Casablanca (1942)

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The Limitless Potentials and the Potential Limits of Classical Hollywood Cinema

Context

You can pretty much see it coming. The American Film Institute is doing its glossy television show on the "100 Most Romantic Films of All Time," and the broadcast has just come back from its last commercial break to the final countdown of the top choices. The runner-up is announced: *Gone with the Wind*. You probably know now what the top one will be. You can probably even guess which clip they'll use. There it is: at the airport in the blur of the fog, smoke, and mist (and teardrops welling up in the woman's eyes), Rick Blaine (Humphrey Bogart) tells his great love Ilsa (Ingrid Bergman) that he is staying to fight in the war and that she must go off with her husband. "You're part of his work. The thing that keeps him going," Rick tells her. "If that plane leaves the ground and you're not with him, you'll regret it, maybe not today, maybe not tomorrow . . . but soon, and for the rest of your life." These lines will be repeated at the end of the homage film *Play It Again, Sam* (1972) by Allan Felix, the Bogart wannabe that Woody Allen plays, as he also heroically sends his great love off to go back to her husband. "That's beautiful," waxes the woman. (Diane Keaton). "It's from *Casablanca*," replies Allan, "I've waited all my life to say it."

One of the great films of cult veneration, *Casablanca* is the perfect example of Hollywood perfection. By this double formulation, I mean to get at two things: (1) *Casablanca* comes closest for many fans to embodying Hollywood cinema in its classic moment insofar as (2) we imagine this classic cinema to encapsulate a certain high level of achievement in escapist entertainment and storytelling accomplishment. *Casablanca* appears to have it all: to cite just a few of its qualities, elegance and escapism blended with gripping topicality; drama and suspense but also wit and charm; lush visuality matched with melodious sound (the romantic wall-to-wall music of the great romantic composer Max Steiner); exoticism mixed with recognizable world-weariness in the figure of its cynical antihero; and a narrative style of seeming effortlessness, each great shot and each great scene gliding into the next with verve, but grace, too. The film seems perfectly acted, perfectly shot and put together, perfectly written (both at the level of those great individual lines and of the larger construction of a gripping narrative).

For Umberto Eco, *Casablanca* is not just a great case of Hollywood cinema. Rather, it is an incarnation of an idea of cinema per se as entertainment. As Eco puts it, "*Casablanca* became a cult movie because it is not *one* movie. It is 'movies'" (208). Working through the beginning of the film scene by scene, Eco shows the extent to which many myths, archetypes, and references to other narratives (filmic and otherwise) run through *Casablanca.* And it is not just that the film is so rich in offering resonances of a whole history of popular culture; it matters that the film does so well in presenting all of this with style but also with seeming ease. *Casablanca* is a film that seems to come to its spectator with confidence—that confident well-being that we take to be one of the trademarks of the Hollywood studio system.

Take, for instance, the first sequences after the credits. With an air of effortlessness, but which the spectator knows to be the result (as the credits have just informed him/her) of the crafted professionalism of the labor-intensive Hollywood film industry, the film guides us into its fictional world by gliding into it: music that plays over shots, dissolves that blend one shot into the next and thereby smooth over the transitions, and cuts that maintain screen directions and match action between shots all work to construct a faultless narrative flow that pulls the spectator in. At the same time, in a seeming divergence from mere escapism, the first moments after the credits assail the spectator with background material that is virtually documentary or even pedagogical in nature—a rush of information conveyed through newsreel footage, maps, and an authoritative masculine voice-over. Later in this essay, we will examine in greater detail some of the ways *Casablanca* may diverge from the classical Hollywood cinema that it is held to be a perfect example of, and, for the moment, it is worth noting the extent to which this opening gives some signs of the film's nonclassical aspects. In this period of war—an historical moment in which it is assumed that citizens will need factual information as much as entertainment—numerous Hollywood films began to be infiltrated by instances of didacticism and direct address to the audience. In such instances, the films presented not a fictional world that the viewer can watch from the safe distance of escapism but a world of immediate pertinence presented directly and explicitly to the spectator.

