

BROKEBACK MOUNTAIN: Excerpts

1. Robert Dinnerstein, *Denver Rocky Mountain News*, Dec. 20, 2005

The movie has a universal quality because it tells a story of unfulfilled lives and roots it in the well-observed specifics of a vanishing Western culture.

2. Terry Lawson, *Detroit Free Press*, Dec. 20, 2005

Brokeback Mountain [has] the power to break your heart -- and, perhaps more important, to open it.

3. Tom Long, *Detroit News*, Dec. 20, 2005

If love does indeed conquer all, it should win hearts across America. If not, then its focus on a tragic stigma will remain as valid as its story suggests.

4. Bill Muller, *The Arizona Republic*, Dec. 16, 2005

In telling the story, Lee breaks the unfair Hollywood taboo about showing gay sexual relationships between men (far less fuss is made over lesbian sex in films).

The love scenes in *Brokeback Mountain* are handled with sensitivity and care, and Lee is intelligent and sophisticated enough to have realized the film wouldn't succeed without them.

5. Bruce Newman, *San Jose Mercury News*, Dec. 17, 2005

If the cowboy movies of John Wayne and John Ford were about the opening of the American West, *Brokeback Mountain* is the somber slam of its closing.

6. Carrie Rickey, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Dec. 17, 2005

Much as it is about love, *Brokeback* is also a potent study of repression that comes alive in Ledger's shattering performance.

7. Eleanor Ringle Gillespie, "'Brokeback Mountain' Is a Pure Original," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, Dec. 15, 2005

"*Brokeback Mountain*" is a love story, but that's not all it is. In some ways, the movie is as much about the way we were as the way they are. Jack and Ennis live in fear of discovery in a Reagan World that considers them in the same league as pedophiles. Surrounded by hatred, contempt and bigotry, they're condemned to lead inauthentic lives, full of curdled yearning and clamped-down emotions.

Domestic bliss is especially demonized as a living hell of dirty clothes, screaming babies and wives that just don't understand them. Actually, Alma does, to her despair, having witnessed them share an amorous kiss. Her bitter resignation is expressed in one of the film's funnier (unintentionally?) lines: "You know, I used to wonder why you never brought any trout home."

8. Andrew Sarris, "In the Minority on *Mountain*: No Tears Shed for Love Story," *New York Observer*, Dec. 19, 2005

The rest of the cast performs above and beyond the call of duty, particularly Michelle Williams as Alma, whom Ennis marries immediately after his tryst with Jack, and Anne Hathaway as Lureen, whom Jack later marries. These are two thankless roles of victimization by disillusion, sexual rejection and abandonment, all in the name of the greater love between Ennis and Jack. Alma's heartbreak is more palpable than that of the self-sufficient Lureen, but we are apparently not asked to weep for either woman, and certainly not for Alma's two daughters or Lureen's son. Still, Ennis turns out to be a more dedicated family man than Jack, who has the foresight to marry the rich daughter of a farm-equipment tycoon, one who is quite happy to take his grandson off Jack's faltering hands.

Lureen, a rodeo rider, is shown aggressively pursuing Jack in a rodeo bar with the one witty pickup line in the movie: "What's the matter, cowboy? You waiting for a mating call?" No matter—Jack's heart is elsewhere. Lureen is quickly caricatured as a ditzy, bleached-blond, chattering busybody. Alma is another story entirely after she catches Ennis in a passionate embrace with his quadrennial "fishing buddy," and she never lets on that she has seen anything, even when

Ennis keeps returning from his alleged fishing trips without any fish. Alma just suffers and suffers and suffers without even being given the compensation of a juicy renunciation scene. All she gets, in fact, is a divorce agreement in which Ennis agrees to provide child support....

Hence, I suppose that my ultimate objection to *Brokeback Mountain* lies in its stretching out what originally begins as a physical relationship between two young men to, after 20 years, Ennis and Jack quarreling like an old married couple about the forced infrequency of their reunions. Yet what are the odds that they would have managed to stay together if they had been together all that time? The current odds on married heterosexual couples staying the course are no better than 50-50, and that is as true in the red states as it is in the blue.

Besides, the problem of the economic disparity between lower-middle-class Ennis and upper-middle-class Jack isn't sufficiently addressed in *Brokeback Mountain*, even though Ennis is rendered virtually immobile by his pressing need to keep his job to support his kids. By contrast, Jack has the means and the time to hop down to Mexico to sleep with male prostitutes. In this, he follows a pattern of promiscuity that raises doubts about the stability of any more lasting day-to-day relationship between him and Ennis.

9. Paul Clinton, "Brilliant 'Brokeback,'" *CNN.COM*, Dec. 9, 2005

Lee is a sublime storyteller, and after all isn't that what a movie is all about?...

Human beings have a deep need to love and to be loved in return. "Brokeback Mountain" celebrates that need without making any moral judgments. One line in the film sums it all up: "If you can't fix it, you gotta stand it."

