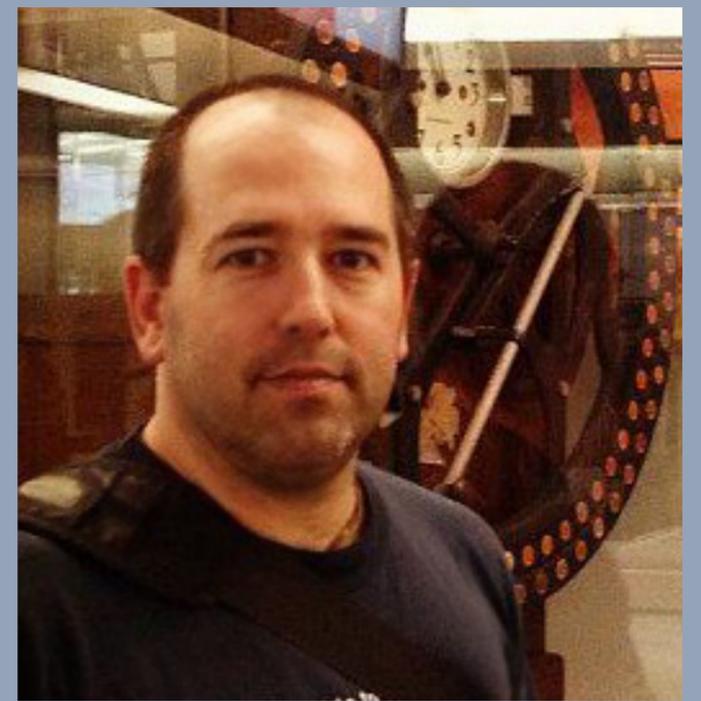


Climbing Brokeback Mountain

A Wilderness-Civilization Dialectic Reading

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Introduction

The film *Brokeback Mountain*, director Ang Lee's adaptation of a short story by Annie Proulx, was released in late 2005 to both critical acclaim and controversy. *Brokeback Mountain* is not the only film to center upon the lives of gay men, yet *Brokeback* differs from predecessors and contemporaries in how it literally changed the cultural landscape. Schneider observed, "brokeback' quickly became a common noun that referred to an unexpected or illicit gay-ish situation: an otherwise straight man could have a 'brokeback moment'; a woman could be stuck in a 'brokeback marriage.'"¹

The film has done far more than contribute to our vocabulary. *Brokeback Mountain* was nominated for dozens of awards, eventually earning three Academy Awards (Best Director for Ang Lee, Best Adapted Screenplay for Diana Ossana and James Schamus, and Best Original Score for Gustavo Santaolalla). The movie has spawned dozens of scholarly and peer-reviewed articles and redefined the quintessential American genre—the Western.² As Grindstaff concluded, the film "has solidified its status as a significant cultural artifact, enjoying box office success and receiving critical acclaim."³ Hain goes beyond mainstream success and argued a significant component is the film's ability to "generate discourse" among professional critics and scholars, and the general public: "it has caused mainstream audiences to reevaluate their perceptions of hetero- and homosexualities."⁴



Our motive in advancing this critique of *Brokeback Mountain* is not to unearth some previously unarticulated truth from/about the text but to contribute to that dialogue through a critical reading.⁵ The purpose of critical theory, as Ingram and Simon-Ingram pointed out, is to respond to the historical events of the day and, "unlike most contemporary theories of society, whose primary aim is to provide the best description and explanation of social phenomenon, critical theories are chiefly concerned with evaluating the freedom, justice, and happiness of societies."⁶ Thus, we do not position ourselves as neutral, objective critics but as situated readers with a critical purpose. We position ourselves publicly and politically as allies with GLBT communities. Our critical reading affirms the normalcy of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered relationships, and stands opposed to heteronormativity (in particular to so-called "defense of marriage" legislation) and supports equal rights for all persons. We believe our reading of *Brokeback Mountain* may revitalize and reinvigorate the text as a vehicle for changing the cultural discourse. In doing so, we draw upon theories of critical rhetoric, intertextuality and polysemy.⁷ We acknowledge considerable critical discourse has been generated by *Brokeback Mountain*, yet much of the discourse has been framed in such a way that the liberatory potential of the text was domesticated. To borrow a phrase from Foucault, the text has been "controlled, selected, organised [sic] and redistributed according to a certain number of procedures, whose role is to avert its power and its dangers."⁸ We hope to advance a reading of the *Brokeback Mountain* framed within what we call the *wilderness-civilization dialectic* which provides a richer reading of the text and, hopefully, re-vitalize the film as a site of critical discourse.



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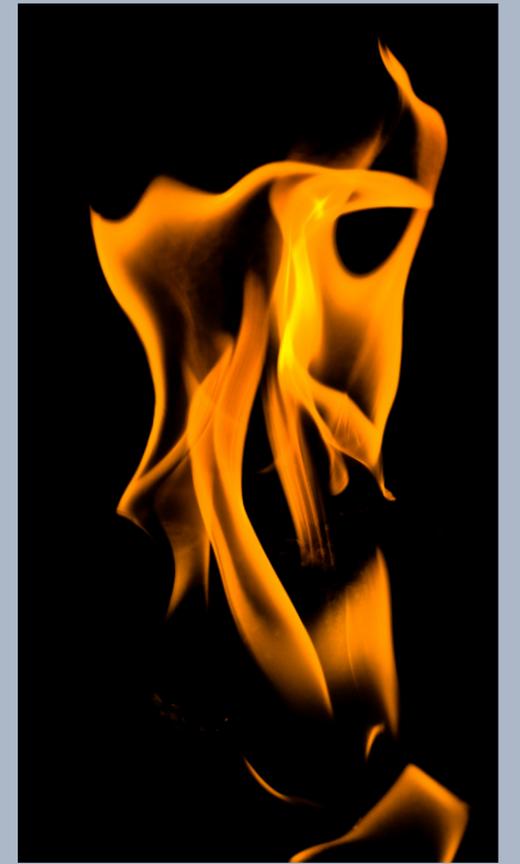
Critical Rhetoric and Rhetorical Criticism

What we refer to as a critical rhetoric begins by understanding *Brokeback Mountain* as both a work of art and “a rhetorical response having a poetic form.”⁹ All art is, of course, political to some degree or another but *Brokeback Mountain* is a uniquely rhetorical film. Cooper and Pease point out great irony: In 2005, while “voters from Oregon to Ohio fought same-sex marriage, one of Hollywood’s most anticipated new films focused on two cowboys in love.”¹⁰ Cooper and Pease further note that in 2004 while *Brokeback Mountain* was in production, “13 states passed laws to ban same-sex marriages and President George W. Bush proposed a constitutional amendment to reserve this ‘most enduring human institution’ exclusively for the ‘union of a man and a woman.’”¹¹ While the



