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## Casablanca's Real Enemies

Rick is far from the most detestable character in Casablanca. While he demonstrates some qualities and actions that could lead to the assumption that he is loathsome, he is not to be confused with his cowardly counterparts. His tireless charade at the beginning of Casablanca may give the wrong impression, as he appears cynical and aloof, detached not just from other people but from the traumatising events happening around him. This quickly changes as the film progresses and his strong moral compass shines through in his good deeds, proving he is a sentimentalist at heart. This is not the case for some of the other characters as their weak, unscrupulous ways become apparent, making Rick seem almost angelic in comparison.

Rick's actions toward the poor Bulgarian couple are telling. When he sees them desperate to escape the uncertainty permeating Casablanca, he is reluctant at first to assist them. His idealistic side soon wins out and he allows the husband to win roulette, saving him from the city's fearful grasp. A horrible person would surely not have rolled over as quickly and easily as Rick did and this act disproved his earlier statement that he "(stuck his) neck out for nobody". Also, in the flashback to Paris we see his gentle, loving side as he and Ilsa fall for each other in a flurry of romance. The man in Paris had kind, sparkling eyes and was relaxed and happy; the flashback shows he has the capacity to love and be loved. And of course at the conclusion of the film he commits a selfless and noble act, putting his feelings for Ilsa aside and helping Laszlo escape to continue his heroic fight for freedom.

Louis is perhaps the most complex character in Casablanca and constantly blurs the lines between good and evil. His expedient ways make it clear he is not a man of high moral standing; however, little clues in the film and his part in the final scene show there is more to Louis than meets the eye. His actions make it clear from the start that he is observant and inquisitive, as his eyes miss nothing and he leans in to hear Rick's opinions. The way he sits back in his chair almost casually and gives a limp salute to fellow Vichy France soldiers displays his flippancy and deceiving insouciance in the goings on. He happily follows the prevailing wind and arrests Ugarte on order, but clearly sees this as an opportunity to impress and raise his status amongst the officers. He shuts down Rick's Café under the pretence that gambling was no longer allowed but happily collected his winnings on the way out. So it can certainly be said Louis is self centred and indulgent in his every urge. On the flipside Rick clearly sees the good in this character from the beginning, and when he didn't join in to the German national anthem, a pivotal point in the film, it became clear that Louis was not fully committed to the Nazis. His closing act of assisting Rick in his plight to help Laszlo escape despite the ramifications on Louis himself is evidence that can be just as admirable as he can be corrupt. Overall his noble actions overcome his selfish misdemeanours.

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Ilsa may not be an obviously detestable character but perhaps her fence-sitting and frustrating complacency make her even more unlikeable than Louis and Rick combined. She may do the right thing in Paris when she leaves to reunite with Laszlo, who was clearly more in need of assistance than Rick, but in Casablanca she is nothing more than an inconvenience to all involved. “You must think for the both of us,” she cries to Rick as they ponder the fate of the two of them and Laszlo, displaying a lack of decisiveness and inability to form a coherent thought herself. She is prepared to leave her heroic husband alone and without support so she can satisfy her own selfish desires, but even this she refuses to decide for sure, allowing the men in her life to mould her in any way they want. To an extent she is also cold and detached throughout Casablanca with her aloof expressions and haughty posture, and she is clearly supercilious. Ilsa’s arrogance, helplessness and emotional instability make her a most unpleasant character.

While Louis and Ilsa are inferior to Rick, a clear antagonist in the film comes in the form of a pathetic, sweaty Italian shyster. Our instant impression of Ugarte is that he is shady and corrupt, his outfit a bit too groomed and his hair a bit too oily. He has distinct “parasitic” qualities as he rips off civilians for letters of transit, and he is responsible for the murder of “two German couriers”. These vile actions are not helped in any way by the way he simpers around, sniffing out the weak and disgusting Rick in every way possible. His smile dances smugly around the corners of his mouth, a metaphor for the way in which he questions Rick – navigating around his real question in a most deceitful manner. Ugarte is very easy to “despise” and is perhaps the only character in Casablanca without a single redeeming quality.

Ultimately, the fitful tension in Casablanca brought out the worst in all involved, and the fact that Rick maintained his good heart set him above the supporting cast. Whether they showed a weakness in character or were corrupted by the war, the “crazy world” around them broke them down into a despicable mess making Ilsa, Louis and Ugarte far more contemptible than Rick.

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