

## Document Citation

Title	<b>The fourteen nights of Orson Welles</b>
Author(s)	Charles Higham
Source	<i>Mayfair Repertory Cinema</i>
Date	1972 Jul 19
Type	program
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	4
Subjects	Welles, Orson (1915-1985), Kenosha, Wisconsin, United States
Film Subjects	Une histoire immortelle (The immortal story), Welles, Orson, 1968 The lady from Shanghai, Welles, Orson, 1948 Othello, Welles, Orson, 1952 The stranger, Welles, Orson, 1946 Mr. Arkadin, Welles, Orson, 1955 Black magic, Ratoff, Gregory, 1949 Touch of evil, Welles, Orson, 1958 Chimes at midnight, Welles, Orson, 1966 Compulsion, Fleischer, Richard, 1959 Moby Dick, Huston, John, 1956 Jane eyre, Stevenson, Robert, 1944

Macbeth, Welles, Orson, 1948

Crack in the mirror, Benson, Robby, 1988

The third man, Reed, Carol, 1949

Orson Welles



# The FOURTEEN NIGHTS OF ORSON WELLES

JULY 19 thru AUGUST 1, 1972

## MAYFAIR

REPERTORY CINEMA

214 SANTA MONICA (At The Mall)  
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WEDNESDAY, THURSDAY, JULY 19-20

### MR. ARKADIN (1955)

Welles began work on Mr. Arkadin in 1951 while appearing on British radio to pay the heavy bills incurred by the shooting of Othello. Further preparations were made during his appearance in Peter Brook's production of King Lear in 1953. In 1954 he finally secured backing from a group of Swiss and Spanish financiers, and shot, when possible, over a period of eight months in Spain, Germany and France, frequently using actual interiors, including those of hotels where he was staying. His old friend, Joseph Cotten's wife Patricia Medina, was cast opposite a new actor, Robert Arden, who may very well have been the most unfortunate player in a Welles production.

Based on a variety of people, Mr. Arkadin (Welles) is a mysterious multi-millionaire who is conducting a complicated relationship with his daughter; he does not want her to know the secrets of his career. He therefore engages an adventurer (Arden) to seek out the people who have figured in his evil past so that he can systematically eliminate them. Despite the maddening eccentricity of the direction and the appalling writing, with its juvenile comments on life and death, the film still fascinates as a curio of the master's. There are good passages: the interview with the flea circus proprietor, played with stylish exaggeration by Mischa Auer, the encounter with the antique dealer played by Michael Redgrave, and most of all the scenes involving the infamous Sophie, brilliantly played by Katina Paxinou. Though the film runs out of steam at the end, these grotesque portraits make it essential viewing today.

### OTHELLO (1952)

Welles' first European film was shot in a four year period between 1948 and 1952. Made, like so many of his pictures, in a wide variety of locations from patched up funds, it featured, successively, three Desdemonas, four Iagos, two Ludovicos, three Cassios, and countless bit players. The director kept chopping and changing the cast, and finally the film emerged as something of a patchwork. Nevertheless, it contained a superb performance as Iago by Michael MacLiammoir, an Irish player who had been partly responsible for aiding Welles early theatrical career in Dublin.

Welles also achieved, for the most part, a stunning visual style for the film. The opening, in which Iago is swung in a cage high above a seething crowd, is thrillingly executed, with extraordinary camera shots from the cage looking down. Poetic in detail, the film matches Shakespeare's verse with no less rich and sumptuous imagery, and the score by two Italian composers is a triumph. Its clanging, vibrating chords immensely enhance the overwhelmingly passionate and romantic mood of the picture.

Scene after scene, though interrupted by rushed and inferior episodes, strikes home: the carousing, laughing crowd while Othello tries to test the fidelity of Desdemona, Othello spying on Cassio through a gap in the castle wall, the screaming of gulls echoing his agony, and the extraordinary sequence when Othello lies transfixed on the rocks, the camera showing us his pained view of the sea gulls in predatory flight. Against a shimmering sky, he beautifully delivers the speech "farewell the tranquil mind" as the riggings of ships dissolve and dissolve again. For all its faults, Othello is a potent expression of Welles' genius.



