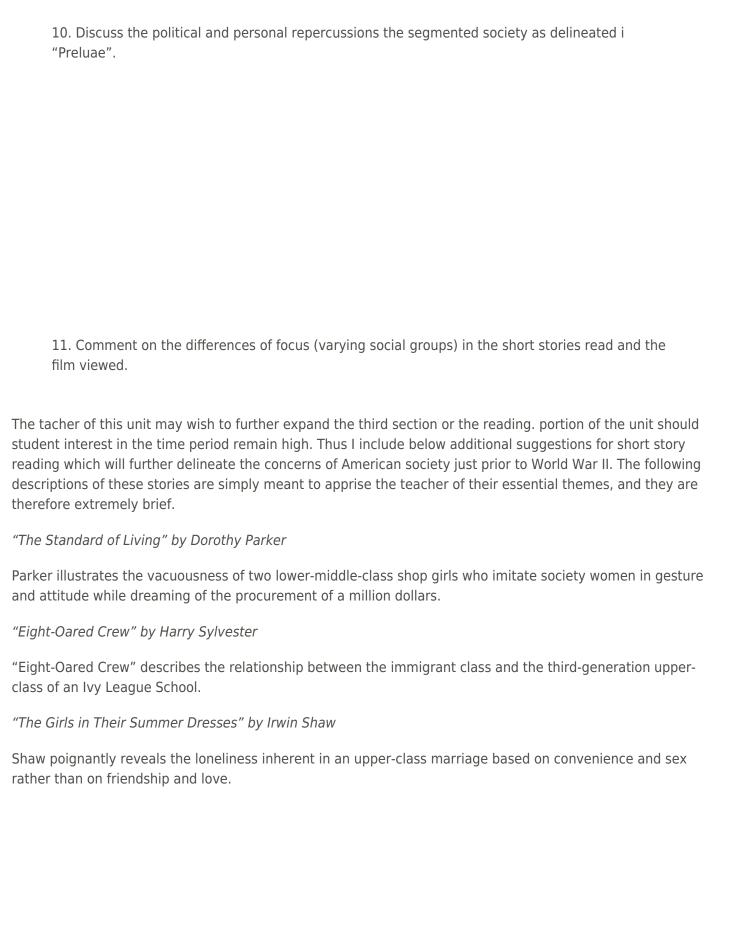
The hatred which is born of a segmented or non-cohesive society is ultimately self-destructive; as the daughter points out to her passive neighbors, " . . . after they get us down they'll go after you." [19] "They" are any of the unbridled disenfranchised members of society who fight (ironically one another) for a piece of America nuch as a dog might fight his own kind for a bone. "They" are also those people who—having lost a sense of dignity or self-worth—are prime candidates for member:ship in a fascist army.

"Prelude" is told from the point of view of Harry, the son. We are privy to Harry's thoughts with regard to the events of the story as well as his feelings about his father and sistzr. Harry is a sensitive and intelligent character whom we instinctively trust as a narrator. His ability to analyze his sister's rage and his father's passivity in the wake of the gang attack, establishes his narration as essentially accurate though passionate. The use of this technique of first-person narration draws the reader into the events of the story. We feel as thou3h we know Harry, for he speaks directly to us. As a result, Harry emerges as a realistic creation, and we, the audience, feel that his world may indeed be ours as well.

