

THE SECRET DAYS OF ORSON WELLES IN BRAZIL

A FULL-LENGTH PLAY

By Doc Comparato

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Registry Membership SGAE – 97738
Registry of Play – SGAE - 9761097
Reg. ® 82300819
Registry on ISBN – 978-85-68325-18-6

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This play is entirely fictional and tells the secret story of the days when Orson Welles 'disappeared' in Ceará, Brazil, while filming *It's All True*. It represents the author's personal view on Welles as the seminal figure of Twentieth Century cinema.

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INTRODUCTION

If one expects to find biographical accuracy in this theatrical text about Orson Welles, one would be sadly mistaken. There is extensive biographical material available to anyone interested in Welles.

In any case, it is well to remember that with his first film - *Citizen Kane* - Orson Welles transformed visual language forever.

He accomplished this cinematic transformation most markedly by his innovative use of the flashback - which he introduced into film while the world was living through the horrors of World War II.

The flashback transforms the memory of the character into action, into a live scene, turning the abstract into something real as it is staged. Nowadays, more than fifty years later, the flashback feature is even used in cartoons.

In fact, we are so used to this technique that we accept, without question, that the memory of the character becomes action and thus "truth and life." Welles sophisticated manner of making an abstraction - the invented character - into something real and effective that promotes a kind of cinematic tension between distancing and approximation, a vision, an "abstraction of an abstraction." The "invented" past of an "invented" character passes as if it were the present of the "invented" character. All "invented" and mirrored. Pure creativity.

The war is over, but the flashback remains.

At that time most of the audience did not understand *Citizen Kane*, even if they sensed that a lasting and memorable method for telling a movie was being introduced behind that trick of time.

And at the height of glory and misunderstanding, the improbable happens.

He was 28 years and decided to film his third masterpiece in Brazil. A remote and forgotten country in 1942.

The movie's title was *It's All True*. Always experimenting, Welles wanted a realistic film, distinct from the frantic fiction of his previous work.

He came to Brazil as a global celebrity, but left hurriedly, in less than desirable circumstances. The movie was never finished. It exists in bits.

Accidents and incidents marked his passage along the coast of Brazil. One of the actors in the film, a canoe fisherman, drowned while they were filming. A tragedy that remains in the movie's footage.

But my play is not about any of these events. It centers on what will be referred to as the secret days of Orson Welles on the Atlantic coast. In the dunes of a place that seemed a paradise.

During filming, so the books say, Welles disappeared alone, with a jeep along the coast for two days. It could have been simply to get away from the stress for a time.

This seems to have been a turning point for him. As he himself said about the contrary course of his life and career: "I started at the top and then it was all downhill."

After his unfortunate experience in Brazil, his judgment is harsh: "I am a genius who lost his talent."

Maybe. Everything is possible. Because for those who write about Welles, looking for the truths and facts of his life, from this moment on it becomes not a question of what's true or false, but a search into the luminous but obscure realm of the imagination. In which anything is possible if not credible.

What had actually happened during his disappearance? Answer: no lies nor much less truths come out, only a torrent of speculation. Only imagination. In typical Orson Welles style.

PREPARATORY NOTES

THE PLAY

It takes place in the sands of Ceará. We are in the Northeast of Brazil, 1942.

SCENERY

Only three major components make up the shifting sets: the sand; the sky; and a blade of water.

Note that the sky appears infinite, an eternal variable against which selected shadows and images can be projected.

The set itself can be very simple (the blade of water made from a piece of cloth or a tarp extended on the floor), or complex, depending on the director's vision and production possibilities. Options are varied and multiple.

CHARACTERS

Six onstage, one voice-off:

- 1- ORSON WELLES (O.W.), the film director as a young man
- 2- MADALENA, the daughter (young girl)
- 3- MIGUEL, the father (mature man)
- 4- MALAQUIAS, the guide (mature man)
- 5- EVA/MOTHER, the mother (a mature woman)
- 6- BENTO, the son (eighteen)
- 7- CAPTAIN (always voice off)

LIGHTING, PROPS

Clearly marked in text and fundamental to the production.