Nonetheless, *Casablanca* also has romantic escape and fantasy on its mind, and it quickly leaves its didacticism behind (although it will return later in the film's central choice between isolationism and war commitment). Soon a seamless dissolve moves us from the world of documentary into the studio-constructed exoticism of an artificial Casablanca. In this imaginary version of a real city prominent in the headlines when the film came out, a fictional narrative can emerge. And this will be a narrative conveyed with precision, economy, confidence, and perfection.

Look, for instance, at a series of four shots that enable the story to get going. In an effort to track down the killers of couriers who had been carrying valuable transit papers, the value of which was established in large part by the opening narration, which informed us about the need to flee Nazism and about Casablanca's importance as a key point in the trajectory of escape, the police in Casablanca have been told to round up all suspicious characters. A montage of shots shows a series of arrests and gives this incident an anecdotal quality: here, the montage appears to tell us, are examples of the sorts of shady figures that people the town. But suddenly, out of this series of anonymous anecdotes of ongoing police arrest, one suspect looks offscreen left and then dashes off in that direction, the camera pivoting to follow him as he moves past his potential captors. The camera ends its pivot, and he moves out of the frame, which now focuses on a young man and woman whom we've not seen before and who in alarm look left in the direction the suspect has fled. A cut leaves behind the couple to give us the predictable object of their look: the suspect who is continuing to run toward the left (with the police now joining him again in the frame, following in hot pursuit).

The couple would seem to have only an incidental function here: they would appear to be mere momentary bystanders whose primary function is less narrative than stylistic, the direction of their look allowing a seamless cut to take place. But through the narrative economy that is so central to the classical Hollywood cinema—a veritable rule that one should introduce nothing that won't be of use somewhere else in the plot—these two people will play an important narrative function through the course of the film. They, it turns out, are young lovers hoping themselves to flee Casablanca, and their plight will eventually touch Rick in ways that reveal chinks in his cynical antiromantic armor.

But for the moment, the spectator's concern is with the suspect running through a frame that also includes the police pursuing him. They stop and take aim at him as he moves past a poster toward a passageway he obviously intends to escape through. With just these two shots—the pivoting one in which the suspect leaves his potential captors behind and out of frame, and the static one in which those captors have regained the foreground and are taking aim at his fleeing figure near the passageway—the film gives evidence of that balancing and rhyming function that a number of film scholars have seen as central to the functioning of classical Hollywood storytelling. Each moment of the story builds tightly from the previous one, each one flows into the next, and sequences of such moments will serve as building blocks for the larger narrative that the film tells. The second shot "answers" the first and makes their conjunction into a veritable mininarrative: the promise of escape and the immediate and seemingly inevitable dashing of that promise.

From the image of the police taking aim, then, the cut to the next image appears consequential, logical, and even natural: the camera has moved close to the fleeing suspect, the blasts of guns ring out, and he falls dead. As he drops to the bottom of the frame, the camera cuts in even closer, showing us the details of a poster next to the passageway the man had intended to flee through: it is of Marshall Pétain, notorious in the public imagination of the time for selling out France to the Nazis. The increasing emphasis by moving the camera closer to Pétain's image adds a symbolic dimension to the scene: *Casablanca*, we are being told, will be a story of betrayal, both personal and political. The police move into frame once again and bend down to the body, the camera following their every gesture and moving in close as they discover Free French resistance documents on him.

These are four quick shots of seemingly incidental nature. After all, they introduce and fully dispatch a character we have never seen and who will never be referred to again. Yet so much has been enabled by them. With precision and brevity, the film has indicated that one genre it will belong to is that of wartime action: out of the picturesque exoticism of the Casablanca market there abruptly emerges a narrative of violence. Likewise, it signals to us that suspense will be key to the workings of this film: there is the sudden hope of escape and, just as suddenly, with a cut, we are in a world of gunfire and death. With economy, the shots have set up some of the political conflict that will be one of the film's central themes—the threat of betrayal and the need to oppose to it the wartime fight for freedom—but they also indicate that nothing about this conflict is decided in advance. A freedom fighter might seem to be getting away from the forces of oppression, but one single cut can lead to the destruction of that hope. Will this be the fate of all such resisters?

