

## Two Review Essays:

### **Anti-Union Clichés float *On the Waterfront*: Rhetorical Analysis of the Film**

### ***Citizen Kane* and *How Green was My Valley*: Have We Sold Ourselves Short?**

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#### **Anti-Union Clichés float *On the Waterfront*: Rhetorical Analysis of the Film**

(This essay is dedicated to Claudia Cassidy, the late arts critic of *The Chicago Tribune*)

Readers of progressive journals dealing with the representation of class issues in film have been under-informed about previous generations' struggles because Hollywood's memory is short. Even the major film stars with a number of roles to their credit on human rights and labor themes are almost forgotten in today's Hollywood. Who recalls today the working-class actor Joan Crawford and her string of shop girl films (e.g., *Paid* (1930), *Possessed* (1931), *Chained* (1934), etc.) that opened a door for young women to see ways to empower themselves? Other actors and filmmakers made startling statements about the working class long before our currently remembered landmark labor films. Yet a few classic films of the 1940s and 1950s have remained in the public's eye, often those films that repeat many stereotypes about labor and the working class. One film in particular, director Elia Kazan's famed 1954 dock worker film *On The Waterfront*, is perennially aired on film channels, its Leonard Bernstein score played in concert by symphony orchestras. While it would be inspiring to note that this film has advanced the cause of the working class and of labor, it has not. Although claims can be made that *On The Waterfront* is pro-labor and is just exposing corruption, these claims are weak and fallacious. Few other labor-themed films balance this film's level of ongoing global media exposure.

While clarity of vision is a virtue, over-simplification is not. In 1954, the historical context of the McCarthy Era House Un-American Activities Hearings was one of rough tactics, forcing people to declare a political side, ruining careers of those who declined or who backed the wrong color political horse. 1954 was the year of gleeful commie hunting and narking on friends. People were feeling 'oh, so right' in whatever position they took. What about artists? Artists generally took to the hills and avoided making comments on the real-life melodrama that was happening all around them. But *melodrama* is not only 'life

with the boring bits edited out,' as Alfred Hitchcock is quoted by Francois Truffaut<sup>1</sup> as saying, but the art of turning all life's colors into blacks and whites suitable for the kiddies.

The 1954 film *On the Waterfront* is an operatic-scale example of a Cold War melodrama that takes a target and demonizes it in such a way that the film becomes the 'slam' that keeps on slamming. That this film is both partisan and propagandistic can be shown in that *On the Waterfront* is used in college economics classes such as Econ 108 at the University of Southern California as an example to illustrate the neoclassical economists' negative views on labor unions (Kaun 2020).

On the grounds of its 'cinematic artistry,' *On the Waterfront* is played often on television, both on commercial classic film channels and on PBS. Symphony orchestras such as the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and opera companies celebrate its musical score, composed by Leonard Bernstein ('CSO'). Thus, the 'slam' about unions and their corruption is a perennial feature of the media landscape. Usually there is no parallax view, no other media giving any differing perspective.

*On the Waterfront* denigrates and over-simplifies unions as criminal organizations in ways too numerous to exhaustively examine here, but two obvious methods are the use of the *synecdoche trope* and Ernest Bormann's tool of symbolic convergence, the 'fantasy theme' theory in his text *The Force of Fantasy*. Fantasy themes can include negative words and phrases about a group not present used to bind a different group (1985).

### **'Seen one, seen 'em all'**

Terry Malloy, (Marlon Brando) is a sacrificial lamb used by his criminal dock workers' union boss brother Charlie (Rod Steiger) to achieve his ends. Charlie makes Terry throw a boxing match and spoils his chances at a boxing career, which, in turn, ruins Terry's life. Terry becomes a bitter loser who can only be redeemed by a selfless woman's love, provided by Edie Doyle (Eva Marie Saint.) Karl Malden presents a nuance-free portrait of a heroic priest, Father Barry. The two characters, Charlie and Father Barry, are flip sides of each other, devoid of depth and growth of character. In this dock opera, one is either good or bad. Terry is that anti-hero who is supposed to give the depth lacking in the other characters. Brando's acting and that of the other fine actors added depth to parts that was largely lacking in the script.

