Introduction: Depicting Love in Cinema

Love is a permeating force that, as sociologist Mike Featherstone observes, ‘can become a powerful ideology which dominates a society’. As such, it is no surprise that romance has been depicted widely across multiple texts from literature and music to art and theatre. Filmic production is no exception; Hollywood, a leading influence in the cinematic arena, has offered a love story in some form since its inception. Using an unbiased sample of 100 Hollywood films between 1915 and 1960, David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson found that love was an element of 85 per cent of the group of films, while 95 per cent had romance as a dominant part of their plot. Data such as this is not remarkable given that love and intimate partnerships are one of the primary mechanisms of socialisation.

Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson are not alone in recognising the dominance of a romantic component in cinematic texts. Kenneth MacKinnon additionally emphasises that ‘heterosexual romance [...] was an almost indispensable feature of every genre’ during the classical Hollywood era, while sociologists James J. Dowd and Nicole R. Pallotta found with their data that over four hundred films were made in the 1930s alone in which the love story was the sole plot. Yet, while love recurs in a variety of ways and to different extents in Hollywood, there appears to be two types of text that focus primarily on ‘romance’, or the intimate relations between two people: the romantic comedy, a genre in which scholarship has invested much energy; and a neglected genre that might be called romantic drama.
Of the two dominant love stories, the romantic comedy is the focus in existing scholarship. Various scholars have commented upon the proliferation of the romantic comedy genre in Hollywood from *It Happened One Night* (Frank Capra, 1934) to *The Five Year Engagement* (Nicholas Stoller, 2012). With its formulaic structure (aligned with the cliché ‘boy meets girl, boy loses girl, boy gets girl’), the romantic comedy stresses a long-term union for the couple at the end of most films of the genre and therefore supports the traits of the stable companionate ‘strain’ love. Even romantic comedy films where the couple does not remain together at the conclusion foreground companionate love in their portrayal of characters searching for a compatible life partner.

Beyond the romantic comedy, there is a group of films with love at their heart, but which do not follow the same model. These films have not been researched as an isolated group. They portray a couple who meet, fall passionately in love and then are usually torn apart, and always experience suffering. Some scholars, such as David R. Shumway have looked at isolated texts, and others have identified an alternate love story (without specifically centring on ‘passion’ as a key trope), but focus on one particular time period. These scholars include Jean-Loup Bourget (1940s), Laurent Jullier (classical Hollywood cinema) and Catherine L. Preston (1990s). The aim of this book is to investigate this, as yet, under-examined area of film scholarship. I contend that it is valid to identify these films, which focus on passionate love, as a group that stands in opposition to the established model of the romantic comedy. As a result, I argue that many passionate love stories can make up part of a genre called ‘romantic drama’. I see this genre as distinct, with its own set of expectations and boundaries, exemplified in a group of films like *Camille* (George Cukor, 1936), *Casablanca* (Michael Curtiz, 1942), *Doctor Zhivago* (David Lean, 1965), *Titanic* (James Cameron, 1997) and *The Notebook* (Nick Cassavetes, 2004).

In order to examine the romantic drama in popular cinema (as well as the romantic comedy through comparison), this book primarily emphasises a film studies perspective, drawing upon genre studies. Approaches from sociology additionally contribute to an appreciation of the way notions of love manifest themselves in popular films. There are many generalised social assumptions associated with the universal concept of ‘love’ that occur in art forms, including cinema,