



Me and Orson Welles

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Coming in 2009, the major motion picture from the director of *Slacker*

The irresistible story of a stagestruck boy coming of age in the golden era of Broadway--with some very famous supporting characters--*Me and Orson Welles* is a romantic farce that reads like a Who's Who of the classic American theater. Called "one of the best depictions of male adolescent yearning ever to hit the page" (*Kirkus Reviews*), it is sure to translate wonderfully to screen in 2009.

Me and Orson Welles Details

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Author : Robert Kaplow

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Anthony says

Most of the Young Adult fiction I've read in the past decade or so has either been fantasy based (Harry Potter, Percy Jackson) or dystopian (Hunger Games). It was a nice change-of-pace to read a YA (or what I guess is now called "New Adult") set in the "real world," even if it is the real world of almost 80 years ago. The book is a fast, easy read, taking place over the course of one solid week and told strictly from the point of view of narrator Richard Samuels. Samuels is an endearing character: bright, insecure-yet-bold, recognizable. As so many of us experienced in our teens, Richard finds it easier to take chances and be bold when he's around people who don't really know him, and is far more insecure when he encounters similar situations in which his friends are involved. And of course, he doesn't treat his parents with half the thought and care he should. His week with the Mercury Theater teaches him the reality of who he is versus who he thinks he wants to be (and how not-so-different those persons are) and lessons about how to deal with people when you're not a singular personality like Orson Welles.

There were dozens of laugh-out-loud moments mixed in with the drama. Kaplow strikes a nice balance between the two extremes and never veers too far in one direction or another. And he captures so well the sense of what it must have been like to see that opening night performance of Welles' Julius Caesar.

I have no idea how well this book translated to film (starring Zac Efron as Richard, with Claire Danes and Christian McKay), but the book is a solid, enjoyable read that I think anyone who has been an teen actor (or any parent who has a teen actor child) would enjoy.

Suzie says

I stumbled across this book because of my recently developed obsession with Orson Welles and, after reading some good reviews from other Welles aficionados, tracked it down at the library. The protagonist, Richard Samuels, is a slightly irritating, slightly precocious teenager who thinks he's cleverer than he is. He's less suave than he'd like to be, prone to hero-worship, as oversexed as any teenager, and too susceptible to romance. It makes for some cringeworthy reading at times, but will ring true to any survivors of adolescence. It's easy to see how he would fall under the magnetic influence of the young genius, Orson Welles.

The Boy Wonder himself appears in all his unbearable glory. His star is rising rapidly on Broadway and radio and while he doesn't become a household name until late the following year, his ego is already too large for his little Mercury Theatre to contain. He worked his actors fiendishly hard--though never harder than he himself was willing to work--and by many accounts he could sometimes be astonishingly difficult, or downright mean. Certainly, though, he inspired loyalty, and coaxed unmatched performances out of his cast. Richard's view of Welles may be overly harsh, but not by all that much. Kaplow has fun with his dialogue, sprinkling it liberally with italics and occasionally swiping lines directly from famous (infamous?) Wellesian quotes. ("What, in the *depths* of your ignorance, do you want me to do?" comes verbatim from the hilarious Frozen Peas recording.) It's easy to hear Welles' voice intoning (Never merely speaking!) his lines.

Kaplow clearly did his homework for this one. It's a quick read. A little short on plot, perhaps--many coming-of-age novels are--but it's a well-researched piece of period fiction. And it makes me wish desperately that someone had recorded that landmark production of Caesar.

Darren says

Loved the voice of the protagonist and the story. It's a very funny read as well, with Orson Welles's behavior and ego supplying much of the humor. I can see why the book was adapted into a movie because it's very visual and has a great character arc.