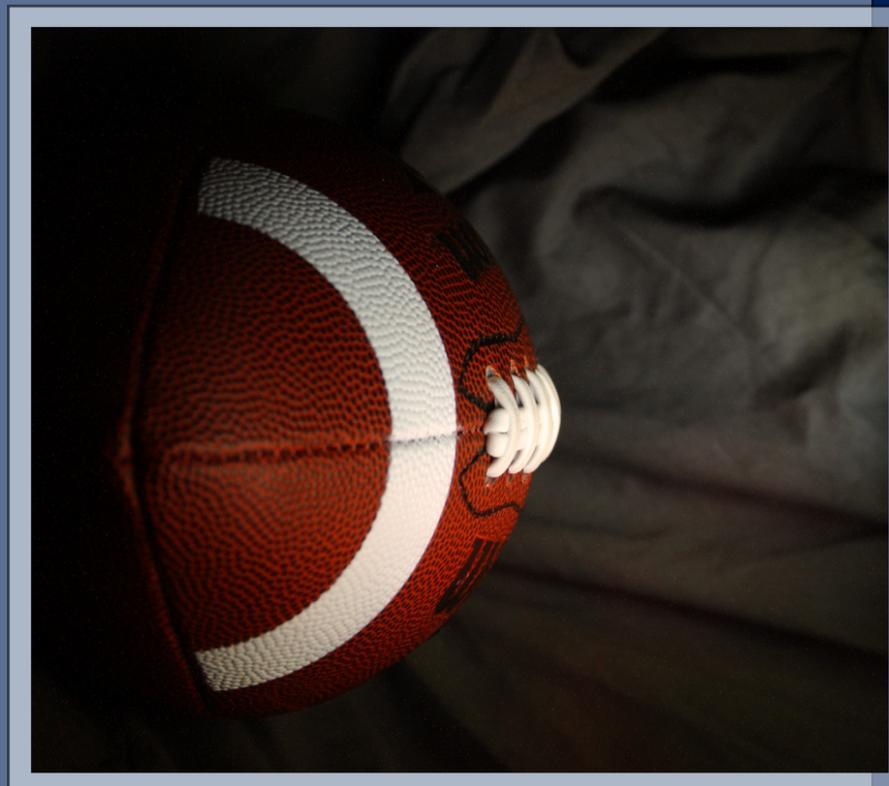
film was an unqualified success, DOMA Watch was tracking anti-gay measures in nine states scheduled for 2006 elections, nearly all of which were passed.¹² While the film’s supporters saw the film as a much needed challenge to “easily anticipated expectations of what ‘gay’ looks like—in large part by shifting the typical gender, class, and regional representations of gay men in to unfamiliar terrain” its overtly political connotations were not universally well received.¹³ *WorldNetDaily* editor David Kupelian, for example, called the film “brilliant propaganda” aimed at changing “the way they feel about homosexual relationships and same-sex marriage.”¹⁴

Audience reactions to the film often depended on how individuals were situated. Holleran noted, for example, younger gay men often did not feel as intense a connection with Ennis and Jack as older gay men, who came of age in a less tolerant time.¹⁵ Though some complained the film had too much sex, many others— especially in the LGBT community—decried the film’s downplay of the Ennis (actor Heath Ledger) and Jack’s (Jake Gyllenhaal) sexual relationship, its over-emphasis on tragic elements, and its minimization of the joy they felt when together. Draz lamented *Brokeback Mountain*’s “squeamishness as depicting Jack and Ennis making love too passionately, [and its] almost unconscious reluctance to show them loving each other too happily.”¹⁶ Other critics challenged the premise that *Brokeback Mountain* was a groundbreaking, discourse-altering film. Grindstaff contended that the film portrays “homosexual desire as a type of gender inversion” thereby leaving unchallenged “the binary, gendered structure of heteronormative masculinity.”¹⁷ Miller opined the film did little more than “stir [the] yuppie demographic to indignation.”¹⁸ Worse than doing nothing, some critics, including Cooper and Pease went so far as to suggest *Brokeback Mountain* performed a masking function, substituting representation of sexual minorities for actual social and political change, mistakenly equating increased visibility with increased acceptance.¹⁹ They contended, “Although *Brokeback* may



have prompted more conversation about gay issues, since the movie's release the nation has, if anything, moved farther from greater acceptance of homosexuality" and "the attitudinal contours of heterosexism in America seem pretty much unchanged."²⁰

We counter that while we certainly have a long way to go in the fight for equality (in the course of finalizing this manuscript for publication our home state of Minnesota defeated a constitutional amendment defining marriage as only existing between one man and one woman but a defense of marriage act preventing state agencies from recognizing same-sex marriages remained in place) major strides have been made since the release of *Brokeback Mountain*. Other signs point to a cultural shift. While a lot of attention was given to Minnesota Vikings punter Chris Kluwe's profanity laden defense of LGBT rights, sports writer David Zirin pointed out that "players such as Scott Fujita, NFL Hall of Famer Michael Irvin, the whole San Francisco 49ers team and even Sports Illustrated NFL preview coverboy Rob Gronkowsky have all spoken out for LGBT rights."²¹ While a handful of players is not the whole league, the vocal support of any professional athletes would have been unthinkable even a decade ago.



While impossible to quantify the degree to which *Brokeback Mountain* contributed to these developments, our desire to revisit the work years after the film's release, is driven by our belief that discourse does impact ideology. How we talk about sexualities changes how we think and may change policies and laws. While *Brokeback Mountain* is far from perfect, its significance in the cultural landscape—it is an Oscar-winning film, an epic, genre-altering work, and one of the final works of a truly great actor Heath Ledger before his untimely death—situates the film as a site of discourse and discussion which has the potential to change the way people think. We hope our reengagement of the work will be what McKerrow called a critique of freedom, which "has as its telos the prospect of permanent criticism—a self-reflexive critique that turns back on itself even as it promotes a realignment in the force of power that construct social relations."²²

The Discursive Spaces of *Brokeback Mountain*

In the "Discourse on Language," Foucault argues the power of discourse lies in the "fact that people speak, and that their speech proliferates" thus in every society certain procedures exist to "avert its powers and its dangers, to cope with chance events, to evade its ponderous, awesome materiality."²³ Whether *Brokeback Mountain* was a deliberate effort to change the discourse relative to sexuality and masculinity, it threatened the always tenuous status quo of heteronormativity. In order to constrain that discourse, two discursive strategies emerged, the de-gaying of the text and the transformation of the text from dramatic to parodic.

