

The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly: *Everybody Comes to Rick's* vs. *Casablanca*

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The play *Everybody Comes to Rick's*, written by Murray Burnett and Joan Alison, and the film *Casablanca*, by director Michael Curtiz, both combine war and romance genres to depict human nature in a time of crisis. Although the two genres are evident in both works, there are a series of remarkable differences that distinguish Burnett and Alison's play and Curtiz's film. These differences are perceptible in the portrayal of some characters, as well the handling of some story plots. This paper will analyze three specific differences between Burnett and Alison's play and Curtiz's film: the character of Captain Luis Rinaldo (called Louis Renault in the film) and his portrayal as a more serious character in the play as opposed to a playful character in the film; the treatment of the war context in both works and the differences in how the war is used as a backdrop for both stories; and the ways in which the two different endings signify the meaning of both play and film.

Rinaldo/Renault

Both *Everybody Comes to Rick's* and *Casablanca* sketch the majority of the characters as either good or evil, with the exception of the character of Captain Luis Rinaldo (named Captain Louis Renault in the film adaptation). In both works, the character of Rinaldo/Renault is drawn as a hedonist. He is a man who seems to care about nothing and no one except himself. He takes advantage of pretty women taking refuge in Casablanca, who seek an exit visa to somewhere safe, like the United States of America. These actions might put Rinaldo/Renault clearly on the side of evil, but he is also a man who looks the other way while refugees and locals do illegal business to survive the difficulties of war. His willingness to bypass the law in order to protect people shows that he is also a character on the side of good. Although there are clear similarities between Rinaldo and Renault, the character's development arc does differ between the two. In the play, Rinaldo is an immoral and cynical womanizer, but in the film, he becomes the teasing and sophisticated Renault who eventually does the right thing, joining Rick to fight the Nazis.

The womanizing aspects of Rinaldo are evident in his dialogue from *Everybody Comes to Rick's*, such as when he tells Rick that he is in love. When Rick asks "still or again," Rinaldo says, "again, and I hope it will be again and

again and again” (1.8). As Rinaldo implies in his answer to Rick’s question, this is not the first time he has believed that he is in love. For him, love is more of one-night stand than a commitment, as Rinaldo further explains that he just saw this “love” for the first time that afternoon (1.8). Rinaldo’s lust and immorality in the play are even more noticeable in the scene where he pressures Annina to bend to his desires in front of her husband. Rinaldo wants Jan, Annina’s husband, to know that she will have sex with Rinaldo in exchange for exit visas.

JAN: Annina, I think we should go.

RINALDO: Why? It is early. You cannot leave now.

ANNINA: Please, Jan, I am having such a good time.

JAN: If we stay, you must promise not to drink anymore.

RINALDO: (slipping an arm around her) You may stay with me and drink all you want.

JAN: (rising) Annina, we are leaving.

RINALDO: Perhaps you are leaving, but when I am the host, I do not like my guests to leave so early.

ANNINA: Please, Captain, we ...

RINALDO: (pulling her down again) Come sit down. We have made a bargain.

JAN: Captain, will you let my wife go!

RINALDO: You fool! If you want an exit visa, do not interfere. (2.2.37)

The dialogue shows that Rinaldo has given up caring about right and wrong. He takes advantage of the couple’s desperation to satisfy his lust, forcing Annina to betray her husband for a promise of safe escape from Casablanca.

Burnett and Alison also create a more bitter relationship between Rinaldo and Rick in *Everybody Comes to Rick’s*, as opposed to the less dramatic and more humorous Renault-Rick relationship established by Curtiz in *Casablanca*, as these lines from the play reveal:

RICK: Come, come, Luis. Why so formal?

RINALDO: Because, for the first time in three years, I am here as Prefect of Police, and not as a friend.

RICK: Not for the first time, Luis. Remember? You closed us up last night.

RINALDO: Until we have settled this, I am Captain Rinaldo.

RICK: Fine. Then it won’t be necessary for me to offer you a drink. With the place closed, free drinks are quite an expense.

RINALDO: You can open immediately ... that is up to you.

RICK: I’m listening.

RINALDO: I want the Vierecks.

