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Touch, The

U.S.A./Sweden, 1970

Director: Ingmar Bergman

Cert—X. dist—Cinerama. p.c—A.B.C. Pictures (New York)/Cinematograph A.B. (Stockholm). p. manager—Lars-Owe Carlberg. asst. d—Arne Carlsson. sc—Ingmar Bergman. ph—Sven Nykvist. col—Eastman Colour. ed—Siv Kanaly-Lundgren. a.d—P. A. Lundgren, Ann-Christin Lohrsten. m—Jan Johansson. titles—Gunnar Fischer. sd—Lennart Engholm, Harry Engholm, Bernth Frithiof. l.p—Elliott Gould (David Kovac), Bibi Andersson (Karin Vergerus), Max von Sydow (Dr. Andreas Vergerus), Sheila Reid (Sara Kovac), Barbro Hiort af Ornas (Karin's Mother), Staffan Hallerstram (Anders Vergerus), Maria Norgard (Agnes Vergerus), Ake Lindstrom (Doctor), Minni Wahlander (Nurse), Elsa Ebbesen (Matron), Anna von Rosen and Karin Nilsson (Neighbours), Erik Nyhlen (Archaeologist), Margareta Bystrom (Dr. Vergerus' Secretary), Alan Simon (Museum Curator), Per Sjöstrand (Another Curator), Aino Taube (Woman on Staircase), Ann-Christin Lohrsten (Museum Worker), Carol Zavis (BEA Air Hostess), Dennis Gotted (British Immigration Officer), Bengt Ottekil (London Page Boy). 10,176 ft. 113 mins. English version.

Swedish title—Beröringen

Happily married for fifteen years to surgeon Andreas Vergerus, Karin is content with her bourgeois life as wife and mother in a provincial Swedish town. But her domestic calm is shattered, first by the death of her mother, then by a meeting with David Kovac, a foreign archaeologist who declares that he has fallen in love with her at first sight. She nervously begins an affair with him, her first, and despite David's moods and violence—he is a rootless Jew, contemptuous of Karin's tidy existence—she becomes increasingly dependent on him. When he is away for six months, they exchange increasingly tender letters, and their affair resumes even more intensely on his return. Apprised of the liaison by an anonymous letter, Andreas confronts David, and after humiliating him by a reference to his attempted suicide is himself humiliated when David refuses to discuss Karin with him. After one of their violent quarrels, David, without warning, leaves Karin, now pregnant, and returns to live with his sister in London. Despite Andreas' declaration that he will not have her back if she sees David again, Karin goes off to London, and after a hostile reception from David's crippled sister Sara, returns miserably to Sweden. Towards the end of her pregnancy, David reappears and asks her to marry him. When Karin, after saying that she still loves him, refuses to see him again, David angrily accuses her of caring only for bourgeois security. She makes no answer, and David walks moodily away.

Bergman has described *The Touch*, simply, as "a love story". But while it is less heavily metaphysical than the films of his middle period and closest to *A Passion* in its palpable emotional realism, its carefully coded symbols attest his continuing interest in general, as well as private truths. The film's credits unfold over successive shots of walls—first the solid, protective wall of an old Swedish town, finally a sea wall with, at one point, a breach in it through which one can see the sea: freedom and danger are inseparable here, one cannot glimpse the first without courting the second. Later in the film, in a church behind this same wall, Karin's archaeologist lover will break through another wall that has been bricked up and discover within it a primitive carving of the Virgin that some six centuries before must, like himself, have travelled there from exotic parts. But the Virgin's beauty cannot survive the light of day: with the breaching of this second wall, the insects that have lain dormant inside the statue are reawakened and start "eating the Virgin's image away from within". The dangers of cutting through protective walls, the dangers of excavating the past, the dangers of foreign influences converge to define the risk which David—a German-American-Israeli-English Jew, uncluttered by roots or property—represents for Karin and to reaffirm that the choice lies between an insular, claustrophobic security and a hazardous ecstasy. It is Karin's unwillingness to make this choice—her indecisive commuting between placid husband and temperamental lover—that ironically makes the choice for her: tortured by her betrayal, the gentle husband withdraws his support, while the lover, in an effort to secure her on her terms, accepts a steady job and offers her a comfortable home. As David walks away after her rejection of him, Karin—standing alone in the autumn leaves and not knowing which way to turn—is miserably free, a victim of Swedish neutralism. Certainly Bergman makes the choice difficult enough for her. To offset the familiar tenderness of her husband (another beautifully understated performance from Max von Sydow), the comforts of home are satirised with a somewhat heavyhanded playfulness—through some fast-edited mock advertisement photography—in the spring-cleaning ritual which keeps Karin away from so many assignations. On the other hand, the encounters with the lover, besides the physical discomfort of his squalid room above a noisy construction site, are emphatically painful: he is impotent at Karin's first visit, rapes her on the second, hits her when she is late or sulks silently for hours at a time. He seems a foreigner not just to Sweden but to love; his violent outbursts often appear less as the suffering of an ancient race than as the rantings of a boorish child; even his gestures of tenderness, his way of laying his head in Karin's lap, suggest not strength but infantile dependence. On their second meeting, he tells Karin that he fell in love with her when he saw her weeping in the hospital corridors over her mother's death, and his relationship with her most often seems designed to reduce her permanently to that same state of frightened vulnerability. Yet from the moment of his declaration, Karin accepts his love for her as axiomatic, is fascinated by the idea of a lover she cannot understand, accepts the misery he brings her as a necessary part of feeling. But if Elliott Gould's David is certainly brooding and strange, it's unfortunate that in the English version of the film showing here (there is another version in which the characters speak English to David and Swedish with one another) he is likely to appear yet more alien to English speakers than to the Swedes. His part is scripted in the slightly archaic, language primer phrases one accepts more readily in subtitles, and this gives his spontaneous outbursts a misplaced and portentously literary quality. That the bond between him and Karin slowly erodes its way into credibility is almost entirely due to Bibi Andersson's magical performance. It is through the minute shifts of her facial expressions that we can accept as certainty the pleasure that this suffering stranger's touch has brought her. Her characterisation of a shallow woman suddenly prey to deep emotions is faultless—whether nervously inventorying her physical defects as she begins the affair, scowling at herself in the mirror, or simply avoiding her husband's eyes. It is probably the most memorable and the most moving portrait of a lady that Bergman has ever given us.

JAN DAWSON

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