

MY WEEK WITH MARILYN

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In the summer of 1956, 23 year-old Colin Clark left his parents' home in Oxford and set out on a journey into the film industry. Colin's determination eventually **paid off** (diede un buon risultato) as he landed the position as a **lowly** (modesto, umile) assistant on the set of *'The Prince and the Showgirl'*, the film that famously united Sir Laurence Olivier and Marilyn Monroe **/mæɪrɪlɪn mɑːnrəʊ/**.

Nearly 40 years on, Colin Clark's diary account *The Prince, the Showgirl and Me* was published, but curiously it had one week missing. The account of this missing week was published some years later as *My Week with Marilyn* and was of course recently adapted into the film we're about to see.

Marilyn the Myth vs. Norma Jeane

With all iconic figures, life is sometimes difficult to separate from legend. Marilyn Monroe needs no introduction, all of us have our own ideas about her, be it a favourite image, quote or anecdote. She is often thought of as the **epitome** (incarnazione, personificazione) of feminine beauty and acknowledged as the number one sex symbol of the twentieth century. A **buxom** (prosperosa, formosa) **blonde bombshell** (bionda strepitosa) of a woman, she turned heads wherever she went. Doll-like and playful, she **oozed** (le usciva da tutti i pori) charisma and seemed to **revel** (godere, crogiolarsi) in her ability to heartbreak.

But what about Norma Jeane Mortenson born on June 1st 1926? Growing up Norma Jeane had a turbulent and unstable childhood, her mother Gladys Pearl Baker suffered from mental illness and was eventually (alla fine - non 'eventualmente' che è 'in case, if necessary') admitted to a State Hospital leaving Norma Jeane in the care and custody of a variety of different guardians. Having never known her father she spent time in an LA orphanage as well as various foster homes. As we see in *My Week with Marilyn*, Monroe had a genuine innocence beneath the dark sunglasses and pearly smile. Her troubled youth often led to stories of **erratic antics** (imprevedibili stravaganze) and deep seated fears of abandonment. **Notoriously** (tristemente – non 'notoriamente' che è 'well-known') needy and difficult to manage she used to test the rather generous patience of her entourage and colleagues, an aspect highlighted in this film by her relationship with Olivier (played by Kenneth Branagh). Evidently Monroe earned a reputation as somewhat of a **diva** (a woman, esp. a celebrity, who thinks she is very important and is difficult to please). Her poor punctuality and **aloof** (not friendly and who does not want to get involved) nature appeared to make her problematic. The film clearly shows her to also be insecure and **sensitive** (sensibile – not 'sensible' which is 'ragionevole'), taking criticism to heart and at times struggling to deal with the pressures of stardom. However it's also clear that people did want to take care of her, she was **loveable** (attractive and easy to like) and earned people's affection easily. It's documented that she was often **'doped-up'** (imbottita di sostanze dopanti) on a variety of different pills and as is widely known this would ultimately play a significant part in her death in 1962. Although as with everything else Marilyn Monroe did, even her **demise** **/dɪmaɪz/** (decesso, scomparsa) is **shrouded** (avvolta) in mystery with various conspiracy theories regarding the circumstances. The official recorded cause of death is "acute barbiturate poisoning" from "probable suicide" although there are a number of theories suggesting murder and CIA involvement, mainly due to her relationship with John and Robert Kennedy.

Prior to the filming of *The Prince and the Showgirl* directed by Laurence Olivier, in which he also co-starred, he praised Monroe as "a brilliant comedienne" and an "extremely skilled actress". During filming at Pinewood Studios, England he resented Monroe's dependence on her drama coach, Paula Strasberg (played by Zoe Wanamaker). Olivier regarded Strasberg as a fraud whose only talent was the ability to **"butter Marilyn up"** (adulare). He recalled his attempts at explaining a scene to Monroe, only to hear

Strasberg interject, "Honey—just think of Coca-Cola and Frank Sinatra". Olivier later commented that in the film "Marilyn was quite wonderful, the best of all" and indeed Monroe's performance was hailed by critics, especially in Europe, where she won the Italian equivalent of an Academy Award, the 'David di Donatello', as well as the French 'Crystal Star Award' and a nomination for a BAFTA.

Language & Cultural Reference

From a language point of view *My Week with Marilyn* offers an interesting opportunity to compare American and British accents. On the British side many of the characters speak with classic Received Pronunciation, the reassuring BBC tones **honed** (affinato, perfezionato) in famous institutions such as Eton and Oxford representing an idea of 'Old England'. In particular Kenneth Branagh who plays Sir Lawrence Olivier eloquently delivers each line with **panache** /pænæʃ/ (stile, eleganza). As for the Americans, we hear accents from the hyperactive Hollywood **buzz** (linguaggio di moda) to the assured New York intellectual, alluding to the new modern America that you could say Monroe embodies. There are some great expressions emanating from both sides of the pond such as 'chum', 'freak show', 'commie reds', 'gee' and 'old hat'. Colin is referred to as a '**gofer**' /gəʊfə/ (fattorino, portaborse) and a '**randy little bugger**' (**stronzo arrapato**) both common expressions in everyday English. Michelle Williams brilliantly captures Monroe's sensual and dreamy voice which was almost as integral as any other mannerism she possessed. Her docile tones accentuated her ability to appear to be submissive and tender whilst at the same time **seasoning** (rendendo più piccante) her intonation and pitch with the wild, excited suggestion of a femme-fatale.

Directorial

Visually I think this film can be described as **quaint** (d'altri tempi). Directed by Simon Curtis the scenery added to the stand out performance from Michelle Williams, mixed in with a strong supporting cast including Judi Dench, makes this a very charming film. Colin Clark, played by Eddie Redmayne becomes enchanted with Monroe, even though she is actually on her honeymoon with her third husband, the **playwright** (drammaturgo) Arthur Miller (played by Dougray Scott). When Arthur Miller leaves England, the coast is clear for Colin to introduce Marilyn to some of the pleasures of British life, **a far cry** (tutt'altra cosa) from her usual Hollywood surroundings. An idyllic week subsequently unfolds and for those of you who are fans of the English countryside, this film expertly displays the relaxing landscape of Buckinghamshire, a mere twenty miles west of central London.

There are many stories about Monroe's **unpredictable** (imprevedibile) behaviour and insecurities. Obviously she didn't live a normal life, people reacted to her fame and beauty everywhere she went, she was surrounded by '**hangers-on**' (seguaci – qui: profittatori) keen to be close and **to use her as a 'cash-cow'** (spremerle dei soldi). At times it's plain to see her loneliness and the distance between the character of Monroe and the real person inside. Her second husband Joe Di Maggio famously said "it's no fun being married to an electric light". As we see in the film, Monroe was adored by her public, her flirtatious, **giggly** (fatto di risatine) and **witty** (spiritosa) personality made her both desirable and an easy target for jealous wives and resentful girlfriends. It's almost as if her glamour, good looks and grace made those around her thrilled and acutely aware of their own inadequacies. In one scene we see her joking with Colin asking "shall I be 'her'?" before dazzling another crowd of onlookers with her trademark poses. Today we're used to the idea of celebrities as brands and famous faces marketing themselves through various media but at that time Monroe's star status must have been nothing short of astronomic. She was **sultry** (sensuale, passionale) and seductive, enchanting and **enticing** (seducente). She had a magnetic draw, her aura leaving those who came into contact with it **spellbound** (incantato, ammaliato) and even today her smile remains as popular and radiant as ever and continues to captivate new generations.