To be sure, the overwhelming omnipresence of the Hollywood happy ending at this moment in film's history (the 1940s) might lead one to suppose that the end of the film is given in advance: this one anonymous freedom fighter may die at the beginning of the film, but the conventions of Hollywood storytelling necessitate a greater victory for the forces of good over the course of the whole film. Yet *Casablanca*'s narrative will reveal itself to be less conventional, conformist, and predictable than that. In fact, it is not clear for much of its narrative how it is defining the very notion of "good," and it is therefore not clear just how it will end: Do the film's deepest sympathies lie in the romantic and very American myth of the independent loner that Rick performs until his final political conversion? Or do they find their value in the commitment to the higher communal good that Laszlo represents? What precisely would a happy ending be in such a context? As a film of the war moment, it would seem that its explicit allegiance is to Laszlo and the need for engagement in the war, but it is also clear that there is something just a little too pure, too squeaky-clean, about Laszlo for audience identification to be wholly and wholeheartedly with him. Caught in a moment of transition from the innocent classicism of Hollywood's golden age in the 1930s to a wartime and then postwar context, which is much more downbeat and even cynical about innocence and the purity of romance—and about the ability of Hollywood entertainment to convey that innocence and purity unproblematically—*Casablanca* offers up a contradictory, even confused, ideology that suggests that its impression of confident classicism is in fact far from assured.

Production History

Indeed, if we look at some of the history of *Casablanca*—and less the history of its reception (so much of which has been about turning it into an unassailable object of cult veneration) than the history of its production within the studio as well as the wartime social history to which it is responding—suddenly the surface impression of effortless perfection seems less apparent. *Casablanca*'s "perfection" comes at a price: ironically, the film that seems to sum up Hollywood cinema is also a "perfect" symptom of the forces brewing in the 1940s that would spell an end to classical Hollywood cinema and its escapist romantic confidence. Production history and social history reveal imperfections in *Casablanca*'s glossy veneer.

Like so many Hollywood films, *Casablanca* achieved its image of perfection only as the result of a complicated production trajectory made up of compromises, last-minute improvisations, and seemingly arbitrary decisions. Despite the assembly-line-like efficiency of the Hollywood production process, there could be something haphazard in the making of any particular film; in fact, much of the specific production history for *Casablanca* shows that its makers were unsure of many things and made often random decisions along the way. The files on *Casablanca* in the Warner Bros. Archives at the University of Southern California reveal a production in which virtually every major decision was subject to modification, in which every element that ended up on the screen came as the result of complicated debate, revision, and downright improvisation. Even the title of the film was not fixed: only on the last day of 1941 was the title for this 1942 production decided on as *Casablanca* and not *Casa Blanca*. With an imminent early spring date for the start of shooting, *Casablanca* would be the object of endless negotiation during the preproduction phase. For example, on January 7, 1942, press releases went out to say that Ann Sheridan and Ronald Reagan would play the leads in the film with Dennis Morgan as Laszlo, suggesting that the studio was thinking of it at this point as something quite other than a prestige picture, since none of these actors was an A-list lead. There is some possibility, however, that Warner Bros. never really planned to cast Reagan but was mentioning his name just to build up publicity around him. (More than one film critic has speculated that if this casting had actually happened and Reagan had garnered success, he would not have remained consigned to the lesser ranks of

Warner Bros. actors and may have had a more successful acting career, thereby removing the temptation to leave acting for politics. World history might have been very different, the speculation goes!)

But even the announced casting was not fixed in stone. Even though Reagan was soon dropped from press releases about the casting and announcements made of Ann Sheridan's pairing with Humphrey Bogart, memos from studio head Jack Warner show that he was dissatisfied with the female casting and appeared to want someone with European connotations: thus, with a very short time to go before production began, Warner contemplated recently arrived French émigré actresses like Michèle Morgan or Edwige Feuillère (on March 30, 1942, Warner wrote that he would take the latter "in a minute for the leading woman" [Warner, File 18882]) or the more established émigré Hedy Lamarr. Warner's borrowing of Ingrid Bergman from independent producer David O. Selznick finally gave the studio its exotically European actress, but it also brought a series of problems with it: for example, to get Bergman, Warner had to accept certain contractual stipulations such as "all calls about tests for wardrobe or makeup or hair must go through Selznick," thus interfering with the studio's own control of the project (Warner, File 12732).

