



ORSON WELLES IN PARIS

Sandy Lesberg

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Orson Welles was in his 20's when he created, wrote, directed and acted in *CITIZEN KANE*, acclaimed as the most important film of the 20th century. Here he speaks directly to you as he recounts his days in Paris, some working on a film and others dining and drinking with friends. He tells of his fist fight with Ernest Hemingway, his shooting Kafka's *THE TRIAL* in the then abandoned Orsay railroad station after his producer ran out of money (it is now the Musee d'Orsay and home of the impressionists, among others).

In many ways this is Orson Welles's tribute to Paris much as was Hemingway's *A MOVEABLE FEAST* and he begins this volume by quoting the opening words of Hemingway's *FEAST*.

“IF YOU ARE LUCKY ENOUGH TO HAVE LIVED IN PARIS AS A YOUNG MAN, THEN WHEREVER YOU GO FOR THE REST OF YOUR LIFE, IT STAYS WITH YOU, FOR PARIS IS A MOVEABLE FEAST.”

He confesses that he acted in *THE THIRD MAN* just for the money to fund his nearly career long quest to shoot *Othello*, and yes, he did write the famous lines when he and Joseph Cotton, up in the ferris wheel in post-war Vienna, discussed comparable life values and Welles challenged Cotton by comparing the contributions of Michaelangelo under the Borgias with the cuckoo clock of the humanist Swiss.

Here he tells of the extreme and sometimes humorous complications in shooting the always cash strapped *Othello*:

ONCE WE WERE IN MOGODOR AND GETTING READY TO SHOOT THE SCENE WHERE IAGO IS PERSUADING RODERIGO TO KILL CASSIO. THE COSTUMES HAD BEEN CAREFULLY DESIGNED TO FOLLOW THE PAINTINGS OF CARVAGGIO AND WERE TO ARRIVE FROM ROME JUST IN TIME FOR THE PLANNED SHOOT. I HAD MY ACTORS, I HAD THE PLACE IN THE TOWN TO SHOOT IT, ALL WAS READY, WHEN WE WERE TOLD THAT THE FELLOW WHO WAS PUTTING UP THE MONEY FOR THE COSTUMES IN ROME HAD GONE BROKE, BUST. NO DOUGH, NO COSTUMES. AND THE COSTUME MAKER IN ROME HAD ALREADY BEGUN TO NEGOTIATE WITH SOME LOCAL THEATRE COMPANY TO DISPOSE OF MY COSTUMES. WE WERE ALL READY, WITH NO COSTUMES.

SO THAT'S WHAT WE DID! WE PLAYED THE SCENE WITH NO COSTUMES. I SET THE SCENE IN A TURKISH BATH, ALL THE ACTORS WORE TOWELS AND SHEETS, AND THE PLACE WAS FILLED WITH STEAM AND MIST AND VAPORS AND THE CRITICS ALMOST UNANIMOUSLY PRAISED MY MINIMALISM - NO COSTUMES - AND THE BRILLIANT TECHNICAL EXPERTISE WITH WHICH I HAD CREATED SUCH A STUNNINGLY MYSTERIOUS AND THREATENING ATMOSPHERE FOR THE ACTORS TO PLAY IN.

ACTUALLY, I HAD RENTED THE LOCAL FISH MARKET FOR THE TWO DAYS, AND WHILE THE STEAM LOOKED GOOD, IT DIDN'T SMELL SO GOOD. I EVEN HAD THE TIME TO FILM IAGO KNIFING RODERIGO THROUGH THE SLATS OF THE FISH MARKET FLOOR FOR HAVING

FAILED AT THE KILLING OF CASSIO. BUT, YOU SEE, IT WAS AN ILLUSION THAT WORKED. THAT'S WHAT IT'S ALL ABOUT, FILM MAKING. ILLUSIONS.

This is Orson Welles speaking candidly and personally about his personal and professional lives including his marriages, his friendships, and most of all, his amazing career as the most productive person of acknowledged genius in the world of creative entertainment.

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