



## My Lunches with Orson

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Based on long-lost recordings, a set of riveting and revealing conversations with America's great cultural provocateur: There have long been rumors of a lost cache of tapes containing private conversations between Orson Welles and his friend the director Henry Jaglom, recorded over regular lunches in the years before Welles died. The tapes, gathering dust in a garage, did indeed exist, and this book reveals for the first time what they contain.

Here is Welles as he has never been seen before: talking intimately, disclosing personal secrets, reflecting on the highs and lows of his astonishing Hollywood career, the people he knew—FDR, Winston Churchill, Charlie Chaplin, Marlene Dietrich, Laurence Olivier, David Selznick, Rita Hayworth, and more—and the many disappointments of his last years. This is the great director unplugged, free to be irreverent and worse—sexist, homophobic, racist, or none of the above—because he was nothing if not a fabulator and provocateur. Ranging from politics to literature to movies to the shortcomings of his friends and the many films he was still eager to launch, Welles is at once cynical and romantic, sentimental and raunchy, but never boring and always wickedly funny.

Edited by Peter Biskind, America's foremost film historian, *My Lunches with Orson* reveals one of the giants of the twentieth century, a man struggling with reversals, bitter and angry, desperate for one last triumph, but crackling with wit and a restless intelligence. This is as close as we will get to the real Welles—if such a creature ever existed.

## My Lunches with Orson Details

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## From Reader Review My Lunches with Orson for online ebook

### **Jeff Jackson says**

Orson Welles newcomers should STAY AWAY from this book. Instead, check out Peter Bogdanovich's wonderful "This Is Orson Welles" which provides a much better career context and gives a more nuanced picture of the man and the artist.

For Welles fanatics, this compulsively readable volume is worthwhile. It's important to keep the context in mind, that Welles was performing for an audience of one and tailoring his comments accordingly, sometimes offering opinions that differed from his own merely to provoke Henry Jaglom. Since this dates from the final years of his life, it also showcases Welles at his lowest point - burnt out, desperate for work, and extremely bitchy. Though not bitchier than Peter Biskind's chapter summaries which work hard to showcase Orson in the worst possible light. And where Welles' opinions of other people's films can be ungenerous, Biskind shows his own taste lapse by putting down the visionary "F for Fake" as simply "too clever for its own good." Still, Welles knows how spin a yarn and his Hollywood stories are frequently illuminating, funny, and rude - and his perceptions remain razor sharp.

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### **Sketchbook says**

Years ago I was meeting a friend in the bar at Brown's Hotel, London. Noodged by a whisky who said, "The Fat Man is here," I saw Orson. Holding forth, he was spinning stories in his honey-baked ham voice. A little group of fleas clustered. Nothing he said was true. Flea Jaglom continues the F for Fake.

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### **Sem says**

Oh, Orson. Even at the end, even when talking to someone as annoying as Jaglom, even when the line between 'truth' and 'fiction' was more than usually blurred, you *shone*.

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### **Ron S says**

Tapes recorded over the course of wide ranging lunch conversations between Orson Welles and director Henry Jaglom in the early 80s reveal Welles as a brilliant, iconoclastic raconteur in merrily uncensored fashion. You don't need to agree with or be a fan of Welles to find this wildly entertaining. The substantial introduction by Peter Biskind, author of "Easy Riders, Raging Bulls" is worth the price of the book on its own. For sheer pleasure, the best non-fiction book I've read so far this year. Absolutely essential for film fans and those interested in the movie business, Hollywood, or Welles.

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## **Oliver Bateman says**

much more fun, and much more revealing, than bogdanovich's prior book of interviews with welles (which was much more work-focused). welles here is like a living, breathing thinkpiece, and you're left w/ the sense that a single conversation w/ him was worth dozens of films and novels by other people. is it possible to be a tremendous waste of talent in spite of an extraordinary body of work? absolutely; here's proof (and he knew it, too).

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## **Erik Graff says**

This book consists of transcripts of tape recordings made by Jaglom of conversations he had with Orson Welles while they were dining in a restaurant. Younger, Jaglom obsequiously primes and pumps the Great Man so it's not just talk about food and the weather, and while Welles has a lot to say, most of it is gossip, Hollywood gossip. I suppose if I were older and more invested in the films and theatre of the forties, fifties and sixties--or in knowing about the sex lives of the stars of that period--this book would have impressed me more. It is a quick read though.

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## **Antigone says**

The two reasons I've resisted this long:

- 1) The presence of Henry Jaglom on this planet taxes me.
- 2) Still scraping the remnants of *My Dinner with Andre* from the cognitive footlocker.