Even the casting of Dooley Wilson, who was borrowed from Paramount, as Sam, came from compromise and improvisation. Jack Warner very seriously considered the *female* African American singers Lena Horne and Ella Fitzgerald for the role, and just as it is perhaps amusing to imagine Ronald Reagan as Rick, it is intriguing to wonder what the casting of either Horne or Fitzgerald would have done to this film that is so much about gender relations and whose plot involves Rick going from one male buddy (Sam) to another (Louis), with Ilsa as only an impossible heterosexual interlude between long moments of homosocial bonding. (It is also saddening to realize from the Warner records that Hollywood racial fears meant that Dooley Wilson was contracted to $3,500 for seven to eight weeks of shooting but did not get major billing in the credits, while Conrad Veidt, in the role of Major Strasser—chosen after Warner contemplated Otto Preminger for the part—got $25,000 for five weeks and had his name in the fifth position in the credits.)

Records show that until at least thirty-two days into shooting, not all of the script issues of *Casablanca* had been resolved. This is probably more typical of the Hollywood mode of production than the seemingly efficient and elegant sheen of its products would lead us to imagine. From its opening credits—where the names of Bogart and Bergman on one line and the lesser star Paul Henreid on the next signal that this will be the story of a love triangle, and seem to indicate how this rivalry of love will work out (the star system will triumph and Bogie will get the girl)—*Casablanca* seems simultaneously to work with the inevitable logic of formula that we have come to associate with Hollywood classicism *and* to emphasize how any logic, any one outcome to its narrative, is random and accidental. Throughout the film, the spectator is unsure of plot twists and unsure of the motivations and commitments of characters.

Film historian Richard Maltby aptly describes the film's open-ended quality in an essay entitled "'A Brief Romantic Interlude': Dick and Jane Go to 3½ Seconds of the Classical Hollywood Cinema." *Casablanca,* he says, "quite deliberately constructs itself in such a way as to offer distinct and alternative sources of pleasure to two people sitting next to each other in the cinema" (443); it "presents an incomplete narrative requiring of its viewers a good deal of basic work in hypothesis-forming and -testing before the movie's story can be constructed" (449).

The 3½ seconds in the subtitle of Maltby's essay refers to the end of the sequence in the film in which Ilsa has come to Rick's apartment to do whatever she can to get the letters of transit from him so that Laszlo can escape to freedom. After several shifting power plays—Ilsa unexpectedly pulls a gun on Rick, Rick unexpectedly disarms her by the sheer force of his seductiveness, and so on—there is the swelling up of irrepressible love and reconciliation as the two lovers overcome everything that has held them back from each other. There is the deep kiss and then a curious sequence with a dissolve to an airplane tower and back to the apartment at a moment later in time, with the two lovers acting casually as if nothing has transpired. As Maltby shows, there are incompatible meanings at work here: some things tell us that Rick and Ilsa have just slept together, and other details tell us they have not. (Amusingly, when the Hays Office, the censorship arm of Hollywood, examined the scripting for this scene, its recommendation was that any fade-outs be replaced by dissolves since the former were known by savvy audience members to be coded signals that sex was happening.)