## FRIDAY, SATURDAY, JULY 21-22

### ***THE STRANGER (1946)***

Sam Spiegel (S.P. Eagle), long an admirer of Welles, approached him in 1946 to play in and direct The Stranger based on an original story by the distinguished writer Victor Trivas. It was a theme topical at the end of World War II: the escape of a Nazi war criminal to a small Connecticut town where he assumes the disguise of a professor. A government sleuth, originally to have been Agnes Moorehead, but later Edward G. Robinson, tracks him down after he has married the daughter of a local judge.

Welles' career was at a low ebb, and he was forced to accept certain rigid conditions. Spiegel engaged an editor called Ernest Nims (later an important figure at Universal) to cut the picture within the script, a pattern of editing Welles must follow to the letter. He must keep to a budget and accept stars who were engaged. He was, however, allowed to engage Perry Ferguson, his art director at RKO, to help him build a complete Connecticut village which is a marvel of realism.

The film contained the tallest set built in Hollywood in the sound era: a 124 foot clock tower which forms the center of the action. Welles found the clock in the Los Angeles County Courthouse collection, transferred when that building was torn down to the cellar of the Los Angeles County Museum. The tower was boxed in on all sides, the walls were not removable, and shooting was immensely difficult.

The most crisp and tightly knit of Welles' films, this more or less routine thriller has some fine passages of suspense, and achieves with amazing realism its small town ambience. Welles' performance as the fugitive turned professor is admirable, and Loretta Young gives a very intelligent performance as his naive wife. The supporting cast, led by Robinson, is equally good.

### ***CRACK IN THE MIRROR (1960)***

Two roles apiece for six characters, a slick Darryl Zanuck production, and direction of practised sureness by Richard Fleischer still do not make for a particularly interesting film. The motivation is somewhat shallow in the writing, and the French setting of the action is extremely insecure. Mlle. Greco may have been a charmer of the Paris clubs, but she singularly lacked the temperament and intelligence to carry off the kind of major dramatic confrontations called for here. Dillman's appearance as a passionate lover in both sections of the film is not really adequate, suggesting a spoiled petulance rather than a sexual abandon. Welles is at his hammiest, particularly as a lawyer in a courtroom scene in which he crudely reworks some of the mannerisms seen in his earlier performance as Jonathon Wilk in Complusion. The film's chief interest is as a mirror of its period, the timid early 1960's, when Zanuck was conducting his most intense cinematic flirtations with Europe and the Europeans.

## SUNDAY, MONDAY, JULY 23-24

### ***MOBY DICK (1956)***

Orson Welles played the bit role of Father Mapple in this production, delivering some engagingly over-ripe Melville prose from a pulpit. He should have directed the film, which desperately needed his fantastic baroque imagination to give it a style equivalent to the writing on which it was based.

John Huston's direction is often visually striking, using subdued ochres, browns and blacks to create the impression of a series of period lithographs, from the haunting, lantern-lit interiors of the inn to the sailing of the "Pequod" and the bustle of life above and below decks. But Huston's imagination is fundamentally too down to earth, wry and sophisticated to convey the proper flavor. Gregory Peck is absurdly miscast as Captain Ahab, stumping around on a wooden leg and declaiming snatches of Melville in a throaty voice. He never for a moment suggests anything but a Beverly Hills socialite in fancy dress playing Peg Leg Pete at a benefit. Richard Basehart and some of the other players appear to have read the novel, and the scenes of the harpooning of the whale (a mechanical contrivance whose predecessor was lost off the coast of Ireland) have a certain power, but it is really only for its visuals and for patches of interesting technique that this film escapes the disagreeable cachet "honorable failure".