De-Gaying *Brokeback Mountain*

In the first effort, the film's makers (including actor Jake Gyllenhaal and director Ang Lee) and many in the press challenged the characterization of the film as "the gay cowboy movie."²⁴ Focus Features issued a series



of advertisements featuring decidedly *ungay* images of Ledger and Gyllenhaal. Ennis is pictured with Alma (played by actress Michelle Williams) at their wedding; Jack appears with his wife, Lureen (played by Anne Hathaway), and an infant son; Ennis is posed in homage to the uber-masculine Marlboro Man.²⁵ Critics, too, challenged the gay cowboy angle. Noted critic Roger Ebert declared:

Brokeback Mountain has been described as “a gay cowboy movie,” which is a cruel simplification. It is the story of a time and place where two men are forced to deny the only great passion either one will ever feel. Their tragedy is universal. It could be about two women, or lovers from different religious or ethnic groups—any “forbidden” love.²⁶

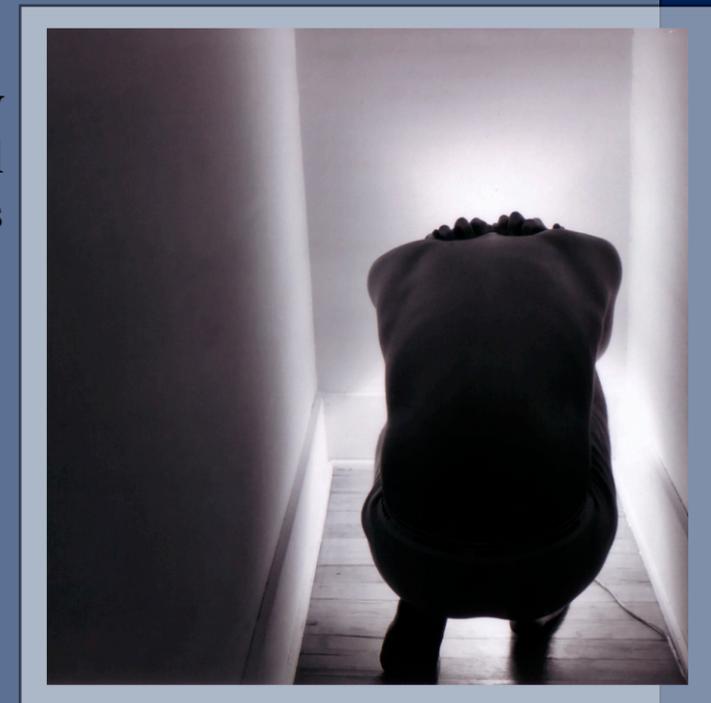
The mainstreaming of *Brokeback Mountain* as a universal love story introduced the film to a wider audience than if the general public had seen the film as speaking only to the gay experience. The efforts of Ebert and other critics complemented Focus Features’ attempt to reach the widest possible commercial audience and to endear the film to the Academy in an effort to win Oscar glory. The move was important in challenging homophobia by positioning a gay love story as a universal love story.

Efforts to de-gay the film did not go unchallenged. Many critics re-emphasized the text’s unambiguously gay themes. For example, in his criticism, Mendelsohn emphatically argued:

Both narratively and visually, *Brokeback Mountain* is a tragedy about the specifically gay phenomenon of the “closet”—about the disastrous emotional and moral consequences of erotic self-repression and the social intolerance that first causes and then exacerbates it.²⁷

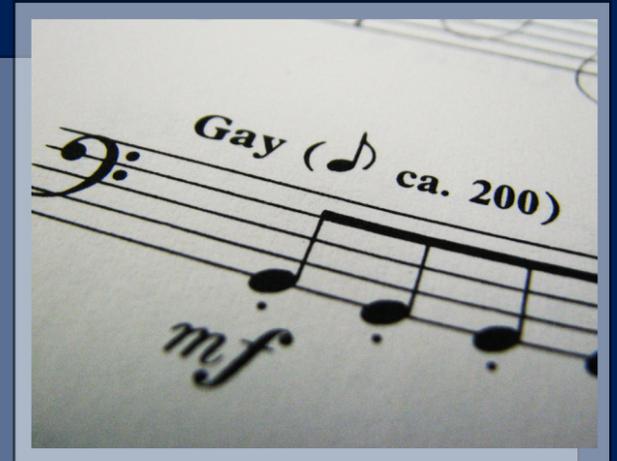
To frame the film as anything but a gay story, Mendelsohn argued, denies the obvious “themes of repression, containment, the emptiness of unrealized lives—all ending in the ‘nothingness’ to which Ennis achingly refers,” while ignoring the rather blatant closet metaphor featured in two of the film’s most climactic moments.²⁸

Ultimately the de-gaying of *Brokeback Mountain* had more to do with exclusion than transformation. Miller argued the criticism of the film ultimately focused more on craft than content. The film was “well made”—it was praised for the quality of filming, the acting, and the cinematography. Criticism was not “around an always-debatable homosexuality that the film builds consensus but around its own conspicuous craft. This craft is the real universal for which the film asks and is receiving general recognition.”²⁹ The nature of sexuality or sexualities, the nature of oppression and liberation, are lost in a discussion of Ang Lee’s crafting of an epic visual narrative. The discussion of what it means to repress one’s sexual identity is replaced by a discussion how well Heath Ledger portrays it.



From Drama to Parody

The “gay cowboy” label, however, dominated popular culture leading to parodies of the film. As Penney noted, *Brokeback Mountain* was the subject of an “enormous amount of jokes, parodies, and skits” in both the mainstream media and user-generated media such as YouTube.³⁰ The humor often relied on traditional, heteronormative stereotypes of both gay men and cowboys. David Letterman’s “Top Ten Signs You’re a Gay Cowboy” included Versace saddles and preferring salons to saloons.³¹ The film was parodied on television by *Saturday Night Live* and on the big screen in the popular slapstick comedy *Date Movie*.³²



While efforts in previous discourses shared a common end of expanding our understanding of the gay experience, parodic representations have had the opposite effect of shrinking the space of gay experience and re-asserting narrow and stereotypical representations of gayness. Ott and Walter described parody as a “stylistic device in which one text incorporates a caricature of another, most often, a popular cultural text.”³³ The parodic text imitates or exaggerates prominent or representative features of the ‘original’ text³⁴ As humor, these



parodies proceed from the assumption cowboys are by definition not gay and gay men are not cowboys. The parody is funny precisely because it is unexpected, and unexpected because it violates an audience’s understanding of “normal.” This unexpectedness proceeds from the assumption a “gay cowboy” is oxymoronic, as an obvious and laughable contradiction. The underlying logic of the parody is that cowboys can’t be gay, thus re-inscribing the myth of a singular, unambiguous homosexual identity upon the public consciousness. If *Brokeback* was groundbreaking in the sense it challenged the public consciousness of a distinct and identifiable sense of gayness, the parodic re-presentations of the text served to obfuscate the complexities of human sexuality. The re-presentations of the gay identity in parody perpetuated the idea homosexuality is singular, visible and obvious or, conversely, reinforced the homophobic paranoia that gay men may walk among us and blend in. In short, the need to present the “gay cowboy” as an oxymoron, a humorously obvious contradiction, ultimately de-normalizes homosexuality.