But the undecidability of this key moment—a moment whose interpretation, for instance, inflects how we read Rick's final conversation with Laszlo, in which Rick reconciles the husband to Ilsa by ensuring him that no sex happened—spreads throughout the film and makes much of the experience of *Casablanca* a guessing game. When precisely does Rick decide to help Ilsa and Laszlo? When does Louis make his decision? How much does Laszlo really know or suspect about Rick and Ilsa? Can we fully believe Ilsa when she explains to Rick her motives in Paris for not telling him about Laszlo—first, she thought Laszlo was dead; then, she felt she had to protect him when he was found to be alive? What do we make of the ending of the film with Rick and Louis walking off into a nebulous fog toward an ambiguous future, a finale that is simultaneously open ended (will they live? will they die?) and yet closed by a perfect poetic justice and political logic (life or death doesn't matter; what is important is that these two men have committed to the war effort)? This structure of undecidability helps explain why spectators can go back to *Casablanca* as a cult object and find so much to work with in it. Indeed, one of the most amusing documents in the papers in the Warner Bros. Archive has to do with the evident frustration of a fan who does not take the ending to be satisfactory at all. This fan, Verne Chute (later a somewhat successful writer of science fiction), writes to producer Hal B. Wallis in 1943 to propose the film be reshot with a happy ending. At the last minute, he suggests, it should be revealed that Laszlo and Ilsa are actually brother and sister who, for complicated plot reasons, pretended to be husband and wife, thus freeing Rick and Ilsa to go off together! Intriguingly, Wallis politely and predictably dismisses the suggestion (he pleads the expense such reshooting would involve), but he does declare, "some consideration is being given to doing a sequel to CASABLANCA; and this may materialize" (Chute). (It might be worth noting that in the 1990s there was in fact a follow-up novel to *Casablanca, As Time Goes By,* by one Michael Walsh, in which Rick, Louis, and Ilsa team up to try to assassinate a Nazi general.)

For all the zaniness of his suggestions, Verne Chute was registering the sense in which the perfect and perfected *Casablanca* can also seem unfinished. There has long been a legend that the ending of *Casablanca*—Ilsa caught between Rick and Laszlo, Rick caught between love and a newfound commitment to the war effort, and each choosing something of the greater good—was improvised at the last minute. While this might seem to overstate the case—it is clear that renunciation of love is the only possible ending to such a wartime film—there nonetheless is something unsettled about *Casablanca*, something ambiguous and open ended.

Analysis

Deconstructing the Classical Hollywood Film

Perfection for the Hollywood film came at a cost (literally so since all the production compromises added up), but in the specific case of *Casablanca*, the difficulties of production—the studio's typical indecision as to just how the product should be put together—seem to have been compounded by its historical moment. If the Hollywood dream machine had ever been a competent apparatus for generating escapist diversions, the moment of the Second World War posed a specific threat to the efficient workings of that machine. How to make audiences believe in fictive happy endings when the outcome of their real lives was in jeopardy—especially early in the war when there had been so many defeats? How to make audiences swallow perfect stories when the world around them was lacking in such perfection? (*Casablanca* at least could exploit the fact of the first Allied victories in North Africa, but still it was released at a moment when ultimate victory was far from assured.) How to continue promoting an ideology of romance when so many couples were being torn apart and where such separation was a sanctioned government policy? As his newlywed wife says to the Bogart character in another Warner Bros. film from just a year later (*Action in the North Atlantic*, 1943) when he is called back to the ship he is commander of, "We can't go around holding hands at a time like this!" Or as the title heroine of the 1943 war-recruitment comedy *Reveille with Beverly* sings to the two men in her life in that film, "I'm taking a rain check on love."

Classic Hollywood revolves around love—around plots that so frequently lead to the formation of a couple and the sealing of their relationship in the happy ending of a kiss that seems to last forever. But the war renders the promise of eternal love unstable. Heterosexual virtues—family, marriage, domesticity, and so on—are some of the values supposedly being fought for, but the fight itself leads to their being

put on hold, bracketed out, and even rendered fragile. For instance, the war sends men away from home and offers them new experiences—ones that are both horrific and energizing in their exotic difference—that often make the return home seem alien. Likewise, women at home discover new opportunities (for example, in the realm of work) that lead to frustration when these are taken away from them in the postwar period. The reuniting of men and women can be joyous, but it can also be a source of suspicion—just what has my partner been doing during our separation? Just as there is an onslaught of sudden marriages during the war, there is as great a rush to divorce in the postwar period, as men and women frequently come to realize they are strangers to each other. *Films noirs* (men realizing the perfidy of seemingly seductive *femmes fatales*) and women's gothic films (women realizing the threat of strangers they've married and who they suspect are out to kill them) register these tensions, but similar anxieties also play through a wartime film like *Casablanca*, a film seemingly more confident in its ideology of romance but already giving in to suspicion about love and romantic commitment. It is standard in the literature on film to imagine that cynicism, suspicion, and doubt entered American cinema in the postwar period of *film noir*, but these were already operative in the moment of the war (where *noir* was already beginning to develop as a genre). For instance, central to the plot of *Casablanca* is the discovery by the man and the woman that each of them has gone in other directions during their separation: being apart has not meant eternal devotion. The war has upset relationships—Ilsa, for instance, first thinks Laszlo is dead and therefore out of her life, and then she has to deal with the fact that he is back—and there is every implication that the stability of romance will not be repaired in any easy fashion. *Casablanca* is immersed in a world of suspicion, and one of the very qualities to be suspected is the profundity of love itself.