ON ENTERING THE THEATRE SPACE

As the audience enters the theatre, they pass through an exposition about the visit and work of Orson Welles in Brazil, at 1941 showing poster stills from the film *It's All True*. There are posters, images and even articles about the movie he came to shoot and never finished. In essence, it's a small exhibition of his plans and dreams about the movie.

It is important to shows his declarations about a new kind of work. He was running from the fiction and searching the reality of the people. He didn't use professional actors and preferred to shoot the history of a fishermen village up to northeast of Brazil, far away from the civilization. Also the audience read the text of the introduction.

SCENES

- 1. Wild Egg (dawn)**
- 2. Painter's Easel (day)**
- 3. Storm (daytime)**
- 4. Straw Mat (daytime)**
- 5. Cigar (afternoon)**
- 6. Whisky (afternoon)**
- 7. Fire (night)**
- 8. Cactus (night)**
- 9. Moon (night)**
- 10. Hammock (night)**
- 11. Head (dawn)**
- 12. Coconut Palm (dawn)**
- 13. Canoe (day)**
- 14. Knife (day)**
- 15. City (night)**

PLAY TEXT**THE SECRET DAYS OF ORSON WELLES IN BRAZIL**

*(House dark.
Curtain goes up.)*

SCENE 1**WILD EGG**

(Water's Edge / Dunes in Northeastern Coast of Brazil, 1942 / Dawn)

(Madalena, a rustic young girl wearing a simple calico dress, is wetting and washing three large eggs of some wild birds. She's squatting down on her haunches.)

(As the light lifts the fog of dawn, a painter's easel becomes apparent, stuck on top of one of the dunes in the beach gains visual prominence as the girl remains concentrating on cleaning the eggs. Finally seeing the easel, she drops the egg, approaches the easel, gently touches the easel with a finger with such ceremony that it is clear that it appears as a sacred object to her. Excitedly, she yells for her father.)

MADALENA

Daddy... Daddy! Father!

*(A few seconds.)
(Blackout.)*

SCENE 2

PAINTER'S EASEL

(Dunes / Deep infinite sky / Blade of water / 1942 / Day)

(Light comes up as day breaks fully over the scene.)

(The blade of water remains as blue as the sea from which it is slightly separated.)

(With the easel in the center, we see Miguel, the father, Eva, the mother and Bento and Madelena, their children. All admiring the strange, exotic object.)

(Remember: we are in the tropics so the colors are strong, intense and even splashy.)

(It's also very hot and the clothes are simple. Pants, T-shirt, white shirts, light calico dresses. The clothes exhibit a simple elegance that remembers that tropical fashion was all the rage in 1942.)

(The group around the painter's easel is admiring, but perplexed. It should be staged so that the audience does not at first know if their admiration comes from ignorance or awe, or just from surprise.)

(Seconds.)

(Someone breaks the silence.)

MADALENA

Didn't I tell you! An artist's easel and everything. Paints and brushes.

MIGUEL

I'm not blind.

MADALENA

Can I try to paint, Daddy?

MOTHER

Listen to your father, Madalena. This must belong to that movie set, those foreigners camped out on the other side of the stream. Better not touch it.

(Silence.)

FATHER

It's an easel. Not a camera tripod, but a painter's easel. I know about photographic equipment.

(Father gets closer to Eva, the Mother.)

FATHER

What was it that Bento said? Tell me, woman. What did he dream about?

BENTO

I'm not dreaming, Dad. It's a voice that I hear.

FATHER

Well, repeat it. What did the voice say?

(Silence.)

(The father is moody. Suddenly he gets irritable.)

FATHER

What *did* the voice tell you?

BENTO

That when Madelena paints her face on the canvas, everything will change.

FATHER

Paint her image on the canvas?

BENTO

Yes.

FATHER

And what else....?

BENTO

So what will happen...

(Mother interrupts.)

