

UNIT ELEVEN

Questions for discussion:

The original title of *Citizen Kane* was *American* in the initial script, which was not much changed in its final version. Which is the better title? Is this a peculiarly American story? How does Kane compare with Gatsby, that other big yearner for a consummate love, the protagonist of a text that also has its eye on the American dream? The drama of *Kane* is driven by the reporter Thompson's search for the meaning of Kane's dying word: "Rosebud". Ultimately, the camera reveals to the audience what the word refers to and thereby puts into our possession what no one in the story knows. What is the point of revealing the secret in this way? Is "Rosebud" just a gimmick (a McGuffin) that drives the plot but means little in itself—like the "letters of transit" in *Casablanca* or has it a more important significance? What is the difference, if any, between the green light at the end of Daisy's dock and Rosebud? Trace the series of accounts given by those involved in his life, each of which takes a particular view of him. What is the point of this temporal back-and-forth, non-consecutive arrangement of events in the movie? Do the accounts of Kane all add up or are there differences, perhaps irreconcilable differences, between some of them? We get Kane's story through accounts furnished by various people who knew him closely; in contrast, we get Gatsby's story through an account of someone who scarcely knew him until a few months before his death. In the first case, the accounts initiate a presentation that contains a good deal of information about circumstance and events that the witnesses could not have known—the camera shows much that they could not have either seen or overheard or learned about afterwards—whereas the prose of *Gatsby* convey nothing but what Nick knows for himself or has learned about later. Does this mean that we learn more or less about Kane than Gatsby? The witnesses in *Kane* are not decisively changed by witnessing part of Kane's life, but Nick is decisively changed by witnessing what happens to Gatsby. Does this relate in any way to the fact that the camera in *Kane* has a power of revelation greater than that of the witnesses whose interview with Thompson initiates a presentation of each recollected episode, whereas we have no access to anything about Gatsby's life except by virtue of Nick's thoughtful telling of it? How easy would it be to turn *Kane* into a prose narrative or turn *Gatsby* into a film? What might be lost in the process?