There is no hint that unions ever do much positive for workers in *On the Waterfront*. Charlie Malloy, the evil brother character in *On the Waterfront* functions as synecdoche for unions in general. The term synecdoche is defined in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as a figure of speech in which a more inclusive term is used for a less inclusive one or vice versa, as a whole for a part or a part for a whole.' In the most powerful lament in the film, Terry complains that his brother, who should be looking out for him (like unions), has only betrayed and destroyed him (like criminal unions.)

It wasn't him, Charley, it was you. Remember that night in the Garden you came down to my dressing room and you said, 'Kid, this ain't your night. We're going for the price on Wilson.' You remember that? 'This ain't your night'! My night! I coulda taken Wilson apart! So what happens? He gets the title shot outdoors on the ballpark and what do I get? A one-way ticket to Palookaville! You was my brother, Charley, you shoulda looked out for me a little bit. You shoulda taken

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<sup>1</sup> 1967, *Hitchcock by François Truffaut, With the Collaboration of Helen G. Scott*, English Translation by François Truffaut, New York Simon and Schuster.

care of me just a little bit so I wouldn't have to take them dives for the short-end money. [. . .] you don't understand. I coulda had class. I coulda been a contender. I coulda been somebody, instead of a bum, which is what I am, let's face it. It was you, Charley.

The dominant culture views difference as pathology. The history of the Hollywood film is littered with 'mammies,' 'reel injuns,' 'chinamen,' Jewish crooked lawyers, and other racial stereotypes. The characters were one singular person but they represented a class, just as the character of Charlie Molloy represents unions. And in the case of such fictional representations, no direct charge is made that all persons of this race are - - -, but the synecdoche sticks. Any group will have people who are criminals and less-than-admirable types. That is the 'grain of truth' so often cited for the value of stereotypes. Propagandists know how synecdoche of this 'one person represents his entire group' works and they use it frequently. In the 1930s, German filmmakers made films such as *Jud Süß*, called the most anti-Semitic film ever made (Liscotto 2008). An insidious court financier makes the Duke of Württemberg dependent upon him, rapes his daughter and is finally tried and executed. This film was only about one man named Joseph Süß Oppenheimer, but its final line could serve equally well for a concluding line to *On the Waterfront*: 'May the citizens of other states never forget this lesson.' Have other states learned the lessons of the propagandistic use of synecdoche (letting one person represent a whole group?) That remains to be seen.

### **All we know about you is . . .**

Rhetoric has many useful tools to describe our own group and other groups so as to aid our in-group binding. 'Fantasy theme' analysis developed by Ernest Bormann involves words and phrases that portray persons, places, or events not present. We often reserve the best 'fantasy themes' for our own group while other groups do not fare as well. One example can be a favorite sports team and what adjectives describe them: top hitters, best base stealers, etc. Other teams might be threats, weak on their outfield, or not much of a challenge this season.

When a 'dock opera' like *On the Waterfront* relies exclusively upon negative fantasy themes, similar to those we might use about that 'other team,' our picture of unions is bound to become skewed. Let's examine a few of the 'fantasy themes' about unions in *On the Waterfront*. The sole interest of unions is in their 'cut,' not workers' welfare.

JOHNNY  
(to Terry)

I know what's eatin' you, kid. But I got two thousand dues-payin' members in my local— that's seventy-two thousand a year legitimate and when each one of 'em puts in a couple of bucks a day to make sure they work steady— well, you figure it out. And that's just for openers. We got the fattest piers in the fattest harbor in the world. Everything that moves in and out— we take our cut.

This is a repeat fantasy theme in *On the Waterfront* about unions. The idea that unions ever fulfill their mission as representatives looking out for workers is repeatedly made laughable throughout the film.

The dignity of labor is also made into a ridiculing fantasy theme, as opposed to the film *How Green was my Valley* (1941) about the Welsh coal mining community of Cwm Rhondda, where people worked in mines, but were portrayed in sympathetic fashion.

NOLAN

He was just tellin' me how proud he was  
to belong to a fine honest local run by such an  
outstandin' labor leader as Johnny Friendly.

SONNY

Don't get wise now, you.

NOLAN

Wise! If I was wise I wouldn't be no longshoreman  
for thirty years and poorer now than when I started.

The fantasy theme of strong arm intimidation is also a leitmotif in *On the Waterfront*.

J.P.

(retreating slightly)

Raise a hand to me and. . . .

NOLAN

. . . and you'll tell Johnny Friendly.

J.P.

You'd be off the pier for good.

