



Casablanca

It's still the same old story. [Over] 75 years after it was released, *Casablanca* remains one of the world's best-loved films. Not just the best-loved, but best-remembered. Many cinephiles can quote large chunks of the dialogue by heart, and *Casablanca* has the most entries of any film in the American Film Institute's 100 Greatest Movie Quotes of All Time list.

Even people who have never seen Michael Curtiz's romantic wartime allegory can conjure up a few lines about beautiful friendships, gin joints and hills of beans... maybe not today, maybe not tomorrow, but soon.

Why is *Casablanca* such a quotable film? Well, it doesn't hurt that the characters themselves use quotation and memory to negotiate their heartbreak. *Casablanca* is about a love affair in the past tense.

During the course of the film, Humphrey Bogart's Rick says 'Here's looking at you, kid' to Ingrid Bergman's Ilsa four times, and what was once a jovial toast becomes a poignant farewell. When Rick and Ilsa agree that they'll 'always have Paris' they're saying that the memory of a happy romance will sustain them through the pain of separation.

Most famously of all, the separate lovers test their own fortitude by forcing themselves to listen to the song, and the lyrics, that scored their prior happiness. That's 'As Time Goes By', a song that insists on the enduring power of love, and its attendant woes: jealousy, hate and tragedy. 'A fight for love and glory/A case of do or die.'

Rick and Ilsa were listening to 'As Time Goes By' in Paris during the summer of 1940, 18 months before we meet them. The song itself was already nearly ten years old by then. It was written for a Broadway musical called *Everybody's Welcome* in 1931. Sam (played by Dooley Wilson, a bandleader in the 1920s) plays a collection of old songs in Rick's bar, including 1924's 'It Had to Be You'. M.K. Jerome and Jack Scholl's sassy 'Knock on Wood' is the film's only original tune.

Rick and Ilsa may reignite their romance in *Casablanca*, but, as in Victor and Ilsa's first marriage, they keep their feelings hidden. Too much passion would be dangerous in the world of *Casablanca*, whose world of cool glamour is defined by understatement and other rhetorical games. Here, the Second World War is played out among polite people in a cocktail bar, where Rick's avowed neutrality sets the tone. Rick and Ilsa remain calm under the threat of bombardment in Paris while finishing their champagne.

Although he declares himself impartial, Louis Renault (Claude Rains) asserts his authority and keeps the horrors of the hour away with his sardonic wit,

offending the Germans by emphasising 'Third Reich' in a way that suggests there will be another.

Likewise, Victor (Paul Henreid), Ilsa's resistance leader husband, ironically describes German citizenship as a 'privilege' but says his time in a Nazi concentration camp was 'honour enough'. No word is wasted in this trim script, which weaponises language. The characters' combination of deadpan comedy and modesty represents their bravery too – it's an aspirational mode of dialogue, in which cleverness, and perhaps a little cynicism, trumps fear and untrammelled emotion. When we borrow *Casablanca's* dialogue, we borrow a little of their grace under fire, and suggest we too could be noble enough to sacrifice our own interests for the greater good.

Quotations from *Casablanca* appear everywhere from TV adverts to other films, right up to recent releases *Allied* (2016) and *Atomic Blonde* (2017). The film has been parodied by everyone from the Marx Brothers to Bugs Bunny. Paul Anton Smith's compilation film *Have You Seen My Movie?* (2016) splices together several scenes from other films in which characters watch the final scene. Karina Longworth's unmissable Hollywood history podcast takes its title, *You Must Remember This*, from a line in 'As Time Goes By', and each episode is introduced by the haunting sound of Bergman humming the melody.

Woody Allen sampled the entire movie in a 1969 play, filmed by Herbert Ross in 1972, although the title – *Play It Again, Sam* – is famously a mangled misquotation of what Rick actually says to his pianist. Bryan Singer's 1995 thriller *The Usual Suspects* took its title from one of Renault's lines. Emma Stone's Mia in *La La Land* (2016) is obsessed with the film, sleeping underneath a giant poster of Bergman and working opposite one of its key shooting locations – which suggests a grim prognosis for her fling with Ryan Gosling's Sebastian.

