

closure because a set of formal expectations has been satisfied. We understand that if after A comes B, then after B comes C, and so forth. Based on that perception, we further understand that if after C comes B, then after B comes A. Therefore, by the limits of the set with which we are dealing, there is no place else to go. Hence, closure. In a narrative that, by its nature, is not purely formal, such a formal closure device (here, the reversal of shots and movement) will gain credibility only insofar as it is perceived as related thematically to the rest of the work. To put it differently, our perception of the device's thematic relation to the work diminishes our perception of its "gimmickry." Thus, in *Citizen Kane*, it is important that the opening and closing shots suggest the plot's essential "No Trespassing" theme. But it is more important that in doing so these shots also shape our feeling about the film's structure.

Viewed rhetorically, then, the ending of *Citizen Kane* shows more complexity than Carringer's fine symbolic analysis suggests. In sum, it brilliantly embodies what another great modernist—Henry James—knew: "Really, universally, relations stop nowhere, and the exquisite problem of the artist is eternally but to draw, by a geometry of his own, the circle within which they shall happily appear to do so. He is in the perpetual predicament that the continuity of things is the whole matter, for him, of comedy and tragedy; that this continuity is never, by the space of an instant or an inch, broken, and that, to do anything at all, he has at once intensely to consult and intensely to ignore it" (*The Art of the Novel*, New York: Scribners, 1934, p. 5).

JERRY W. CARLSON
University of Chicago

To the Editor:

Robert L. Carringer's "Rosebud, Dead or Alive: Narrative and Symbolic Structure in *Citizen Kane*" (*PMLA*, 91, 1975, 185-93) is more than a little deceptive in its persistent tendency to ignore the obvious. Too often, the essay demonstrates complexity in the motion picture's structure by disregarding its simplicity.

Carringer's model takes viewers in the wrong direction. He associates the use of multiple points of view to tell a story with "the Modernist period's general preoccupation with the relativism of points of view" (p. 185) and with the idea "that all mediums of transmission are inherently distorting; that there is no such thing as an objective or definitive account of a personality or event; that all mediated (that is, narrated) information is suspect" (p. 186). As examples of works in this mode, he mentions *The Ring and the Book*, *The Sound and the Fury*, and *Rashomon*. His argument mixes one modern artistic

strain with a close cousin: He confuses a style of cubistic portraiture which attempts to manifest inner nature in a series of "objective" external fragments with a narrative mode whose emphasis is the relativity of human perspectives. To borrow some terms from Wylie Sypher's *Rococo to Cubism in Art and Literature*, Carringer would have us see Charles Foster Kane as merely a series of relationships, to observe in the reporter's search a disappearance of the object instead of a revelation of meaning.

While this may be the tendency of pure form in the movie, the content—the dogged literary development of the theme—bespeaks something quite different. In the middle of the picture, Jed Leland quite explicitly analyzes Kane's character: "Love . . . that's why he did everything. That's why he went into politics. . . . He wanted all the voters to love him, too. All he really wanted out of life was love. That's Charlie's story. How he lost it." The story idea has the quality of a cliché. Throughout the movie, Kane is the man who, because he was snatched from the bosom of his family at an early age, searches for some love relationship to take its place but fails to find the emotional understanding and acceptance he seeks. Though fragmenting the narrative, the structure consistently develops this theme. Much of the story concentrates on Kane's marriages and his friendship with Jed Leland—and, as Bernstein tells us, "There were plenty of girls in the early days." These relationships with individuals are complemented and complicated by Kane's relationship to what he likes to imagine as an adoring public. His newspaper career and his political adventure are orchestrations of his affair with his public and it is quite fitting that the happy days in this relationship are manifested in the song and dance number that features young Charlie and his musical fan club. Under Kane's aggressive management, *The Inquirer* cultivates a personal relationship to its readers, its impulses to a crusading honesty always confined within the context of Kane's emotional dramatics (as evidenced by Charlie's "noble gesture" of finishing Leland's negative review).

From the young boy's headline-like cry while sledding—"The Union Forever"—politics and patriotism (perhaps with a notion of togetherness) are part of the dream of being loved again. Thatcher, of course, represents the lovelessness characteristic of a capitalistic enemy of the people. (The cold indifference of the sterile images of his library and the emotionally neuter librarian are echoed ironically in the cavern emptiness of Xanadu.) As Leland discovers, Kane's crusading in politics is also personal in a childishly egotistical manner. Not much is made of his first wife's political association, but the reaction to the wedding announcement hints this may have been an obscure part of her attractiveness for Kane.

