

Imagine, say, the fruit of our Orson and some wondrous, tall, fair girl from thereabouts.

Yes?

Peter O'Toole. How do you like that?

Good Lord! That's remarkable. Why, he is . . .

Wellesian?

Wouldn't you say so?

I could see it.

Anyone could see it.

But we could never say that.

Oh, never. Never. The lawyers!

So, you see the great danger in going?

On the mainland once more, the painter's life was less appealing. Summer was gone. It rained. Sleeping in or out of the cart was no longer as pretty a prospect. So he moved eastward, by way of a barge on the Shannon and then bus. He came to Dublin itself, a place he called "the grand capital of eloquence," toward the end of September. Painting was reassessed as one more lost Eden, and one more thing that actually moved him more than whatever he was doing at the moment.

He sometimes said he was broke in Dublin. But he was an American tourist who could wire home to Dadda for more money. He could afford some kind of hotel and a ticket to the Gate Theatre, where he would see Micheál MacLiammóir in *The Government Inspector*. There were two great theaters in Dublin, the Abbey and the Gate. The Abbey was older, more prestigious and maybe more set in its ways—it had a reputation for Irish drama. The Gate had been set up only in 1928 through the partnership of two men who had met in Anew McMaster's touring company: Hilton Edwards, London born, an actor, but a director and a manager; and MacLiammóir, one of those actors so mellifluous, so eccentric in his timing, so gracious in his exaggeration that he was a reminder of the Victorian stage. They made a pair. They enjoyed a range of material far beyond that of the Gate, and they were—fit for Orson—vivid characters, forever in the limelight of that pretty, malicious and gossip-ridden city.

MacLiammóir was in the scene dock painting scenery—this was a theater where the bosses did mundane chores—when Edwards came to find him. "Somebody strange has arrived," he said. "Come take a look." So the two men assembled to see a phenomenon come in off the street, volunteering his services. As MacLiammóir would later write (despite Welles's tetchy observation that Micheál hadn't even been there that day):

A very tall young man with a chubby face, full powerful lips, and disconcerting Chinese eyes. His hands were enormous and very beautifully shaped, like so many American hands; they were coloured like champagne and moved with a sort of controlled abandon never seen in a European. The voice, with its brazen transatlantic sonority, was already that of a preacher, a leader, a man of power; it bloomed and boomed its way through the dusty air of the scene dock as though it would crash down the little Georgian walls and rip up the floor; he moved in a leisurely manner from foot to foot and surveyed us with magnificent patience as though here was our chance to do something beautiful at last—yes, sir—and were we going to take it?

Orson was sixteen,* smoking a cigar, fluttering American “notices” under their noses too quickly to be read. He said he was eighteen and yes, candidly, gentlemen, if they wouldn’t make too much fuss about it, he was the Orson Welles they had probably heard of. He maintained that he was traveling, a touch bored, and free for a week or two. He lied like a maniac. And he read for them as the Archduke in Lion Feuchtwanger’s *Jew Süß*, a part they were looking to cast.

They said later that, of course, they knew he was lying. What was wrong with that? What better promise could one ask of an actor than lying when managed with this boy’s weary calm? They said he was pretty awful as the Archduke but quite magnificent as himself. As the Archduke, he threw chairs about, he slaughtered innocent scenery. They were stifling their laughter while astonished by the “preposterous energy” that pulsed through everything he did.

Later in life, Welles took credit for taking them in. He would also roll his eyes a little to admit that they were ardent homosexuals while he was startlingly lovely. But Edwards and MacLiammóir were experienced and expert men of the theater, as well as connoisseurs of bullshit. That they were amazed is beyond question; they may have been enchanted, and in love. But show people can fall in and out of that sort of love without relinquishing their pitiless sense of what works.

They saw a marvel and a monster, a hollow actor and a helpless pretender with uncanny gifts. They offered him the part, so long as Welles would promise one thing.

* Years later, in anecdote, he made it fifteen.

"Don't obey me blindly," said Edwards, "but listen to me. . . . You must see and hear what's good about yourself and what's lousy."

They gave him a little money and told him where to find lodgings. He would have to be ready for *Jew Süß* by October 13.

"Of course," he said.

"You're an extraordinary young man," said Edwards.

"I know," said Welles. But he always had to act as if he knew everything.

9

Or Spanish, Or . . .

WELLES WAS very nervous the first night of *Jew Süß*: this was the first time he had acted professionally, and there he was, playing a lead role with one of the more notable theatrical companies in Europe. He mangled a few lines, and at one moment there was a heckling cry from someone in the audience that threw him. It suggests that something in Welles intrigued or provoked the audience—the sheer presence, the cello voice and the outrageousness. The Archduke was meant to watch a pretty young woman (actress Betty Chancellor) exit and then say, "A bride fit for Solomon! And Solomon had a thousand wives, didn't he?" Whereupon a male voice in the audience cried out, "That's a black Protestant lie!" Welles had been walking on air, but now he felt himself falling. His Archduke was about to die, with the resounding line "Ring all the bells and fire the cannon." But the rattled sixteen-year-old reversed the line: "Ring the cannon and fire all the bells." In the shocked silence that followed, rather than execute the Archduke's designed death, slumping in his throne, Welles, without a word of warning, introduced a bit of business—a reckless back somersault down a flight of stairs—to let anyone know that he was still Orson, despite his fluff.

The audience surrendered. At the close of the performance, Hilton Edwards graciously arranged the curtain calls so as to display the newcomer from America. Micheál MacLiammóir was already fascinated—who knows what history of romance offered or rejected accompanied that? Still, he is the first observer in this story who is both thrilled and a little horrified. He watched Welles as the applause came down, and he saw the young man swell:

The chest expands, the head, thrown back upon the round, boyish neck, seems to broaden, the features swell and beam, the lips curling back from the teeth like dark tropical plants, twitched into a smile. Then the hands extend, palms open to the crowd, the shoulders thrust upwards, the feet at last are satisfied . . . and back goes the big head, and the laugh breaks out like a fire in the jungle, a white lightning shifts open across the sweating chubby cheeks, the brows knit in perplexity like a coolie's.

The fellow actor saw all the show of modesty and sharing, with a beast within, the lust for one extra curtain call, the will that can hear just a few people left clapping, and urge more, while the hesitant house breaks out again and "the unappeasable head" of the actor rears up once more as if to roar—"Me!" There are fine actors who go to pieces at curtain calls, as fatigue, modesty and shame combine in their longing for the whole thing to end. And there are actors who are most naked in the last rites of applause.

In *Citizen Kane*, the opening night of *Salammbô*, in Chicago. Bernstein is nodding off in his seat; Jed Leland has made origami of his program. The huge, frame-filling head of Kane hears a sotto voce joke. The last note falls. There is a routine round of polite applause, though Kane does not move—he has not really heard the music or Susan. Then the applause folds up and Kane tries to resuscitate it. He stands, looking at the camera, his hands beating, the pops and smacks hollow but resounding. Susan looks up: she hears his violence. But the applause dies, and the houselights come on, exposing Kane, his hands out. He draws back; he swallows in mortification. It is great acting.

Welles was seven months in Dublin, the winter season of 1931-32. He was in several other productions, though never in lead roles. For sure, he was well received; he had good notices in the Irish press, and a stringer got some feel of them into *The New York Times*. In later years, he ac-