### ***JANE EYRE (1944)***

This was an original project of David O. Selznick, who packaged it, with Ronald Colman as its star. Characteristically, the producer sold the entire package to 20th Century Fox, which filmed it in 1944. The director, Robert Stevenson, had distinguished himself with such excellent films as, in his native England, Tudor Rose and King Solomon's Mines, and, in America, a beautiful version of Back Street with Margaret Sullavan. His British sensibility is very much in evidence in Jane Eyre, as is that of the joint author of the screenplay, Aldous Huxley. The playing of Welles as Rochester and Joan Fontaine as Jane Eyre owes a great deal to Stevenson's civilized and refined sensibility. The film is, in fact, a beautifully modulated work, photographed richly by George Barnes using shallow focus effects which are the opposite of Welles' and Toland's in Citizen Kane. Particularly good are the opening scenes of the child Jane, held a virtual captive by her adopted aunt (played by Agnes Moorehead), the school scenes, alive with a sense of terror and the horror of over-discipline, the episodes involving the mad wife, and particularly the sequence toward the end when, visiting the dying aunt, Jane recalls the voice of Rochester which seems to summon her back to his home. A discreet touch was to have the final fire scene take place off the screen.

The precise influence of Welles on the film has been the subject of argument. The director emphatically rejects the theory that Welles stood behind him on the picture, and his word is to be trusted. Nevertheless, the brooding visuals, Bernard Herrmann's score and the presence of several Mercury players makes this an authentic companion piece to Welles' directorial oeuvre.



## TUESDAY, WEDNESDAY, JULY 25-26

### *MACBETH (1948)*

Considered as something of a laughing stock in its day, *Macbeth* has grown more interesting with time. The offer to make it came from Republic Studios. The production chief there, Herbert Yates, admired Welles but attached certain conditions similar to those of Spiegel (then S.P. Eagle) on *The Stranger*: that he must finish the film in three weeks and come in on an \$800,000 budget. With his usual gift for improvising, Welles created a sinister ambience of rain-swept rock, so that the entire film could take place on what appeared to be the desolate crags of a Highland landscape. He tried the whole thing out in Salt Lake City at the Utah Centennial Festival in order to prepare the players for the unusually brief schedule. As Lady Macbeth, opposite himself he cast Jeannette Nolan, an old friend and colleague, whose performance unfortunately failed to work. The film made its budget and time, but got disastrous reviews. It suffered most notably from a horrible sound track, whole portions of which could not be made out. Exactly why Orson Welles, with his deep devotion to Shakespeare, made such a hash of the sound track only he can answer. Several re-recordings took place, supervised by Richard Wilson but even in its final version, the film was an aural disaster. Much of it was a visual disaster also, but it did have some striking sequences, and some vivid evocations of magic in the scenes of the witches. These are in fact, better realized than in any other film version of the play, particularly at the opening when the ancient sorceresses knead a clay doll of Macbeth and we know at once that he is accursed. The score of Ibert is also a notable feature, and the film is often handsomely shot by John L. Russell.

### *COMPULSION (1958)*

Based on a novel which dealt with the famous Leopold-Loeb case of the 1920's, this Richard Fleischer film featured Welles as Jonathan Wilk, based squarely on the character of Clarence Darrow, the tough, sweating, angry and brilliant defense attorney who saved his young clients from the death chamber. The story originally was of two homosexuals, the one aggressive and brilliant, the other submissive and frightened, who for a joke murdered a heterosexual young boy. They stood trial for murder, but only served life imprisonment. Because the film was made in 1958, it suffers from the tiresome watering down effects of the censorship at the time. Though clear enough, the relationship of the male couple is skated over in the action of the film just as it was in the novel. The real problem, therefore, is that the actors have to play out an essentially dishonest presentation. In view of the problems involved, Bradford Dillman and Dean Stockwell give highly competent performances. It is left to Welles to carry the second half of the film. In a memorable display of histrionics he makes the character of Wilk believable and evokes something of the tension between judge, audience and attorney which must have made the original case an extraordinary spectacle for witnesses. Fleischer's style is glossily impersonal and slick, never compensating for the shallowness of the script, but Welles' unbridled ham still provides good spectator sport in 1972.

## THURSDAY, FRIDAY, JULY 27-28

### *A TOUCH OF EVIL (1958)*

In 1957 Albert Zugsmith offered Welles the part of Hank Quinlan, police chief of a small American city, in an adaptation of a novel called *Badge of Evil* by Whit Masterson. Charlton Heston was responsible for Welles getting the job of directing the picture, and once Welles was hired in that capacity he naturally came up with a script. He also used Russell Metty, cameraman of *The Stranger*.