RICK: The Vierecks?

RINALDO: (impatiently) The young boy and girl who were here last night. The ones who were responsible for the closing. The people that

you have hidden successfully. (3.2)

Unlike the more threatening dialogue above, this conversation happens with a more lighthearted tone in the film:

RENAULT: As I suspected. You're a rank sentimentalist.

RICK: Yeah? Why?

RENAULT: Why do you interfere with my little romances?

RICK: Put it down as a gesture to love.

RENAULT: Well, I forgive you this time. But I'll be in tomorrow night with a breath-taking blond. (*Casablanca*)

Renault, instead of focusing on the Vierecks like he does in the play, makes jokes about his "little romances" and "breathtaking blonds."

Renault overall supplies more levity in Curtiz's film adaptation than Rinaldo does in the play. He may at times come off as despicable, but he's also one of the funniest characters in the film, providing relief in dramatic moments. The following dialogue between Rick and Renault, at the moment they are talking about whether Laszlo will leave Casablanca, captures one of these moments:

RENAULT: This is the end of the chase.

RICK: 20,000 francs says it isn't.

RENAULT: Is that a serious offer?

RICK: I just paid out 20,000, and I'd like to get it back.

RENAULT: Make it 10. I'm only a poor, corrupt official. (*Casablanca*)

The above dialogue is in contrast to the play, which only refers to a "wager" (1.11) between Rinaldo and Rick, and the amount they bet is only "five thousand francs" (1.11). The play does not include the additional remarks that Renault makes about himself as being a "poor and corrupt official" (*Casablanca*), which adds comic relief to the scene.

War-time Context

The war-time context in which both stories take place is crucial for both works, but there are important differences between how Burnett and Alison represent it in *Everybody Comes to Rick's* and how director Curtiz represents it in the film *Casablanca*, due in part to their two different media (stage and screen). The story, both in the play and the film, is set in 1941 during World War II. Jule Selbo claims that "the opening of the dramatic *Casablanca* is framed in the war genre—in the opening scenes ... and its conclusion" (18). From the beginning of the film, the war itself is an important element, both visually in terms of cinematography and stage design, and expressively in terms of the *mise-en-scène* throughout the entire film.

As mentioned earlier, the war dominates the overall climate of the film.

Selbo states, “the supporting genre (romance) ... is present ... when Ilsa (Ingrid Bergman), Rick’s former lover, enters Rick’s Café ... [but]... it is interesting to note how the main genre (war) dominates the narrative” (18). The film sets the historical stage by using a series of visual references to establish the time period. It starts with a revolving globe, which then stops revolving and shows Europe, only to turn into a flat contour map of Paris. Jeffrey Geiger and R.L. Rustky, in the book *Film Analysis: A Norton Reader*, argue that the film guides us into its fictional world with smooth transitions and matching actions between shots, creating a smooth narrative flow as it lays out the facts of World War II.

The film then shows superimposed scenes of maps; refugees fleeing from all sections of Europe by foot; and pushcarts, cars, and ships. They all converge upon one point at the tip of Africa: Casablanca. Arrows on the maps illustrate the routes taken as voice-over narration describes the migration. Authors Geiger and Rustky write:

The first moment 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 authoritative masculine voice-over. (364)

The film then depicts a scene of refugees in Casablanca surrounded by the military. A man trying to escape the authorities passes by a couple, the Brandels, who “play an important narrative function through the course of the films” (Geiger and Rustky, 365). As the camera pivots, it shows the sorts of shady figures that populate the town. Selbo describes Casablanca as a population of “anxious refugees angling for transit papers in outdoor cafés, military police shooting a criminal with false papers, to set the war genre scheme” (18). Other references are purely visual and strengthen the atmosphere of war, such as the constant revolving beam of light and the German Expressionist style.

Contrary to the strong war visuals in the film’s opening, and the first scenes that clearly illustrate the World War II backdrop of the film, Burnett and Alison’s play relies on characters’ dialogue, rather than visuals, to set the wartime scene. The first stage direction, in Act One, defines the place and the year of the story without mentioning the war specifically: “The bar of RICK’S CAFE. Casablanca, French Morocco, 1941” (5). Then, a character named Ugarte refers to the refugees in a conversation with Rick:

UGARTE: You know something about Europe, senior. You have seen these refugees. They may have everything ... money, permission to enter the United States or South America, and yet they can no leave. Why?