The cluster of rhetorical themes surrounding unions in *On the Waterfront* strongly suggests that, while wildly ineffective in helping workers in any way, unions are quite effective in making workers' lives a misery. This is a set of fantasy themes from an opposing rhetorical discourse community.

Fantasy themes surrounding 'ratting' on friends and betrayal imply that such friends as those in a union deserve to be ratted on and that those who are 'ratting' have the moral high ground. Only those *outside* the union know how to run things equitably, according to these fantasy themes.

CHARLEY

(tolerantly)

Let me explain you something, kid.  
Stooling is when you rat on your friends, on  
the guys you're with.

(sees Terry frown)

When Johnny needs a favor, don't try to figure it out,  
just do it. Now go ahead, join the congregation.

This congregation is missing a few members, not least of which are the owners of the industry, those powerful New York financiers and shipping magnates. But there is no portrayal of the managers and owners of the docks in *On the Waterfront*. Since they are entirely absent, there is no chance for dialogue nor for any cinematic representation of their role in the industry. Has this omission ever been noted by any film critic? The workers in *On the Waterfront* seem blissfully unaware that the docks are, in fact, owned by *anybody*. And their union is too busy picking the hapless workers' pockets to ever deal with labor negotiations. The subject never arises. In this opera of the docks, there are *no* depictions of union contract negotiations, *no* pickets of unfair conditions at specific docks, *no* strikes in which brave workers risked their livelihoods, *no* wives and children supporting their family members for better conditions. Why waste time on such incidentals?

Before throwing one's hands up in the face of such glaring omissions in a film that purports to represent the shipping industry, a word might be said for poetic license. Leo Braudy's book-length analysis of *On the Waterfront* studies the factors involved in Elia Kazan's 'take' on the shipping industry, in which he had never worked nor appears to have even a familial connection, is a metaphor for his *own career*, starting as a Communist in the 1930s, then a reformed Communist in the 1940s, then a singer of McCarthy-era testimony in the 1950s. The slightly self-serving plot of this 'dock opera' served Kazan well to justify his own testimony naming friends' names during the McCarthy Hearings. There may have been delightful music in the film as a by-product, similar to those yummy tasting Armour Star by-products of the meat packing process. Another by-product may have been to empower some people in legitimate situations where testimony was required and difficult decisions made, but here Kazan's self-interest is just too obvious to sing angelic notes above the madding crowd. In Elia Kazan's fantasia of wanton union vice *On the Waterfront*, the anti-union clichés merely float, slightly belly-up from long overuse, like rotting bloated mackerels.

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### ***Citizen Kane* and *How Green was My Valley*: Have We Sold Ourselves Short?**

Another way that the voice of the working class and labor have been muted in film history is to compare a sympathetic film that portrays working people in depth unflatteringly to other films. The case of *Citizen Kane* and its 1941 Best Picture Oscar rival *How Green Was My Valley* is a unique confluence of artistic and social pressures that begs to be examined. The only way others who are not working class experience the lives of working-class people is via the media. To know ourselves as working class, it is important to follow the trajectory of how we have been socially constructed via media representations. And this skewed representation did not begin last week.

Film critics tend to be outraged and marvel today how this miscarriage of aesthetic justice ever could have happened. Why, they cry, did *How Green was My Valley* ever get chosen as 1942's Best Picture of the Year over Orson Welles' artistic triumph *Citizen Kane*? A couple summary critiques of *How Green was My Valley* may show the general tendency. One of the unnamed reviewers at the online *AMC Filmsites* argues that *How Green was My Valley* 'is one of John Ford's masterpieces of sentimental human drama. It is . . . melodramatic and nostalgic' (AMC). Renowned film historian David Bordwell found *How Green was My Valley* included in a list of 'The Most Overrated Best Picture Winners' and challenged the derogatory attitude toward *How Green was My Valley* in his online essay 'The Citizen Kane Assumption.' Bordwell takes on the easy dismissal of *How Green was My Valley*, but stops short of explaining how all

this controversy fits into larger issues of class and society. The history beyond the frame of the two films is needed to establish the magnitude of the problem.

*Citizen Kane*'s innovative cinematography, non-linear plot, and stream-of-consciousness narration fit with the aesthetics of high modernism, such as breaking the frame of linear time, detailing ruptures in Kane's psyche. But was this merely a mistake? Or is something else going on? Did 'the heart' win over 'the head' and a 'sentimental' film about the hardships and changes over a generation in a Welsh coal mining village temporarily surpass a 'timeless' masterpiece?

