



The ABCs of Classic Hollywood

Robert B. Ray

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Speaking about the kind of filmmaking now known as Classic Hollywood, the most popular and influential cinema ever invented, Vincente Minnelli once gave away its secret: "I feel that a picture that stays with you is made up of a hundred or more hidden things. They're things that the audience is not conscious of, but that accumulate."

What are those hidden things? Can we invent a method that will enable us to discover them?

Robert Ray attempts to answer those questions by looking closely at four movies from the 1930-1945 period when the American studio system reached the peak of its economic and cultural power: *Grand Hotel*, *The Philadelphia Story*, *The Maltese Falcon*, and *Meet Me in St. Louis*. To avoid the predictable generalizations that have plagued film studies, Ray works with the movies' details—*Grand Hotel*'s room assignments or *Meet Me in St. Louis*'s ketchup—which are treated as mysterious but promising clues. By producing at least one entry for every letter of the alphabet, Ray demonstrates that a movie's details have much to tell us. *The ABCs of Classic Hollywood* is a movie primer, a deceptively simple book that spells out a fascinating account of the most powerful storytelling system ever designed.

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