

# Brokeback mountain – annie proulx essay



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The story tells of a love affair spanning two decades between two men whose relationship begins as young, aimless, hired sheep herders on the symbolic "Brokeback" in rural Wyoming. The homosexual relationship is juxtaposed against an unforgiving life and landscape that perpetuates 'traditional' American mid-western values and as such, we understand our protagonists' relationship is doomed from the beginning.

Proulx use of non-linear narrative establishes this mood of loss and unrequited love in the story's opening when we are told of Ennis Del Mar waking to his humdrum existence in a trailer (belonging to his daughter) yet "suffused with a sense of pleasure because Jack Twist was in his dream". As he looks to the comfort in his reminiscence of their days "on the mountain when they owned the world" the introduction ends with;

"The wind strikes the trailer like a load of dirt coming off a dump truck"

This rude awakening foreshadows the story of their relationship which Proulx now turns to - it was very much a dream which could never last and which the environment it existed within would never permit.

As the story of the "pair of deuces goin' nowhere" begins, Proulx continues this use of setting as a foreshadowing device upon the mountain itself. On the trail up to the grazing flat Proulx writes of the men and the animals "flowing" into "the great flowery meadow and the coursing, endless wind". The relationship which will serve to act as the beauty in their life yet it too will be unable to withstand the "course wind" of prejudice in Wyoming. And at dusk before their first sexual encounter, we are told;

“ the cold air sweetened”

The mountain itself becomes a symbol of a place they can escape to in their minds where they can revisit their love and acts as a pure, untainted memory. This contrasts sharply with the married life they fall into once the summer on the mountain ends. Ennis's wife, Alma, adds to Ennis's sense of shame with “ her misery voice” and her growing resentment over his relationship with Jack and his emotional distance from her and their children. It is this shame that Ennis displayed upon leaving that summer when he told Jack,

“ I ain't no queer”.

Their weekend ‘ fishing’ trips to cheap motel stops have the air of temporary respite from this family-man facade. This transient existence is not what Jack wants though and dreams of getting a place together with Ennis who still maintains “ He likes it with woman”. Further conflict is lent to the relationship when he tells Ennis;

“ I wish I knew how to quit you”

Ennis never reciprocates this emotional commitment and upon the return of one of his postcards to Jack (to arrange another fishing trip) marked ‘ deceased’, Proulx writes “ The huge sadness of the northern plains rolled down on him”. The harsh Wyoming setting is further utilized to reveal the true character of Lureen Twist who on the phone gives the explanation of Jack's death being down to an exploded truck tire;

“ She was polite but the little voice was as cold as snow”

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Yet Ennis knew “ they got him with the truck tire”- just like the old man Earl whom Ennis’s father took him to see as a child - dead with his genitals torn off for committing the same sin. Again we end the story just as it started with the Wyoming terrain reflecting the mood as Ennis goes to visit Jack’s parents;

“ The road to Lightning Flat went through desolate country past a dozen abandoned ranches”

The story ends in the same trailer it began with his dreams of Jack and makes use of poignant symbolism. Ennis hangs Jack’s shirt that enclosed his own plaid shirt he found at Lightning Flat in Jack’s “ shallow cavity” of a closet and pins a postcard of Brokeback above it. Finally, Ennis gives his heart to Jack “ as he looked at the ensemble through a few stinging tears”;

“ Jack - I swear”

We are left to wonder whether Jack is mourning the fact he didn’t tell him whilst alive or is aware that their love can only exist on another plain - on the dream that was Brokeback.

Despite the obvious weight of the societal pressures that bear down on Jack & Ennis, “ Brokeback Mountain” when stripped down is first and foremost a tragic romance just like “ Romeo & Juliet” or “ Love Story”. It is more so a testament to the time in which we live where this prejudice is recognizable and its impact upon this relationship is as strong as the outside forces in either of the above mentioned. The story serves tells us that true love

doesn't necessarily conquer all when it's as strong or as fragile as the people we choose to persecute or tolerate.