



GLEND A JACKSON

Women in Love

When *Women in Love* opened theatrically in Britain in the autumn of 1969, its director, Ken Russell, had been a professional filmmaker for a full decade. Although he had only made two cinema features, he had also made over 30 BBC productions, graduating from brief fillers for the *Monitor* arts magazine programme (1959-63) to feature-length 35mm productions, including *The Debussy Film* (1965), *Dante's Inferno* (1967) and *Song of Summer* (1968), the first two of which starred Oliver Reed. Whereas the cinema films had been circumscribed by budget restrictions and an unfinished script (1963's *French Dressing*) or the dictates of the spy-film genre and a very hands-on producer (1967's *Billion Dollar Brain*), the later BBC films were made with far greater freedom, and *Women in Love* was the first time that this unfettered creative licence spilled over onto the big screen.

It was a very ambitious project to take on: although Russell had adapted novels in the past, they were lighter fare like George and Weedon Grossmith's *Diary of a Nobody* (filmed for the BBC in 1964) or the Len Deighton source for *Billion Dollar Brain*. By contrast, D.H. Lawrence's *Women in Love* was one of the major British literary masterpieces of the 20th century, its psychologically dense pages defying easy translation. Quoted in John Baxter's biography *An Appalling Talent*, Russell himself acknowledged that: 'It's impossible to film a 600-page novel and be true to the author's vision. Two hours is about all anyone can take at a sitting. Many great scenes had to be sacrificed. I particularly regret the omission of the Brangwen girls' sojourn in London where they sample *la vie bohème*. It helped form their characters and explains their subsequent behaviour.'

Although he later made it clear that he was unimpressed with certain aspects of the novel: 'A lot of the book seemed pretentious and repetitive, and I left a lot of it out because films lasting 24 hours are frowned on by distributors and partly, as I say, because Lawrence simply repeated his theme about the separate-yet-united philosophy of love eight times over in different guises. I thought twice would be enough in the film for most people to get it.'

But much of it struck a resonant chord. In particular, the early scene in which Rupert Birkin (Alan Bates) deliberately subverts the self-consciously affected Russian-influenced 'entertainment' devised by Hermione Roddice (Eleanor Bron) includes a passage that, while sourced from the novel, might as well have been Russell's own personal credo: 'It was an act of pure spontaneity. You can't bear anything to be spontaneous, can you? Because then it's no longer in your power. You must clutch things and have them in your power. And why? Because you haven't got any real body, any dark, sensual body of life.'

Russell dedicated his entire creative life to discovering and unveiling that dark, sensual body of life. Indeed, an even earlier exchange between the Brangwen sisters neatly encapsulates much of the critical commentary about Ken Russell: 'He's got go.' 'Yes, but where does his go go to?' (This was also directly sourced from the novel.)

For once, Russell had largely sympathetic producers in the Americans Martin Rosen and Larry Kramer. Kramer also wrote the first-draft screenplay, and he and Rosen initially tried to interest Peter Brook, Jack Clayton, Stanley Kubrick and Silvio Narizzano (*Georgy Girl*) in the project before it fell into Russell's hands. More usually fired up by music and visual art, Russell had never read any Lawrence, although he threw himself with gusto into rewriting Kramer's script, and was later miffed not to receive a co-writing credit and share the resulting Oscar nomination – although his first and only Best Director nod must have been somewhat mollifying. Kramer's subsequent screenwriting work brought him financial security, allowing him to turn to more heartfelt but less commercially appealing gay themes that were clearly nascent in *Women in Love*. Several people have quipped that the film could equally be titled *Men in Love* – the relationship between Rupert and Oliver Reed's Gerald Crich is clearly just as intense, both spiritually and physically.

Talking of which, Russell was lucky that the British Board of Film Censors was then overseen by the liberally minded John Trevelyan, although it was only two years since the BBFC had first passed a scene featuring prolonged frontal female nudity (Jonas Cornell's *Hugs and Kisses*, 1967). In his memoir *What the Censor Saw* (1973), Trevelyan recalled: 'We thought [*Women in Love*] a fine film, a view that was shared by the critics and the public, and although there were strong and explicit sex scenes, we passed it without cuts. This film included a remarkably brilliant scene in which two young men wrestled naked. We had to consider this carefully, but decided to pass it; in a sense this was a milestone in censorship since male frontal nudity was still a rarity. We had little criticism, possibly because of the film's undoubted brilliance.'

By contrast, the entire wrestling scene was removed from South American prints, to Russell's great amusement. He told John Baxter that: 'Gerald simply locked the door, then there was a direct cut to the two men lying naked on the carpet side by side, panting. It became known as The Great Bugging Scene and filled the cinemas for months. So much for the subtleties of censorship.'