Bergman said of the film that 'it has a life of its own. There is something mystical about it. It seems to have filled a need, a need that was there before the film, a need that the film filled.' The film's popularity has only grown, and it seems we still need the spirit of *Casablanca*. In November 2016, after the terrorist attacks in Paris, thousands shared a clip from *Casablanca* online. It was the scene in which the patrons of Rick's café begin singing the Marseillaise in unison to drown out the Nazis. In a time of trouble, with hate on the rise in Europe, many people found that the defiance of these glamorous refugees in a septuagenarian movie said everything that they needed to say.

Pamela Hutchinson, bfi.org.uk, 30 November 2017

How many different drinks does Laszlo (Paul Henreid) order in *Casablanca*? Even the 90 per cent of the population who must feel they know the film's dialogue by heart might be foxed by that one. The answer, it appears, is four: Cointreau, a cocktail, cognac and whisky. The information comes from an

essay on *Casablanca* and the cult film by Umberto Eco. The explanation, Eco suggests, is not that Laszlo was an eclectic drinker, or that scriptwriters can be forgivably lackadaisical on such fine points, but that Michael Curtiz 'was simply quoting, unconsciously, similar situations in other movies and trying to provide a reasonably complete repetition of them.'

I don't think I believe this. But Eco on *Casablanca* is worth seeking out (the essay is in a collection called *Travels in Hyperreality*, Secker and Warburg, 1986). His view of cult films is that they should not 'reveal a coherent philosophy of composition' but actually benefit from something rickety in the construction – as in *Casablanca*, where no one knew how the story was going to end. 'One must be able to break, dislocate, unhinge it, so that one can remember only parts of it, irrespective of their original relationship with the whole.' The *Casablanca* authors 'mixed a little of everything, and everything they chose came from a repertoire that had stood the test of time ... To make a good story, a single archetype is usually enough. But *Casablanca* is not satisfied with that. It uses them all.'

All the archetypes, says Eco, can be found in the film's first 20 minutes, and he reels off a splendid list, from *Casablanca* as the Magic Door to the Promised Land, of course requiring the Magic Key (the transit letters) to 'The Faithful Servant and the Beloved Master, Don Quixote and Sancho' and 'Play it (again Sam). Anticipated quotation of Woody Allen.' 'Two clichés make us laugh but a hundred move us, because we sense dimly that the clichés are talking among themselves, celebrating a reunion.'

The essence is that *Casablanca* became a cult film because it never set out to be one. Quotations self-consciously used in modern movies 'born in order to become cult objects' are quite another matter. 'Spielberg and Lucas are semiotically nourished authors working for a culture of instinctive semioticians.' Eco ends his urbane essay: 'It will be a sad day when a too smart audience will read *Casablanca* as conceived by Michael Curtiz after having read Calvino and Barthes. But that day will come. Perhaps we have been able to discover here, for the last time, the Truth...'

'Kockenlocker', *Sight & Sound*, Winter 1986-87

CASABLANCA

Directed by: Michael Curtiz

©/Production Company/Presented by: Warner Bros.

Executive Producer: Jack L. Warner

A Hal B. Wallis production

Dialogue Director: Hugh MacMullan

Screen Play by: Julius J. Epstein, Philip G. Epstein, Howard Koch

From a play by: Murray Burnett, Joan Alison

Director of Photography: Arthur Edeson

Special Effects by (Director): Lawrence Butler

Special Effects by: Willard Van Enger

Editor: Owen Marks

Montages by: Don Siegel, James Leicester

Art Director: Carl Jules Weyl

Set Decorations by: George James Hopkins

Gowns by: Orry-Kelly

Make-up Artist: Perc Westmore

Music by: Max Steiner

Songs by: M.K. Jerome, Jack Scholl

Musical Director: Leo F. Forbstein

Orchestral Arrangements: Hugo Friedhofer

Sound by: Francis J. Scheid

Sound System: RCA

Technical Adviser: Robert Aisner

uncredited

Unit Manager: Al Alleborn

Assistant Director: Lee Katz

Screenplay Supervisor: Jerry Wald

Sam's Piano Playing Dubbed by: Elliott Carpenter

Narrator: Lou Marcelle

Cast

Humphrey Bogart (*Richard 'Rick' Blaine*)

Ingrid Bergman (*Ilsa Lund Laszlo*)

Paul Henreid (*Victor Laszlo*)