The film concerns the corruptions, intrigues, and tensions of a border town in which virtually everything and everybody is entirely in the grip of evil. The very stones of the city seem rancid. Welles sets most of the picture at night, creating an earthly equivalent of Hell. At the very outset, there is an explosion in which a local politician and his girlfriend are blown to pieces. When the narcotics investigator, played by Heston, arrives, his wife is trapped in a lonely motel, raped, pumped full of drugs and kidnapped in order to discredit the husband. We see a decent man and woman flung into a nightmare as Welles' gallery of horrific and bizarre characters threaten them.

Although supposedly mangled by the studio, the film came out reasonably close to Welles' intentions. One or two linking passages were directed by Harry Keller, a Universal contract director, because clarification was needed. There was some recutting apparently, and it is believed that Henry Mancini's score was added after Welles left the picture. At all events it is a thoroughly effective music track. The film has the bonus of Marlene Dietrich as a world-weary brothel keeper and Mercedes McCambridge as a mannish, leather-clad S&M freak. The scene in which Miss McCambridge figures (a ritualistic rape) was partly censor cut at the time.

### *BLACK MAGIC (1949)*

This is one of the most peculiar films ever made. Orson Welles apparently took it on to help finance *Othello*. He played Cagliostro, the 18th Century magician, charlatan and intriguer who in this version of the story becomes entangled in the plot of the diamond necklace which was to bring about the downfall of Marie Antoinette. An immensely lavish budget was provided by the producer, Edward Small, and the picture was shot in Rome using a good deal of local architecture.

Ostensibly, the director was Gregory Ratoff, husband of the great Russian star, Eugenie Leontovich. Ratoff had an odd career, chiefly as a party friend of Darryl Zanuck who picked up and directed various odd properties when nobody in particular wanted them. His style, as a rule, was, to be generous, ordinary, but on this occasion he seems to have been inflamed by extraordinary baroque pretensions. Either literally handing over the direction to Welles or simply attempting an imitation of him (it is far from certain) he created a work which is totally a corrupt version of the Master. Its fantastic camera work, immense sets, weirdly exaggerated acting performances and occasional patches of stylish direction suggest a very odd combination of talents indeed. Although the impersonation of various well known figures of history such as Dumas pere et fils is laughably inept, at other times the characterizations surprisingly work. A very rare movie, it should be fascinating to see again as a pendant to the director's career.



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## SATURDAY, SUNDAY, JULY 29-30

### ***THE THIRD MAN (1950)***

The Third Man gave Welles one of his most famous roles as Harry Lime, the ambitious, slippery crook of post war Vienna, conducting his vicious intrigues against the shell of a once happy city and to the plangent strains of Anton Karas' zither.

Carol Reed directed the picture in a manner which showed that, like Stevenson and Ratoff before him, he could not entirely escape the influence of his star. The chase through the sewers at the end, the use of tilted camera, pursuits through dark streets and the frequent deep focus camera effects owe a good deal to Welles, whose playing is unusually disciplined and precise. Graham Greene wrote a polished, somewhat mechanical script matched by the even more polished, and even more mechanical direction. It is the kind of picture in which, if someone is hidden in a doorway, a kitten invariably has to appear and threaten his security.

Fascinatingly dated, the picture amid all its visual and oral stridency often works excitingly. The two best sequences are also the best-known: Harry Lime on the Prater wheel high above Vienna, talking about the futility of the Swiss ("What did they invent? The cuckoo clock!"), and the last episode in which Alida Valli walks, in a very long held shot, down an avenue of Vienna towards the camera and out of the hero's life.

### ***THE LADY FROM SHANGHAI (1948)***

Harry Cohn, head of Columbia, engaged Welles to direct Lady From Shanghai in 1946. He hated the picture and released it after Gilda, also starring Rita Hayworth. Originally, Welles decided to make the picture a simple and straightforward thriller, but gradually it became more and more complicated until there were several glaring holes in the plot: at one stage, a character called Grisby is, in fact, in two different places at once. The point is not to examine The Lady From Shanghai for sense, but to regard it as a fantastic nightmare in which an innocent is trapped. Welles has the capacity, shared only by Cocteau, of exploring the cinema's potential as a dream-machine. Lady From Shanghai is totally a dream, the dream of a simple sailor, played by Welles himself, who is captivated by a blonde siren, and who soon learns that the price of beauty and of a nodding acquaintance with the rich is suffering and perhaps death.