When they're not engaging in elaborate bonding rituals, Rupert and Gerald become involved with Ursula (Jennie Linden) and Gudrun Brangwen (Glenda Jackson), sisters who reject society's intended straitjacketing from the start. They wouldn't yet have the vote (granted in 1918, just before the film's setting, but only to women over 30 with property qualifications), but there's a strong sense of a cultural sea-change, even if it would take another few decades to fully flower – parallels between the early 1920s and the late 1960s summer-of-love era are of course intentional. The Brangwen sisters' early search for 'love' stems less from a great romantic passion than a desire to escape, be it with the intellectual iconoclast Rupert or the well-heeled Gerald – although it's his willingness to spur on a clearly reluctant horse that has the most visible effect on Gudrun. Jackson's Oscar-winning performance, combining cerebral aloofness with unbridled sensuality, is beyond praise: Russell wanted a younger Bette Davis, and that's precisely what he got.

Michael Brooke, extract from *Women in Love* Bluray booklet (BFI, 2016)

WOMEN IN LOVE

Directed by: Ken Russell
©: Brandywine Productions
Production Company: Brandywine Productions
Produced by/Presented by: Larry Kramer
Co-producer/Presented by: Martin Rosen
Associate Producer: Roy Baird
Unit Manager: Neville C. Thompson
Production Controller: Harry Benn
Location Manager: Lee Bolon
Assistant to Producers: Tom Erhardt
Assistant Director: Jonathan Benson
Continuity: Angela Allen
Written for the screen by: Larry Kramer
From the novel by: D.H. Lawrence
Director of Photography: Billy Williams
Camera Operator: David Harcourt
Assistant Cameraman: Steve Claydon
Electrical Supervisor: George Cole
Editor: Michael Bradsell
Set Designer: Luciana Arrighi
Art Director: Ken Jones
Set Dresser: Harry Cordwell
Property Master: George Ball
Construction Manager: Jack Carter
Costume Designer: Shirley Russell
Wardrobe Supervisor: Shura Cohen
Make-up: Charles Parker
Hairdresser: A.G. Scott
Original Music Composed and Conducted by: Georges Delerue
Choreographer: Terry Gilbert
Sound Recordist: Brian Simmons
Dubbing Mixer: Maurice Askew
Dubbing Editor: Terry Rawlings

Cast

Alan Bates (*Rupert Birkin*)
Oliver Reed (*Gerald Crich*)
Glenda Jackson (*Gudrun Brangwen*)
Jennie Linden (*Ursula Brangwen*)
Eleanor Bron (*Hermione Roddice*)
Vladek Sheybal (*Loerke*)
Catherine Willmer (*Mrs Crich*)
Christopher Gable (*Tibby Lupton*)
Sharon Gurney (*Laura Crich*)
Sarah Nicholls (*Winifred Crich*)
Alan Webb (*Thomas Crich*)
Michael Gough (*Tom Brangwen*)
Norma Shebbeare (*Anna Brangwen*)
Nike Arrighi (*Contessa*)
James Laurenson (*minister*)
Michael Graham Cox (*Palmer*)
Richard Heffer (*Leitner*)
Michael Garratt (*maestro*)

uncredited
Leslie Anderson (*barber*)
Charles Workman (*Gittens*)
Barrie Fletcher (*1st miner*)
Brian Osborne (*2nd miner*)
Christopher Ferguson (*Basis Crich*)
Richard Fitzgerald (*Salsie*)

UK 1969©
131 mins

GLEENDA JACKSON

Women in Love
Sat 2 Jul 17:40; Wed 13 Jul 20:3; Fri 15 Jul 20:30
Horror of Darkness + Let’s Murder Vivaldi
Sun 3 Jul 15:20
Mary, Queen of Scots
Sun 3 Jul 18:15; Wed 20 Jul 20:30
Glenda Jackson in Conversation
Tue 5 Jul 18:15
Sunday Bloody Sunday
Tue 5 Jul 20:40; Sun 24 Jul 18:30
Hedda
Fri 8 Jul 18:00; Sat 16 Jul 16:30
A Touch of Class
Sat 9 Jul 15:15; Sat 23 Jul 20:45
The Romantic Englishwoman
Sun 10 Jul 18:10; Mon 18 Jul 20:40
Stevie
Thu 14 Jul 20:30; Sat 23 Jul 12:00
Hopscotch
Fri 15 Jul 18:00; Tue 26 Jul 20:40
House Calls
Sat 16 Jul 18:45; Fri 22 Jul 20:30

The Maids
Sat 16 Jul 20:50; Sun 24 Jul 15:50
The Rainbow
Tue 19 Jul 20:40; Sun 31 Jul 13:00
Giro City + Glenda Jackson & Politics (clip compilation)
Thu 21 Jul 17:50
Turtle Diary
Thu 21 Jul 20:50; Fri 29 Jul 20:30
Strange Interlude
Sat 23 Jul 15:30
The House of Bernarda Alba
Mon 25 Jul 17:50
Elizabeth Is Missing
Fri 29 Jul 18:15
Elizabeth R (the complete series)
Eps 1-3 Sat 30 Jul 14:20; Eps 4-6 Sun 31 Jul 14:30

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