Questions for Students:

1. Compare/contrast the characters of Charles Kane and Big Lannie with reard to the ideas of power, strength, and success, What is success?
2. Discuss the meanings of the titles of each work.
3. Compare Dorothy Parker's use of symbolism/ambiguity in "Clothe the Naked" with the symbolism inherent in *Citizen Kane* (Rosebud,etc.) How would you create the ambiguity of the attack on the grandson ("Clothe the Naked") in a film adaptation of that story?
4. Dorothy Parker's use of conflicting sentence structures with regard to Big Lannie and Mrs. Ewing serves to create rhythms which we associate with each character. How do hese rhythms help to delineate character? How might this establishment of rhythm be accomplished in film? Discuss with regard to various film elements. (Use of background music? Pace of dialogue? Visual rhythm through the use of composition?)
5. Why does the author use a contemporary character to introduce us to Mr. Yavner in "Slipping Beauty"? Would such an introduction work in a film adaptation? Why? Why not? If not, what cinematic techniques could you use to create a similar effect?
6. Discuss the theme of isolation with regard to *Citizen Kane* , "Prelude", "Slipping Beauty", and "Clothe the Naked". Why are the characters in each ork isolated? What is the result of this isolation? Reiterate the film techniques which underscored isolation in *Citizen Kane.* What literary techniques are used to underscore the distance between characters in "Clothe the Naked" and "Slipping Beauty"?
7. Compare/contrast the parental concerns dig-played in *Citizen Kane* , "Slipping Beauty", and " Prelude".
8. How does the use of first-person narration help to delineate the character of Harry in "Prelude"? How does this first-person narration affect the reader? Why? How could this narrative technique be used in a film adaptation of "Prelude"? or Would the employment of particular elements of film serve the same purpose? Explain.
9. Compare and contrast Mr. Yavner's ("S1ipping Beauty") and Mr. Silverstein's ("Prelude") feelings about America.

10. Discuss the political and personal repercussions the segmented society as delineated i "Preluae".

11. Comment on the differences of focus (varying social groups) in the short stories read and the film viewed.

The tacher of this unit may wish to further expand the third section or the reading. portion of the unit should student interest in the time period remain high. Thus I include below additional suggestions for short story reading which will further delineate the concerns of American society just prior to World War II. The following descriptions of these stories are simply meant to apprise the teacher of their essential themes, and they are therefore extremely brief.

"The Standard of Living" by Dorothy Parker

Parker illustrates the vacuousness of two lower-middle-class shop girls who imitate society women in gesture and attitude while dreaming of the procurement of a million dollars.

"Eight-Oared Crew" by Harry Sylvester

"Eight-Oared Crew" describes the relationship between the immigrant class and the third-generation upper-class of an Ivy League School.

"The Girls in Their Summer Dresses" by Irwin Shaw

Shaw poignantly reveals the loneliness inherent in an upper-class marriage based on convenience and sex rather than on friendship and love.

Closing the Unit: An Opportunity to Adapt Fiction Into Film

It has always been my contention that student appreciation of an art form is markedly increased when the.L are provided with the opportunity for creating an example of that art form. This hands-on procss enables students to put to use the knowledge gained through study and analysis. The act of creatinn also serves to underscore the value of students' own ideas and feelings. I have encouraged this sort of creative endeavor in the past, and as a result have seen student enthusiasm, cooperation, and self-esteem increase. Creative projects encourage the most reluctant of students to "speak their minds."Interestingl y enough, I have noted time and again that the quie, less articulate student often "shines" in this arena. In short, there are potential artists, poets, photographers, and perhaps even film makers, often sitting anonymously in the back rows of our classrooms, who benefit greatly from the creative component of education. Thus I hope to provide my students with the opportunity for filmmaking in the form of adaptations of the previously read short stories) as the final activity of this unit. Many of the questions for students in the previou section of this unit are meant to initiate discussion about the adaptation of fiction into film. Thus students should be "primed" for this large project of film making through adaptation.

I hope to work closely with the theatre and writing teachers of our arts program at the Cooperative Migh School in planning this student-produced work. I envision student activity in a variety of arenas including script-writing, acting, directing, and camera work. The school has a "camcorder", and we will be able to call upon the Center for Theatre Techniques for technical assistance.

At this point such a project looms large in my mind. I am cogizant of the fact that this is a project which can evolve only through the cooperative efforts of a variety of players, and that I cannot with any certainty map out a comprehensive plan for film production at this point in time.