But it's Orson. It's Hollywood's premiere *l'enfant terrible*. It's the Emperor of Dish, parked with his poodle at Ma Maison, digesting soft-shelled crab as he opines on the entirety of the known artistic universe. It's stories in that basso profundo voice that may or may not be true, but always serve to make his point - even if it's just that he's completely apathetic to what you think you know about him, about *Kane*, about film in general, or whether capers should have come on that salad.

Who's going to resist this forever? Not me.

Welles is on the skids at this juncture, desperate for work (and friendship?), and has bonded for reasons that are beyond my comprehension with fellow filmmaker Henry Jaglom - who's acting, rather bizarrely, as his agent as well as his occasional luncheon companion. Jaglom, known for leeching the life force out of every human being he's ever met, has managed to talk Welles into permitting him to record their conversations so long as the recorder remains hidden throughout the process. It does. They do. Three years of cultured bonhomie pass. Welles dies and Jaglom, of course, does nothing with the material. Doesn't even get it transcribed. Along comes Peter Biskind (author of *Easy Riders, Raging Bulls*), who succeeds in talking Jaglom into allowing him to edit it all into a book, and voila.

The content is shocking, naturally. Absorbing, intuitive, petulant, grandiose. He's filled with bias, bluster and a surprising amount of self-awareness. Just what one expects from a sybarite at sunset; the ruminative breath taken between sins. I enjoyed this immensely, and that's saying something considering his rebuff of Richard

Burton, his scoff of Robert Wagner and his denouncement of Pauline Kael - all of whom I hold in esteem.

But it's Orson. Orson Welles. Hard not to forgive him just about anything.

Including Henry Jaglom.

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### **Daniel Russo says**

This isn't a formal rundown of of Orson Welles' career, but a great part of this book's appeal is how gloriously informal it is. This is Welles at his most relaxed and unguarded, free-associating across the years with Henry Jaglom over lunch, touching on both his most famous works and the ones that never got made at all. It's not an altogether flattering portrait of the man, but it's a very human one, capturing a period of quiet desperation during the last few years of his life when he was still hustling to get projects made even as his health began to fail him. And then out of nowhere Jack Lemmon or someone else will show up and sit in on the conversation, and you remember that this is all taking place in public, in a restaurant.

I don't know if I can entirely trust every story Welles tells here (anyone who's seen *F for Fake* would know that he positively revels in being an unreliable narrator), but just seeing how he chooses to frame his own story---especially in a context where he has little opportunity to prepare or self-edit---reveals a lot about him. Plus there's a ton of juicy old-Hollywood gossip, which never fails to keep things lively. This is a book I could easily imagine going back to again and again, noticing new details each time.

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### **mwpm says**

Illuminating insight, humorous Hollywood (circa Golden Age) gossip, ultimately unfulfilled...

The book could have been edited into a shorter form; there were passages that could have easily been cut; but the decision, I'm sure, would not have been an easy one. The reader can only speculate on the excess of material editor Peter Biskind had to cut down already.

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### **Elizabeth says**

*My Lunches with Orson* documented a series of taped interviews at a West Hollywood restaurant with Orson Welles and Henry Jaglom at the last stage of Welles's life. At first, I was appalled by Welles, an artist of stature, who resorted to gossip and put-downs of Hollywood stars to puff himself up. My opinion switched to that he had a sarcastic, wicked sense of humor. The magnitude of his talent and genius gave himself permission to think that he was superior. A turn-around occurred midway through the conversations. A bolt of insight jolted me out of an old stupor of formulated opinions of what I thought about the Golden Age of Hollywood. Welles the magician, filmmaker, actor and stage director either pulled a magic trick out of a hat or devised a kind of a heist that unwittingly obliterated the common consensus regarding the popularity of Hollywood, a dream machine of manufactured illusions. Welles's caustic opinions provided the impression that it's best to slash the silver screen of the past and step into a new realm regarding inventive storytelling, acting and directing. The conversations, impishly entertaining and ripsnorting shed Welles as dark as some

of his best film noir.

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### **Bob Schnell says**

Is the art of conversation dead? Or is it just that great conversationalists have lost their place to social media? You might think about such things while reading "My Lunches with Orson". While Orson Welles is still a divisive figure (people either love or hate him) no one can say that he didn't know how to spark reactions that led to discussions ranging from witty banter to deep talk about a wide range of subjects. Henry Jaglom lets us in on the conversation by transcribing many recorded luncheon talks with his friend and client during the late 1970s and early 1980s.

This should be required reading for aspiring film makers. Among the gossip, recollections and musings on art and literature there is a running thread about what it takes to finance and make a movie. Just being Orson Welles presented its own set of hurdles but we slowly realize why so many previously great directors get pushed into corners where they are no longer allowed to express themselves freely. In Welles' case he refused to create a "commercial" film which meant being in commercials in order to pay the bills. In one particularly tragicomic bit he considers doing an episode of the Love Boat. While Jaglom can be accused of pushing some of Welles' hot buttons in order to get a reaction, Welles doesn't seem to mind.