A person's world is a pastiche of responses to various people, events, and concepts that the mind renews daily. Personalities shift but the mind tends to normalize the shifts as coming from outside. Things 'out there' cause people to change their minds occasionally about certain things but they remain the same inside. People seem to possess a unified inner self as they rehearse those words mentally that make them who they are. Sometimes one's mind can see the strings being pulled in the media to draw the crowd this way and that. But those interior monologues go on saying that 'we are we' and 'they are they' and so that a person remains the same person she or he always was. The juncture between the individual subjectivity and the present time, between selves now and in times past is fascinating because this juncture is as iridescent as the rainbow streak on the stream(s) of time.

The events of another time tend to be viewed through the lens of today, no matter how much the viewer tries to adjust the camera's focus. The artifacts of the past have something to tell but they are filtered by today's light. Current dominant social narratives make the past seem to us as though its contours fit the selves constructed to meet today's world. In general, past is considered as a time when life was simpler and people's choices may have been clearer, even though there were social constraints that do not exist currently. 'Today is better than the past and the future will offer even more than today' is one narrative. 'The past was better than today and life has been going downhill since . . . ' (some fixed key event) is another narrative. A third narrative might be that 'life has always been full of surprises and we pull the threads we choose (or threads that choose us) from a tangled skein.'

That brings me to the point of this essay: how do the viewers of films shift between the 'we' and 'I' of life and how do stimuli from culture reinforce one's constantly refurbished life? The public's lives are reflected in the imaginative media so it follows that the key films of a year can tell how spectacle helped people of the past to make sense of their lives, as well as how students of culture reinterpret these artifacts in the present. Two 1941 films, *Citizen Kane* (Dir. Orson Welles) and *How Green was My Valley* (Dir. John Ford) turned 75 years old in 2016. These two films competed for the Oscars in the World War II year of 1942. The reasons are multilayered to even begin to understand why *How Green was My Valley* won the best picture over *Citizen Kane* in the 1942 Oscar competition. Neither film portrayed the war. *How Green was My Valley* was an adaptation of the 1939 autobiographical novel by Richard Llewellyn, set in Queen Victoria's time, the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. *Citizen Kane* detailed the life of a newspaper baron, largely based upon the lifespan of William Randolph Hearst from roughly the 1860s through the 1930s. Did giving Ford's film the Best Picture Oscar represent the greatest error of the Oscar voters ever or something else? How can this Oscar vote speak to us about our social values then and now?

### **It's Huge to be Great**

In order to view any film in its historical and social context, like most film history students, I need to look at what can be gleaned from the dominant historical narratives at the time of that film's production and showings. The ideals of the various countries are different but all sides in what would develop into the confrontation of World War II had huge personalities leading them from chaos into the light. So I will first speak about the world into which these two films came. The 1930s had seen a history-altering parade of state actors on the world stage: Adolph Hitler, Josef Stalin, Benito Mussolini, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and Winston Churchill, to name the most obvious cast of characters.

The impersonal forces of the global 1930s financial collapse were difficult for non-specialists in the field of economics to understand. To assuage the fear of the populace, an untiring media put wind in the Great Leaders' sails so that, to this day, new biographies are being written and filmed of the leaders of the twentieth century. They steered the courses of their individual nations, forming alliances through the entire 1930s era of financial loss and upheaval. Each great leader offered something that a population would call 'hope.' All the above leaders were far, far larger than life. If their virtues were monumental, then their flaws were gargantuan. And if history tells the story accurately, many people had lost their sense of social cohesion during the dark 1930s. These men helped to bond their various countries together by being icons of change, but people watched the giant personalities with admiration and alarm, because their acts rippled for good and ill across the globe.

In media studies, Stuart Hall's methods of creative encoding and audience decoding known as audience reception theory (2001) tells us that, not only were there actors on the global stage, there were also those who reacted and were swept along willingly or unwillingly into the orbit of these 'great,' 'celestial' human bodies. How did it feel to be led? Until recently, this was uncharted territory. Jackie Stacey (1994) analyzes decades of fan letters to British film magazines in *Star Gazing* to see how the lives of fans mingled and merged with those of their stars. Just as in film theory people are only now starting to study the film magazines for evidence of how *viewers* reacted to the films that have been long critically studied, historians are now studying letters from obscure people to see how it felt to be led by the great leaders of the twentieth century. From this evidence, we can say that great public figures exerted a magnetic pull on the public's attention span. Of course, those who controlled the media also controlled how people would estimate the value of the great leaders and all of culture.