(Father calms down.)

MOTHER

No. Miguel, listen to me: we're a family of fishermen, there's no cause to upset yourself. We are what we are, husband. And we live our little lives.... My hand hurts so much. Ooh,ow, my hand hurts. Look at this wound.

(Mother shows her bandaged hand.)

FATHER

True, I'm just a fisherman who wants to have a normal life, just like the others around us, Eva. All of a sudden, I've got a son who hears voices from the beyond.

MOTHER

Not just voices! He talks with God.

(Silence.)

(Seconds)

BENTO

Better that you prepare yourself, father!

MADALENA

Because Uncle Malaquias is coming. Really soon.

MOTHER

I don't understand so much hate in a family...

MADALENA

What's Uncle Malaquias coming here for?

FATHER

Right. What does Malaquias want here? Didn't this voice from the beyond tell you that, Bento?

(Silence.) (Bento, with irony)

BENTO

I went deaf at that moment. Deaf!

(Miguel gets fierce.)

(Bento takes off running through the dunes like a naughty boy, but stops on seeing the bird eggs.)

MADALENA

Watch it!

(The father grabs Bento by the neck, forcing his face down towards the ground until Bento's face is buried into the sand.)

FATHER

The happier you get, the madder I get. It's like a big, ugly itch!

BENTO

I want to get out of this place.

FATHER

Only when you're grown, a man. Eighteen like the law says. You're still a boy.

BENTO

What law?

FATHER

The same one that's going to tell you to climb up that mountain of sand and ask the voice when that bastard Malaquias will leave here.

BENTO

That's not the way it works, Dad.

FATHER

Well, it will today! The voice will speak when I command it to.

(The boy's face is flattened out in the sound next to the eggs.)

(Mother and daughter remain silent throughout the interchange.)

FATHER

That's how it'll be - and before it begins to rain. Look at that sky.

(Bento raises his eyes.)

FATHER

The heavens will split apart! The storm is coming on strong, sand flying everywhere. Dunes shifting, sand and wind so strong nobody can find anybody. And Bento, the cripple who talks to the eternal, in the middle of nowhere, waiting for a voice to tell him when Malaquias will get out of here? I want to know when the miserable bastard will go back to where he came from!

(The father's hand grinds the boy's head into the sand.)

(Seconds.)

(Blackout.)

(Sound of the storm as it hits the dunes, of the storm at sea overwhelming other sounds.)

SCENE 3

STORM
(Dunes / Ceará / Day)

(Lighting concentrates on the sand.)

(Fine streams of sand - illuminated to resemble a curtain - descend from the stage ceiling, forming another dune.)

(Music.)

(Sound of the wind.)

(Seconds.)

(Bento approaches the sand flowing down.)

(Miguel, the father, comes up.)

FATHER

Tell me! I want to know what the beyond told you!

(Bento tries to speak, a few incomprehensible words come out, his body trembling with anxiety. He tries to listen for it, but no voice comes to him)

FATHER

Before the rain gets here! Now! With the wind!

(Bento tries, visibly concentrating.)

BENTO

I don't hear anything!

FATHER

Listen to the voice!

BENTO

I can't! It's not there!

FATHER

Speak with the Eternal! Or else, stay here buried in the sand. Talk to your voice or eat sand!

(In despair Bento, goes under the falling curtains of sand. Pervading anguish. Sand starts to cover the boy.)

(Silence. Full blackout.)

SCENE 4

STRAW MAT
(Dunes / Sea / Sky / Day)

(Light in the sky gains intensity until the sky appears infinite.)

(Day.)

(On top of one of the dunes, we see a transmitter, and a portable radio, American, from that epoch. The apparatus - a dark wooden box - has a metal pointer and loud speakers. It's a big box with valves, the most modern model of the American Army in 1942.)

(The transmitter rests on a thick straw mat spread out under it. There's a cable that comes out of the machine and disappears into the sand.)

(Malaquias is messing with the transmitter.)