Many of the stories covered in this book are told by others in the various biographies of Orson Welles. Hearing it straight from the source makes it fresh.

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### **Lisa Lieberman says**

Welles was a perfectly awful human being, and I don't like Jaglom much for egging him on. That said, I kept this book on my night table and dipped into it before bed with great enjoyment.

**Henry Jaglom:** Is Bogart as good as I think he is?

**Orson Welles:** No. Not nearly as good as you believe. Bogart was a second-rate actor. *Really* a second-rate actor. He was a fascinating personality who captured the imagination of the world, but he never gave a good performance in his life . . .

**HJ:** To me, he gives the perfect performance in *Casablanca*. And he was good in *In a Lonely Place*.

**OW:** Oh, come on, he had that little lisp. Bogart was a well-educated, upper-class American trying to be tough. You didn't believe him as a tough guy. Anybody who knew him as I did . . .

**HJ:** Do you always have to add "as I did"?

**HJ:** My mother once said, "All old people look Jewish."

**OW:** True, you either look Jewish or you look Irish -- you have your choice. It has nothing to do with the nose. It's an expression that happens to people when they get past sixty -- they usually look like their Jewish or Irish other. Like Mailer, who looks exactly like his Jewish mother. He never looked Jewish before at all . . . And Lenny Bernstein is getting to look like his mother too, you know.

**HJ:** I just saw him in New York. He conducted --

**OW:** They don't look like their fathers, they look like their mothers. Lenny's really -- I mean, he's developed

this flourish with the baton, that he started a couple of years ago.

**HJ:** His pinkie is up?

**OW:** Way up all the time. And he can't jump as high anymore. It's as if he's announcing to the world that he can still jump, but he doesn't really leave the floor! He used to leave the floor!

**OW:** You know, Jack [John Barrymore] was quite mad. His father died at forty-five, in an insane asylum. Jack would get drunk in order to be the drunk Barrymore, instead of the insane Barrymore. He would suddenly realize at the table that he didn't know where he was or how he got there. A tragic situation . . .

**OW:** I saw *Grand Hotel* again the other day. They had it on cable. It was almost the last picture he made, where he was still highly considered, was still "John Barrymore." You know what Garbo did the first day of shooting? When he came to work in the morning, she was waiting outside the stage. To say good morning to him, to escort him to the set. It is the only nice thing I know about her.

For the record, I loved Bogart in *The African Queen* and *Casablanca* (not so much in *In a Lonely Place* but that was largely the screenwriter's fault) and *Grand Hotel* is one of the best movies ever made, right up there with Renoir's *Grand Illusion* and *Rules of the Game* and von Sternberg's *Shanghai Express* and the Carol Reed/Graham Greene collaboration starring Welles (who was great) and Joseph Cotton, *The Third Man* and Godard's *Breathless* and Billy Wilder's *Sunset Boulevard*. Oh, and I think *Citizen Kane* is overrated. (To be Wellesian, it's the sort of thing that college sophomores taking their first film course think is deep -- I certainly did.)

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### **Evan says**

Oh my god. The afterglow.

I've read books that have moved me to tears, made me ecstatic, and even given me a hard-on. This book did *not* do any of *those* things, but it did do something that I have never before experienced while reading. At one point while eagerly lapping up its onrushing constant goodness I had a genuine endorphin rush, a natural high -- and it startled me.

In this book, the late Orson Welles bares his soul and takes no prisoners. He's an atomic neutron dirty bomb spewing toxic radiation that kills everything and leaves the buildings intact. He is Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde wielding a menacing dagger of words. He's an inebriated, bloated, wounded Falstaff, bemoaning his fate and cursing his enemies and the darkness to anyone who will listen in a trendy Hollywood eatery that becomes his own version of the Bard's Boar's-Head Tavern. He dishes up the dirt and the truth, the half-truths, and the lies, and sometimes tells lies that are closer to the truth than the real truth.

The sessions that make up this remarkable book are transcriptions of a series of interviews/conversations that Welles conducted with friend, hanger-on, exploiter, con-man, and Hollywood outsider, Henry Jaglom, while they dined at the now defunct, once-trendy Ma Maison, a *nouvelle cuisine* eatery where chef Wolfgang Puck made a name for himself, and where the obese Welles mistakenly believed the fare would help him lose weight. The conversations are the last extended ones that Orson Welles ever did, taped over three years from 1983 to 1985 and all the way up to just five days prior to his death. They are, to say the least, priceless.

