



Women in Love

Director: Ken Russell

Country: UK

Date: 1969

A review by J Hoberman for *The New York Times*:

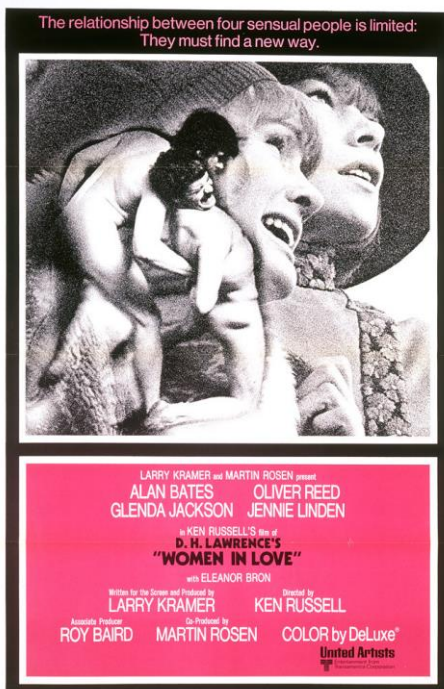
“Women in Love,” directed by Ken Russell from the playwright and activist Larry Kramer’s adaptation of D. H. Lawrence’s 1920 novel, is a double period piece — set in the aftermath of World War I and evocative of the late 1960s, when it was made.

The novel challenged Victorian conceptions of sexuality. The movie, which opens Friday for a week’s run at Metrograph in a remastered digital print, defied Hollywood conventions, most obviously in its daring use of male frontal nudity.

Set in an English Midlands mining town, “Women in Love” is a four-hander. It explores the stormy romantic relationships between the sisters Gudrun and Ursula Brangwen (played by Glenda Jackson and Jennie Linden), two exotic blossoms of the coal country, and their respective swains, the wealthy mine owner Gerald Crich (Oliver Reed) and his best friend, the restless intellectual Rupert Birkin (Alan Bates, bearded to resemble Lawrence).



“Women in Love” is a novel of ideas, but Lawrence’s overheated prose suggests an Expressionist landscape painting in which every element is supercharged with erotic energy. It helps knowing the novel to appreciate the movie, which in some ways is an improvement. The screenplay, for which Mr. Kramer (who was also a producer) received sole credit, streamlines Lawrence’s dialogue without sacrificing his chewy philosophical notions.



Russell’s mise-en-scène, restrained by comparison with his subsequent films, is as florid as the material — rich in color and costume, and full of shock cuts. Moreover, Russell appears to have discovered a vein of submerged satire in the novel and mined it for broad comedy. The movie’s several dance numbers go too far in giddy abandon, but the naked wrestling match between Gerald and Rupert is deftly choreographed. So too the shifting relations between four wilful, intermittently annoying characters.

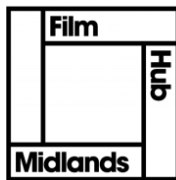
More so than in the novel, the central figure is the liberated Gudrun. Ms. Jackson, then primarily a stage actress, exudes movie star charisma (and won an Oscar for her performance). When she was profiled in *The New York Times* in early 1971, the writer, Guy Flatley, was surprised to encounter “a thin, soft-spoken girl with reddish-brown bangs and a face that, in less discerning days, would have been described as plain.” Throughout “Women in

Love,” Rupert expresses a desire for a love beyond love. Through the force of her personality and intelligence, Ms. Jackson achieved a beauty beyond beauty.

As a commercial success, Russell’s “Women in Love” was controversial. Indignant to see Lawrence so popularized, the British critic F. R. Leavis called the movie “obscene” and “an outrage.” A decade that began with court rulings in the United States and England allowing for the expurgated publication of Lawrence’s scandalous “Lady Chatterley’s Lover,” the 1960s were a receptive moment for his thoughts on men and women, and men and men (he died in 1930 before his right-wing political views could overshadow these sexually revolutionary ideas).

In an appreciation of the novel “Women in Love,” the critic Camille Paglia recalls in her collection of essays “Vamps & Tramps” that a poster portrait of Lawrence was a dorm-room pinup — perhaps only among English majors — in the late ’60s. This cultlike objectification is akin to Russell and Kramer’s film: a robust, entertaining, tastefully vulgar celebration of Lawrence’s philosophy.

From: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/29/movies/erotic-energy-restored-women-in-love-with-sex-in-their-heads.html>



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This film show is part of Shrewsbury Film Society’s *Five at Fifty* season of classic films from 1969 which has been made possible with support from Film Hub Midlands through funds from the National Lottery. Film Hub Midlands support people to watch, show, and make films in the Midlands.