That is, all this attention on our leaders didn't *just happen* but an imaginary Klieg light such as used in film studios was focused daily upon the *same few figures* by the film, radio, television, and newer digital media industries.

### **The Long Run of Fame**

Despite the fevered typing by billions of hands, messages then sent out over the Internet, the sorting of society still allows but a few to be the key players on the global stage. Drama has always told us that the lives of the few are far more worthy to view or read about than the lives of the many. Look to ancient Greece, Shakespearean England, Japanese Noh, or any other culture's historic repository of fiction and drama. Any bean counter can make comparative counts: the activities of the kings and the gods at the top of the list of what counts as culture. Obviously, commonsensically, everybody cannot know everybody so some sort of selectivity must be involved and society has to fall into some kind of structure. That has been

the prevailing idea. What the Romans called ‘fama’ favors but a few and soon leaves even these in the dust. Who wants to read about the person next door when there are gods, kings, and monsters, or gods and kings who *are monsters*, to be viewed on stage? Over and over, down through the ages, this was the thought.

Our cultural history records mixed results in those attempts to recognize and dramatize ‘the many’ in society rather than just ‘the few.’ Most of these films, dramas, and fictional texts have been produced in societies that hold less of an individualistic dominant narrative than Western Europe and the United States. The result is that *individuals* get ground out of existence by huge—always with the ‘huge!’—stone wheels of history that depict a phalanx of people, each having no face to speak of, stepping shoulder-to-shoulder into some kind of collective Valhalla. And then there are monstrous lapses, genocides, and abuses that tend to give a bad name to the whole project of focusing a film studio’s Klieg lights on ‘the many.’ Readers and viewers have become wary of any idealized film or novel delighting in the lives of ‘the people’ as opposed to their ‘great,’ ‘huge’ leaders. In 1941, into this world came *Citizen Kane* and *How Green was My Valley*.

Serendipitously, an email just popped into my box to tell me that ‘Jesus Christ is trending’ but ‘not for the reasons you think.’

### **Man and Studio**

‘Studio politics meets personal inclinations!’ That could be a name of some new televised game show. But in fact it was within this social dynamic that both Darryl F. Zanuck and Orson Welles chose their film topics. The word ‘man’ does denote the idea that, in the patriarchal world of film studios, most who made films have always been men—or at least dressed that way, fitting whatever vagaries of actual gender identification into the preformed slots available for film producers and directors.

In her history of the film’s production, Lea Jacobs (2016) details how Darryl Zanuck was swept into the popularity of the bestselling 1939 *How Green was My Valley* and bought the novel. The film was shot in just three months. Orson Welles shuttled a script back and forth between himself and Herman Mankewicz. They bickered about who wrote most of it (Jacobs 2016). After showing the evidence, the film industry has credited Welles for the definitive touches. Each film was timely in its own way. *How Green was My Valley* showed the recurring disruptions of an industrial community in Wales as, in real life, repeated industrial strikes and upheavals of closures went on in the mining towns of the United States (Appalachian). Newspaper oligarch William Randolph Hearst, a major model for Welles’ Kane, was one of the most recognized names in the United States. His word was the law for much of the newspaper industry, so if *Citizen Kane* did not please Hearst due to its recognizable portrayal of him, the newspapers in the Hearst Syndicate did not mention the film.

The 1996 PBS documentary, *The Battle over Citizen Kane*, details the various ways that Hearst attempted to censor the film, but is this all? To list but a few of the well-funded Hearst shenanigans, he ordered Louella Parsons to defame Welles repeatedly in her film news column. He tried to buy up prints and negatives. Hearst attempted to intimidate RKO Studio head George J. Schaefer, but this, too, failed. The censorship attempts made *Citizen Kane* a cause célèbre and in the long run this has helped secure the niche for a film that challenged the powerful. But at the time, censorship hurt box office (Battle). Failure to win the 1942 Oscar might also have been due in part to the film’s inability to play well in small towns.