10. Mike Clark, "'Brokeback' Opens new Vistas," *USA Today*, Dec. 9, 2005

After a languorous opening third, the movie soars for the duration as it dramatizes the fallout and periodic reunions from the pair's first and only idyllic summer laboring together. And alone....

There's nothing fussy or attention-getting about Lee's direction or Rodrigo Prieto's photography, but the selection of shots and the rhythm of their cutting seem unerringly right. And while many of today's movies don't really end — you see a splice, and the end credits roll — the capper here is a kick in the gut. It's an old-style virtue for a film that's old-style in the best way: unassuming but people-oriented and aiming to endure

11. Kenneth Turan, *Los Angeles Times*, Dec. 8, 2005

t's a deeply felt, emotional love story that deals with the uncharted, mysterious ways of the human heart just as so many mainstream films have before it. The two lovers here just happen to be men.

12. Peter Rainer, "Cowboys Saddled with a Secret," *Christian Science Monitor*, Dec. 9, 2005

In Ang Lee's "Sense and Sensibility," the characters never stopped talking. In his new film, "Brokeback Mountain," they rarely start. Ennis Del Mar (Heath Ledger) is a ranch hand who is hired, along with sometime Texas rodeo rider Jack Twist (Jake Gyllenhaal), for a summer job herding sheep on Wyoming's Brokeback Mountain. They've never met before, and for a while, they communicate - or at least Ennis does - mostly through grunts and mumbles.

Their closeness is that of the classic Westerner's - what is not spoken is more eloquent than that which is. But then the film takes a startling turn. On a cold night, Ennis and Jack lie together for warmth and then, suddenly, have sex.

In most Westerns, the devotion between cowboys is depicted as deeper and more spiritually sustaining than the love between a man and a woman. "Brokeback Mountain," which screenwriters Larry McMurtry and Diana Ossana expertly expanded from the celebrated 1997 short story by Annie Proulx, makes explicit the sexual undercurrent that, rightly or wrongly, not a few critics have at times detected in the intense masculine bonds of these strong, silent types.

In this sense, as well as in the graphic nature of some of the sex scenes, "Brokeback Mountain" is a zeitgeist-capturing moment for Hollywood. But, ultimately, its timing may well be a matter for the sociologists. As, too, will be the response from the general audience, which inevitably, and understandably, will be sharply divided. After all, nothing like this film has ever really been seen before from a major movie company. I'm referring not only to the film's sexual content here. What is truly distinctive about "Brokeback Mountain" is that it brings to life a love story that, after all these years of love stories, is essentially new to mainstream movies, and it does so without special pleading or sentimentality.

13. Anthony Lane, *New Yorker*, Dec. 5, 2005

Its beauty wells from its sorrow, because the love between Ennis and Jack is most credible not in the making but in the thwarting.

14. Richard Schickel, "A Tender Cowpoke Love story," *Time magazine*, Nov. 20, 2005

The movie becomes more and more episodic as the years wear on, losing intensity and conviction in the process and betraying the passionate romanticism of its beginnings. Since it was written (from a story by Annie Proulx) by Larry McMurtry and his partner, Diana Ossana, it focuses, as some of his fiction does, on the modern, anti-romantic West, a place of trailer parks and honky-tonks, of small, thwarted hopes, wrangling wranglers and sweet dreams betrayed by raw reality. That sense of place is true to life, one imagines, but it has a dwindling effect on this well-acted and well-made movie. For all its brave beginnings and real achievements--its assault on western mythology, its discovery of a subversive sexual honesty in an unexpected locale--*Brokeback Mountain* finally fails to fully engage our emotions.

14. Peter Howell, *Toronto Star*, Sept. 9, 2005

What Ang Lee has wrought with his stunning contemplation of two men who find love in a lonely place is more about universal human needs than about gender preferences.

15. Todd McCarthy, "Brokeback Mountain," *Variety*, Sept. 3, 2005

That most chameleonlike of directors, Ang Lee, pulls off yet another surprising left turn in "Brokeback Mountain." An achingly sad tale of two damaged souls whose intimate connection across many years cannot ever be properly resolved, this ostensible gay Western is marked by a heightened degree of sensitivity and tact, as well as an outstanding performance from Heath Ledger. With critical support, Focus should have little trouble stirring interest among older, sophisticated viewers in urban markets, but trying to cross this risky venture over into wider release reps a marketing challenge for the ages; paradoxically, young women may well constitute the group that will like the film best....

Ultimately, it's a sorrowful story of men lucky enough to connect but forlornly unable to fulfill their characters and live according to their true natures. Unfortunately, the film hits this same note far too often in the latter going; the point is made well before the yarn plays itself out and, like virtually every Lee picture, this one is too long for its own good...

The beautiful, rugged locations, which would have roused Anthony Mann, are majestically captured by lenser Rodrigo Prieto. The passing years, from the early '60s to the late '70s, are subtly indicated in the production and costume design, hair styles and gingerly aging makeup, while Gustavo Santaolalla's conventionally supportive score is nicely abetted by a host of period and setting-appropriate tunes.