Brokeback Mountain was not the first film to feature openly gay characters but it did come at an opportune time for the LGBT rights movement. As Wood noted, whether by chance or astute planning, it was “the ideal film for mainstream audiences ... a film about gay men that the general public is ready for and can accept.”³⁵ While not everyone was ready to accept Ennis and Jack as role models (many were not even willing to accept them as cowboys), the film was far more critically and commercially successful than “its most obvious forerunner, *Making Love* ... the first mainstream Hollywood film in which two men kissed on screen.”³⁶ From a critical and rhetorical perspective, the film provided the discourse with a mythic narrative that challenged the campy gay stereotype while highlighting the reality of lives left destitute by heterosexist repression. The discourse was, literally and figuratively, neutered. The discourse ceased to be a commentary on gayness that was strikingly absent from *Sex in the City* and *Will and Grace* and became an epic *Romeo and Juliet* set in the mountains of Wyoming instead of the piazzas of Verona. Eventually, and more



damaging to its potential as a vehicle for critical discourse, Ennis and Jack were transformed from suffering victims to the butt of a thousand jokes.

Re-Reading *Brokeback Mountain*: A Wilderness-Civilization Dialectic

We argue the de-gayng and parodizing of *Brokeback Mountain* can be challenged by re-framing the narrative within what we call a *wilderness-civilization dialectic*. We begin our argument by pointing to the impact framing has upon audience interpretation. According to Entman:

Framing essentially involves selection and salience. To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described.³⁷

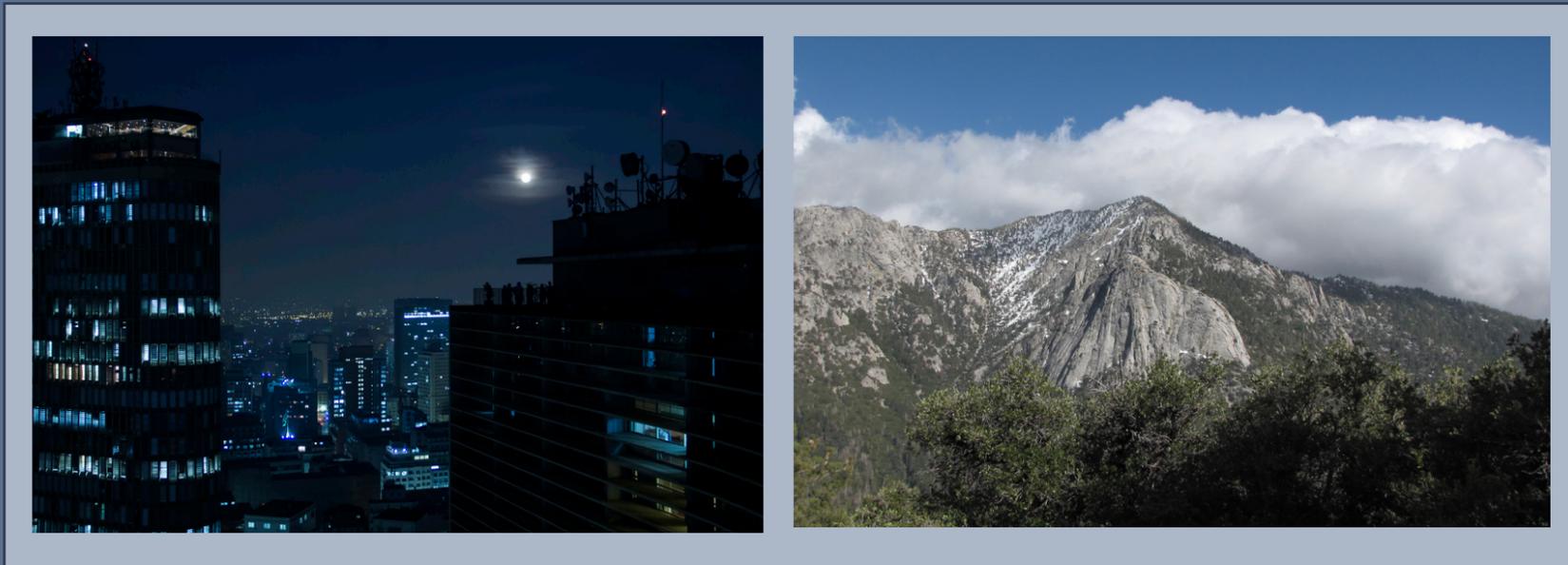
The frame draws attention to some textual elements while simultaneously minimalizing others. Entman observed that framing makes some dimensions of the text “more noticeable, meaningful or memorable to audiences.”³⁸ Callaghan and Schnell directed their attention to the political sphere and point out framing effects are a concern “whenever an issue can be presented using multiple packages or thematic slants.”³⁹ How an issue is framed “can alter how an issue is understood and thus shift public opinion.”⁴⁰

We argue framing is a natural part of both writing and reading. While authors of discourse (whether political speech or a fictional narrative of two cowboys in Wyoming) frame their messages, the author is at best a nominator of a frame to which a reader may subscribe.

Each reader ultimately frames the discourse. To designate the author as the sole determiner of a text’s frame, as Barthes pointed out, *closes* the text. In his estimation, “a text is not a line of words releasing a single ‘theological’ meaning (the ‘message’ of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash.”⁴¹ The responsibility for selecting a textual frame lies with a reader who, we contend, should critically reflect upon and chose the frame which reflects the reader’s view of the world as it is (descriptive), and the reader’s view of the way the world ought to be (prescriptive or normative). The selection of a frame is ultimately a rhetorical act. Frame selection furthers a particular interpretation. Weaver believed it influences the world of our imaginations.⁴² A change in imagination is prerequisite to changing the world around us. The text of *Brokeback Mountain* brings about change in the imagination of the audience members, influencing how they understand homosexuality and gay relationships, and thus impacts how a reader participates in the political sphere within which such issues are grappled.