MALAQUIAS

Mister. Mister! Is here O.K., or do you want it more over there? Here or there? The antenna!

(Malaquias tries to move the machine.)

(Sound of a voice off, deep, speaking words in a distorted manner)

MALAQUIAS

What? What did you say? I can't get it. Can't hear with the wind roaring around. Over here or over there?

(Seconds.)

(The voice-off gets upset.)

MALAQUIAS

What? The pointer is moving?... Which one?... Hey, Mister Welles! Be careful walking around these dunes. This is the largest coastal desert in the world. And the most treacherous! Scorpion nests everywhere. You get lost in a minute. Did you know that there are people buried under these dunes? Listen, stay near the jeep and don't lose sight of the ocean. Mister?

(Another voice in off.)

MALAQUIAS

What? It's not the meter... So, I only have to press the button and pray there's no short circuit..

(Seconds.)

MALAQUIAS

O.K., here goes.

*(Malaquias is fiddling with the machine.)
 (After a short wheeze then a long one, an infernal screeching noise turns into happy music, full of fanfare. This can be either classical or 1940s music.)*

MALAQUIAS

Mister Welles! Mister Welles, it's working! It works!

*(Seconds.)
 (The music swells, lights go down: Orson Welles, at 28, appears on top of one of the dunes. He's wearing a white suit and a straw hat.)
 (Seconds.)
 (Lights and music go down.)
 (Welles' appearance should be surprising and brief. Almost an apparition.)*

O.W.

Of course it works, Malaquias. Remember: human ingenuity has no limits!

(Seconds.)

O.W.

My mother was a great pianist. She said that to the contrary to how the Bible tells it, the Universe was not born from with an explosion of light. It was created from a symphony.

MALAQUIAS

That's beautiful.

O.W.

A silent symphony...

(Seconds.)

MALAQUIAS

Whisky.

O.W.

Whisky.

(Malaquias fills O.W.'s glass with whisky.)

O.W.

Cigar.

MALAQUIAS

Cigar. Right, dark glasses. If it wasn't for Malaquias, the best guide on the Atlantic coast.

(Malaquias lights the cigar in O.W.'s mouth. Then he passes him the sunglasses. Green lenses, Ray-ban style.)

(Seconds.)

(O.W. puts on the sunglasses.)

(Stage lights go green, turning sand, water and sky green.)

(Seconds.)

MALAQUIAS

Everything fine?

O.W.

Ok. Where's the easel?

MALAQUIAS

What easel?

O.W.

To paint. For me to relax, body and soul, while I wait for the life and death news that never comes from Hollywood. From America.

MALAQUIAS

Hold on a minute, didn't you want to paint yesterday?

O.W.

Yesterday. Right. I asked you to get the jeep ready, because "today" I would disappear from the film camp.

MALAQUIAS

Everybody's gonna get worried when they discover you're gone. Then, they'll blame me...

O.W.

So, the easel?

MALAQUIAS

Right, the easel? It's gone. Disappeared. It must have gotten lost in the sand storm. I left it right over there. The wind.

O.W.

I want to paint. I need to paint. To do something... Can't you understand? It's a matter of life and death news!

MALAQUIAS

The Hollywood bosses want to cut, destroy your new film!

O.W.

That's it! How did you know?

MALAQUIAS

How do I know? I listen. I've got two ears... You invented the flashback. Didn't you?

O.W.

I invented the flashback... Well, to a certain extent...

MALAQUIAS

Ah, now he's happy. So, the flashback... What's it for?

O.W.

To stop time in its tracks. It's a new way of telling a story.

(Seconds.)

MALAQUIAS

No matter, you wouldn't be able to paint anyway. These green lenses mess up your vision.

(O.W. takes off the sun glasses)

(Stage lights go back to normal.)

(The transmitter wheezes, blinks and conks out.)

MALAQUIAS

The human machine.

(Seconds.)

(O.W. gets desperate.)

O.W.

My God! This can't be happening! The radio transmitter.

MALAQUIAS

It went deaf... Sound died.