With the war, lovers in Hollywood movies go out of sync. First, they are separated *spatially:* the men are "over there," and the women are on the "home front," the second word implying that they are also in a battle, but the first recognizing that they are relegated to a sphere of action other than that of men. A few films during the war will bring men and women together in a united front—for example, stories of nurses or women journalists allow for women to be shown fighting alongside the men in their lives. But for the most part, men and women move in the war film in separate spheres and come together only in mythical places—mythical because such places allow love to bloom but mythical also because love there can only be ethereal and dreamlike, utopian and unreal, all too doomed and impermanent. Thus, in the exotic space of Casablanca, Rick and Ilsa can find love again and can find their separate narratives coming together as one. Given its snappy dialogue, its high-society locale (for example, the nightclub electrified by seductive ambience), and its story of wizened and experienced lovers who have split from each other but are beginning to scope each other out toward a rekindling of romance, *Casablanca* might seem to echo back toward one of the great romantic genres of the 1930s—namely, screwball comedy—as much as it looks forward to the disruptions war brings to romance.

Like the screwball films that the philosopher Stanley Cavell calls comedies of "remarriage"—in which lovers who have known each other intimately have split up but now find occasions to begin furtive first steps to coming back together—*Casablanca* narrates how in a space apart, an exotic and erotic space, a magical space, lovers who had gone their separate ways can once again appear to share in one single story of love. But if screwball can end optimistically with a static image of the couple united forever, it would seem, in love (as in the last shot of *Bringing Up Baby,* where the man and woman are solid in their love as the world crashes down around them), the wartime film generally can represent romantic togetherness as only a temporary state. In a time of war, there are no private islands for lovers, no natural green places where one can repair to find romantic stasis. As the focus of so much of its plot on letters of transit reminds us, *Casablanca* is about a world of love in transition, a world of diasporic and displaced figures who can come together for a moment, only to find the larger forces of history pulling them apart.

But this is to suggest that the separation of the couple in wartime narratives is as much *temporal* as spatial: they are also out of sync insofar as they cannot be together in the present. On the one hand, the wartime film holds out the intangible promise of a future in which the couple will once again be united: this is intangible *of necessity* since the extracinematic reality of the moment means that one cannot really know what the future will bring, one cannot really be sure that the men will come back from "over there" and that there will be a future for love. On the other hand, then, many wartime films will look back with profound nostalgia to a past in which the couple was once perfectly united, perfectly in sync. "We'll always have Paris," Rick tells Ilsa: there will always be the memory of a moment that had seemed out of time (although in fact the disruptive time of history and world events came crashing inevitably in on it).

This suggests the importance of the flashback to so many films of the war period. The flashback actualizes on the screen the image of a lost past. In a moment when men and women have to go their separate ways, it allows for the vision of them together and directly puts this vision in the present tense. For example, in another film from the same year as *Casablanca, Joe Smith, American,* the eponymous hero is captured by Nazis but resists torture by remembering great moments from his courtship and marriage with his beloved wife, his memories rendered in flashbacks that unfold in the present tense. Likewise, *Casablanca*'s Paris flashback takes up a fair amount of screen time and by doing so pushes the real present tense of 1942 and its disruptive events offscreen: the Paris sequence becomes for a while an all-consuming utopian flight that holds history at bay and lets the unities of love unfurl in a seemingly atemporal idyll.