The effect of this work is of a probably unconscious morality play. Though the director may have made it up quite cynically as he went along, he succeeds in saying that riches bring corruption and misery and that the only happiness is achieved in a clean and simple life of physical action. All of the characters, the crippled and impotent lawyer, played by Everett Sloane, his lecherous partner Grisby, played by Glenn Anders, his evil wife, and others are destroyed, leaving only the sailor Michael to walk away to the clean life at sea. Although critics have dismissed the film as foolish and novelettish, and although the score is more suitable for a B-quickie, the film is still tremendously exciting to watch. Impossible to forget the scenes of the cruise from the Caribbean to San Francisco, Michael's speech about the sharks, the aquarium encounter (borrowed from Rex Ingram's Mare Nostrum), the Chinese theatre confrontation and, above all, the extraordinary final shoot-out in a hall of mirrors in San Francisco.

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## MONDAY, TUESDAY, JULY 31-AUGUST 1

### ***FALSTAFF (1964)***

Falstaff was a development of Five Kings, which Welles had presented on stage both in America and Ireland as a condensation of the Falstaff plays of Shakespeare. He shot it in the early 1960's, using various highly inappropriate Spanish buildings for the English setting. English actors and actresses flew into Spain for brief appearances. The dubbing was a torment and the film suffers from the frequent handicap of Welles' European sound tracks.

The result is an often indifferent film which nevertheless remains simple and touching in many passages, a quiet distillation of the director's talent.

One feature of the picture which really succeeds is the performance of John Gielgud as King Henry IV. His silent movement through the chilly palace and his exhausted delivery of the famous "uneasy lies the head" speech have a painful beauty. We see the king, crumbling towards death, fighting his anguish with a bitter austerity, in one of the greatest performances in the history of the screen. It is to Welles' very great credit that he directs Gielgud's scenes with a patient intelligence rather than decorating them needlessly with his usual surface effects. In fact, the simplicity of the film is both surprising and gratifying. The ending is very moving, as Falstaff in a giant coffin is trundled off to become part of the English earth. The winter scenes have a poetry reminiscent of those in Citizen Kane: they are equally replete with nostalgia. Another fine aspect of the film is the extremely virile and magnetic performance of Keith Baxter, wholly convincing as Prince Hal. The finest thing in the film however is the great battle scene in which the two armies clash with a tremendous thud of armor and gradually submerge in mud, struggling in their death agony like primeval beasts.

### ***THE IMMORTAL STORY (1968)***

Produced for French television in 1968, The Immortal Story is the last picture of Welles' to be released at the time of writing. It is a miniature, a distillation both of the original novella by Isak Dinesen and of Welles' lifetime of experience. It is extraordinary in its quiet subtlety and elegance.

It is the story of a millionaire, typical of those Welles had previously played, who lives in a mansion in Macao during the last century. His only companion is a virginal clerk who has never known the comfort of human love. The millionaire, too, is dead to the world, his sexual desire extinguished with nothing left to do except count his money. He is like Kane at the end of his life, a shell of a man, the very image of the futility of riches. Clay, the millionaire, recalls the story of a rich old man (himself) who picked up a sailor on the waterfront and took him to his house to make love to the old man's wife. Clay hopes to watch their rapture and thus recall his youth.

Using a photographic style of delicate beauty, Welles achieves a refinement seldom seen in his work hitherto. The seduction scene has an astonishing eroticism far beyond mere pornography. Welles captures with sensual ease the very texture of flesh, making the spectator share the experience. In its own way, The Immortal Story is a masterpiece, a Mozartian work in the midst of a Beethoven-like career.

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**AUGUST 2-15**  
**VINTAGE HITCHCOCK**

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**BEGINS AUGUST 16—**  
**A CHARLES LAUGHTON RETROSPECTIVE**