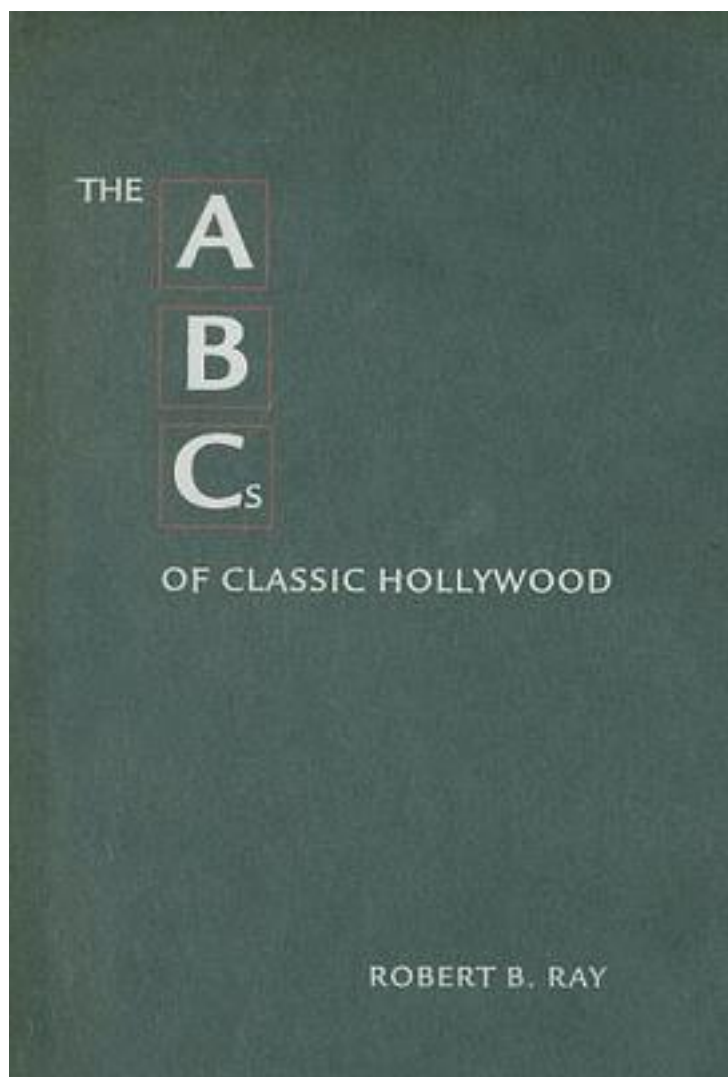


The ABCs of Classic Hollywood



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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." How would we go about finding those things? What method would enable us to retrieve them, and by doing so, to understand better how Hollywood films got made? The ABCs of Classic Hollywood 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, treated as initially mysterious, but promising, clues: e.g., Grand Hotel's coffin and room assignments; The Philadelphia Story's diving board and license plate PA55; The Maltese Falcon's clocks and missing bed; Meet Me in St. Louis's violinist and ribboned cat. By producing at least 26 entries for each of these films (one for every letter of the alphabet), Ray demonstrates that a movie's details contain the record of the work and ideas that produced them, the endless negotiation between commercial efficiency and seductive enchantment. In our unconscious memories, we recognize something in the movies, something tantalizing and just out of reach. This book unlocks those memories, making them conscious and explicit, so that they will help us understand the most powerful and important storytelling system ever designed.

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