But to try to live life as an eternal present of everlasting bliss is a fiction. There is the danger that one will live in the fantasy so obsessively that one will be fully unprepared for the inevitable harsh moment when the forces of history reassert themselves—the moments when fantasy reveals its limits. Hence, the extremity of the shock Rick experiences when he feels himself betrayed by Ilsa: from a man who lived in the eternal present tense of love, he turns into one who lives in an unchanging eternity of bitterness and cynicism. Rick here is already like the postwar antihero of *film noir*—and of course Bogart would be one of the central figures of that tradition, in films like *In a Lonely Place* (1950)—who is so unprepared for life's betrayals that he retreats into coldness, hardness, or, at worst, a despairing inertia. The images of Rick drinking himself into stupor over Ilsa are not so far from those of brooding, morally wounded *noir* figures like "the Swede" in *The Killers* (1946) who have been defeated by life and passively wait for extinction. They dreamed of a space and time of unchanging romance and were unprepared for all the changes the world was holding in store for them.

Conclusion

In a sense, there are two predominant cinematic images of timelessness in the period of transition from prewar classicism to a postwar period in which American film increasingly moves in new directions and into new stylistic and thematic territories. On the one hand, as in the screwball comedies of the classic 1930s, there is the affirmative timelessness implicit in the notion of eternal romance and encapsulated in the final image of the couple united in an embrace. If the narratives of the screwball comedies of remarriage have been filled with madcap actions as the lovers scheme and counterscheme to win back their former partners, the endings to those narratives are about a glorious leap into inaction—into the blissful stasis of a kiss. On the other hand, as in the *films noirs* of the postwar period, there is the pessimistic timelessness implicit in the existential brooding that comes when one has seen all the perfidy of the world and understood that there's no path to eternal bliss. Here the stasis is that of the psychologically wounded male who has been betrayed by life (represented by the erotically vital but dangerous *femme fatale*) and has given up and awaits his end. Often the only way out of his existential funk is to suddenly discover in himself resources of stereotypically masculine strength and reassert his machismo: thus, in *Dead Reckoning*, a 1947 *film noir*, Bogart plays a returned GI who, when he discovers the woman he loves is irremediably evil and has played him for a sucker, turns soldier once again and blows her up with a grenade. The Bogart of *Dead Reckoning* could almost be a later version of *Casablanca*'s Rick Blaine emerging from the passivity and funk of his own cynicism and rediscovering the affirmative values of engagement in a masculine cause. Certainly, the postwar *films noirs* are as much a legacy of wartime as a cynical response to it: they narrate what the period imagines as the vulnerabilities of men not masculine enough to rise above the seductions of dangerous femininity.

Between the joyous stasis of eternal love and the pessimistic stasis of a brooding wounded masculinity, the wartime film holds out the option of warrior masculinity. Even as he continues to be inspired by the memory of romance ("We'll always have Paris"), Rick separates it out of his present and future and becomes a man of action who bonds in homosocial relationships with other newfound men of action (as he says to Louis, "I think this is the beginning of a beautiful friendship"). Love can still occur in this world, but only in one's past or only to other people: it is noteworthy that several times in the film, Rick is instrumental in enabling other couples to solidify (the young lovers we saw in the three-shot sequence; Ilsa and Laszlo) but gives up on romance for himself. The wartime warrior discovers bonds with others, but these cannot be bonds of romantic love: in that, he is still an isolated individualist. Even as it upholds a mythology of love, *Casablanca* announces the more-than-partial irrelevance of romance to the new present and future needs of a world that is growing up. Seemingly the prime example of classical Hollywood cinema, *Casablanca* also appears to announce a transition from the purity and perfection of that cinema into one that is much more modern, tough-minded, questioning, and suspicious of the resonant romantic myths of an earlier time.

Credits

United States, 1942, Warner Bros.

Director: Michael Curtiz
Producer: Hal B. Wallis
Screenplay: Julius J. Epstein, Philip C. Epstein, and Howard Koch
Cinematography: Arthur Edeson
Editing: Owen Marks
Music: Max Steiner
Art Direction: Carl Jules Weyl
Costume Design: Orry-Kelly

CAST:

Rick Blaine	Humphrey Bogart
Ilsa Lund Laszlo	Ingrid Bergman
Victor Laszlo	Paul Henreid
Captain Louis Renault	Claude Rains
Guillermo Ugarte	Peter Lorre
Signor Ferrari	Sydney Greenstreet
Major Heinrich Strasser	Conrad Veidt
Carl	S. Z. Sakall

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