



Borden, Lizzie (b.1958)

by Tina Gianoulis

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Bisexual filmmaker Lizzie Borden gained fame in the mid-1980s among gay audiences and fans of independent movies for her visionary films about the unexplored politics of women's lives. A sharp observer of social realities, Borden brings a feminist perspective and a dynamic authenticity to her films that make them relevant long after their creation.

Borden was born on February 3, 1958, the daughter of a Detroit stockbroker. Her given name was Linda, which she retained until she was eleven years old and heard the children's rhyme about the famed ax murderer. Perhaps foretelling her iconoclastic tendencies as an artist, young Linda changed her name to Lizzie Borden.

She majored in art at Wellesley College before moving to New York City to become an artist and art critic. Attending a festival of Jean-Luc Godard films persuaded her to try her hand at filmmaking. She taught herself the skills she needed to make movies.

Although she made a black and white film called *Regrouping* in 1976, Borden first received public attention with the release of *Born in Flames* in 1983. A feminist science fiction film, *Born in Flames* envisions a future ten years after a bloodless "Second American Revolution" has brought democratic socialism to the United States.

Though smarmy politicians and media spokespeople assure the audience that equality has been universally achieved, the hypocrisy of the new society is soon revealed. Backed by the beat of an energetic punk soundtrack, the film's heroines, mostly lesbians of color, rise up and form a women's army to fight against the oppression they still face in the new society.

Made in a documentary style, *Born in Flames* delivers its powerful political message with intensity and poetry, leaving audiences energized. After its successful premiere at the 1983 Berlin Film Festival, the film went on to win first prize at the women's film festival in Sceaux, France.

Released on video in 1997, *Born in Flames* remains a lesbian-feminist standard. When some feminists criticized the violence of Borden's solution in the film, Borden responded by saying, "I asked many, many women if they would ever use violence, and the answer was always no. How convenient for the government. I'm posing the question: What if we did?"

Borden followed *Born in Flames* with another faux-documentary, this time portraying a day in the life of a New York call girl. *Working Girls*, released in 1986, follows the life of Molly, a lesbian photographer who works as an upscale prostitute to pay the bills. Neither romantic nor lurid, *Working Girls* presents prostitution mundanely, as a job, often boring and occasionally dangerous. Like *Born in Flames*, *Working Girls* is a feminist film with a lesbian heroine that attempts to tell some unpleasant truths about society.

After directing some episodes of the syndicated television horror show "Monsters" in the late 1980s, Borden

went to Hollywood to make her next film. *Love Crimes* (1991) is a dark exploration of erotic fantasy and violent reality. It was not well received by either film critics or many of the feminist fans of Borden's earlier films. Borden herself was not happy with the film and felt the need to move out of Hollywood again to gain more control of her work.

In 1992, continuing her exploration of female sexuality, Borden directed two episodes of the series "Inside Out," produced by Playboy Video; and in 1994, she directed a segment of the film *Erotique*, titled "Let's Talk About Sex," which explores the life of a Latina phone sex worker.

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About the Author

Tina Gianoulis is an essayist and free-lance writer who has contributed to a number of encyclopedias and anthologies, as well as to journals such as *Sinister Wisdom*.