

Top 5 Films to Watch this Valentine's Day

[Izzy Moore](#) offers viewing suggestions for Valentine's Day. Other holidays are also available

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There's a general consensus in the movie industry that the 'romantic-comedy' is dying. Look at box office figures or reviews by critics. Mass crowds of people aren't going to see these types of films anymore, and if they do they are often disappointed. Outcompeted by blockbusters, this middle-ground type of film movie is no longer a staple in our cinematic diet.

I'm not claiming that the genre is exhausted; in fact here's a list of the "best" films to watch on the second most overrated day of the year. To paraphrase the tagline of *500 Days of Summer*, these films aren't necessarily love stories, but stories about love. There's plenty of pizzazz to both tantalise and depress – depending on your preferred option – and you might end up deciding your love life isn't that dire after all, because at least you didn't do what these characters did. This list favours films that are a bit more "experimental", although still appealing to the mainstream, films that are at least thought provoking, while still revolving around the conundrums of love, life and relationships. I can't promise happy endings, but that's what makes it all the more interesting.

500 Days of Summer -



Image: Fox Searchlight Pictures.

One of the better performances of Joseph-Gordon Levitt and Zooey Deschanel's careers, and the best of Marc Webb's directorial career. Meet Tom and Summer, and watch their love story unfold over the period of 500 days. Of course things are never that simple, the story is revealed in a non-chronological order, so 'Day one' may be followed by 'Day three hundred.' This helps highlight the contrasting emotional highs and lows from their relationship, and disrupts the usual 'boy meets girl' narrative. Along with this, Summer doesn't exactly believe in love, while Tom is an avid romantic, essentially falling for Summer before he really knows her and on the basis that she's pretty and likes The Smiths. If anything *500 Days of Summer* is a cautionary tale against romanticising people and relationships, and the film makes it clear that being too fixed as either a 'romantic' or an 'anti-romantic' is destructive. There might be a few too many literary metaphors used by the characters - I'm looking at you Sid and Nancy - but this film deconstructs the grandiose love story that we've seen time and time again. It's a creative film which is mandatory watching if you fancy yourself as a romantic.

Moonrise Kingdom -



Image: Focus Features

Wes Anderson has broken into the mainstream with the success of *The Grand Budapest Hotel*, but it would be a crime to not verge slightly back and watch *Moonrise Kingdom*, based around the young love of Sam Shakusky (Jared Gilman) and Suzy Bishop (Kara Hayward) and their attempt to run away from home. I'll add that they live on a fairly small island. Anderson is a master at delivering stunning visuals and stories, so while this film is wonderful to watch on the basis of its cinematography and character design, the narrative is also enchanting. Anderson's films are essentially contemporary fairytales, with a good deal of the strange and the awkward thrown in for good measure. Another strength of the film is the fabulous ensemble cast including Edward Norton as a scout leader, Bruce Willis as a police captain who

wears great glasses, Bill Murray as Suzy's father and Tilda Swinton as "Social Services". So while *Moonrise Kingdom* is a love story between this young couple, the surrounding adults add extra humour and wit. In typical Wes Anderson style, this film is slightly odd but that's all part of its charm.

Gone with the Wind -



Image: MGM

Cinephiles unite! Oh, you haven't seen *Gone with the Wind*? Honestly I did only watch this film because of its reputation as "a classic", but I encourage everyone to take the leap. This isn't just a simplistic love story. It is complex, and not only in the story and its presentation of the American Civil War, but also as a piece of cinematic history. In short, this film was a bloody pain to make, but still to this day it is the highest grossing film of all time when adjusted for inflation.

Based off the Pulitzer prize winning novel, our female lead is Scarlett O'Hara, played by the wonderful

Vivien Leigh. She's a young woman hopelessly in love with a man already betrothed, she lives on a plantation, and it's the eve of the American Civil War. Rhett Butler (Clark Gable) is introduced after he overhears her declaration of love to Ashley Wilkes and her prompt rejection by him. This is a long film, so I'll just stick to the basic plot. Civil War hits, and we see the conflict from the side of the Confederacy, through to the ending of the war and its aftermath. Scarlett continues to be in love with Ashley, while continually bumping into Rhett, and that eventually develops into a somewhat romantic relationship. There is a lot of conflict, both physically and emotionally, and the fact that this film is essentially a historical epic should not be overlooked. Despite its length, it is widely interesting and subversive film. Our two main characters never have the traditional relationship, and circumstance seems to prevent their inevitable romance, although when this does happen it is not entirely a happy ending. What is most interesting about *Gone with the Wind*, is that our two main characters are not good people, and the film never retreats from highlighting this. The mistakes and selfish choices they make end up ruining lives, including their own.

Watching this film is a commitment, but it's worth it. Directed by Victor Fleming, who also directed *The Wizard of Oz*, starring actors from their prime and the golden age of Hollywood. In terms of racial cinematic history, it has the first Oscar winning performance by a Black American, Hattie McDaniel as Mammy. Yet the film seems to glorify the South, including the practice of slavery. It's not only a doomed love story between Scarlett and Rhett, it's a doomed love affair with Scarlett's home - the American South. Needless to say, it's classic for a reason.

Her -



Image: Warner Bros. Pictures

An amalgam of science-fiction and romance, *Her* is set in a near utopian type future. Joaquin Phoenix

stars as Theodore Twombly, whose job is to ghost write personal letters. The main drive of the plot is the developing relationship he has with an "OS" (operating system) called Samantha, played by Scarlett Johansson. Samantha possesses artificial intelligence and is able to learn, emotionally grow and have discussions with Theodore about life, love and much else. The narrative explores this relationship. Its limitations, for example the issue of intimacy, is directly explored in one scene between Theodore, Samantha and a surrogate partner - and its potential benefits. *Her* presents technology not under the usual parameters often relied upon in sci-fi, i.e. the evil machines trope, and it doesn't present this relationship as inherently inferior. It's a mature take on our potential future. It's a thought provoking piece which challenges the usual narrative assigned to "alternative relationships" and our use of technology. The realism of the film relies upon Johansson and she produces a charming and likeable character in Samantha. In fact there was serious discussion whether she qualified for an Oscar, a discussion which hopefully will continue as the boundaries of cinema are expanded. *Her* doesn't just examine love, it examines relationships and how we connect to other people. You'll end up not seeing the distinction between man and machine so clearly.

Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind -



Image: Focus Features

Another film with a more "experimental" presentation. Joel (Jim Carrey) finds out his ex-girlfriend Clementine (Kate Winslet) has had the memories of their relationship erased via a special procedure. He decides to have the same treatment performed. Naturally mid way through, and because the removal process involves revisiting these memories, he begins to doubt his decision. A surrealist journey through his memories then takes place, accompanied by Clementine. The film is stylistic and strange at times, but this can be expected when the screenplay is by Charlie Kaufman, who also wrote *Being John Malkovich*. It's an exploration into why relationships can disintegrate and second chances, all through a very human lens. Watch with an estranged partner for more authenticity.



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