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Contact: Jessica Moody, VP Marketing
(800) 562-2139 x101
jmoody@greyhouse.com

Salem Press Announces the Newest Addition to the Award-Winning *Critical Insights* Series; *Critical Insights Film: Casablanca*

Edited by James Plath, an Professor of English at Illinois Wesleyan University, *Critical Insights: Casablanca* contains fourteen essays from pop culture scholars and film critics, along with introductory essays on the film, its director; and a resource section containing a general bibliography, director's chronology/filmography, cast list, awards and honors, and the volume's contributors. *Casablanca* has received both popular and critical acclaim over the years, and in that spirit *Critical Insights: Casablanca* is intended as both a companion for serious film fans and a resource for students and scholars. The essays add to the critical "conversation" from different angles; collectively explaining why *Casablanca* is so highly regarded-still, or despite its flaws-and why it will likely remain so. Certain themes resonate among the essays, as contributors consider whether *Casablanca* was, in fact, the "happiest of happy accidents" that critic Andrew Sarris posited and try to identify the reasons for its success. The issue of auteurism comes up a number of times, with varying opinions over the amount of credit due to director Michael Curtiz-though none of the contributors disputes the film's-or Curtiz's-greatness.

Beginning with **The Movie & the Director**, Editor James Plath begins by providing an introduction to *Casablanca* and follows with a biography, "Michael Curtiz: One of Hollywood's Most Versatile Directors" on the director and his work. The book then shifts to a series of four **Critical Contexts**, Brennan M. Thomas notes that *Casablanca* performed well at the box office partly because of fortuitous timing. Early reviewers remarked that Warner Bros. was either lucky or prescient, given that the film's premiere came less than three weeks after Casablanca, Morocco, was captured by Allied forces and the film's subsequent worldwide release coincided with the Churchill-Roosevelt meetings in Casablanca. In "We'll Always Have *Casablanca*: Popular Culture's Embrace," Kathy Merlock Jackson considers the far-reaching effects of a film that director Billy Wilder called "wonderful claptrap." Jackson notes, though it was the right movie at the right time, the film transcends its age because "no other film has captured the American psyche as eloquently as *Casablanca*"; because of "the Cult of Bogart," the iconic figure that "stands at the crux of the film's popularity"; and because it features one of the big screen's most romantic scenes and a host of characters that have also become "embedded in the popular culture." On the surface, Li Zeng writes in "Bogie Noir: *Casablanca* and *The Maltese Falcon*," *Casablanca* seems the opposite of film noir because of its patriotic and propagandistic messages and optimistic/upbeat ending. Zeng doesn't go so far as to call *Casablanca* a noir film, but she does, through a comparison of the two films, "illustrate the relationship of each film to noir and the significance of *Casablanca* in the canon of 'Bogie Noir.'"

The next major section, **Critical Readings**, comprises of eleven essays from a variety of different critics. Beginning with Erik Esckilsen's essay, "I Stick My Neck Out for Nobody: Rick Blaine's Antiheroism", he considers the deeply flawed nature of the cynical nightclub owner. In "Ilsa's Sacrifice: Gender, History, and *Casablanca's* Conversion Narrative," Linda Mokdad acknowledges Rick's importance but asks readers to consider how Ilsa Lund (Ingrid Bergman) is "also essential to understanding the film's connections between gender, history, and wartime ideology." Delia Malia Konzett considers Sam and issues of race in "Classical Hollywood, Race, and *Casablanca*," while also looking critically at the trajectory of Curtiz's career. In "Defining Classical Hollywood Narration in *Casablanca*," Eric S. Faden applies the film/media studies definition of "classical cinema" in order to talk more specifically about the three things that establish *Casablanca* as a prime example of classical Hollywood narration: studio practices, a recognizable formulaic narrative, and a distinct style. Kirk Honeycutt discusses the writing-by-committee approach that somehow worked in "Adlibbing Greatness: *Casablanca's* Screenplay" and the wartime mandate from the U.S. Office of War Information that helped shape the film-which obliged by "featuring an apathetic, cynical antihero rediscovering the Cause; satirizing the enemy as pompous, belligerent fools; and emphasizing a nightclub teeming with a veritable United Nations of anti-fascist refugees and resistance fighters." Other essay topics include:

- "Here's Looking at You...and You: The Actors' Contributions" by Christopher S. Long
- "This Crazy World: Cinematic Space and the Casualties of *Casablanca*" by Larrie Dundenhoeffer
- "Rick's Café International: *Casablanca* as a film of the World" by Björn Nordfjörd
- "The Undercut Auteur: Michael Curtiz and *Casablanca's* Iconic Imagery, Motifs, and Symbols" by Michael O'Conner
- "The Music of *Casablanca*" by James Plath
- "*Casablanca*: The Individual and the Collective" by Paul Morrison

Each essay in *Critical Insights: Casablanca* is 2,500 to 5,000 words in length, and all essays conclude with a list of Works Cited and detailed endnotes. Also included in this volume is a list of the **Cast** and **Awards & Honors**, a **Chronology of Director's Life**, a list of **Director's Filmography**, an annotated **Bibliography**, biographies of the **Editors** and **Contributors**, and an alphabetical **Index**.

The *Critical Insights* Series distills the best of both classic and current criticism of the world's most studied literature and films. Edited and written by some of academia's most distinguished film scholars and critics, *Critical Insights: Casablanca* provides authoritative, in-depth scholarship that students and researchers will rely on for years. This volume is destined to become a valuable purchase for all.

Free Online with Print Purchase.

In addition, *Critical Insights: Casablanca* comes with complimentary online access via <http://online.salempress.com>. A single purchase of the printed version is all it takes to gain access to this important title on the web.

Critical Insights: Casablanca

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