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Mank Essay

FMX-342-1 Producing Motion Pictures

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September 18, 2023

The movie, *Mank* is a 2020 biographical drama about Herman “Mank” Mankiewicz, a screenwriter working in Hollywood during the 1930s and 1940s. David Fincher directed *Mank* with the screenplay being written by Jack Fincher. The premise of the film is the complicated story about how Mank developed, created, and wrote the Academy Award winning screenplay for Citizen Kane. The film showcases key characteristics a successful screenwriter should possess and reveals a screenwriter’s creative process. As a film student, many lessons relating to screenwriting can be learned from watching the movie, *Mank*.

Herman Mankiewicz (Mank) possessed the key characteristics required to be a successful screenwriter. In *Mank*, Mank demonstrated creativity, great storytelling ability, attention to detail (paint the scene), and character development. In *Mank*, we see Mank’s creative genius produce the Academy Award winning screenplay for Citizen Kane. Mank creatively collected and consolidated real-world people, situations, and events over a period of ten years into the final screenplay; in essence developing his characters. In one of the first scenes, Mank demonstrates his ability to paint the scene paying attention to every detail; one of his greatest strengths. Bed ridden Mank dictates while Rita, the typist captures his every detail. “...we see an old man in a robe smoking a pipe sitting alone by his pool discarded pages at his feet...we see through trees as an aide pushes this old man in a wheelchair across neatly groomed lawns.” One can easily picture the scene. Later in the movie, Mank demonstrates his great storytelling skills in an ad-lib moment. Mank arrives in a drunken state to San Simeon, the home shared by William Randolph Hearst and his girlfriend, Marion Davies. Mank joins the dinner party late. An agitated Mank, spews out in detail an idea for a movie about a newspaper man who runs for office, and he wins. In the story, Mank describes the newspaper man’s side kick as well as his love interest. The scene provides the insight into the screenplay for Citizen Kane.

Mank mastered the process of creating a nonlinear story; a story that is not in chronological order. Mank utilized flashbacks which further demonstrated Mank’s strength in

storytelling ability. In *Mank*, Mank described the collection of fragments that jump around in time as “a big circle like a cinnamon roll.” A great, creative way to tell a story as many films are linear and the ability to do this right helps the audience understand what is happening in the story and maintain the attention of the audience.

As a screenwriter, Mank drew inspiration and fed his creativity to craft compelling stories by observing people, talking with people, and everyday controversial topics like politics, social equity, and love. Within the film, I observed Mank enjoying engaging in controversial conversations to learn more about the individual and their circumstances. For example, in the scene celebrating Mayer’s birthday, Mank engages in the political discussion about the gubernatorial race. Mank seemed to enjoy discussing controversial topics with other literary minds because Mank feels the writer always provokes thought. In the scene that followed, Mank walks around San Simeon grounds with Marion Davies and engages in conversation with Marion. Marion shares deep insight into her person, beliefs, and thoughts. Mank seemed delighted with their conversation.

On the darker side, Mank was an alcoholic. Alcohol was a creative inspiration for Mank. While working on the script, Mank stated, “I do my best thinking before I fall asleep.” In the film, when Mank finished the script, Mank, Housman, and Rita are toasting the “support devices.” The support devices were the bottles of alcohol.

My favorite technique deployed by Mank was his use of flashbacks to tell the story. It kept my attention for the entire length of the film. I was sitting on the edge of my seat wondering what would happen next. I’ve attempted to use flashbacks in some of my projects. I will use Mank as an example when utilizing flashbacks. I believe the film, *Mank* was a tribute to Herman Mankiewicz and his style of screenwriting. Without watching *Citizen Kane*, I am curious if the *Mank* screenplay follows the *Citizen Kane* screenplay but uses the real characters?