

Love Lessons

(original title unknown) [**Lust och fägring stor**]

Sweden : 1996 : dir. Bo Widerberg :

: 118 min

prod: : scr: Bo Widerberg : dir.ph.:

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Johan Widerberg

Ref:	Pages	Sources	Stills	Words	Ω	8	€	M	♀	Copy on VHS	Last Viewed
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Scotsgay – October 96 – review:

“Through some eyes the Swedish **“LOVE LESSONS”** is a controversial new film as it covers the affair an attractive 15-year old boy has with his 37-year old lady teacher¹. The British Film Censorship Board are currently deciding what certificate they can give it, but the distributors assure me it will be open by the end of the year. Bo Widerberg, best known for making **“ELVIRA MADIGAN”** in the latter sixties, cast his son Johan in his latest film who was 19 during production, but is certainly believable as a nervous 15-year old. It was an Academy Award nominee and is essential viewing for anyone into blond teenagers.

Mr Widerberg’s script imaginatively depicts life in a Swedish school in 1943 and Johan’s discussions on sex with his friends. His teacher is married to an alcoholic travelling salesman who constantly seeks female companionship on his selling trips. So his wife has no conscience about reacting to her student’s passes².

Most of **“LOVE LESSONS”** is engrossing, but Mr Widerberg goes slightly off track writing a scene where the teacher, in a drunken jealous rage, breaks a bottle and threatens her teenage lover with it. Rewriting that scene, with her continuously slapping his face in her frenzy, would have made **“LOVE LESSONS”** a masterpiece.”

[no listing in "Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide 2001"]

¹ “Lady teacher”? How quaint.

² Or “pupil” as we say in English. There were no 15-year old “students” at a 1943 Swedish school.

No further information currently available. I see nothing remotely “controversial” in this plotline. Fuzzy tales of female paedophilia / male sexual “initiation” are common enough, whether played for comedy or titillation, and never attract a tenth of the opprobrium heaped on a film where the gender roles are reversed. Women are not “sexual predators” you see, which makes it OK for them to molest male pupils (their terminology, not mine). Alternatively, it is the woman’s function to make herself sexually amenable to males, and a male of 15 who avails himself of that service is merely “precocious”, an “early starter” – that would be the conventional patriarchalist view of such defloration episodes. Both positions are inherently hypocritical.

Most people probably have their first sexual experience in their mid teens (very many a deal younger than that), and whether it happens to be with their own age group or an older person is not strictly relevant to the value of the experience. The law as presently constituted denies that people of this age are capable of meaningful choice on the question, and pretends that this is for their own protection, but in truth it is simply a means – and a largely ineffectual means at that – of **controlling** adolescent sexual behaviour. A boy or girl of 15, particularly in current times, is manifestly competent to decide whether they wish to engage in sex or not, but society does not care to **let** them engage in it, and so determines them incapable of “meaningful consent”. The affair described in this film would still be regarded by most legislatures as “statutory rape”, regardless of the fact the boy initiated it.

It is irritating, through perhaps inevitable, to find once again a 19-year old youth cast as an adolescent of 15, as though there were not a huge gulf of emotional development and experience between those two ages, and all the more so in 1943, when some 15-year olds would not have hit puberty yet. A 15-year old boy of 1943 would equvalate to a 13-year old today. As for the suggestion this would be a masterpiece if it weren’t for a scene where the woman threatens the boy with a broken bottle, we must mark that down to hyperbole, if not sexism. Lady teachers do not wield broken bottles, they slap faces. Yeah, right.

Compare and contrast this title with “**HETS**” (Sweden, 44), “**SUMMER OF ’42**”, “**MY TUTOR**”, “**PRÉPAREZ VOS MOUCHOIRS**”, “**WEIRD SCIENCE**” and “**OH, WHAT A NIGHT**”, or for a TV movie scraped direct from the tabloid headlines, try “**ALL-AMERICAN GIRL – THE MARY KAY LETOURNEAU STORY**”.

See subject index under [ALL IN THE FAMILY](#), [SCANDINAVIA](#), [SCHOOL](#) and [SEX & SEXUALITY](#).