(O.W. messes with the machine.)

O.W.

No communication. And no music.

MALAQUIAS

No life and death news.

O.W.

Must be the jeep's battery.

(Silence.)

MALAQUIAS

I don't like this sand pit.

O.W.

What's wrong with it? It's clean, Malaquias. Clean! Now, go to the jeep and restart the battery. We'll try it again.

(Seconds.)

MALAQUIAS

Mister Welles. Think about it. Wouldn't it be better to get back to the city? The easel just vanished, the radio transmitter doesn't work..... Really... I don't have good memories of this place... Besides, this business of a picnic in the tropics doesn't make sense. It's just madness. You need to return to the set.

(Seconds.)

O.W.

Whisky.

(O.W. takes off his hat and jacket.)

(Malaquias serves the whisky.)

O.W.

Nobody understands me. Nobody listens to me. At least God hears me!

MALAQUIAS

...Such an intelligent man. Traveled across oceans and continents. Speaks several languages. Learned to speak Portuguese and speaks it like a native. He made the greatest film in the world, *Citizen Kane*. He invented the flashback. The flashback! A kind of clock that counts time backwards. That's extraordinary. Almost eternal. What's he got to be so sorry for?

O.W.

Nobody listens to me... I'm an artist divided... Sometimes I think I don't want to do fiction anymore. Reality's what's important. Not a question of art imitating life, nor life imitating art... A real dilemma for me... I came here to shoot a documentary about the poor fisherman in Brazil, to try to get a hold, a sense of this dilemma... whiskey...

MALAQUIAS

Forget about these complicated thoughts. The most important man on the planet. In America. Filming in the middle of a World War. Isn't that real enough?

O.W.

The war. It's true, the world's at war.

MALAQUIAS

Of course we're at war. The world's always at war.

O.W.

They say that Hitler, lord of the III Reich, stopped the war to watch *Citizen Kane*.

MALAQUIAS

And he liked it?

O.W.

He left in the middle.

MALAQUIAS

He didn't like it.

O.W.

He didn't understand the flashbacks.

MALAQUIAS

Right. This flashback complicates everything.

O.W.

Movies are an illusion. One of the muses of drama, of playwriting. And what's drama for? To open up your idea of life. To tear down the wall of the common place. To push you to infinity... Bullshit!

MALAQUIAS

You could have warned people about these things. Trained them to see it before they saw the movie.

O.W.

It doesn't work that way. It's not something you teach, it's done by the emotions, when you get carried away by them. I just plant the seed, the sense of beauty that we all carry in our hearts.

MALAQUIAS

Some people are just slow. Don't let it upset you. Some day, maybe, they'll wake up and discover that they've caught the germ. Don't let it get you down.

O.W.

Maybe it's too late.... It's a feeling.

MALAQUIAS

What feeling, Mister Welles? So young to have knocked the planet over with your first radio program. Martians. As if that wasn't enough, you stop a world war in its tracks to see a film. A movie. And it's a movie that nobody understands

O.W.

Yes, extraordinary. I stopped the truth with a lie of the same caliber: the flashback. Maybe now, I'll go in the other direction.

MALAQUIAS

Now he's all happy again... Now, let's get back to the Grand Hotel, or to the film set, wherever you want... it's the same. I'll start getting things together. And forget about this life and death news flash!

(Seconds.)

O.W.

Whisky!

(Silence.)

(Malaquias reacts.)

O.W.

It's a feeling, Malaquias... A premonition that my life started at the top... and that from now on it's all downhill... I see failure before me, and nobody listens to me. I got to the top of the universe... If I take one step forward, I'll fall into nothingness.

MALAQUIAS

Let me clean up. I think our outing is over. Whisky and heat go straight to the soul.

(Seconds.)

(Malaquias picks up something and walks over a dune, going in the direction of the jeep, which is off-stage.)

(Malaquias suddenly stops on top of the dune.)

MALAQUIAS

It can't be... God, I hope it's not him.