### A New Genre of Unflinching ‘Sentiment’

Are the reasons above the only reasons that the Academy voted *How Green was My Valley* as the Best Picture of 1942 or could there be another reason? Praise for *Citizen Kane* was not universal. Some prominent critics wrote negative reviews. In his 1941 review for *Sur*, reprinted in *Selected Nonfictions*, Jorge Luis Borges famously prophesied that *Citizen Kane* will endure as a certain Griffith or Pudovkin films have ‘endured’—films whose historical value is undeniable but which no one cares to see again. It is too gigantic, pedantic, tedious. It is not intelligent, though it is the work of genius—in the most nocturnal and Germanic sense of that bad word (Borges 2000).

On February 7, 1942, *Argus Weekend Magazine* critic Erle Cox called the film ‘amazing’ but thought that Welles's break with Hollywood traditions was ‘overdone.’ On October 22, 1941, *Tatler's* James Agate called it ‘the well-intentioned, muddled, amateurish thing one expects from high-brows’ and ‘a quite good film which tries to run the psychological essay in harness with your detective thriller, and doesn't quite succeed.’ Eileen Creelman of *The New York Sun* called it ‘a cold picture, unemotional, a puzzle rather than a drama’ (Higham 1985)

Less surprisingly, many critics such as the *New York Times's* Bosley Crowther used the word ‘sentiment’ for *How Green was My Valley*. In *The Times* of October 29, 1941, Crowther observed

. . . (p)ersons who have read the haunting novel by Richard Llewellyn from which the story is derived will comprehend at its mention the deeply affecting quality of this film. For Mr. Ford has endeavored with eminent success to give graphic substance to the gentle humor and melancholy pathos, the loveliness and aching sentiment, of the original. And Mr. Zanuck has liberally provided with the funds of his studio a production which magnificently reproduces the sharp contrasts of natural beauties and the harsh realities of a Welsh mining town. In purely pictorial terms, ‘How Green Was My Valley’ is a stunning masterpiece.

Crowther asks viewers to forgive the ‘sentiment’ in *How Green was My Valley* because of other exalted qualities in the film, such as its scenic beauty. But in general being told that a film is ‘sentimental’ is the kiss of death and a conversation-ending epithet. Anthony Trollope sniffed in his 1855 novel *The Warden* about reformers like ‘Mr. Sentiment’ (code for Dickens) who is

. . . [t]he most powerful. It is incredible the number of evil practices he has put down: it is to be feared he will soon lack subjects, and that when he has made the working classes comfortable, and enough bitter beer put into proper-sized pint bottles, there will be nothing further for him left to do. Mr. Sentiment is certainly a very powerful man, and perhaps not the less so that his good poor people are so very good; his hard rich people so very hard; and the genuinely honest so very honest. (161)

Defenders of *Citizen Kane* have lobbed the term ‘sentimental’ at *How Green was My Valley* like a hand grenade for daring to take an Oscar from their paragon. This attack is entirely unnecessary since both are fine films; they no longer compete because both are recognized as masterpieces. What is more, *How Green*

was *My Valley* created a new genre in film that allowed dignity in working-class families without making them an 'other' or walking case books of maladjustment and personality disorders.

*How Green was my Valley* not only lamented for the poor village but showed its joys over time and how characters evolve. But the film *unflinchingly* examined how religion was misused as a tool of oppression in the small town, with deacons creating little fiefdoms to pick on less powerful members of the community. Far from being 'sentimentalized,' lives in this village are ripped asunder by the narrow minds and 'idle tongues.' The minister, Mr. Gruffydd (played by Walter Pigeon), condemns such behavior in his chapel, telling the churchgoers before he leaves their village 'never to return'.

. . . I know why you have come - I have seen it in your faces Sunday after Sunday as I've stood here before you. Fear has brought you here. Horrible, superstitious fear. Fear of divine retribution - - a bolt of fire from the skies. The vengeance of the Lord and the justice of God. But you have forgotten the love of Jesus. You disregard His sacrifice. Death, fear, flames, horror and black clothes. Hold your meeting then, but know if you do this in the name of God and in the house of God, you blaspheme against Him and His Word.

The emotions shown in *Citizen Kane* and *How Green was My Valley* are but two different styles of sentiment. By this standard, Orson Welles followed the, let us not forget, well-worn path of making a film about the mighty and famous. *Citizen Kane* is no less a film in that 'king and gods' genre because it makes the mighty topical and current. Using Kane's flaws in its exploration of his 'rich, evolving inner life' is a close relative to the nuanced royal plays of Shakespeare.