Yet, ideas are beginning to emerge even now through discussions with my seminar fellows and others. Perhaps we will be able to film the *process* of learning about film which will culminate in another film making activity.Perhaps we will go beyond film adaptation in order to create a film which will cature th thoughts, dreams, or themes which are foremost in the minds of our students. If this idea of film production seems am biguous(and surely it is), it is exciting in its possibilities as well. Realizing that one must begin the process—even amidst the initial brain-storming phases of creation—I include below one final exercise for students which is simply meant to encourage a preliminary discussion on the film adaptation of a particular short story.

Exercise: Using the Elements of Film in the Adaptation of Short Fiction (*Initial Scene*)

1. What kind of film stock would you choose for the particular story at hand? Why?
2. What use would you make of lighting? Why?
3. What would be the composition of your first shot? (Would you use a long-shot? Close-up? High-angle shot? Low-angle shot? Why?)
4. How would you use either camera movement or subject movement to make a statement about the character(s) presented?
5. Discuss the pace and volume of the dialogue presented in the inital scene.
6. What use would you make of synchronous and asynchronous sound effects? Why?
7. Choose a song or a melody which would serve as background music for the opening scene.

Why is this song particularly appropriate?

Notes

1. Thomas Sobochack and Vivian Sobochack, *An Introduction to Film* , p.493.
2. *Ibid* , p.177.
3. Robert L. Carringer, *The Making of Citizen Kane* . p.86.
4. *Ibid* , p.84.
5. Thomas Sobochack and Vivian Sobochack, *An Introduction to Film* , p.73.
6. *Ibid* , p-73.
7. *Ibid,* p.79.
8. *Ibid* , p.86.
9. *Ibid* , p.88.
10. *Ibid* , p.85.
11. *Ibid,* p.183
12. *Ibid* , p.459.
13. Robert L. Carringer, *The Making of Citizen Kane* , p.108.
14. Ernestine Taggard, ed., *20 American Stories* , p.93.
15. *Ibid.* p.91.
16. *Ibid* , p.90.
17. *Ibid* , p.95.
18. Roger Goodman, ed. , *75 Short Masterpieces, p* .262.
19. Ernestine Taggard, ed. , *20 American Stories, p* .156.

Student Readings

(These stories are included in the anthologies listed in the Teacher Bibliography.)

"Clothe the Naked" by Dorothy Parker

"Slipping Beauty" by Jerome Weidman

"Prelude" by Albert Halper

"The Standard of Living" by Dorothy Parker

"Eight-Oared Crew" by Harry Sylvester

"The Girls in Their Summer Dresses" by Irwin Shaw

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Teacher Bibliography

Carringer, Robert L. *The Making of Citizen Kane* . Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985.

This fascinating book providessa"back-stage'. look at film creation. It is a comprehensive technical study of Citizen Kane which includes discussions on scripting, art direction, and cinematography.

Crane, Milton, ed. 50 Great American Short Stories. New York: Bantam Books, 1963.

This fine collection of American short stories is representative of the USA, for it includes regional and ethnic works.

Giannetti, Louis. *Understanding Movies.* Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1987.

This fine text deals with such cinematic subjects as: theory, acting, editing, and sound.

Goodman, Robert L., ed. *75 Short Masterpieces.* New York: Bantam Books, 1961.

This anthology of short fiction from world literature includes many well-known and lesser-known masterpieces. Sobochack! Thomas and Vivian. *An Introduction to Film.* Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1987.

This text provides the film student with easy-to-follow explanations of a variety of film elements. Many illustrations both visual and written—serve to delineate (a working) film vocabulary.

Taggart, Ernestine, ed. *20 American Stories* . New York: Mantam Books, 1947.

This anthology provides many student-tested/ high-interest American short stories.

* * *

Film

(Copies are available for loan at the Teachers Institute Office—53 Wall Street:

Citizen Kane

The 39 Steps

Sabotage

The Innocents