O.W.

What happened?

(O.W. approaches Malaquias.)

MALAQUIAS

You don't see? Look closely, way over there. People walking in our direction.

(Seconds.)

MALAQUIAS

I hope to God it's not him.

O.W.

Looks like a family.

MALAQUIAS

Let's get out of here.

O.W.

It is a family. And what if they need something here?

MALAQUIAS

They don't need anything.

O.W.

You know them?

MALAQUIAS

Just by sight. I don't have any relatives around here.

O.W.

Well. Let's have some fun! Perhaps they have some answer to my dilemma... A little spectacle to see what happens!

MALAQUIAS

What do you mean?

O.W.

Go get my magic box from the jeep. I'm going to do some magic for them. They'll have an unforgettable flashback for the future.

MALAQUIAS

No. You don't know these folks, sir. They're strange. There's no magic that'll make them happy. They live in these dunes, shifting around. Without roots or rest.

O.W.

We'll see about that, Malaquias. But first I need my magic box that's in the jeep.

MALAQUIAS

I hope it's not him... Oh God... It is him. I knew it. I never should have come around here. And him. What now?

O.W.

Him, who? Who is he?

MALAQUIAS

I mean, this family. It's not important. Let's get out of here.

O.W.

I'm going to make magic.

MALAQUIAS

Maybe they already have enough magic.

O.W.

Here? In the middle of nowhere? Magic? Where?

MALAQUIAS

Don't kid yourself, Mister Welles.

O.W.

We'll see about that. I'm going to get the box and start the batteries. While I do that, you stay here and welcome the audience. Tell the audience who I am.

MALAQUIAS

Audience?!

O.W.

In a manner of speaking.

(Seconds.)

MALAQUIAS

He's like a big spoiled kid.

O.W.

I am a spoiled kid. All my seventeen nannies said so.

MALAQUIAS

Let's get out of here, sir.

O.W.

Later. Let that fat cloud pass by the sun first.

(O.W. leaves.)

(Seconds.)

MALAQUIAS

It's blocking out the light.

(The intensity of light is modified.)

(A huge shadow falls over the dunes.)

(Light changes.) (Seconds.)

(The family troops in from different stage entries. All of them dressed in Sunday clothes, in their best clothes, mostly white or almost white.)

(Bento appears, then Madalena and Eva. Miguel comes in last.)

MALAQUIAS

Miguel.

MIGUEL

Who is that man, Malaquias?

MOTHER

So well dressed. Looks like he came from Rio de Janeiro... Look, Malaquias, my hand's wounded. I've got a sore festering on my palm.

(The mother shows him her bandaged hand.)

MADALENA

Uncle Malaquias, what's the name of the movie guy?

MALAQUIAS

Mister Welles.

BENTO

What does he do in the movies, Uncle Malaquias?

MALAQUIAS

Everything. It all comes out of his head.

MIGUEL

We also knew that you were coming.

MOTHER

Bento has that ability. It comes straight out of his head.

MALAQUIAS

I can imagine. Does he still hear voices?

MOTHER

No. He talks with God... There's a lot going on here.

MIGUEL

Why did you come back?

MOTHER

After so long a time, Malaquias.

MALAQUIAS

I'm a guide, Eva. I'm working. The gringo got drunk. A real binge. Whisky up to the eyeballs. And decided to take off in any direction.

MIGUEL

It can't be that simple...

MALAQUIAS

But it is. Don't get started imagining stuff, making up weird things, Miguel. That's the way it happened and that's that. I had no intention of invading your territory. This visit is just a matter of chance.

(Silence.) (Seconds.)

MALAQUIAS

The easel... I just remembered. Did any of you see an easel tossed in the sand? A painter's easel, with a canvas and everything.

MIGUEL

Malaquias, what did that man come here to do, really?

MALAQUIAS

He's the boss. So I do what he tells me.

(Silence.)

MALAQUIAS

You want to know? He's come to show off some magic tricks. Magic!

(Light changes.)

