

Eco: casablanca



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Eco: Casablanca The film Casablanca is introduced as an unremarkable film with average artistic quality but as having achieved a cult status. The requirements of a cult film are discussed including the idea that the film must be well loved and it must present a completely furnished world. This description of the cult is applied to books and other movies. It is indicated in order to achieve cult status, a movie must be fragmented so scenes and events can stand out in the mind as individual series of memories rather than a complete whole while still retaining some quality that indicates the author had little to do with the outcome.

To discuss the film in more detail, Eco introduces his idea of common and intertextual frames. Common frames refer to those events that occur within the film representing everyday living activities. Intertextual frames refer to stereotyped situations based on preceding textual traditions. He also introduces the idea of the intertextual archetype as being those intertextual frames that contain a certain ‘magic’ providing the viewer with an intense emotion and feeling of *déjà vu*.

With these definitions established, Eco proceeds to discuss the making of the film, mentioning how the way it was written even while it was being shot contributed a great deal of the mystery and mystique of the film. This causes both the actors in the film and the viewers of the film to automatically place their own expectations into the action, adding a sense of ownership and therefore utilizing as many of the intertextual archetypes it could find. It is precisely this wholesale use of the intertextual archetype that Eco claims is the reason behind Casablanca’s achievement of cult status. In analyzing several of these archetypes, Eco breaks down the first portion of the movie as a means of pulling out the major melodic themes (intertextual

archetypes) and then applies these to the rest of the movie. In doing so, he enumerates more than 24 different archetypes that are used. He then moves into discussion of the symphonic elaborations upon these themes, including the theme of purity and sacrifice, unhappy love, Platonic love, the Supreme Sacrifice and the Redeemed Bad Guy.

Because of its use of these elements, Eco claims Casablanca is not simply a movie, it is the 'movies' combined, making it work despite its unconnected nature and promoting it to cult status. Discussing the structure of the film, though, he indicates that Casablanca achieved a sense of archetypal clichés meeting and having a conversation among each other by accident, while films that followed have worked to recreate this structure in order to become cult films to lesser success. Films he mentions here include Bananas, Raiders of the Lost Ark and ET. These movies are shown to fail to achieve the same degree of cult status as Casablanca because of the degree of dependence on other information that they rely upon – quotes in Bananas, the unprotected hero in Raiders and the connection between directors and characters in ET.