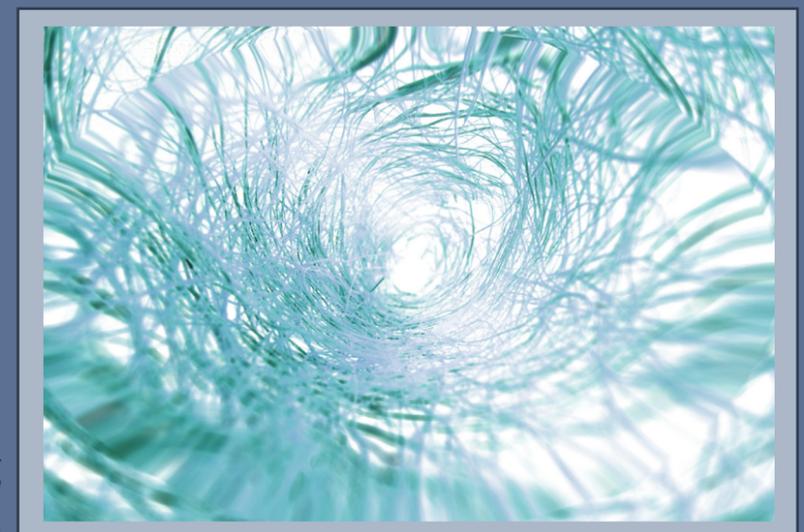


A critical rhetoric, we contend, is a rhetoric—a persuasive argument—for the adoption of a particular frame. The audience’s selection of a frame is influenced by the author, by the text itself, by the intertextual elements a reader brings to the text, and by the discourse surrounding the text. Critical rhetoric engages the final component, the discourse surrounding a text, in an effort to shift the discourse and promote the adoption of a particular frame that serves the interests of the critical rhetor. We, as critical rhetors, argue for the adoption of a particular frame for *Brokeback Mountain*—a wilderness-civilization dialectic.



Dialectical theories originate in Hegelian and Marxist thought and are generally characterized “by internal contradiction and constant flux.”⁴³ In a dialectical relationship, the two dimensions are understood as existing in a state of contradiction and symbiosis. Neither term has ontic (independent, self-validating) status; we have no intelligible sense of *slave* (to borrow Hegel’s oft-referenced analogy) without a sense of *master*.⁴⁴ The *slave-master* dialectic demonstrates how neither term can exist without the other and, while in conflict with one another, the each defines the other. As our understanding of one term changes, we must also change the other to account.

We contend the wilderness-civilization dialectic is an effective and appropriate frame for *Brokeback Mountain*. The setting of the narrative plays significant roles and, in a very real way, participates in the drama as much as Ennis Del Mar and Jack Twist. Indeed, the move from short story to motion picture transformed Annie Proulx’s story into “expansive visual poetry.”⁴⁵ Filmed in the Rocky Mountains just outside Calgary, the narrative is dominated by majestic scenery. Lee misses few opportunities to saturate the reader with a sublime sense of space. His efforts do not go unnoticed. Writing for the online review *Salon*, Zacharek captured Ennis and Jack’s relationship saying:



When Jack and Ennis are together (they manage to sneak away from their wives a few times a year, ostensibly on male-bonding-style fishing trips), we see them framed against majestic mountain backdrops, as clear, sparkling rivers rush by—obvious symbols of the natural, pure quality of their love. But in their homes, Jack and Ennis are hemmed in, respectively, by expensively paneled suburban walls and drab, messy rentals where the mewling of hungry babies is a constant.⁴⁶

Kennedy echoed:

The open glory of the scenery is in absolute contrast to the social entrapment that fates Jack and Ennis to loveless marriages and negligent, ineffectual fatherhood. It is after their agonizing first summer farewell that the movie skillfully treats time like an accordion. The early scenes languish on the epic majesty of craggy peaks, electric storms, and endless horizons dotted with conifers. Searing life memories are made for Jack and Ennis.⁴⁷

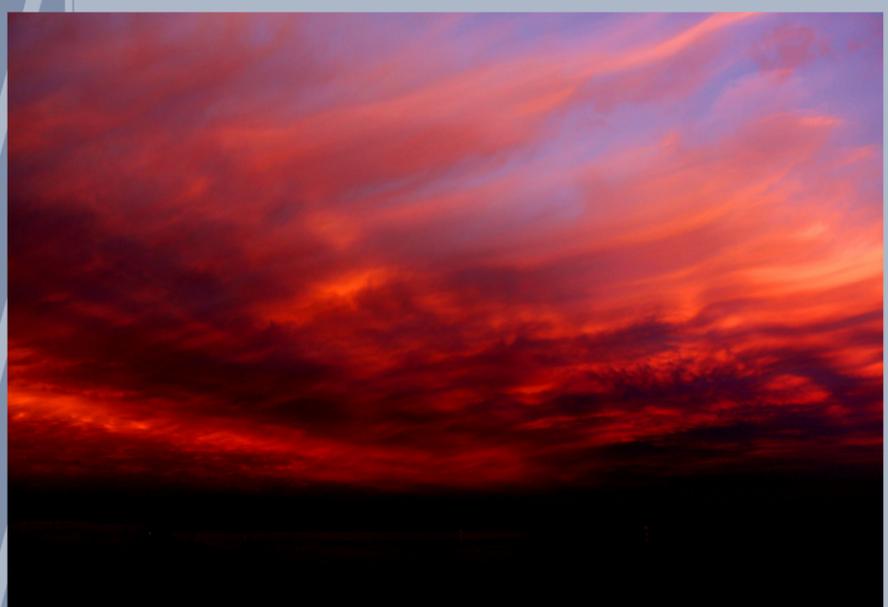
Kennedy and Zacharek's criticisms emphasized the appropriateness of framing the film in dialectical terms: Ennis and Jack's love flourishes in the wide open spaces, beneath the majestic blue sky and upon the grassy foothills of (perhaps foreshadowing) the jagged gray-black peaks. In contrast, their heterosexual relationships take place inside sterile, plastic living rooms, depression-era prairie farm houses, and in a squalid apartment above a laundry mat. In the final moments of the film, a lost Ennis looks out the dingy window of his ramshackle trailer, the prairie in the distance, the postcard picture of *Brokeback Mountain* in the foreground as images of what might have been or, perhaps, the fragments that he has been able to salvage. True love blooms in the wilderness. False love scrabbles for existence in civilization.



