

HOWLIN' DARLINGS

A twisting early portrait of Beat writers before the Beat Generation

KILL YOUR DARLINGS: Directed by John Krokidas. Written by Krokidas and Austin Bunn; story by Bunn. Cinematography, Reed Morano. Editing, Brian A. Kates. Music, Nico Muhly. Starring Daniel Radcliffe, Dane DeHaan, Michael C. Hall, Jack Huston, Ben Foster, David Cross, Jennifer Jason Leigh and Elizabeth Olsen. Sony Pictures Classics, 2013. R. 104 minutes. ★★☆☆☆

In *Kill Your Darlings*, Daniel Radcliffe, with a mop of tousled hair half swallowing his face, plays the young Allen Ginsberg, when the now-renowned poet was but an innocent Columbia freshman. You can stop thinking of Radcliffe as Harry Potter now; since that series ended, he's made a career of heading off in the opposite direction, and his role in John Krokidas' directorial debut might be the final step on the road to being taken seriously.

On what seems like his first day of college, the studious Ginsberg sees a charismatic young man leap atop a library table and begin reciting the restricted words of Henry Miller. Everyone is utterly shocked, of course, because it's 1944 and repression is all the rage — but Ginsberg can't keep a small, delighted smile from his face. The boy, it turns out, lives just down the hall.

Worldly and more than a little volatile, Lucien Carr (Dane DeHaan, with a spark of early DiCaprio about him) takes Ginsberg under his wing, leading him to the village, where he meets "Willie" (the underappreciated Ben Foster,



doing a delicious William Burroughs) in a bathtub, and gets a glimpse of the complicated relationship between Carr and David Kammerer (Michael C. Hall), a former professor now apparently making a habit of hosting college parties for would-be intellectuals.

Krokidas and his co-writer, Austin Bunn, make the wise choice to shape *Kill Your Darlings* into one of the circles its characters are always going on about; it starts near the end of the tale, so there are no surprises when Carr finally snaps, but it takes its time making its way all the way around. Ginsberg loves Whitman; Carr wants to start a movement but never writes a word; Jack Kerouac (played loathsomely by Jack Huston), whom Lucien praises as a "real writer," joins their little gaggle, leaving his girlfriend, Edie, at home (Elizabeth Olsen does as much as anyone could with Edie, but this film is definitely a boys' club). Tensions simmer between all of them, heightened by the volatile, vulnerable, self-loathing Carr.

You might be tempted to watch *Kill Your Darlings* in search of insight into the Beats, but I'm not sure that's what you'll find here. These are boys on the road to being great men, but they're still sophomoric and immature (and

often likably so, in Ginsberg's case). It's clear that the climax of this story affected everyone involved, but that's later; this is the early days, the "before" part of a before-and-after. What Krokidas and Bunn seem more interested in is the tangled web of affection and wariness that existed between these men in a time that was, to put it mildly, much less open to homosexuality. Michael C. Hall is all wide-eyed quiet desperation, but Radcliffe makes palpable Ginsberg's enlivening; his drug-addled writing fits go hand in hand with his willingness to become more vulnerable, to go on midnight library raids, to — eventually — explore his sexuality. He never quite breaks free completely, but you can see it coming. It's DeHaan, though, that makes this film. His Carr is constantly on edge, constantly in denial, pushing at everyone around him to create a world, a movement, in which he might finally be comfortable. He wants life to be nothing but beginnings but can't figure out how to bring anything to a peaceful end. *Kill Your Darlings* paints a sepia-toned, beautifully detailed picture of a writer becoming himself — but the story belongs as much to Carr, the one whose name we might've forgotten. ■

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BLUE IS THE WARMEST COLOR (NC-17) 2:15, 6:00

ENOUGH SAID (PG-13) 7:20

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DON JON (R) 9:30

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