RICK: Do you have to go to all this?

UGARTE: I insist. They need exit visas from the country that they wish to leave, and they are very difficult to obtain.

RICK: And that’s where you come in.

UGARTE: Right, Senior. Just as the lowest animal have their reason for existing so have I. I supply these poor people the necessary exit visas.

RICK: For a price, Ugarte, for a price.

UGARTE: (nodding) And why not? People pay well to get out of Europe today. (1.3)

This dialogue is meaningful because it establishes a sense of urgency from the refugees to leave Europe, where Nazis are conquering and invading their homelands. Instead of explaining the whole war or the general history, like the film does, the play focuses on how the wartime situation affects individual characters. Another reference to World War II in the play occurs in one of the earlier conversations that Rick has with Rinaldo, when Rick explains to Rinaldo that Laszlo must have taken the refugee trail. Rinaldo replies that he doesn't care how Laszlo got to Casablanca; he only cares about the fact that Laszlo needs to stay. This again shows how the war affects the individual characters, rather than showing the war as a whole.

The blog *Rick on Theater* explains how the playwright Murray Burnett's experiences led to his exploration of the war:

Burnett was horrified by what he witnessed there, and he met "a new breed of people": refugees who were about to become "stateless people," unwelcome in their homelands and unable to escape Europe easily. While in Vienna, too, Burnett learned about the "refugee trail," a circuitous and perilous route from Nazi-controlled Europe across the Alps into France (not yet occupied by Germany in 1938) to Marseille and across the Mediterranean to Morocco then back to Lisbon, the capital of neutral Portugal and the center of espionage and intrigue in World War II Europe (2009).

Burnett and Alison include more allusions in the play that help create the war backdrop of the story, such as the entrance of Captain Heinrich: "The door opens. A YOUNG MAN in German uniform enters. Other Germans salute him in the room" (1.19). The German invasion of France is also mentioned during a conversation between Rinaldo, Rick and Strasser:

RINALDO: (quickly) Rick is unlike any American you have ever met, Captain. He is completely neutral.

STRASSER: So, I have heard. I understand you came from Paris in '37.

RICK: (with a slightly sour smile) That seems to be no secret.

STRASSER: (with a lightning glance at Rinaldo) I have always been happy in Paris. I had hoped to be stationed there.

RICK: A pity.

STRASSER: Ah. So, you are not one of these people who cannot imagine the Germans in their beloved Paris. (1.20)

This focuses again on how the individual characters feel about the war. At one point, the characters even discuss how little they know about who will win:

STRASSER: You are very clever. Who do you think will win the war?
RICK: I haven't the slightest idea. (1.21)

Despite the fact that the wartime framing is established early in the play, references to the war appear in other acts as well. In Act Two, Rick asks Lois about her preferences, prompting an intimate moment between lovers:

RICK: Good. What do you like? Cricket, baseball, the war?
LOIS: Oh, the war.
RICK: Disgusting, isn't it? (2.1.5-6)

As these passages all show, references to the war in the play *Everybody Comes to Rick's* focus on interrelations among characters. They do also include dramatic sequences like the singing duel between the German and French anthems; the resolution of the central romantic triangle; and even the signature song "As Time Goes By," which functions as trigger for Rick to reawaken his love and his political activism. Overall, in the play the war reveals character traits and character relationships, rather than using characters to tell the larger war history.

