

How does *Casablanca* reflect the film industry of the time in which it was made?

Casablanca (Michael Curtiz, 1942) was a product of Warner Bros. "car assembly line" production process, the fairly limiting 'Hays code' and the classical Hollywood style that we all know and love today. In 1942 the film industry was a well-oiled machine; with the oligopoly of 'The Big Five' churning out 40-60 films per year. *Casablanca* perfectly reflects the amalgamation of these key features of the film industry at the time.

Until 1948, the film industry consisted of 8 studios: The Big Five (Warner Bros, Paramount, MGM, RKO, Fox) and The Little Three (Universal, Columbia, United Artists). The Big Five supplied all Class A films and each had their own 'stable' of contracted directors, writers, producers, actors and technicians. With the same creatives behind the scenes, films produced by The Big Five were extremely formulaic - the movie moguls and studio executives knew what audiences liked and kept repeating it for a successful profit. One major part of this routine manufacturing was the sets; using backlots for exterior shots and sound stages for interior shots. A good example of this in *Casablanca* is the opening sequence. During the sequence we see the streets of Casablanca filled with a crowd of multiple ethnicities and cultures connoted by the costume, all shot in a studio backlot. To actually shoot in Morocco in 1942 would be highly impractical and illogical due to the ongoing war at the time, as well as this shooting in a backlot would have been cost and time effective - something which is paramount in the highly demanding production process. There is also pre-filmed, documentary footage which establishes the political climate in Casablanca at the time, this also feeds into the idea of efficient filming and reusing archive footage for practicality. During the opening sequence, we are introduced to Rick's Bar. This was a new set built on stage 8 at the Warner Bros. Studios: the main room, the gambling room and Rick's quarters - while the other locations in the film were created from existing sets including the streets of Casablanca. Another example of reutilizing features from other films is during the flashback scene when Rick gets on the train - this is reminiscent from a scene in *Now, Voyager* (Irving Rapper, 1942) where Paul Henreid stands in the doorway of the same train set in a long trench coat and a hat - identical to Bogart. Within this opening sequence we hear a tense underscore; Max Steiner was a contracted musician for Warner Bros. who wrote the music for *Casablanca*. As well as Steiner, Hal B. Wallis (Production head of Warner Bros.) chose Michael Curtiz to direct, Julius J. Epstein, Philip G. Epstein, Howard Koch and Casey Robinson all to write and Humphrey Bogart to star as Rick - all of whom were contracted to the production company. Ingrid Bergman was cast as Ilsa Lund due to the decision that the female lead should be European, however Bergman was already contracted to MGM so to have her on the film she was traded with actress Olivia De Havilland for 8 weeks. This further proves how *Casablanca* is a good reflection of the film industry in 1942 due to its efficient filming in reused sets and Warner Bros. use of recycling creative talents.

The 'Classic Hollywood' style (mid 1920's - late 1960's) consisted of simple lighting techniques and continuity editing - the 'Letters of Transit' scene featuring Ugarte and Rick effectively uses these attributes. For example, when Rick and Ugarte are sitting down, 3 point lighting is being used. This is where you have a key light, a back light and a fill light all directed at the actor, this traditional method is used to create a natural look to the shot.

Other scenes when it is slightly later at night, for example when Rick is talking to Sam about Ilsa, low-key lighting has been used. This is to create contrasting shadows across the actors face, in this scene: to highlight the conflict Rick is facing (also connoting America's decision to join the allied efforts). The 'Letters of Transit' scene uses a shot-reverse-shot when Rick and Ugarte are speaking. This type of framing, where the eyeline matches, makes the audience feel as though the scene is happening in real time due to the continuous action - it is often used in dialogue scenes to show the characters speaking and also their reactions. Feeding into the idea of continuous action, *Casablanca* also uses invisible string editing. This is an editing technique where shots are arranged in a certain way to suggest a progression of events. During this scene, we are introduced to Rick as he is signing a check, he then deals with an unwanted customer and then sends them to the bar, Ugarte enters the scene and Rick and him take a seat to have a discussion, when the conversation ends, Rick then gets up and leaves. Both the sound and certain visual elements of each shot are carried over into the next to create a feeling of one, uninterrupted take. Part of the iconography of the film industry in 1942, were the actors. After starring in films such as *High Sierra* (Raoul Walsh, 1941), *Sirocco* (Curtis Bernhardt, 1941) and *The Maltese Falcon* (John Huston, 1941) Humphrey Bogart was a household name, he also became the highest paid actor after securing a new deal with Warner Bros. once *Casablanca* was released. Other names like Ingrid Bergman, Paul Henreid and Claude Rains show that *Casablanca's* all star cast is a reflection of the 'Hollywood Studio Era' at the time. In summary, the 'Letters of Transit' scene provides a clear example of the filming and editing techniques used at the time as well as the overall look and feel of 'Classic Hollywood' in the early 1940's.

The Production Code Administration (PCA) was a set of guidelines which determined the content in the American film industry from 1934 to the late 60's - AKA 'the Hays code' named after Will Hays, president of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America at the time. While not mandatory, *The Big 5* and *The Little 3* used these guidelines to appeal to the widest audience and minimize outside censorship. The basic principle of the codes was that the audience should never be swayed on the side of sinful behavior. For instance, some of the headings in the guidelines were: crimes against the law, sex, profanity, religion, national feelings and extremely graphic violence. In *Casablanca*, the closing sequence of the film might have had its content restricted due to the PCA. One example of this would be when Rick shoots Major Strasser, there is no blood or gruesome features to this as we just see him fall to the floor - one of the PCA codes limiting this scene would have been under the heading of extremely graphic violence. In the final scenes, Rick sends Ilsa off with Laszlo and she ends up with him. This decision for Ilsa not to end up with Rick may have been made on the basis that adultery is sinful and therefore wouldn't have been within the limitations of 'the Hays code'. Allegedly, during the shoot Bergman only knew up until filming the infamous scene that she would end up with Laszlo; Curtiz told her to "play it inbetween" for the scenes prior. This could show how it was a last minute decision which may have been based on the PCA. *Casablanca* is a good reflection of how 'the Hays code' limited what you would see in films.

To conclude, in 1942 the film industry was highly prosperous and thriving in a time of war. Films being produced by *The Big 5* were often similar in narrative and aesthetics, due to

their contracting of specific writers and directors as well as the intense level of demand for films at the time. Films like *Casablanca* are a product of this Hollywood studio system: we see reused sets, traditional lighting and editing techniques, famous Hollywood stars and a fairly tame representation of violence. Therefore, *Casablanca* perfectly reflects the film industry in 1942.