(The transmitter goes live.)

(Music.)

SCENE 5

CIGAR

(Dunes / Sea / Sky / Early afternoon)

(Light changes.)

(Music from the transmitter.)

(O.W. enters, dressed as a magician, with top hat and everything, holding a tray that is supported by a tripod.)

(Spot on O.W.)

(There are three crystal glasses on the tray.)

O.W.

Ladies and gentlemen, here I am! Mister Orson Welles!

(Slightly tipsy and slurring a bit, he makes magic with the crystal glasses while he delivers this speech.)

O.W.

Watch this glass of fine crystal. It came from Bavaria. Anything there? Anything here? Nothing. Not a thing. As empty as darkest infinity, where no light shines. Like my mother's stare. The pianist's pianist. Every key touched was a poem... A separate beauty, like the colors of a rainbow! Beyond imagination... And now, words! Words! Magic words! Attention: Xanadu, Xanadu and Xanadu! So! What happened to the magic? My mother died when I was eight. Anyone think that's fair? An orphan at eight... She played the piano and died... spitting up blood from her lungs... Oh! How I hate red. Blood is red... Look! The second chalice is as empty as the grave. Pure matter in ruins. Nothingness. Nothing. And the third chalice is as empty as the other two. So full of air. And... Allah! Jesus! All the Saints! Zarathustra! Moses! All idols! Xanadu! Xanadu! Xanadu! Lords of Heaven and Hell! Where is the gold coin? The gold coin from the other side of the world! The great master magician taught me this: "Look at the void and you will find life." The life of a gold coin! Oh! Great master, the greatest of the great, where is the gold coin? Where? In nothingness, in all. At my birth, my first sex, in a single kiss. Xanadu! Xanadu! Unicorns and fairies. My millionaire father, my artist mother. She dies. Throwing up blood on the piano. I remember it even today. And he, he, he, my rich father asks me one night: "What kind of artist do you want to be?" I respond: "A professional magician." From remorse or passion, he then determined: "Orson Welles, your education will be exquisite and complete. We'll meet the world, the universe, knowledge... The magic of life. Imagination. My father was the master teacher who taught me to know men! Life! Wisdom! Existence. Xanadu. Three times Xanadu! I went to India, I saw castes and divinities, I saw a Chinese man poison a dog, the Taro cards, I ate fish that still fought for their lives only to sleep in the bellies of lascivious young girls. And it was salty, the fish! Salt. Salt. And the gold coin rises up as invisible as it is permanent. And where is the trick, the magic, the truth? Behold - gold rises from the third crystal chalice. Gold! Xanadu! Xanadu! Let there be gold dust.

*(A golden, sparkling powder rises up from the third chalice.)
 (Seconds.)
 (O.W. blows on the gold dust.)*

O.W.

But unfortunately we cannot eat gold, not even in the most prestigious delicacies. Because we are as nothing, rising in the excess of the unpredictable.

(A gold dollar appears on the tray.)

O.W.

Nothing in this hand. Nothing in the other. And... Xanadu! A gold dollar for the gentleman!

(O.W. gives the gold dollar to Miguel, the father.)

O.W.

And ... a cigar!

(O.W. lights a cigar.)

O.W.

Smoke over there! Smoke and nature catching on fire. Fire! Fire! Xanadu! The heat of French coquettes, the lame and the hopeless! It's Xanadu!

(O.W. passes the cigar underneath the table and it is transformed into a bouquet of flowers.)

O.W.

Voilà! The Hanging Gardens of Babylon! Flowers! The cigar is transformed into a bouquet for Madame!

(O.W. hands the bouquet to Eva, the mother, with a flourish.)

MALAQUIAS

Hurray for Mister Welles! Applause for Mr. Welles!

(All applaud.)

O.W.

And now for the girl in the dunes. For the young *mademoiselle*!

MALAQUIAS

Careful, sir.

O.W.