Like an earlier book of Welles interviews, the classic *This is Orson Welles*, compiled from interviews conducted a decade earlier by the director's younger peer, Peter Bogdanovich, this one with Jaglom finds

Welles holding forth on practically every subject under the sun like a Renaissance Man who has stored the entire *Encyclopedia Britannica* in his still-sharp mind. Along with Welles' musings on art, politics, topical events and history, the legend has plenty to say about old and new Hollywood, and it is this subject that finds him at his cattiest and bitchiest, and for someone like me who has a vast interest and knowledge of the old Hollywood system and its stars and creators, this was immeasurably fascinating stuff. The juicy and often laugh-out-loud stories (Welles had a million of them) come so fast and furiously that my endorphin rush was inevitable.

Suffice it to say, once I picked this up I could not put it down. It was simply impossible.

Which is why I am confounded by some of the hateful reviews the book has generated. These seem to fall into two categories in which the reviewers apply the following odd standards:

- 1.) I hate Henry Jaglom, so anything he does, including this book, sucks.
- 2.) I love my filmic god and hero Orson Welles, and I don't want my myths about him to be shattered by anyone telling me what a prick he was, because I don't like my heroes being depicted as pricks. So, anything that does that gets a low rating.

So much for critical acumen. Now, let me offer you whiners a nice tall glass of "grow-up" juice.

I love Orson Welles as much as the next movie nut, and this book doesn't change that. What this book shows me is a bitter and broken artist at the end of his life, understandably jaded and ornery, and it's fascinating to behold. I love Orson no more or less by learning these things. I can process it in context because -- apart from being an adult -- I realize that Welles was just as much a victim as he was a victimizer with a self-destructive bent. He was, as I alluded to, like Shakespeare's Falstaff in *Henry IV, Part II*, a figure once favored but now spent and rejected -- corpulent, bloated, flustered, bitter, broken, dissolute, disillusioned, and as deflated inside as his outward pronouncements and physicality were inflated.

I can step back and look at Welles objectively and still not lose my subjective admiration for him. And I can value and enjoy anything that presents me with further shadings on his character. As Marlene Dietrich said in Welles' 1958 masterwork *Touch of Evil*: "He was some kind of a man. What does it matter what you say about people?" And that is true. We are all blind men confronting the elephant, and this book allows us to feel another appendage to try to get at the scope of the subject.

Whatever you may think about Jaglom, it is clear from these conversations that he was a well-read, well-traveled and thoughtful companion for Orson, and their conversations have a lively and often illuminating give-and-take. Jaglom does not always kowtow to Orson in these discussions, but goads, challenges and even opposes him -- especially when the impish and purposely contradictory Welles becomes ultra un-PC. Welles says a lot of cringe-worthy things here, but his frankness is refreshing. Even if some of it is a put-on, it reveals Welles' inherent sense of the absurd.

The book is a sweeping kaleidoscope in which the colors are ever-changing. The old Orson Welles was a sad figure, and in this book he seems to support those who charged him with being his own worst enemy. Even at the end of his life, barely able to pay his grocery bills, he was constantly shooting himself in the foot, finding excuses to scuttle promising projects and opportunities. In one instance, an approaching Richard Burton is told by Welles to "Fuck off!" In another, a producer from HBO is cold-shouldered by Welles, who, like a petulant little boy, capriciously refuses to tell the story idea he had requested to pitch. (Welles' close-lipped stance was predicated by a mere *look* by the producer, a skeptical look that he had seen for so many decades that his pride simply would not let him tolerate it again).

At this stage of his life Welles had a bitter tongue that was rollicking, raw and lowdown, and it is perhaps these interviews, coming from a man almost in a kind of suspended animation, that constitute his unintentional final legacy.

There are stories in here about Greta Garbo and Marlene Dietrich and Charlie Chaplin that are amazing. And his trashing, cutting remarks about rivals and/or fair-weather friends (Laurence Olivier, John Houseman, and Peter Bogdanovich) are wickedly delectable.

I bookmarked and check-marked way too many quotes and passages in this book that I could not possibly take the time to reprint here, even though I wanted to.

This review of the book by *The New Yorker* mostly mirrors my own positive reactions:  
<http://www.newyorker.com/books/page-t...>

The book's conversations are book-ended by an introduction by its editor, Peter Biskind, which is very good but which also contains some assessments about various Welles' movies that I disagree with, and by a final epilogue by Jaglom that is poignant and moving.

Like *This is Orson Welles* this is one book that will never be purged from my collection as long as I am alive.

(KevinR@Ky 2016)

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### **Chad Lind says**

Awesome. I don't understand why anyone would care in the least about the truth content of the stories contained in this book. The entire thing is entertaining. For those looking for a series of truthful, dry, Hollywood stories from the mouth of Orson Welles, look elsewhere during your lengthy reality check.

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### **Scott says**

So many of the conversations transcribed in this book struck me as trivial rather than interesting. Welles comes of as bitchy, more than anything else...

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