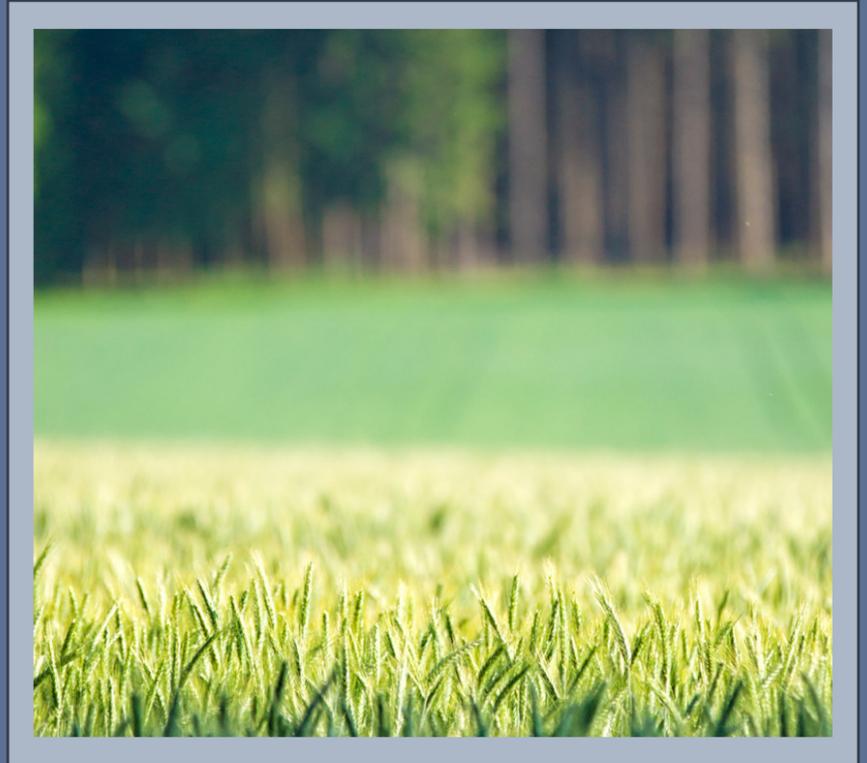
We believe it is important to distinguish between the wilderness-civilization dialectic and what we take to be more static, limiting binary frames such as a natural-artificial or private-public dialectic. Such simple binaries lack the flexibility needed to encompass the interpretations the *wilderness-civilization dialectic* permits and encourages. Natural-artificial and private-public are mutually exclusive binaries. They are opposites such that where one is, the other is not. What is public cannot also be private and the natural cannot also be artificial. To read the film from this perspective, however, ignores the publicness of their relationship: the relationship is discovered by Joe Aguirre (played by actor Randy Quaid) who denies Jack Twist work because he and Ennis had been “stemming the rose;” the relationship is known to Alma who confronts Ennis with the knowledge he believed to be private had been known for some time. The same can be said of the natural and the artificial.

While certainly true that Jack and Ennis's love affair flourishes in the mountains, it is overly limiting to say the love is natural while everything else is artificial.

Unlike either the private-public or natural-artificial binaries, wilderness and civilization are not so easily separated. A key distinction in this dichotomy is the degree to which the rhetorical construct of wilderness is a space of ambiguity within which multiple meanings are possible, while civilization stresses monosemy. Roderick Nash contended “wilderness is a matter of perception—part of the geography of the mind.”⁴⁸ Wilderness is both literally and symbolically an ambiguous space, and a space



within which the ambiguous is fitting. By definition, wilderness is a deprivation of civilization; the purpose of civilization is to control/tame the wilderness. Neither term has an ontic referent; they define one another dialectically. In seeking the essence of the dialectical nature between civilization and the wilderness, some insight is suggested by Durkheim who found the essence of civilization in the division of labor.⁴⁹ The division regulates our interactions lest conflicts “incessantly crop out anew” and “mutual obligations had to be fought over entirely anew in each particular instance.”⁵⁰ Indeed, for Durkheim, the more complex a society, the greater the division. The wilderness-civilization dialectic is interpenetrative. The border between the two is ill-defined. While the natural-artificial dialectic has some claim to objectivity (we treat such terms as capable of empirical verification), the wilderness-civilization dialectic is inherently subjective. Some of us find the wilderness only when we believe we are in a space where few if any have come before, while others call going out of sight of a Starbucks “into the wild.” Finally, wilderness and civilization are interpenetrative. We are comfortable in the civilization of our neighborhoods but, as many residents of suburbia have discovered, the wilderness often wanders in, appearing as a bear in our garbage cans or a flat tire on a lonely wooded lane. In the wilderness, we bring our civilized global positioning systems and other high-tech gear. Regardless of where we are, we find traces, eruptions and manifestations of each in the other. Wilderness is in civilization; civilization is in wilderness.⁵¹



Wilderness and Civilization in Brokeback Mountain

The movie starts at the raw edge of civilization. Jack Twist is dropped off in Signal, Wyoming at sunrise to find another cowboy, Ennis Del Mar, already waiting. The two wait in silence outside the office trailer of Joe Aguirre, a sheep rancher looking for men to care for his flock grazing on government land in the Big Horn Mountains. Aguirre, a physically daunting man, imposes himself upon Ennis and Jack. Aguirre drives into the parking lot where Ennis and Jack have been waiting in silence for his arrival, walking past them without speaking into his trailer and pulling the door shut behind him. Aguirre sets the time, the place, and the circumstances for their meeting. His bearing and manner speak of domination and control. When he does speak his words break the long silence, “If you pair a deuces’ are lookin’ fer work I suggest you get yer scrawny asses in here pronto.”



He imposes upon them, designating their status both in how he acts toward them and in what he calls them, “a pair of deuces,” a nearly worthless poker hand. Ennis and Jack are “scrawny asses”; only parts of men rather than complete men. The vivisection is, after all, the dark side of civilization and is inherently partializing. In assigning roles, designating spaces and constraining action, civilization makes each person a part of something rather than a whole. Civilization constructs discursive cages in order to constrain the wilderness.



Michal Zacharzewski
<http://www.sxc.hu/profile/mzacha>

Aguirre intends to send Ennis and Jack into the wilderness, yet he has no intention of relinquishing his controlling force provided by civilization. His motive, after all, is the most civilized of motives—capitalism. In order to maintain a profitable operation, Aguirre informs them of a Forest Service policy which designates campsites on the allotments or ranges where the sheep are to be pastured. The campsites are located down the mountainside from the sheep pasture which requires the shepherd to leave the sheep exposed to coyotes and other predators. Aguirre orders them to violate the Forest Service policy. He designates Ennis as “camp tender” who will maintain the campsite and Jack as the “herder” who will sleep with the sheep. Ennis and Jack roles are labeled, assigned given duties, and designated activities by Aguirre through civilization’s division-of-labor power.

The text keeps the wilderness (the increasing absence of civilization) at the forefront. Jack and Ennis enter the wilderness, moving sheep through valleys and streams, up into the high mountain passes. Extended panoramic images of ragged peaks and wide open skies remind us, or rather refuse to allow us to forget, where they are. They attempt to carve out a civilized space, setting up a tent, building a fire ring, raising their food high to protect it from bears. Civilization attempts to penetrate the striking wilderness and to impose order.

