

BROKEBACK MOUNTAIN

Hello, I'm Edgar Loessin with Loessin at Large. The time is 1963, in Signal, Wyoming, a dusty, barren no-place with a lonely highway straight as an arrow slicing through it. Ennis Del Mar and Jack Twist are two nineteen year old ranch hands who have spent their lives in places like Signal. They meet when they are applying for a job to drive a thousand sheep through pastures of a National Forest. Ennis is hired as the herder and is to sleep with the sheep to ward off predators. Jack has a pup tent and looks after their provisions. For several days the men see little of each other. They speak only when necessary.

There comes a night of really bad, cold weather. Ennis decides to sleep in the camp. He plans to bunk down by the fire but the cold drives him inside the tent. Late in the night the two men find themselves having violent, passionate sex. What we are allowed to see is almost a bit of a wrestling match.

The next morning they try to pretend that nothing has happened but the fact is quite clear that their lives have been changed forever, even though they insist they are not "queer". After all Ennis is engaged to marry Alma. They come to the end of their job with the sheep and go their separate ways. Ennis does marry Alma and Jack weds a somewhat wealthy girl in Texas. They have children but the marriages are less than ideal. The two cowboys are eternally lassoed to one another. Finally, after four years of being out of touch, they are reunited and the power of their love overwhelms them the moment they see each other. They continue to meet spasmodically. There is talk about finding a way to be together permanently when Ennis finally gets a divorce. They are now nearing forty. Their lives are miserable and they are as lonely as they were in their childhoods. Being who they are and where they are preclude any sort of visible togetherness. There is no solution.

Director Ang Lee is Taiwanese but received his film training in America. There is a true grit quality in his understanding of the macho west in particular and American society in general. Adapted from a short story of Annie Proulx by Larry Mc Murty and Diana Ossana, the film is a land mark of cinematic art. Not because of the subject matter, but rather the movie's vivid illumination of the forces that dominate our lives, namely the emotional makeup within us and the restrictions and mores of society. The two men, two human beings, did not chose to have their lives take this unlikely path. In fact, there are moments of self loathing that erupt in fights and violent hostility. Lee presents the story in a slow but very intense and ominous rhythm. There are moments where the film seems too slow. And yet. it keeps moving, unrelentingly, as if to the beat of a funeral drum, toward the inevitable ending facing the cowboys. There is painful peripheral damage to their families. The confused wives are touchingly portrayed by Anne Hathaway and Michelle Williams.

The acting is without flaw. The two men give multifaceted, deeply touching, superb performances. The taciturn Ennis is played by Heath Ledger. He is tormented and driven to near alcoholic madness and yet shows great joy in discovering the meaning of his relationship to Jack. Jake Gyllenhaal is more accepting of who he is. His wife says that

she didn't know where Brokeback Mountain is but she thinks Jack thought of it as a pretend place where the blue birds sing and there's a whiskey spring.

Indeed Brokeback Mountain is a sort of mystical place. It's part of the Canadian Rockies and the cinema- photography is indescribably beautiful. The cowboys are in a totally different world from the dusty, barren and lonely places that shaped their lives and hold them hostage. It is here that their doomed odyssey begins This is Edgar Loessin with Loessin at Large and I'll see you at the next opening.