Chapter 9 - "Brandon Goes to Hollywood" by Melissa Rigney

- "Brandon Goes to Hollywood: Boys Don't Cry and the Transgender Body in Film" Melissa Rigney

Chapter made sense without having seen the film (though it made us want to see it)

is a textual analysis of the film

Explanation of the film made it seem like the movie was portraying Brandon Teena as a confused lesbian, rather than an authentic trans man. Criticisms of the film seemed a little harsh. Praises the queer and trans visibility afforded by the film, but takes issue (at least implicitly) with the messages it might be sending to audiences. Takes issue with the authenticity/accuracy of the portrayal of brandon's state of mind, identification

parts about brando, dean and failed masculinity - relating the brandon teena character to the classic male of hollywood film - we can read him as a male character, not necessarily as a scared lesbian

beginning wasn't as strong as the end

discussed how hilary swank almost became a symbol, author could have elaborated on this more

at first film is praised as great movie for visibility, but reception analysis showed that audiences could identify with the killers rather than the victim

visibility of FTM transsexuals and equating that to butch stereotypes, rigney said the "are you a man or a woman" scene was very queer, but it seems like the scene emphasizes binaries, which seems to contradict the idea of queer as questioning binaries and norms

she did a good job of arguing how the movie fell into hegemonic structures and made it possible for peopel to identify with the murderers

silence of the lambs as "negative" portrayal of trans people - maybe that's not the best example to use

"Brandon Goes to Hollywood"

Sets up a clear discussion of what it means to be butch and how masculine female challenge the patriarchal discourse to argue that “the exposure of the construction of gender by the masculine female accounts for the ways in which masculine identified women are often symbolically castrated in mainstream film.” Rigney thus asks the question how does Boys Don't Cry challenge yet still play into this quota.

Great discussion of Boys Don't Cry as a paradox:

“Although female masculinity comes to the forefront in this film, I argue that the film works to subsume the transgressive potential of the gender outlaw within a lesbian framework and narrative, one that reduces and, ultimately nullifies Brandon’s gender and sexual excess” (185.) The movie tries to rationalize Brandon too much into a mainstream context even though asserts queer moments in the film where it attempts to break down binaries such as repeating the question: “are you a man or are you a woman?”

Argument that the film’s main problem is that it doesn’t treat Brandon as a transgendered character but rather just works to secure “Brandon’s identity as both female and as a confused and/or closeted lesbian” (186)

Good discussion of patriarchal its demand that women have to be controlled to assuage men’s fears that they are becoming to feminine. If this fear is right, could it explain for why most male-to-female killers are often depicted as crazy, psycho-killers as Rigney points out?

This essay really criticizes the danger of when a subcultural message enters the mainstream and how its message can easily get corrupted. It uses an interesting political lens as well when discussing the reception of the movie as opposed to media, and people’s, reception to the actual crime.

--Kareen Abi Rafieh