

## Document Citation

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# Hell's Belles

I turned up the new Sleater-Kinney album and brooded about my crabby reaction to Alex Sichel's *All Over Me*, the latest contribution to the not exactly burgeoning genre of teen-girl coming-of-age films.

*All Over Me* has a heartbreak cast and an exhilarating soundtrack that runs the postpunk girl-group gamut from Patti Smith to the aforementioned Sleater-Kinney—enough to make some cinematically deprived riot grrrls and their putatively more mature fellow travelers embrace it wholeheartedly. I, however, could not get past Alex Sichel's anemic, flat-footed direction and sister Sylvia Sichel's awkwardly plotted script. This rule-bound filmmaking betrays its subject—a young girl breaking out, defining her sexuality and desire.

Fifteen-year-old Claude (Alison Folland) is hopelessly, abjectly in love with her best friend Ellen (Tara Subkoff). Claude, who's solidly built and wears her shoulders bunched up like the incredible hulk she imagines herself to be, worships the fragile, blond Ellen, which is exactly what Ellen, teetering on the edge of smack oblivion in her Jodie Foster-in-*Taxi Driver* rickety sandals, doesn't want or need. "You know I'm your dog," whispers Claude, having just saved Ellen from ODing by sticking her fingers down her throat and holding her while she vomits. Ellen pauses just long enough to apply lipstick to her mouth and to Claude's ("That looks weird," she says, her zonked eyes regarding the unfamiliar red slash on Claude's defiantly naked face) before rejoining her Neanderthal boyfriend, the local pusher and gay basher.

The most knowing thing about *All Over Me* is that it makes the breakdown of Claude and Ellen's friendship turn not so much on Claude being gay and Ellen being straight as it does on Claude's desire for love and Ellen's need for abuse. "Claude's my knight in shining armor," says Ellen, but the harder Claude tries to rescue her, the more desperately she runs away.

Exceptionally well-cast, *All Over Me* is best when it gives the actors the time and freedom to play together. Cole Hauser is properly dull-witted and nasty-tempered as Ellen's menacing boyfriend, and Wilson Cruz as Claude's gay high school chum and Pat Briggs as a slightly older gay rocker are just as fine. In a misguided attempt to jack up the action, the rocker is stabbed to death by Ellen's boyfriend—but not before he's had a chance to send Claude to the club where she finds both music

*All Over Me*  
Directed by Alex Sichel  
Written by Sylvia Sichel  
A Fine Line release  
Opens April 25

*Lolita*  
Directed by Stanley Kubrick  
Written by Vladimir Nabokov  
A Warner Brothers Classics rerelease  
At Film Forum  
April 25 through May 8

BY AMY TAUBIN

with this amazing gift? Instead of just letting the scene roll, she chops it into pieces, intercutting it with a scene of Ellen trying to get her boyfriend to fuck her on Claude's bed (which, on its own, would have been pretty strong as well). Why would a director make such a pointless juxtaposition, diminishing both her actresses in the process? Because she's afraid of violating Hollywood standards of editing and pace? Because she's scared of emotional dis-

Kubrick's stroke of genius—how through a displacement of libido, he transforms a novel about a madman's mad love into a movie about male competition, jealousy, and revenge. Specifically the competition between Nabokov, the cultured European literary intellectual, and Kubrick himself, the Bronx-born vulgarian art filmmaker. In the film, Humbert (James Mason) murders Quilty (Peter Sellers) in the opening scene, his bullets penetrating the large 19th-century portrait of a young lady behind which Quilty is hiding. Could anything be more blatant? (Pauline Kael brilliantly dubbed Quilty "Humbert's walking paranoia." Still, that's not the whole of it.)

Now, one can only wonder at how the collective cultural consciousness has misread both film and novel so that we have, to cite a very personal example, Agnès B., a designer without whom I might have spent the last 25 years dressed in sackcloth, sending thousands of teenage girls into the world flaunting "Lolita" backpacks, not to mention the more déclassé example of Amy Fisher, "the Long Island Lolita."

It behooves us then to remember that, as Mim Udovich wrote in

the *Voice* a few years ago, "although in and of itself this is no more the novel's theme or subject than the equation of young girls with psycho-sluts is, Nabokov's *Lolita* is a rape victim." As is Kubrick's. That said, *Lolita* is a wickedly funny social satire spiced with unlikely moments of romantic anguish, and even ecstasy. I don't know which is worse: the rescanned 16mm version (a staple of college courses) or the easily available laser disc that preserves the wide-screen format while losing the lush, deep focus of black-and-white celluloid. If that's all you've seen, then run to the Film Forum, which is showing not Adrian Lyne's remake (still



There's a riot grrrl goin' on: Folland and Subkoff in *All Over Me*.

to set loose her soul and fresh, true-hearted love with a fuchsia-haired guitar player played by tough and spritely Leisha Hailey.

Tara Subkoff makes Ellen's strung-out hysteria so believable it's easy to overlook what a complicated performance she's giving. But crucial as Subkoff is, *All Over Me* is Folland's film; her work takes an otherwise skimpy indie to another level. Folland has a slightly hesitant, husky voice reminiscent of Linda Manz and a wide-boned, soft-featured face made to map mixed emotions. Her mouth curls back as if to mock its own hunger; her gaze is simultaneously guarded and searching. Her Claude is of a piece with the vulnerable teenager she played in Gus Van Sant's *To Die For*—but here she has more room to stretch and grow.

Although not quite enough. About halfway through *All Over Me*, Claude goes home with the lesbian guitar player who's obviously attracted to her. Claude's attracted, too, but the more turned on she gets the more she feels she's betraying her devotion to Ellen. Putting Patti Smith's "Pissing in the River" on the the stereo and muttering about "dangerous music," she begins to dance by her herself. And as she dances, she falls apart. It's the kind of naked expression—of pain, desire, and confusion—that one almost never sees onscreen (Folland is in Gena Rowlands territory here). And what does Sichel do

play? I have no idea, but the sequence made me want to run for the exit.

Lacking an expressive visual style, *All Over Me* relies on cliché images (the circular pans around Claude's room; the shot of Ellen, dressed in black, glimpsed through the metal bars of the local playground). The film has so little authentic sense of place that its Hell's Kitchen settings could have passed for Toronto. As filmmakers, the Sichel sisters have an eye for casting—and an ear for music—and not much else.

The master of critiquing his misogyny and indulging it too, Jean-Luc Godard had only kind words for Stanley Kubrick when he jumped through similar hoops in his 1962 adaptation of Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*. (For the skinny on just how little Nabokov had to do with the script for which he received credit, check out his hilarious intro to *Lolita: A Screenplay*, published by McGraw-Hill.)

When Kubrick's *Lolita* was first released, the conversation was all about how faithful or not the film was to the novel. For all that, critics failed to nail



Lush life: Sue Lyon in *Lolita*

without a distributor despite ample glossy magazine coverage) but a spanking-new print of Kubrick's American classic.