

4b2- Brokeback Mountain (United States, 2005), A movie review by James Berardinelli

Longing is such a potent element of the human experience that it has formed the fabric of numerous stirring motion pictures. *Brokeback Mountain* is one such movie - a tale of love and loss, of unrealized dreams, and of lives wasted by denying passion and accepting convention. The primary difference between *Brokeback Mountain* and say, for example, Clint Eastwood's *The Bridges of Madison County*, is that in Ang Lee's picture, the central relationship is between two men. And this isn't a platonic friendship. These men are as intimately involved as two lovers can be.

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Jack Twist (Jake Gyllenhaal) and Ennis Del Mar (Heath Ledger) meet in the summer of 1963 when both are hired by Joe Aguirre (Randy Quaid) to be shepherders on Wyoming's Brokeback Mountain. Their job: keep the sheep moving and make sure as many as possible make it home. Gradually, a friendship forms between the two men, although neither is a master of words. And, one chilly night, the relationship turns physical. They agree that what happens on Brokeback Mountain stays on Brokeback Mountain, and when the summer is over, they have every expectation of never seeing each other again. Ennis is off to marry Alma (Michelle Williams), and Jack meets rodeo queen Lureen (Anne Hathaway). But, deep down, neither can forget their summer together, and Jack eventually decides to break the silence and make contact.

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The richness of the characters and situations in *Brokeback Mountain* is both its strength and, to an extent, its undoing. Although the tale is well developed, and there is great emotional resonance in the push-and-pull between the characters and their world, *Brokeback Mountain* doesn't break new ground, except that this story has not previously been told (at least not in a major motion picture) with the gay spin. (...) While it shouldn't matter that the romance occurs between two men, there are some who will feel uncomfortable about the subject matter. One would hope, however, that *Brokeback Mountain* won't be pigeonholed as a "gay cowboy movie." That may be essentially accurate, but it's an underrepresentation of what's going on. (...)

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Brokeback Mountain spans a time period of nearly twenty years. We only get the highlights, but they are enough to give us a picture of the compromises both men have made to steal the occasional moment with each other, and the boundaries they are unwilling to cross. (...) The ending is predictably tear-jerking, but it's filmed with less melodrama than it might be. Lee's restraint during this portion of the story is welcome. Another director might have taken things too far in his quest to provoke an emotional reaction.

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The film is based on a short story by Annie Proulx, and has been adapted for the screen by Diana Ossana and *Lonesome Dove*'s Larry McMurtry. *Brokeback Mountain* offers a study in yearning, love, and loss. It's a brave and affecting effort from a director from whom we have come to expect worthwhile things.

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