Plot Changes: Different Motives, Different Outcomes

Changes to the plot between the play and the film create critical differences between *Everybody Comes to Rick's* and *Casablanca*. One of the main differences between the play and the film is Captain Strasser's motive for capturing Laszlo. In the play, Strasser's reason is economic, while in the film, the Nazis' quest for Laszlo is politically motivated. In the play, the tension between Strasser and Laszlo is based on the seven million dollars that Laszlo has collected from criticizing the Nazis:

STRASSER: Laszlo, we are not unreasonable. You can stay here indefinitely ... or you can leave in the morning for Lisbon. On one condition.
VICTOR: And that is?
STRASSER: (leaning forward, speaking intently) When you left Prague, you had on deposit in various other countries a sum amounting to seven million dollars. You made this money by vilifying the German government and its people. Germany is entitled to it! (1.30-31)

In the film *Casablanca*, however, Strasser's motive to catch Laszlo changes. Instead of stemming from economic reasons, Laszlo's persecution is political. This more profound motive increases Laszlo's likability, causing the audience to identify more with his character. The following dialogue from the film emphasizes Strasser's intentions:

STRASSER: You know the leaders of the underground movement in Paris, in Prague, in Brussels, in Amsterdam, in Oslo, in Belgrade, in Athens.

LASZLO: Even in Berlin.

STRASSER: Yes, even in Berlin. If you will furnish me with their names and their exact whereabouts, you will have your visa in the morning.

RENAULT: And the honor of having served the Third Reich.

LASZLO: I was in a German concentration camp for a year. That's honor enough for a lifetime.

STRASSER: Will you give us the names?

LASZLO: If I didn't give them to you in a concentration camp where you had more "persuasive methods" at your disposal, I certainly won't give them to you now. (*Casablanca*)

According to Kriegl, this switch works in favor of the character's impact on the audience and the overall repercussions of the film. He writes:

In *Everybody Comes to Rick's*, the freedom fighter Victor Laszlo is sought after by the German Captain Strasser to obtain seven million dollars the fugitive has accumulated through an underground newspaper publishing "foulest lies" (1.23) about the Nazi regime. Once the money has been delivered, Laszlo would be allowed to leave Casablanca immediately, or so Captain Strasser wants him—and the audience—to believe. The quarrel, it seems, is all about money. In the film adaptation, Major Strasser ... demands from Victor the names of the underground leaders in every major city in the Third Reich as a prerogative for freedom of passage. (5)

Furthermore, although both the play and the film end with Laszlo getting the girl and Rick sacrificing his happiness in order to fight Nazism, the aftermath of Rick's actions in each work differs. In the play, Rick decides not to kill Strasser, instead surrendering himself to Rinaldo's authority. In the film, however, Rick kills Strasser and allows Ilsa and Laszlo to escape Casablanca. Josiah M. Hesse reasons:

Laszlo would get the girl (as in the play) and Rick would avoid jail for shooting the Nazi general, because Claude Rains would utter the memorable "round up the usual suspects" to his officers. The film closes with an intricate dance of the bad guy defeated, a happy couple flying into the moonlight, and two hardened cynics strolling into the fog and commenting on their future: "a beautiful friendship." (1)

In the play, Rinaldo resumes his "blowing with the wind" behavior, but in the film, he chooses a side and joins the resistance against the Nazis. According to Kriegl:

Captain Renault, who appears to be the epitome of neutrality and supine demeanor in both play and screenplay, abruptly performs a complete volte-face by covering up Rick's murder of Major Strasser and subsequently joining the fight against the Nazi regime. In the play, he very much remains the same. (5)

A thorough analysis of the differences and similarities between the play *Everybody Comes to Rick's* and its film adaptation, *Casablanca*, reveals that the film uses powerful visuals and a wider historical approach to World War II, in contrast to the play's reliance on dialogue to reveal how the war affects specific characters. Moreover, while Strasser pursues Laszlo's economic reasons in the play, his reasons are political in the film, emphasizing black and white morals rather than ambiguity. Indeed, the film also softens the womanizing, bitter, and morally questionable character of Rinaldo into the more positive and playful character of Renault, who only provides comic relief, but also makes the right moral decision to fight against Nazis at the end. The plot changes affecting Rick's fate are also important. In the play, Rick's actions likely condemn him to capture by the Nazis, but in the film, Rick and Renault commit to the right cause and fight together against the Nazi threat. Overall, the play creates a complicated world where characters are put in difficult situations and make questionable decisions, something that may have been more appealing to theater audiences. The film, on the other hand, sets up a world with more comic relief and a clearer sense of good and evil, which was probably more appealing to the audience of a Hollywood movie.

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