

## THE GERMINATION OF "ROSEBUD" IN *CITIZEN KANE*

Although it is commonly held that Orson Welles' keyword "Rosebud" in his most famous film, *Citizen Kane*, is a tradename,<sup>1</sup> to claim that such a source is the only or leading one is surely prosaic, underscoring the *cliché* "business is business." Nor does it help much to claim that the word is simply a Freudian artifice.<sup>2</sup> Even more difficult is the problem of whether the term derives more from Welles or his assistant Mankiewicz, though the producer stated that it was mainly his partner's concoction. Still, he admitted that he himself composed the keyline "Maybe Rosebud was something [Kane] couldn't get or something he lost."<sup>3</sup> Hence it is safe to say that Welles had some inkling of the symbolism behind the word, that it probably stood for the name of a girl. With this idea in mind, I was struck, in teaching Dickens' *Drood*, how the hero names the girl he eventually loses Rosebud (short for Rosa Bud). Further research revealed that the Dickensian allusion is the only one cited in a standard literary reference work under "Rosebud,"<sup>4</sup> and that Welles was particularly enamored of Dickens. Indeed, critics have pointed out the unique Dickensian flavor of the film: Kane "rises to manhood in a series of Dickensian scenes"; there is that "vivid, thoroughly Dickensian scene" when Kane arrives at *The Inquirer* offices for the first time; "Dickens in his humorous mood sets the tone of all these characterizations, as well as that of much of the pace of the first half of the film, with its boisterous allegro clip, its procession of grotesques. . . ."<sup>5</sup> Moreover, the very next film Welles wanted to make after *Kane* was *Pickwick Papers*.<sup>6</sup>

If *Drood* is the raw material that germinated the Rosebud image, does it have any thematic kinship besides a lost love? Yes, for several reasons. First, the most obvious literary source for *Kane* is, of course, Coleridge's "Kubla Khan," quoted at the outset. The poem is famous, or notorious, as opium-inspired. *Drood* also deals with the influence of opium and has similar

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<sup>1</sup>For the best discussion of the problem since *The Citizen Kane Book* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971), see R. Fleissner, "Rosebud," in *American Notes and Queries*, 10 (1972), 103, which engendered six responses in the issues of Sept. 1972 and May 1973.

<sup>2</sup>Welles' reference to "Rosebud" as "rather dollar-book Freud" is cited by Robert L. Carringer, in "Rosebud, Dead or Alive: Narrative and Symbolic Structure in *Citizen Kane*," *PMLA*, 91 (1976), 185-93 (see p. 188). The essay is reductionist since it minimizes the importance of the name (the title in a sense being ironic). See n. 8 below.

<sup>3</sup>Peter Bogdanovich, "The Kane Mutiny," *Esquire*, Oct. 1972, p. 182.

<sup>4</sup>*The New Century Handbook of English Literature*, ed. Clarence L. Barnhart (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1956), p. 177.

<sup>5</sup>Charles Higham, *The Films of Orson Welles* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1970), pp. 27-28. See also M. L. Campbell's response to me for further Dickensian overtones (n. 1 above).

<sup>6</sup>Higham, p. 27. The influence of Dickens on Welles is subtle. For example, his film on Falstaff was originally called *Chimes at Midnight*, derived I strongly suspect from Dickens' own famous appropriation of Shakespeare's line "We have heard the chimes at midnight, Master Shallow" in his novella *The Chimes*. Dickens, in a production of *The Merry Wives*, played Shallow. See my *Dickens and Shakespeare: A Study in Histrionic Contrasts* (New York: Haskell House, 1965), p. 44. No one would doubt the debt Welles had to nineteenth-century Romanticism.

references to the Far and Near East (to China and Egypt).<sup>7</sup> Secondly, the most obvious literary source for "Rosebud" is surely "Gather ye rosebuds while ye may," a Herrick line that no doubt inspired the name in Dickens; for the Romantic link is obvious.

But there is an even more curious connection. Drood also calls her "Pussy." Mankiewicz, in gathering his rosebud material from Mrs. Fremont Olden's biography of William Randolph Hearst, would have noted that young William "pointed out the rose buds to Pussy,"<sup>8</sup> the nickname of his childhood friend Katherine Soulé. Lest we think that the rosebud/Pussy connection is sheer coincidence, we need note only that Mrs. Olden took pains to emphasize Hearst's fondness for Dickens. (Not surprisingly, perhaps, the financier was especially taken by *Dombey and Son*.) "Charles Dickens, his first literary hero," she wrote and then waxed more emphatic, "And his literary hero of all time, the one writer that has most completely satisfied Hearst." She went on to explain just how Dickens came to inspire the prototype for Citizen Kane: "In this novelist Will found richness and variety of humor, riotous fancy, unequalled genius for characterization, sympathy for humanity and a desire to better the conditions of the world of which he never tired"; she noted that "again and again he reads the English novelist," that "in Hearst's conversation there are frequent references to Dickens," and that, even when she was writing the biography, "the favorite writers of his own staff are those who have come under Dickens's sway."<sup>9</sup> It seems clear that Mankiewicz, if not Welles himself, also came under Dickens' sway when associating the rosebud/Pussy image with both Hearst and *Drood*—a subliminal connection.

The reporter, in being asked in the film to discover the meaning of Kane's dying word "Rosebud," is told: "Rosebud, Dead or Alive."<sup>10</sup> Dickens had many alternate titles selected for *Drood*, but his principal one was *Dead? or Alive?* That title in effect spells out *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*<sup>11</sup>—and of "Rosebud" in *Kane*.

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<sup>7</sup>Chinese appear in the opening chapter, and Drood wants to travel to Egypt, the land of the Nile (one of the proposed sources for "the sacred river" in "Kubla Khan"). More subtly, both Coleridge's poem and *Drood* reveal a debt to *Macbeth* (see H. Duffield, "The *Macbeth* Motif in *Edwin Drood*," *The Dickensian*, 30 [1934], 263-71; G. Wilson Knight, *The Starlit Dome* [London: Methuen, 1941], p. 145), for Welles also stressed the witchcraft atmosphere in his film of *Macbeth*. Both "Kubla Khan" and *Drood*, like Kane's Xanadu, were unfinished.

<sup>8</sup>*William Randolph Hearst: American* (New York: Appleton-Century, 1936), p. 19. Carringer first pointed out the significance of this allusion as one to "Rosebud" in "The Scripts of *Citizen Kane*," *Critical Inquiry*, 5 (1978), 384, but he ignored entirely the Dickensian undertones and finally supplanted his finding with his emphasis upon "Rosebud" as a name in the manufacturing industry. The point was debated in open forum during a panel discussion on Welles in the 1979 Ohio Shakespeare Conference at the University of Toledo.

<sup>9</sup>Olden, p. 40. She has more on Dickens and Hearst on p. 38.

<sup>10</sup>Capitalization is from the title of Carringer's article (see n. 2). Other hints in the film include the following: "racehorse?" "It will probably turn out to be a very simple thing," his wife Emily herself being "no Rosebud" (nor Susy), "a piece of a jigsaw puzzle," and "all he really wanted out of life was love." More is implied than a sled—a classic case of misdirection.

<sup>11</sup>See Felix Aylmer, *The Drood Case* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1964), p. 187 ("The Notes"). See also R. Fleissner, "Drood the Obscure: The Evidence of the Names," forthcoming in *The Armchair Detective*. Curiously enough, when "Rosebud" is first cited in *Drood*, so is the name "Wells" (Charles Dickens, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* [New York: New American Library, 1967], p. 25). (The answer to the alternate title is, I submit, *dead*.)