

# Self-interest and self-discovery in the characters of 'casablanca'

[Entertainment](#), [Movie](#)



Self interest is a prominent ideal in Casablanca, manifesting itself in characters such as Louis Renault, and his manipulative tendencies.

Conversely, kindness and altruism prevail in characters such as Rick Blaine and Victor Lazlo, most saliently through their respective relationships with Ilsa Lund, as well as their prioritisation of politics. All of these characters do indeed “ look out for themselves,” to an extent, but they ultimately choose the Allied cause as their primary focus at the conclusion of the film – all of them sacrificing love for duty – demonstrating that the characters in Casablanca all make the journey from self interested to selfless.

The bitter and jaded Rick Blaine typifies the masculine and cynical man of the time, with his indifferent veneer and drinking habit, yet, he is perhaps one of the most selfless and kind characters of the film. The audience is initially introduced to Rick as an elusive and enigmatic figure, always hearing about him, but never actually meeting him. In fact, in our first encounter with Rick, he attempts to demonstrate that he indeed “ sticks his neck out for nobody,” by turning his back on Ugarte, and then subsequently rudely rejecting his lover, Yvonne’s, earnest question; “ will I see you tonight?” to retreat back to his solitude. However, this cold-hearted version of Rick is merely a façade; one that cracks throughout the film with the introduction of the “ beautiful,” Ilsa Lund. Although he attempts time and time again to portray himself as cynical and ill-tempered (such as the scene where Ilsa attempts to explain why she abandoned him at the train station so long ago and his hurtful quips leave her in tears), Rick is truly “ a man who’s trying to convince himself of something he doesn’t believe in his heart.” Rather, Rick is a “ sentimentalist,” suffering from heart break, not cold-heartedness.

Towards the end of the film we see him “stick his neck out,” for countless characters; Annina, Jan and finally, Ilsa, making the ultimate sacrifice so that she can “keep [Lazlo] going,” and secure the future of the cause. This sacrifice shows the true nobility which inevitably defines him, that he’s willing to give up a familiar, albeit uncomfortable, life in Casablanca and a potential union with the love of his life solely so that the war effort will benefit. Another character whose politics precede his personal problems is Victor Lazlo.

Lazlo displays the qualities of a conventional hero: passionate, political and selfless – dedicating his whole existence to the Allied cause; demonstrating that he is one of the characters in Casablanca who “sticks his head out” for somebody, or rather, everybody. A useful example of the hardship Lazlo endures so that the world will benefit is his elusive, yet harrowing time spent in concentration camps; exemplified in the long and jagged scar that reaches across his face. Building on this, Victor’s honesty and suffering is illuminated through lighting director Eddison’s choice to shoot him in full light, accentuating all of his features – even his scar, illustrating his honesty and the fact that he is unable to hide himself and the values that define him. Lazlo is truly willing to put himself in danger so that others would benefit; another example being the scene with the singing of “La Marseillaise.” He impassions the people at the expense of exposing himself to the authorities, and as a result is told that he is no longer “safe to stay in Casablanca,” leaving him desperate and flailing for a way out. He compromised his own safety for his morals, and so that the people in the bar would feel a sense of

hope again after spending so much time wallowing in the bleak nature of war.

In stark contrast to these characters is the sardonic and witty Captain Louis Renault, whose womanising ways demonstrate his egotistical nature and apparent need to satisfy his qualms. Renault exploits young and vulnerable women; even bribing them to sleep with him, such as Annina, who contemplates compromising her morals for his own gain. He offers her letters of transit in exchange for sexual favours – knowing full well that this “terrible thing” would destroy Annina’s conscience, an act that shows his self interested nature as well as his poor morals. Moreover, Renault’s loyalty is sold to the highest bidder, he never advocates for the right thing, rather just the cause that benefits him the most. He sways with the wind, and the “prevailing wind [in the film] just so happens to be from Vichy.” As a result of his flimsy morals, he is hardly dedicated to his chosen cause – able to drop it at a moment once another one catches his eye.

Louis doesn’t “stick his neck out” for a cause, rather, rides on its coat tails until it has been exhausted of favours. However, at the end of the film, Renault’s morals are tested, and the more honourable ones prevail with him joining Rick’s fight with the resistance; the beginning of not only a “beautiful friendship,” but the beginning of Renault turning over a new leaf, so to speak.