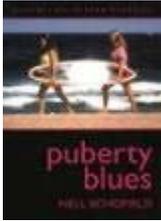


Puberty blues by Nell Schofield. Strawberry Hills, NSW: Currency Press, 2004, pp. 86, A\$16.95, paperback, ISBN 0 86819 749 1.



On my very first night of a recent year-long visit to the University of Queensland, a committed surfer opined: ‘follow the surfers, do what they do and that way you can’t go wrong’. Surf culture is strong and it is everywhere: ‘Retro Surfie Scrag, it would appear, is the look du jour’ (p. 2)

There is a dedication connected to surfing that makes the content of the original book, the film and this commentary deeply intertwined with that mystical ‘Australian way of life’. And who better to write a commentary on an iconic surf film but the lead in that same film, Nell Schofield. To surf is a sport, a look, a religion and Nell Schofield takes us through the film in an open way that aids understanding and offers personal insight. Schofield can empathise with her character’s life so clearly that it illuminates not only the film but also an Australian teenage life in the seventies. This is where the importance of this commentary lies:

Puberty Blues was a far cry from all those picturesque period films which dripped sentimentality and nostalgia. It was about a group of people at the very bottom of the food chain – contemporary teenage girls (p. 14).

Schofield similarly does not offer sentimentality – rather a deep and vibrant honesty. She explains technical reasons why things happen, what people thought at the time and beyond that explains the relevance of certain devices, for example the repeated use of toilets and how this imagery can be read as a need for private space or even, ultimately, a link to the sea.

This account gives us a double reward; it is partially an autobiography of Schofield’s life around the time of the film, as much as it is an understanding of the film and it’s this that makes the work compulsive. Albeit a grown-up one, Schofield’s cadence is partially a mirror of the likable straight-forwardness of the film, being, as she was, right at the heart of the film as Debbie, with her friend Sue:

In fact, theirs is the most important relationship in the whole film. At its core, this is a buddy flick, a bosom buddy flick (p. 39).

The film touched on many important issues: drugs, gang-bangs, teenage pregnancy. Nell retells her reactions to these at the time and how the work whether in book or film may be cheesy at times but fills a need and helps champion the female cause. The final words: ‘Go girlfriend!’ (p. 76) sum up the zest and impetus of this *Puberty blues*. The work has that delicious insider feeling of a DVD commentary, a mark of a series that includes Nowra’s insight on *Walkabout*. The *Australian Screen Classics* series is surely a must for any Australian film buff’s library.

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