

SUMMER WITH MONIKA 1953

Ingmar Bergman

OVERVIEW

Summer with Monika (1953) is an early film of Bergman, based on Per Anders Fogelstrom's novel of the same kind. This film, replete with splendid evocations of bare, austere Swedish seascapes, was a source of controversy, when first released, because of its hearty nude scenes, and its happy go lucky treatment of marriage, which had been the trademark of Bergman's film-master Sjostrom. Against this backdrop a lusty but unsure young man takes his hot and adventurous girlfriend, Monika, for a summer in Harry's dad's boat, an escape into the lakes of the Baltic peninsula, during which the two teen-agers can discover sex, violence, and the limits of their mutual relationship. They return to the city. They are given papers to marry, Monika gives birth to their child, and the couple 'settles down,' very briefly, to married life. Monika's betrayal of Harry with another man wipes out the marriage, and Harry is left to care for the baby, which he does.

STORY

From the get-go, Monika is adventurous, lusty, aggressive toward her boyfriend, with whom she bonds on several scores—they are both working class youngsters caught in despairing family situations, they both hate their jobs, and they are both up for rebellious discovery of what life is all about. When she is kicked out of her chaotic family home Monika turns to Harry, whose recourse—as he too is going crazy living with his neurotic dad—and goes down with him to where Harry's dad's motorboat is tied, to 'borrow the boat for the summer.' The bulk of the film concerns the unquiet summer idyll of the two youngsters on the lakes of the Stockholm Archipelago, an idyll during which Monika fully unfolds her sexuality, proves her toughness, and defines the limits of her commitment to Harry. It is in fact Harry who comes out of the whole experience with credentials for adulthood—he who gets a job, cares for the infant—while Monika in the end sleeps with an old boyfriend, lets herself get caught by Harry, and sails off into her own open horizon future while Harry remains an employed single dad.

Youthful Rebellion Monika first meets us as she takes a smoking break from work. She is in a local Stockholm pub, and cozies up to her boyfriend, Harry, who is griping about his work as a stock clerk in a porcelain factory. Monica is pissed off by her work life, which exposes her to a lot of unwanted male attention, and by her family life, with siblings falling over one another and brawling parents. Out of the blue Monika suggests to Harry that they should travel, wander together, discover the wide world together. She has little to keep her at home, where she is obsessed with babysitting chores, and is regularly pushed around. As she expostulates over coffee and a cigarette, in the small bistro where she is having a work break, Harry is listening, but cautiously. He is unhappy in his home, his mother having died when he was a child, his father having become ill and a hypochondriac, and his employers, at the delivery service office where he works, thoroughly sick of his unreliability—to the point where he has just been fired. Harry and Monika are ready to rebel, though Harry is more happy go lucky and patient than Monika. He rebels to explore, and relax; she rebels more globally, to escape her world and find a new o

Playing house on the water As they launch onto their summer, of fun, We see significant character differences between the two teen agers, and signs of the differing life directions they will take, as time goes by. Although she is not ready for the roles either of housewife or mother, as we will see at summer's end, Monika flirts with the anticipated pleasures of 'caring for her man.' One morning on the lake she rises early, in the motorboat beached along the shore, and prepares coffee and toast for her man. She spoils the still sleeping Harry by waking him with the unexpected smell of java, and both of them have a brief idyll of imagining what a normal family existence would feel like. Monika needs many more years under her belt, before she will be able to live a sustained reality of this sort, but in this moment on the shore she enjoys a brilliant fantasy. It will soon be shattered by the terrible fight between Harry and an old boyfriend

of Monika, as well as by Monika's near capture for stealing vegetables. Harry takes one thing at a time, enjoys what he can of his adventure, but has little chance to do more than cope from one incident to another.

Betrayal At the end of the idyll, Harry and Monika need to face the realities of life, and, with the intercession of Harry's aunt, they make their relationship legal, with a quick marriage, to legalize the status of their newborn baby. Here the personalities of the two protagonists diverge. Harry goes to night school, to build up his credentials for fatherhood, and takes an out of town job. Monika and Harry begin to live a young parent life together, but the tedium quickly tells on the fluttering Monika, who heads out to flirt, while Harry is away. When Harry returns a day early from out of town, he surprises Monika in bed with another man. Harry is shattered, as we read on his face; he and Monika fight, leaving him shattered and shamed, but he remains true to the infant, while Monika, not yet up to the challenges she has opened herself to, goes her way empty.

THEMES

Lust. Harry and Monika are in the full bloom of sexuality, when we first meet them, in the workingman's café in a poor quarter of Stockholm. As she lights her cigarette for her, we feel the electricity that passes through their lips and down into bodily desire. While these two are of low privilege, come from chaotic and unsupportive families and workplaces, they are at a burning point of evolutionary biology, and want one another.

Poverty. Both Harry and Monika come from a working-class neighborhood of Stockholm. Their families have jobs, their mouths are filled and they have beds to sleep on, but other than that life is stripped down to work, sex if you're lucky, and enough sleep to keep you going. The way the two youngsters kick up their heels, this particular summer, must be understood against the background of poverty.

Fidelity. Both of the major characters have a degree of fidelity. They agree to marry, they remain basically faithful to keeping their child alive. For Monika, though, that is about as far as it goes. She is already sleeping around again, at the film's end. Harry, however, goes farther. He keeps the infant with him; he commits himself, at least for the present, into making the summer with Monika more than just that.