Their civilized roles begin to break down after only a short time under the influence of the wilderness. Jack, in a foreshadowing of his resentment at having civilization forced upon him, bemoans Aguirre and the arrangement. He complains:

Jack: I can’t wait ‘till I get my own spread and I won’t have to put up with Joe Aguirre’s crap no more.

Ennis: I’m saving for a place myself. Alma and me, we’ll be gettin’ married when I come down off this mountain.

Jack: Shh—This stay-with-the-sheep no-fire bullshit. Aguirre ain’t got no right making us do something against the rules.

In this sequence, Ennis and Jack are unresponsive to one another. They speak but we hear no intercourse of language. Ennis responds to Jack’s statement that he wants a spread of his own by expressing his own desire to have a place of his own. Ennis imposes a sameness upon Jack, a recognition they are (dis)similar but suppressing the (dis)similarity by emphasizing the similitude. Ennis sees (or wants to see) Jack as a reflection of himself. The exchange also forces us to consider the polysemy, or multiplicity of meanings, of the scene. Ennis’ invocation of Alma could be read as a mere statement of fact—he is engaged. The statement could, however, be read as an effort to deflect any implied advance by asserting his heterosexuality. The text is silent on this, constructing a space that invites readers to bring our own experience to the narrative and to reflect upon our presumptions of heterosexuality.



The relationship changes when the wilderness begins to overwhelm civilization. Jack makes a single request: “No more beans.” When Ennis makes his next trip down the mountain for supplies he requests soup instead of beans (a meal he had previously expressed disliking).

The shackles of civilization start to lose their grip when it can no longer provide expected provisions. Importantly, the development occurs at a crucial turn in the narrative. Ennis asks the man who brings supplies why “we didn’t get the powder milk and spuds” and the response is simple and direct, “S all we got.” The statement is not an answer to Ennis’ question—*why*—but a statement of brute circumstance which speaks to the failure of civilization to fully provide. In this moment, Ennis (and through him, we) are confronted with the paradox of civilization. Civilization may provide some, but not all one asks. Civilization offers stability and predictability but not wholeness. The significance of this moment in the narrative is taken further when wilderness overwhelms civilization in the form of a bear, an ideal symbol of the wilderness’s potential for violence, spooks the mules and scatters their provisions (recall earlier when Jack and Ennis were constructing a civilized space/camp within the wilderness by building a stand to protect their food from bears) as Ennis brings them to Jack.

Without the supplies provided by civilization and faced with a lack of food, Jack suggests shooting one of the sheep:

Jack: We gotta do something about this food situation. Maybe I’ll shoot one of the sheep.

Ennis: Yea, what if Aguirre finds out, huh? We’re supposed to guard the sheep not eat ‘em.

Jack: What’s the matter with you? There are a thousand of ‘em.

Ennis: We’ll stick with beans.

Jack: Well I won’t.

In this exchange we witness very different perspectives. Jack’s suggestion they eat the sheep is a rejection of civilization attempting to impose order, and respond to the wilderness survival imperative. Ennis stays focused on the requirements of civilization—to protect Aguirre’s property and means of profit (the sheep).

Ultimately, Ennis finds a middle ground by shooting an elk. Ennis is responding to Jack’s needs, participating in those needs and the elk provides a bounty for the hungry men. The wilderness provides what civilization cannot while still honoring the ownership and economic codes of civilization. Jack and Ennis start down a path toward wholeness in the sense there is no longer a division between them and what sustains them. They are not dependent upon civilization for food. They turn to the wilderness—to Brokeback Mountain—for their sustenance.



When Jack complains again about Aguirre's rules, Ennis' response is different:

Jack: Ya know I'm commutin' four hours a day. I come in for breakfast. I go back to the sheep. Evening get 'em bedded down. Come in fer supper. Go back to the sheep. Spend half the night checking for damn coyotes. Aguirre got no right makin' me do this.

Ennis: (After a pause). If you wanna switch I wouldn't mind sleeping out there.

Jack: That ain't the point. The point is we both ought to be in this camp. The goddamn pup tent smells like cat piss or worse.

Ennis: I wouldn't mind being out there.

Jack: Well I'm happy to switch with you but I warn you. I can't cook worth a damn. I am pretty good with a can opener though.

Ennis: You can't be no worse than me then.

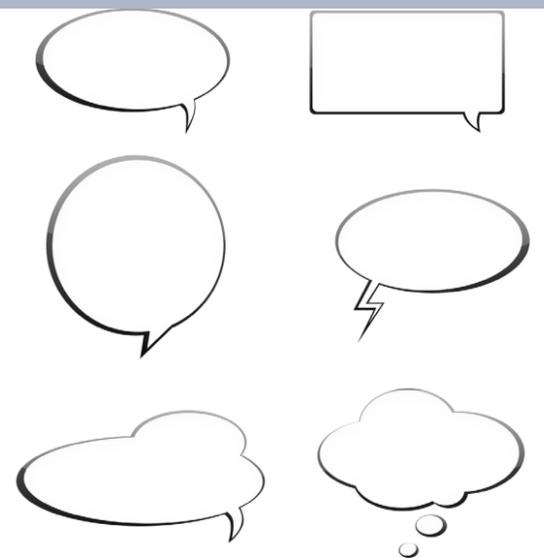


In trading places, the two break a rule established by Aguirre/civilization. The conversation turns to Jack and Ennis' talking about their respective backgrounds. Jack gripes about his bull-riding father who never taught him a thing and who never once come to see him ride. Ennis tells about his brother and sister "who done as right by 'em as they could" considering that when their parents died they left nothing but \$24 in a coffee can.

Jack remarks that Ennis' monologue is more than he's spoken in two weeks. Ennis responds it's more than he's spoken in a whole year. The verbal exchange, literally a *verbal* intercourse, preludes the relationship that is to become. This is accompanied by the further degradation of the civilizing

influence. As they move their camp deeper into the mountains, Jack has not set the tent up properly. It will not stand. As readers, we note the extended depictions of Ennis and Jack setting up their first camp, all performed in silence, are absent. Now we have dialogue. They discuss Jack's harmonica playing, being thrown from the mare, and the Pentecost. The nature of their relationship established within the constraints of civilization changes as the wilderness permeates deeper into their being. Ennis, no longer feeling compelled to narrowly define himself as the strong and silent cowboy, finds his voice. He is free to speak and to move toward becoming his whole self.