The desert princess! Desire of all desires, since there's no pleasure more exquisite than a man inside a woman! Xanadu! Xanadu! I shift the three crystal glasses around. First here, then, there. And another magic gift will emerge! Xanadu, Xana...

(Seconds.)

(The light changes.)

(The music is abruptly interrupted.)

(The transmitter blinks, whistles, emitting strange and irritating noises.)

(A short time.)

(O.W. approaches the transmitter.)

O.W.

My news! It's my answer, Malaquias. I'm going to tune in the frequency.

MALAQUIAS

The machine is blinking. The pointer is moving around

O.W.

The headphones!

MALAQUIAS

The phones.

(Malaquias helps O.W.)

MADALENA

What about my gift?

MIGUEL

Shut up, Madalena.

(O.W. puts the headphone to his ear.)

(Silence.)

O.W.

Orson Welles here. Listening. Speak up...

(Silence.)

(Seconds.)

(O.W. is transfigured, becoming more desperate by the moment. Finally, he rips the headphones off his ears and throws them far away.)

O.W.

They fired me! Fired me! My new film is going to be cut to pieces! To pieces!

MALQUIAS

A fatal blow.

O.W.

They want me to go back... "Immediately, Mister Welles," they say. Immediately out on the street!

BENTO

The voice... The voice.

MIGUEL

The voice is coming from the transmitter. Shut up, Bento.

MALQUIAS

Let's go back to the film set. That'll be better. Patience... They chopped a movie into little pieces... Patience, Mister Welles. Finish what you're doing here in Brazil, so you can rub their faces in your talent.

O.W.

Cut it out! Listen! I'm not going to make any film in Brazil, in Siberia or in any other place on this planet! It's over! The end! I'm unemployed and broke!

(Silence.)

BENTO

The voice.

MIGUEL

Keep quiet.

MALQUIAS

In debt... How? You just talked about how rich your father was... How you were born with a silver spoon in your mouth.

O.W.

That's true. My father had an immense fortune. He spent half of it on my education, travels, orgies and art. The other half? He drank it. He drank night and day. Champagne to cognac... I was fifteen when he died. Died... spitting up pieces of his own liver on a sofa in a Paris hotel.

(Right then, Bento becomes agitated. Trying to stifle a yell, he clamps his hands over his ears and runs to the top of a dune.)

MIGUEL

Bento! I order you to stop this now!

MOTHER

No. Let him be. It's the voice. He's hearing a voice from the soul! It's his voice...

O.W.

What's going on?

MALAQUIAS

Nothing. It's nothing. The boy has these crises. He hears voices.

O.W.

He's sick...

(Bento tosses sand up into the air. In torment, he proclaims.)

BENTO

Listen to the voice. The voice! It's saying! It's telling me to say... That Uncle Malaquias will go away on the day that, here in these dunes.... Here in the sands, three things will come to pass...

MOTHER

My son! What three things did you hear about?

BENTO

On the day that a man turns into a woman. That's the first sign.

MOTHER

The second sign, son. What is it?

BENTO

On the night that a woman turns into a man...

MOTHER

A man becomes a woman, a woman becomes a man.

BENTO

Everything will change place, then.

MIGUEL

Cut this nonsense out right now!

BENTO

The voice. The voice. After these two events... It's going to snow! Above this sea, on these dunes!

MALAQUIAS

Snow? Here? In the tropics?

BENTO

A woman turns into a man, a man turns into a woman and it snows in a place where it never gets cold.

(Exhausted, Bento falls to his knees in the sand.)

(Madalena and the mother tend to Bento, who's breathing but seems to have lost his senses.)

(Silence.)

(O.W. begins to smile and laugh out loud.)

MIGUEL

What's so funny, mister?

O.W.

...Fired. In debt up to my eyeballs. To top it off, lost somewhere in Brazil, but getting advice from a boy who hears voices. Can I be on Mt. Sinai? A schizophrenic. A delirious schizophrenic. And I'm hallucinating. Whisky, please!

(Seconds.)

(The light goes down.)
(Sounds of the wind and sea.)(Blackout.)