Violence. There is an impending violence, in the great storm clouds which rumble over the Stockholm archipelago, and which repeat themselves in the human violence that beset Harry and Monika, on their summer adventure. An old boyfriend of Monika sets fire to the protagonists' motorboat, and a brutal fist fight ensues; Monika tears herself away from a bourgeois family who have caught her stealing, and barely escapes into the reeds by the shore.

CHARACTERS

Harry. Harry is a delivery boy for a porcelain sales outfit. He is sick of his job when he and Monika meet, fall for each other, and set out on a summer's adventure of love. The results make a man of him.

Monika is a teen ager sick of her chaotic and unloving home environment, ready to fall for any good-looking guy, and to take off for a summer of love. She gets pregnant by Harry, but ends up all alone in the end, sleeping around.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

HARRY

Character Harry is a hearty young delivery boy, living in a poor workingman's neighborhood of Stockholm. His mother is dead, and his father, a motor boat enthusiast, is unwell and a hypochondriac to boot. Furthermore, Harry's boss, at the delivery center, can find nothing but fault with the young man, and is in the process of firing him. Harry himself is happy go lucky, fed up with his job, and quite ready to

rebel; and when the chance comes to escape home with the adventurous Monika, he is all for it. The film traces Harry's summer with Monika, after they have stolen Harry's dad's boat, and hung out for the summer around the lakes and bays of the Stockholm archipelago. There is plenty of sex, for the two teenagers are all about desire at this point, dancing with country folk, some violence that really hurts, like Harry's fistfight with an old boyfriend of Monika, but in the end the pair returns to home, this time to marry and settle down with their new baby. In the very end, after some moments of terrible despair, Harry has the guts to take charge of the baby after having returned early from work one day, and found Monika sleeping with another guy.

Illustrative moments

Cheerful. While Harry is not deeply involved with his job, transporting crates of porcelain through busy city streets, he is good natured toward his bosses, friendly toward his morose dad, and patient with Monica and the baby at the end of the film, when pressure is on his young life and he is newly plunged in responsibility.

Adventurous. Harry is prepared to follow Monika's suggestion, that they rebel against their miserable lives, and escape for the summer. Harry is not reckless in his readiness to rebel, he still checks in at home and treats his dad with respect, but he is quite ready to steal the old man's motorboat and head for the lakes with the minimum in cash or supplies.

Lustful. Harry is at the full blossom of his sexuality, and can't keep his eyes off Monika, especially when she capers bare-assed across the rocks of the Stockholm Archipelago. From their first chat, in the workingman's café, he is sensitive to Monika's seductive-aggressive manner toward him, and infuses even his lighting of her cigarette with a lingering passion.

Brave. Harry is a real guerilla fighter when it comes to protecting Monika from other guys, or driving off Monika's former boyfriend, who is trying to burn up Harry's boat. Strong and agile, and ready to punch with all his power, Monika surrendered herself up to a passionate and capable guy.

Thoughtful. Harry's (and Monika's) baby squalls at night, in their Stockholm apartment. Harry is good natured about getting up at night with the infant, while Monika is predictably reluctant to do her part. We see here the Harry who will continue to care for the child even after Monika is gone.

MONIKA

Character Monika is a lusty rebellious late-teen, who, eager to hit the road and have some adventure, decides to get out of town with her boyfriend Harry. Worn out with her hostile, neighborhood impoverished family, she goes along with Harry as he steals a motorboat from his sickly dad, and drives them out into the bays and lagoons of the Stockholm archipelago. There Monika and Harry spend the summer, cruising around, getting into major fights with one another, playing at husband and wife from time to time, screwing abundantly, and on the whole feeling free, until Monika finds she is pregnant. With pregnancy comes some concern for the future, and as Monika returns to home, at summer's end, she gives in to marriage with Harry. After a brief spell at playing Mom she can't stand it any longer, shacks up with an old boyfriend, is caught in flagrante by Harry, and finds herself soon divorced—ready to start over, but with nowhere to go.

Illustrative moments

Aggressive. Monika is sexually on the make, from the time we meet her, leaving over toward Harry, to ask him for a light. Her body language is sexually alive, and the proposal she makes to Harry, about getting away from it all together, is erotically oriented.

Frustrated. In her own house, as we see, Monika is surrounded by the confusion of squalling children, and arguing adults. She lights a cigarette first thing, on waking, as she does throughout the day. Even in the courtyard of her flat she is beset by harassment and taunts.

Domestic. Monika enjoys the fantasy of being a married woman living in a domestic setting. While on their motorboat adventure, Monika delights in fixing a hot coffee for Harry, as he is lying asleep in the cabin of the boat. She thinks of herself as a housewife, settled in her dream routine.

Thief. Along the water route the couple takes, Monika boldly attempts to supplement the couple's food supply, by stopping off to steal vegetables from a waterside plot, cultivated by an upscale family. She is caught, detained, then with fresh boldness breaks away from the family that has caught her, and rushes through the reeds to Harry's boat.

Selfish. As the mom of a newborn, Monika would seem to be the one to get up with the baby at night, but in fact she can barely leave the bed, while Harry is the one to pacify the squalling child. Monika is a selfish partner.