Tony says

Kaplow, Robert. *ME AND ORSON WELLES*. (2003). ***. I think this started out to be a YA novel in the style of Horatio Alger, but somewhere in the middle the author changed his intent and his approach to the story. Our hero is Richard Samuels, a 17-year old high school student from Westfield, NJ. The time is 1938. Richard is a studious type and relatively shy – especially around girls. He is a member of a group of guys in his school that he seems to have nothing in common with. They manage to get all the girls while he manages to be the girls' best friend. Richard is in love with the theater and music. He knows the words to every popular tune and the cast of every play and show on broadway. He wants to be an actor, but doesn't know how to go about it. By a series of misadventures, he ends up in New York with a small part in Orson Welles' production of "Caesar" put on by the Mercury Theater – their first production. There are lots of famous people in the story aside from Welles: Joseph Cotton and John Houseman are but two. Richard soon finds out that the theater world is not all it's cracked up to be. Although he is initially friendly with Welles, he soon finds out that Welles is an egomaniac who wants things his way only and that he is willing to sacrifice anything or anyone to get it. Welles doesn't come off in a very good light in this novel. The story is essentially that of a rite of passage for young Richard, where he learns that people and life are not all that they should be. This knowledge tosses him into manhood. The story is well plotted and the characterizations are good. The book forces us to read about the author's extensive researches and admire his groundwork, but lacks the spark of creativity that sets a novel apart.

Elizabeth Knowlton says

Bravo!

Beautifully written and captures so well the passion and angst of a young man. You won't be disappointed! Order now, and then watch the movie!

Dyan says

A delightful read about a seventeen-year-old's whirlwind week of working under the dictatorial direction of Orson Welles as the Mercury Theater rehearses "Julius Caesar." As the cliche goes, he learns more about himself, life and love in that week than he ever learned in school. It perfectly captures a young boy's yearning to find himself, to fall in love, and to be someone. I look forward to seeing the film!

Lorraine says

An easy read. The author made me abhor Orson Welles. I understood his genius, but nothing could forgive his disgusting behaviour. The book also inspired me to research Orson Welles, his wives and his children. I was also shocked at the risque behaviour considering the time frame.

Lauren says

The thing is, Richard, I have a soft spot for Holden Caulfield and *The Catcher in the Rye*. I'm not saying it's subtle or all that clever, but it sticks in my head. It's the weird kind of comfort food that makes you feel a little sick when you eat it.

You're just a poor-quality imitation Holden. And the thing with him is that near the end, there's that hint that maybe, just maybe, he realises that the biggest phony in the whole book is him. Maybe, I'm saying. It's possible to argue the point.

But you? You're pretty much insufferable all the way through.

Amanda says

'Me and Orson Welles' is one of those books that starts off a bit strange but by the end I was really enjoying it.

My main issue was the thrown-in quotes from various plays that seemed to create a dis-jointedness when reading. I would start to wonder what the point was, but by the end, I realised that this is a book about theatre, the people in it and the stress related to putting on a show. It is a book about egos and trying to fit in in a place where everyone is trying to be someone. It also gives you a backstage glimpse of what can go on behind the curtain.

'Me and Orson Welles' frustrated and delighted me. I'd be interested to see the movie to get a glimpse of what the final performance was like.

Boo says

I heard this book was being adapted into a movie so i thought i'd read the book first. I really loved it actually. I think the film was good too but i found the book more enjoyable for the text itself

Candace Lazzaro says

A delightful book and a quick read. I needed something to read and picked this up in a used books store. Good choice Candace! I loved it.

Amanda says

I did not enjoy this book very much. I had to read it for my english class and I ended up skimming most of the end. It had some really good themes and sections of it I enjoyed, but overall I had a hard time reading it. I realize he is a real person so there isn't much that can be done, but I HATED Orson so much that it made it a struggle. Richard was not my favorite character either. However, i did like Kaplow's transformation of Richard. I liked how in the begining he has this image of what his life needs to be perfect. He also is very unsure of who he is and is trying to be everyone else. Then he meets Greta and she shows him that he doesn't need to be actor and he doesn't need to be just like Orson or try really hard to get girls. He just has to be himself and everything else will come. However, most of his thoughts didn't seem very realistic, and that was agreed on by the guys in my class, the way he moves on from girl to girl and doesn't really seem to have any regard for them. Richard was pretty skeezy.

