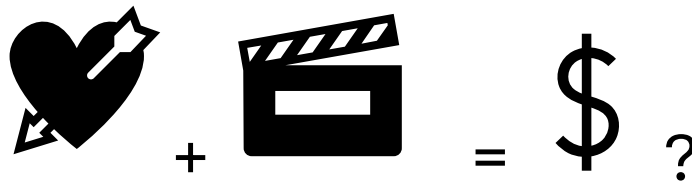


THE (BOX OFFICE) POWER OF LOVE



By Jason Fité

‘Hollywood Accounting’ is notorious for generally not being ruled by the known laws of mathematics, or possibly, even of physics. Film Budget and Box office figures seem to exist in their own peculiar quantum state of reality whereby a film can be both a ‘hit’. and yet, also lose impossibly huge amounts of money. Schrodinger’s Cat would have felt right at home in the film business.

I suspect that there exists some, as yet, undiscovered force in the universe which may ‘account’ for this. Something like dark matter or dark energy, but infinitely more mysterious and powerful. A mystical force which only the great sorcerers of film accountancy are able to yield, for with great power comes great amounts of money.

However, there is at least one natural science which has consistently proved itself to be financially reliable, predictable and extremely lucrative – biology. Yes, I’m referring to films about ‘love’ or more specifically, romantic dramas. From 1927’s ‘Sunrise’ to the slightly more recent ‘Before’ ‘Sunrise, Sunset and Midnight Trilogy,’ films about the nature

of love have proven to be one of the unheralded box office champions, as my brief delve into the strange world where love meets film finance illustrates...

Sunrise: A Song of Two Humans (1927)

I struggled to find any box office data for this particular romantic gem, which I'm guessing is because it was released in the days when the studios would simply go to the cinemas on Monday morning and collect the large bags of money. This was an early form of Hollywood Accounting, which basically involved not keeping any accounts and not telling anyone how much money your film made.

We can presume the film made some decent money and more importantly (yes, really!) won three Oscars and is now considered to be a cinematic masterpiece which regularly appears in 'greatest films of all time' polls. Despite being nearly a hundred years old, this is still one of the most powerful and poignant love stories ever told. It's as heartwarming as it is heartbreaking. If you have never seen it I would advise cancelling everything else in your life until you do.

Gone With the Wind (1939)

Arguably the most successful film of all time if adjusted for inflation, and if you consider the amount of people who have paid to see it since it was released (and re-released). Golden Age filmmaking at its finest and most romantically epic. It won a very impressive ten Oscars and shocked many people with the use of the word 'damn.' They were obviously more innocent times.

Budget: \$3.85M Box Office: \$390M (\$4.3B adjusted for inflation)

Casablanca: (1942)

Another perennial Hollywood classic. It's one of those extremely rare 'catching lightning in a bottle' films. It's hard to find anything about this film that is less than perfect – the cast (lead and supporting) are outstanding, the story and the script are sublime and the direction by Michael Curtiz highlighted his particular brand of cinematic dynamism and idealistic energy. He infamously considered people who ate lunch to be 'lunch bums' who would run out of energy in the afternoons. Curtiz deservedly won the Best Director Oscar and Casablanca won for Best Film and Best Screenplay.

Budget: \$1M Box Office: \$7M

Dr Zhivago (1965)

One of my personal cinematic favourites. I first watched this on TV when I was nine or ten and it had a mesmerising effect on me. David Lean's direction is peerless and the cast are nothing less than stellar. Julie Christie and Omar Shariff give devastatingly poignant

and almost transcendent performances at the doomed lovers. The supporting cast is also a veritable who's who of the greatest actors of their age – Alec Guinness, Tom Courtenay, Rod Steiger, Geraldine Chaplin and a brief, yet brilliant, performance by Klaus Kinski. The book is also an extraordinary work of (romantic?) literature. Adjusted for inflation, Doctor Zhivago is the ninth highest grossing film of all time.

Budget: \$11M Box Office: \$2.6B (adjusted for inflation)

The Graduate (1967)

Unbelievably, virtually every major studio passed on this film which was eventually made independently and went on to gross almost \$900M (adjusted for inflation) and would make an unlikely star of Dustin Hoffman and win an Oscar for film director, Mike Nicholls. Anne Bancroft would win a Golden Globe for her iconic and infinitely alluring portrayal of an older woman seducing a younger man. In reality, she was only six years older than Dustin Hoffman.

Budget: \$3.M Box Office: \$857M (adjusted for inflation)

Love Story (1970)

I have to confess I have never seen it , but I guess the clue is in the title! I do know that it was hugely popular and made several tonnes of money on a relatively small budget.

Budget: \$2.2M Box Office: \$772M (adjusted for inflation)

Titanic (1997)

Something of an obscure film this one. For those of you who have never heard of it (both of you) it was a romantic drama that made an iceberg sized stash of money. Admittedly, the budget for this film was itself a titanic \$200M. It quickly became the highest grossing film of all time and held the top spot until uber-director, James Cameron, possibly in a moment of glorious megalomania, decided he needed to have the two highest grossing films of all time. He went big and he still hasn't gone home.

Budget: \$200M Box Office: \$2.2BM

The Twilight Saga (2008-2012)

I think I may have seen one and a half of this five-film series, but whatever your opinion of them, you cannot deny their immense popularity and box office power. I am still waiting for my own novel about teenage vampires (*The Vampires of Suburbia*) to be adapted into a billion-dollar franchise, but I suspect I may have to wait just a little while longer. Fortunately, vampire fiction writers are as immortal as their subject matter. I hope.

Budget: \$401M Box Office: \$3.35B (5 films)

My interest in this subject is not entirely inspired by idle curiosity. I am currently producing a time-travel romance feature film entitled, '*An Adventure in Time*,' so, before I ask a potential investors to invest a large sum of their money in our film, I thought it prudent to discover whether the film will actually make any money. I really, really dislike losing money even if it is not my own.

And yes, despite the increasingly esoteric laws of Hollywood Accounting, it looks, like we will have a hit that doesn't actually lose money.

As I am sure you are aware this is not an exhaustive list of romantic dramas and I have cherry picked a handful of well-known and moneymaking films to show that romantic dramas have become an extremely underrated genre which is often unfairly dismissed by critics and those in film finance. The simple truth is that 'love sells' – it always has done and always will do and in terms of box office love does conquer all.

Some of the commercial and critical classics I could have included *include Pretty Woman, Ghost, When Harry Met Sally, Breakfast at Tiffany's, Vertigo, Roman Holiday, Bringing up Baby, Four Weddings and A Funeral, The Notebook, About Time, Notorious, Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind, Brokeback Mountain, The Bridges of Madison County, The Way We Were, Brief Encounter, Closer, Me Before You, The Fault In Our Stars, Call Me By Your Name, If Beale Street Could Talk and Blade Runner* (I consider it a sci-fir love story)

I haven't included the incredible non-US and British films – that's a list for another time...

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