

Casablanca (1942)

Directed by Michael Curtiz

Written by Julius J. Epstein, Philip G. Epstein & Howard Koch

Starring Humphrey Bogart, Ingrid Bergman, Paul Henreid,  
Claude Rains and Conrad Veidt



Casablanca is classic film made in the middle of Second World War. The film is set in Casablanca that is unoccupied territory of France that is otherwise under the domination of Nazi Germany. People fleeing from Europe to America can make it through Casablanca if they manage to get the letters of transit to Lisbon and from there to United States. Rick Blaine (Humphrey Bogart) is the owner popular night spot of Casablanca. He comes to possession of couple of letters of transit just before freedom fighter Victor Laszlo (Paul Henreid) arrives to the city. To his surprise he arrives with his wife Ilsa Lund (Ingrid Bergman) who used to be Rick's lover. Victor and Ilsa could escape to America with the help of Rick but is he able to overcome his bitterness towards Ilsa and his cynical view of life itself? And what has German leader Heinrich Strasser (Conrad Veidt) to say in matters? Whose side will the French leader of city, Captain Louis Renault (Claude Rains), take?

The protagonist of the story is Rick Blaine, the owner of the café. He is portrait as a cynical smoker who use to participate in wars in underdog's side. A bit by bit is revealed more levelled man who still have this romantic side to him and who still believes the underdog can win. He seems to be very serious man but he doesn't seem to take things seriously. Perhaps he is protecting himself? The antagonist of the story could be Major Heinrich Strasser because when he arrives to Casablanca the peace of the city and Rick's joint is disturbed. Only thing that Rick wanted was to live in peace in safe area but Strasser's arrival disturbs it. According to the character map (check the second page) it looks like he is the external force. But then again, his arrival never sets Rick in motion like the arrival of Ilsa. Also war itself is huge external opposite force to Rick's wish to live in peace. If we think that Rick's internal dilemma is his cynical attitude towards life that is obviously caused by Ilsa's abandonment then Ilsa is again our antagonist. But to be honest, all of the mentioned have cases. It would be interesting to talk about the matter more.

By looking at how the characters develop, it is evident that Rick is the one that changes the most in the context of the film story. He is introduced as this cynical being who really don't care much about anything and who certainly doesn't want to attach himself to anyone. But in the end he is idealistic who still believes world can be changed for good. The whole change seems to be caused by love. Captain Renault is the other one that audience can see kind of change. The viewer doesn't exactly know him that well but he comes out less kind than he in the end is. Ilsa is the same person throughout the whole film but the viewer learns a lot about her life, perhaps the most and that information is essential for the audience to get to know Rick better.

Structure wise the attraction is set when Rick comes to possession of the letters of transit and a little while later Ilsa arrives to his gin joint. The main conflict of the story is the love story between Ilsa and Rick. During the second act, the audience anticipation is build buy questions like what has happened between Ilsa and Rick? Do they still love each other? Is Rick capable overcoming his bitterness? What will he do with the letters of transit? Do the opposite external forces come between? And the second part forces the viewer to ponder his/her own principles by asking what the right choice to do is? In the end the story comes to satisfying conclusion after more than one twist when Rick makes the selfless choices and sacrifices himself for the greater good: *"Ilsa, I'm no good at being noble, but it doesn't take much to see that the problems of three little people don't amount to a hill of beans in this crazy world."*

Audience is not let into the secrets of this film especially in the end when the twists happen. But also, we never learn what has happened to Rick or where he is going next. Even Ilsa doesn't know the latter. Ricks stays as a mystery to the viewer. And that's what makes him very intriguing protagonist.

Character Map