Ruth says

When I saw the trailer for the upcoming film *Me and Orson Welles*, I knew I had to read the book on which the movie is based. The story looked tailor-made to cater to my tastes – the clothes, the music, the theater of the time period, I love it all. With the book, Robert Kaplow has crafted a witty and insightful coming-of-age story that doubles as one of the best love letters to a bygone age that you could wish for. (Just a heads up, there is some off-color language in this book – I would've preferred a less, but if you can get past that the story is that the story is terrific!) In the late 1930s, America was in a depression with no thought of the war to come, and master songsmiths like Irving Berlin and Cole Porter were making their contributions to what would become known as the Great American Songbook. It was a “golden age,” when American films featured stars like Gary Cooper and Cary Grant, and the theater was peopled by the likes of the Barrymores and young Orson Welles.

Into this glittering theatrical world, seventeen-year-old Richard Samuels literally stumbles upon his first acting job – a bit part in Welles’s fledgling Mercury Theatre production of *Julius Caesar*. Full of big dreams and hopelessly idealistic, Richard has no idea what he’s gotten into when he joins the production and finds himself in Orson Welles’s starry orbit. Welles is a star on the rise and he knows it. The man is a pompous jerk but the allure of his genius is irresistibly strong and undeniable. In one short week, Richard probably learns more about life, love, and his own purpose and self-worth than many people do in an entire lifetime.

Richard’s voice just shines and makes this novel a joy to read. He’s worldly-wise yet naïve, sarcastic yet sweet – in other words, a typical teenager made up of all the confusion and contradictions that accompany that time of one’s life. Kaplow also excels at building his setting – he absolutely nails NYC. The city itself is as much of a character as Richard or Welles, and reading the descriptive passages in the novel made the sights, sounds, and smells of the city come alive. This book is also one of the best mash-ups of fiction and historical fact that I’ve ever come across. I’m a huge classic film fan, so reading about Orson Welles’s theatrical beginnings, or learning that actor Joseph Cotten was a member of the Mercury Theatre troupe, were absolutely fascinating. While I could never claim to be a Wellesian scholar, based on my perception of Orson Welles’s character from his films that I’ve seen, Kaplow has done an excellent job of capturing the essence of the man. Every time Welles spoke on the page, it was his unmistakable voice that I heard in my head while reading.

If you've seen the television show *Slings & Arrows*, *Me and Orson Welles* comes as close as you could wish to capturing the humor, angst, and life found in the theater. *Me and Orson Welles* is a breezy, insightful, laugh-out-loud funny love letter to a golden age in American entertainment.

Jason Panella says

3.5 stars.

It's light and breezy. The narrative revolves heavily around the "young man learns about life thanks to hero worship and sex" tropes, but the story occasionally surprised me in spots. There are some really nice moments. But I also thought it was pretty forgettable overall. That said, I definitely enjoyed it.

Jessica says

This is a cute book. It's the story of a high school kid, swept up in a Broadway production in the 1930s. Much of the time, you're backstage with the actors, listening in on their snappy dialogue, camaraderie, and melodrama. It's a fun, whimsy read, and I laughed out loud several times. Somehow, though, it felt more like a short story than a novel. I just finished it today, and can remember the things that made me laugh and the big events-- but I can't tell you exactly what happened for most of the book. I mean, the pages were turning, but what was there? Skipping school and lying to mom to go to play rehearsals; funny conversations; wanting to be just like Orson Welles, until you see him act like a egotistical (yet talented) jerk over and over? How did that story fill a whole book? To sum up, this was a fun read, but probably won't stick in your brain for too long. Pick it up if you want a chuckle and a little razzle-dazzle of 1930s Broadway. Just don't expect too much plot.
