

BROKEBACK MOUNTAIN:

The story of love between two men in "Brokeback Mountain" is both about two men and it's also universal.

It's about the one that got away. It is about forbidden love. It's about the one you can't have. It's about culture. It's all rolled into one. After thinking about this movie for a while, I understood this movie through director Ang Lee's other movies. His theme is about love, first and foremost. And it's about both genders.

Ennis (Heath Ledger) and Jack (Jake Gyllenhaal) are two young cowboys who meet in 1963 while herding sheep in Wyoming. One bitter winter night, they spend time together making love. "You know I ain't queer," Ennis says to Jack in the morning. "Me neither," says Jack. Both admit to the lie, more in fear than reality.

Ennis tells Jack that, as a child, his father showed what happened to two men who had shacked up together. They were butchered.

The rest of the movie shows them living a "normal" life. Both get married, have children, but the burning desire for each other can't be extinguished. They plan fishing or hunting trips two to three times a year to see each other. Their love is unremitting. It goes on for 20 years.

One of the minor problems in the film is that Ang Lee compresses time. What looks like encounters between Ennis and Jack seem to transgress over months, actually they unfold over 20 years. Yet, their incessant love affair lasts 20 years.

We know Ennis is faithful and doesn't fool around with other men, but Jack does. Realistically, would this ephemeral relationship and doomed love affair last for 20 years? Or, was it all Jack's fantasy about a better life? This is an unanswered question.

Ennis is taciturn, perhaps because of what his father showed him as a young boy. Jack is outgoing, willing to come out, and have a blissful and rosy life with Ennis. But, that too is perhaps an illusion. It's the longing that creates that tension of wanting someone so bad. Would it last?

And, what of Ennis and Jack's love affair? What exactly is it based on? Physicality only? An intellectual bond? Or something mysterious and unknown? We never know, so we are left in doubt as to their attraction. This is the one mystery for this reviewer.

Lee was smart in picking two male hunks for his lead. Women will probably flock to see the film, bringing their boyfriends and husbands along. It's a non-subtle, brilliant marketing ploy.

I see this film as a brave attempt at acknowledging and accepting homosexuality, especially between men. Like the brilliant "Boys Don't Cry," it attempts to explore a world some find uncomfortable.

I think the film will be more easily accepted by women. But I don't want to lecture here or give a social commentary. I'll leave that to the director.

The outdoor sequences add to the male bonding theme, and in this sense a male bonding not of machismo with the world, but one of bonding with someone that we treasure. The green mountains, the lush rivers and streams, the blue sky are used by Lee to signify a freedom and a chance to blossom. It isn't just a secret location to meet.

When Ennis and Jack are married, they seem to live in squalor. The cities are ugly and drab. There are dusty roads, laundromats and broken down trailer homes. There is no life for them there. They are like white, trailer trash.

Ennis' wife Alma (Michelle Williams), slowly unearths the truth about the two when she secretly finds them kissing. But like the dutiful wife, and the times, she keeps quiet for a while.

Jack's wife Lureen (Anne Hathaway) is a ditz, but scheming wife. Her eyes tell much.

The movie ends on a tragic note as Jack disappears, but we don't know exactly what happened to him. Ennis goes to visit Jack's parents. We see where and how Jack grew up. We sense Jack's despair and vividly see his parents' lost life. Nothing needs to be said. Just viewing them creates sad portraits. It's now Ennis' despair.

134 Minutes

MPAA Rating: R (for sexuality, nudity, language and some violence)

Rating: B+