Initially, Susan's sole appeal seems to be that she likes Charlie without knowing who he is. Then, when his political relationship to the public collapses, Kane uses her as a means to regain the affection and applause of an audience by becoming a Svengali impresario. The fact that Susan obviously has no talent and that the opera career is manifestly an emotional strain for her indicates that she is reduced rather quickly from a source for love to a device for gaining approval.

After such a relentless emphasis, for Carringer to see Rosebud and the globe Kane drops as symbols of such recondite complexity is to ride a thesis particularly hard. Harkening back to the brief, almost insignificantly presented, childhood situation does seem rather simplistically sentimental. But Bernstein's anecdote of the impression a glimpse of a young girl in a white dress made upon him has in effect provided an argument for the "real" nature of such sentiments. The link between the globe and the Colorado boyhood reveals the same sense of subjective significance. And when the boy is first presented, he does seem like a small figure in one of those snowstorms stirred by the tipping of such a liquid-filled globe. The grownups pathetically reassure him that he won't be lonely, but it turns out that he is.

Rather than presenting us with "a sense of his [Kane's] complexity," the film seems rather to show us how simple human impulses get complicated by the refusal to recognize the Otherness of the world. Carringer's other point—"in Kane's attachment to what he calls Rosebud, we ought not to think of how the past intrudes into the present" (pp. 191-92)—also seems quite unconvincing in terms of what we are shown in the film.

WALTER SHEAR
Kansas State College of Pittsburg

Mr. Carringer replies:

I think there was a stage in the evolution of *Citizen Kane* when even Welles would have agreed he was doing the kind of story Walter Shear outlines. A sense that Kane ought to be provided with a definitive psychological motive persisted well into the film's production, though the burden seemed to fall more heavily on different motives at different stages. Only a week before the script was to go to the Hays Office, for instance, Kane's final break with Leland, his best friend, over the opera review was being placed early in the story, where it would emphasize the psychological compulsion associated with Kane's name. Only gradually (as I tried to show in my essay) did Welles come to realize where his narrative method was leading him—toward a "prismatic" view of his subject. Kane, as Welles said, is all the things said

about him, or none—it "depends on who's talking about him." To ignore this warning and look for a *real* Kane in one of the stories told about him inevitably will be to do what Shear does, to distort and trivialize the story. In my essay I tried to provide an alternative to his view that the obvious, surface meaning represented by Rosebud is the only acceptable one. I think if Shear felt obliged to comment he ought to have tried to discredit my methods or refute my arguments, rather than just to repeat a familiar old interpretation of the film.

ROBERT L. CARRINGER
University of Illinois

UNITY IDENTITY TEXT SELF

To the Editor:

Heinrich Henel's comments on Norman Holland's "UNITY IDENTITY TEXT SELF" raise several important issues that Holland's reply did not address (*PMLA*, 91, 1976, 293-95). Any theory, for example, that requires that we rule out of court all shared responses to literary works as mere accidents is itself ignoring a potentially fruitful avenue for inquiry. For all the popularity of the notion of "plurisignificance" (whether it be New Critical ambiguity or Holland's brand of idiosyncratic response), the experience of most teachers of literature is that there *are* important shared inferences when we read (say) *King Lear*. Good evidence for this assertion was provided by the audience's response to a paper Holland read at the 1975 MLA Convention in San Francisco. In trying to demonstrate that readers "match up" their own unique identities to texts, Holland argued that when he read *King Lear* he found himself glad at the end of the play when Lear and Cordelia die. Lear, it seems, has been guilty of causing all the trouble, and Cordelia has been irresponsible in allowing the old fool to get away with it. Holland reacted this way, he explained, because he had always resented weak father figures.

I venture to say—from my conversations with others who attended this session—that a uniform response was that this was the most original and idiosyncratic *interpretation* of *King Lear* they had ever heard. Something, in other words, required many of Holland's listeners intuitively to reject such an interpretation as somehow false to their own experience with the play. Although Holland rejects the notion of a "regulative force" that "limits" response, precisely such an immanent force had functioned for most of his listeners when they had read the play.

This is not to say that even two members of the audience would have agreed on one interpretation of *King Lear*, evidence Holland alludes to when he