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4/21/23

TSEM102-013

Shute

Reading Assignment

1)

When the author refers to the invisibility of lesbian representation in film, they are referring to Hollywood’s repression of openly lesbian characters in film. Specifically, films released during the Hays code had to abide by the strict rules it presented, leading to nonverbal hints being the only way to convey lesbianism in movies such as “*Johnny Guitar* (Nicholas Ray, 1954), *Old Acquaintances* (Vincent Sherman, 1943), *The Great Lie* (Edmund Goulding, 1941), and *Rebecca* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1940)” (Weiss, 53). These nonverbal hints had the effect of appealing to Hollywood’s expressed desire for films that do not “lower the moral standards of the public” (Weiss 52), while still conveying lesbian characters (albeit in a much narrower and shallower sense). An interesting point that Weiss makes is that lesbianism was occasionally used as a conflict in the plot, as a means of making heterosexuality “appear the more natural and desirable”, as in *Rebecca (*Alfred Hitchcock, 1940) (54). Unfortunately, a lot of the elaboration on this point is cut off in the reading on Blackboard, but this trope of including lesbian characters in a way that reinforces the perceived superiority of heterosexuality is something that persists into more modern films, like unrealistic portrayal of lesbian relationships in *Personal Best* (Robert Towne, 1982) in an effort to appeal to heterosexual male viewers (and directors!), as discussed in my first response to this question.

2)

1. *Personal Best* includes an “obsessive use of ‘crotch shots’” (pg 76). Following logic from question 1, one can see how this appeals to a heterosexual male fantasy.
2. *Personal Best* has Tory and Chris in a lesbian relationship, but the fact that Tory references her past relationships with men (pg 76) not only attempts to imply that she is to some extent available to men, and thus their heterosexual male fantasy, but also discredits the notion that Tory and Chris are truly lesbians, again giving the imagined male audience a justification to continue to fantasize.
3. Lesbian-feminist critiques of *Personal Best* “most frequently and emphatically commented” on the dissatisfaction they had by the omission of a lesbian context for Tory and Chris’s relationship (pg 77). The implausibility of their “unexamined, taken-for-granted attitude about the relationship” to lesbian audiences shows that the relationship is not genuine, and to some extent, made by heterosexual men for heterosexual men.