Claude Rains (*Captain Louis Renault*)

Conrad Veidt (*Major Heinrich Strasser*)

Sydney Greenstreet (*Señor Ferrari*)

Peter Lorre (*Ugarte*)

S.K. Sakall (*Carl, the head waiter*)

Madeleine LeBeau (*Yvonne*)

Dooley Wilson (*Sam*)

Joy Page (*Annina Brandel*)

John Qualen (*Berger*)

Leonid Kinsky (*Sascha, the bartender*)

Curt Bois (*pickpocket*)

uncredited

Helmut Dantine (*Jan Brandel*)

Marcel Dalio (*Emile, the croupier*)

Charles La Torre (*First Officer Tonnelli*)

Corinna Mura (*Andreya, singer*)

Ludwig Stössel (*Mr Leuchtag*)

Ilka Gruning (*Mrs Leuchtag*)

Frank Puglia (*Arab vendor*)

Dan Seymour (*Abdul, Rick's doorman*)

Oliver Blake (*Blue Parrot bartender*)

Gregory Gaye (*German banker*)

George Meeker (*friend*)

William Edmunds (*contact*)

Torben Meyer (*banker*)

Gino Corrado (*waiter*)

George Dee (*Casselle*)

Norma Varden (*Englishwoman*)

Leo Mostovoy (*Fydor*)

Richard Ryen (*Heinz*)

Martin Garralaga (*head waiter*)

Olaf Hytten (*prosperous man*)

Monte Blue (*American*)

Michael Mark (*vendor*)

Leon Belasco (*dealer*)

Paul Porcasi (*native*)

Hans Heinz von Twardowski (*German officer*)

Alberto Morin (*French officer*)

Creighton Hale (*customer*)

Henry Rowland (*German officer*)

Jean Del Val (*police officer*)

Franco Corsaro (*French police officer*)

Jamie Hasson (*muezzin*)

Lal Chand Mehra (*policeman 1*)

Manuel Lopez (*policeman 2*)

Wolfgang Zilzer (*civilian*)

Winifred Harris (*Englishwoman*)

Arthur DuLac (*news vendor*)

Gerald Oliver Smith, Herbert Evans (*Englishmen*)

Joe de Villard (*Moroccan*)

Adrienne D'Ambricourt (*concierge*)

Louis Arco, Lester Sharpe (*refugees*)

Jacques Lory (*moor*)

Arthur Hull (*elderly admirer*)

Anita Camargo (*woman companion*)

George Renavent, Louis Mercier (*conspirators*)

Geoffrey Steele (*customer*)

Maurice Brierre (*baccarat dealer*)

Frank Arnold (*overseer*)

Dina Smirnova (*woman customer*)

Dick Botiller, George Sorel (*native officers*)

Gregory Golubeff (*cashier*)

George Carleton (*American*)

Jacques Vanaire (*Frenchman*)

Paul Irving (*prosperous tourist*)

Jean De Briac (*orderly*)

Nino Pellini (*gendarme*)

Paul Panzer (*waiter*)

Barry Norton, Elinor Vandivere (*gamblers*)

Don Keefer

Dewey Robinson

Lotte Palfi

Trude Berliner

Melie Chang

USA 1942©

102 mins

SIGHT AND SOUND

Never miss an issue with **Sight and Sound**, the BFI's internationally renowned film magazine. Subscribe from just £25*

* Price based on a 6-month print subscription (UK only).

More info: sightandsoundsubs.bfi.org.uk

SIGHT AND SOUND

Join the **BFI mailing list** for regular programme updates. Not yet registered? Create a new account at www.bfi.org.uk/signup

BECOME A BFI MEMBER

Enjoy a great package of film benefits including priority booking at BFI Southbank and BFI Festivals. Join today at bfi.org.uk/join

BFI PLAYER

We are always open online on BFI Player where you can watch the best new, cult & classic cinema on demand. Showcasing hand-picked landmark British and independent titles, films are available to watch in three distinct ways: Subscription, Rentals & Free to view.

See something different today on player.bfi.org.uk

Programme notes and credits compiled by the BFI Documentation Unit

Notes may be edited or abridged. Questions/comments? Email prognotes@bfi.org.uk

The British Film Institute is a charity registered in England and Wales No. 287780