The innovative qualities of *Citizen Kane* had less to do with content than novel camera angles, deep focus shots, and other new cinematography. Some historians attempt to make the case that *Citizen Kane* was a trail-blazer in using flashbacks and a non-linear narrative structure, but other films had done that feat before *Citizen Kane*--such films as director Preston Sturges' 1933 film *The Power and the Glory*, for instance, which is told through flashbacks. Pauline Kael in her essay 'Raising Kane,' describes the film about the empty life of a railroad tycoon as a prototype for the narrative of *Citizen Kane* (1941). Significantly, Herman J. Mankiewicz, who along with Orson Welles won an Oscar for the screenplay of *Citizen Kane*, was acquainted with the director.

*How Green was My Valley* took on the challenge of creating a depiction of those who are the many rather than the few. Very few films by the late 1930s could run the gauntlet of critics' condemnation of attempting to raise the lowly beyond their station. The narrative ran (and still runs) that these lives are too commonplace to be interesting. Critics' complaints included that the writer, director, or producer obviously must have had a political motive for making such a fuss about common and ordinary people. Or if the film were balanced enough to escape that criticism, then perhaps it could be said that this film 'has its points' but it strays into the 'maudlin' and 'sentimental.'

One of the greatest instances of critics' tunnel vision is their inability to see that the great man agonizing is also 'sentimental.' Critics miss this because *his* emotions are always to be respected as he clenches his mighty jaw and furrows his lofty brow or even chews his well-appointed scenery. But when those who depict lesser rungs of the social scale act overwhelmed by what life has dealt, we are told that this is shameless tear-jerking. These are the obstacles that the film *How Green was My Valley* faced at its time of release. Just as Welles faced his dragons, so John Ford and Darryl Zanuck faced a public and critics

who were nowhere near as naïve and sympathetic to a story about a coal mining village as some may believe today.

### **Citizen Kane Front and Center**

The most short-sighted aspect of a monocular view of the outstanding individual and life at the top is that the way that the horizon becomes populated with nothing else. As the ex-lover Joe Gillis says, finding photos of the aging star Norma Desmond everywhere in her house in the film *Sunset Boulevard*,

How could she breathe in that house full of Norma Desmonds? Around every corner, Norma Desmonds. . . more Norma Desmonds. . . and still more Norma Desmonds.

(B-8, 'Sunset')

How can anyone breathe with the few taking up every inch of space on our mental maps? The star has the stage. The people at base level live through the stars. The stars need the commoners just as vampirically as Norma needed her adoring fans (who had long passed her by.) But in this addictive state, there is no room for people but only the few, the few, the few. When media makes the outstanding individual the fantasy focus of the majority, this causes a 'creeping paralysis.' This paralysis of the mind is similar to the decay of Norma Desmond's mansion in *Sunset Boulevard*. Society as it now exists may have gone too far, been too shielded from its own reality, to find a way out of the house of fame.

The few at center stage will continue to show their manufactured selves to the many. This generation's *Citizen Kanes* will flaunt their unique traits and qualities, blown to monstrous proportions. Is there any chance that a 'sentimental' film like *How Green was My Valley* ever again will win over *Citizen Kane*'s manufactured egos and riding crops of the mighty? Whether *How Green was My Valley* won the Best Picture of 1942 because of its own qualities or because *Citizen Kane* was prevented from winning by Hearst's henchmen, Kane has won now. Big time. Kane's mesmerizing force is huge, indeed. For seventy-five years both films focused their spotlights at society. Maybe it is timely to look again at what these films are saying and ask what has been learned.

### **Author Bio**

**Gloria McMillan** was born in East Chicago, Indiana. She grew up in this steel mill town. She received her BA and MA in English literature from Indiana University and her Ph.D. in Rhetoric and English at the University of Arizona. She has taught college writing at the University of Arizona and Pima College in Tucson, Arizona, for over 25 years. She has published a mystery novel titled *The Blue Maroon Murder* and has edited a collection of essays on the writer Ray Bradbury, *Orbiting Ray Bradbury's Mars* (McFarland, 2013.) She has also written plays that have been produced in Tucson and the Chicago suburbs.

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