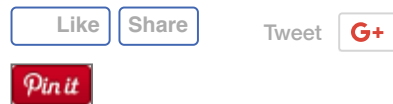




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## MY SUMMER OF LOVE

By [Erica Abeel \(Http://Www.Filmjournal.Com/Taxonomy/Term/93\)](http://www.filmjournal.com/Taxonomy/Term/93) May 11, 2005



### Reviews

Overshadowed by the hoopla surrounding *Sideways* in the 2004 Toronto Film Festival, *My Summer of Love* quickly achieved the status of cult favorite at that event. The film by Pawel Pawlikowski (*Last Resort*) became saddled with the tag "teen-lesbians flick," only because its particular magic beggars description. Though based on a novel by Helen Cross of the same name, the adaptation couldn't be more filmic, relying on close-ups, landscapes, editing, sound, and other non-print means to convey its story. The result is an enrapturing tale, shaded with Slavic mysticism, about the search for transcendence through obsessive love and religion, which may well leap the art-house divide.

During a hot summer in West Yorkshire, working-class Mona (Nathalie Press) gets dumped by her boorish older boyfriend and finds herself at loose ends. She meets up with exotic, pampered Tamsin (gorgeous Emily Blunt), who, in effect, has also been dumped for the season in the family manse. Through a parade of sensual, beautifully composed shots and fades, along with startling, unexpected dialogue, the film carries the two young women from opposite cultures through friendship, to deep affinity, to an intimacy without boundaries.

In an erotic pivotal scene, the pair dances to Edith Piaf's "La Foule," and it's clear Tamsin can lead Mona anywhere she chooses. "We must never be parted," Tamsin tells Mona-but is Tamsin something of a fantasist? Adding a dangerous volatility is Mona's older brother Phil (the superb Paddy Considine), who closes his pub so he can devote himself to Jesus, wants to erect a giant crucifix on a hill over the town, and is not immune to the seductive Tamsin.

According to the press notes, the Polish Pawlikowski, who lives in the U.K., purposely steered away from making a gritty social-realist film that explores class tensions or contemporary youth. Rather, the film feels spare and timeless-even the West Yorkshire locations, shot off-center, glow with

disorienting saturated color. For the filmmaker's subject is rapture, imagination and faith in a world that runs roughshod over such concerns.

What lends heft to these rather abstract notions is a use of arresting images, ranging from pastoral frolics conveying a hothouse intimacy, to stark angular images-as when Phil raises the cross on the hill-that call up Russian constructivist design, to giant close-ups of the hugely gifted actresses, both relative newcomers. The film feels as if it were shot chronologically. (It was.) Best of all, it breathes, capturing summer languor and haze, insects buzzing, cigarette smoke drifting above a patch of heather. A soundtrack drawing on Piaf, the band Goldfrapp and Saint-Saens is spot-on. Stylized, yet without a single false moment, *My Summer of Love* opens windows into the truest moments you're likely to see in summer's upcoming silly season.

-Erica Abeel

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