A central component of wilderness is the ambiguity in which it thrives.⁵² As the wilderness encroaches on Jack and Ennis, the deficiency of civilization's controlling influence opens space for multiple interpretations of what occurs next. The two get drunk and Ennis decides to stay and get "forty winks" and return to the sheep in the morning. Ennis' abandonment of his duties as herder, another rejection of the controls of civilization, sets the stage for





the initiation of a sexual—penetrative intercourse—relationship between the men.⁵³ As Ennis crawls into the tent with Jack, the clouds part to reveal the full moon, a symbol of insanity and the breakdown of civilized norms. The stage is set.

The central event in the film is fraught with ambiguity. Jack makes the first advance but does so as if asleep, a gesture open to multiple interpretations: Is the gesture an accident? The product of some dream? A response to the cold mountain air? As readers, we are uncertain what we are seeing. Their actions are rough, blurring the distinction between aggression and affection and we are unsure whether they are about to make love or fight. Ennis' mumbled "What are you doing?" is barely intelligible. We may find it difficult to believe his inquiry is genuine. Their first sexual encounter leaves us with more questions than answers, in part because we have been waiting for this moment since we entered the theater. One small movement in particular catches our attention as critical readers and raises questions for which we see no answers in the text. As Jack unbuckles his belt and turns to accept Ennis, Ennis spits on his fingertips using his saliva as a lubricant. This act gave rise to different interpretations. On one hand, the action may be dismissed as insignificant, an obvious response to a need. On the other hand, the action may read as an indicator of homosexual experience. Ennis had stated earlier he had not yet had the opportunity to sin, yet he knows the sexual encounter will require lubrication. Ennis does not have to think about where to get it. He knows. But does he know from experience? Our point is not to settle the question of whether or not this is Ennis' first homosexual encounter. Our point is to demonstrate that we, as readers, are not given the answers. The text leaves the interpretations to the readers.

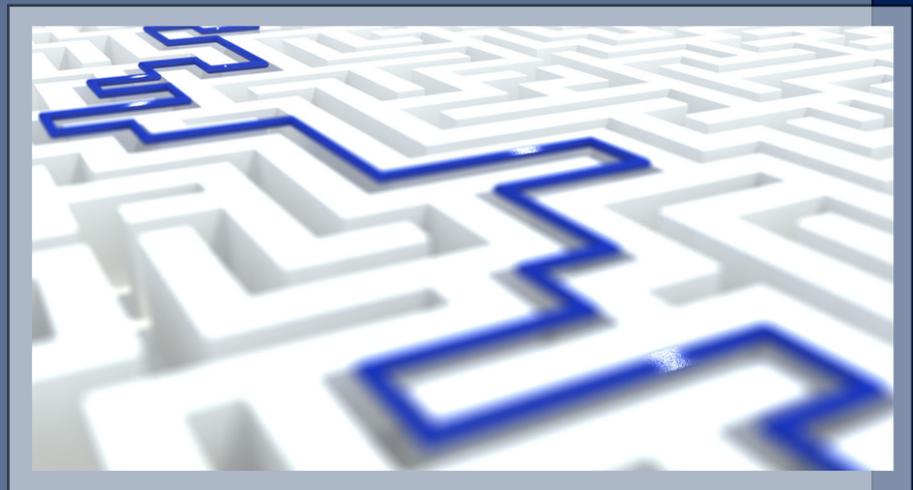
This level of ambiguity is the defining characteristic of Ennis and Jack's relationship on Brokeback Mountain. Ennis leaves the next morning in silence, turning away from Jack's half-hearted statement about dinner. When they do talk about the encounter, their language is open, vague and unspecified:

Ennis: This is a one-shot thing we got goin' on here.
Jack: (nodding). It's nobody's business but ours.

This exchange appears to be similar to others, with the two talking past one another but it differs in key respects. In this instance, the two define their relationship, each declaring his stance and acknowledging the position of the other without imposing. For Ennis, this is something which can only be right now, a where and a when, while for Jack it is a who, that it is theirs and theirs alone. The two positions are not contradictory but they are not the same. The exchange continues:

Ennis: You know I ain't queer.
Jack: Me neither.

They define themselves by what they are not—"I ain't queer." Both men reject the epithet and thereby reject the narrow definition of who they are as men. However, rejection of queerness is not an acceptance of anything else. Ennis and Jack are emphatic about what they are *not*, but leave it for the reader to decide exactly what they are. With no civilized terms to define it, their relationship has moved into the wilderness.





Nowhere in the film is their relationship defined in clear and unambiguous language. Established labels that may simplify and solidify Jack and Ennis or their relationship are not provided. Even characters hostile to their love are unable to clearly speak about it. Aguirre, for example, who saw Jack and Ennis in a loving embrace later tells Jack, “you guys wasn’t gettin’ paid to leave the dogs baby-sit the sheep while you stemmed the rose.”⁵⁴

Jack and Ennis’ relationship thrives in the wilderness. However, tent camping beside clear lakes and tumbling rivers in the wilderness is not just the place where they are in love. Wilderness becomes a metaphor for their love. After four years of separation, Ennis and Jack rekindle their relationship. Jack and Ennis are lying together in bed when Jack whispers, “Old Brokeback got us good, don’t it?” The postcards they exchange depict wilderness scenes, often of the mountain where they fell in love. In the same way wilderness is penetrated by—and sometimes overwhelmed by—civilization, civilization may be stripped away to reveal the wilderness. Ennis makes love to his wife and transfers his desire for Jack to her. The first reunion of Jack and Ennis, however, is when the wild takes hold and their passionate kiss overwhelms them. Ennis recognizes this danger and later tells Jack, “The bottom line is, we’re around each other and this thing grabs hold of us again in the wrong place, in the wrong time, and we’re dead.”

At their final meeting, Ennis and Jack construct another metaphoric space—Mexico—as an antithesis to Brokeback Mountain. Mexico represents another avenue for gay relationships where you find sex without love. When Ennis reacts violently to the idea Jack has been visiting gay prostitutes, Jack responds angrily: “We could have had a good life together. Fucking real good life. Had a place of our own! But you didn’t want it Ennis. So what we got now is Brokeback Mountain!” Tragically, this is the last time Ennis and Jack meet. Even the final circumstances of Jack’s death are left unspoken, only implied in Lureen’s cold and impassive phone call. Although the scene clearly implies Jack was murdered, as readers do not know if the scene of Jack being beaten to death actually happened. Is it an objective view of the actual events surrounding Jack’s death, a mental recreation by Lureen from facts she does not share with Ennis, or is a product of Ennis’ imagination? The text does not provide readers with an answer.



What leads to Jack’s murder is his belief he can tap into the wilderness while living in the grasp of civilization. Creatures (human or otherwise) don’t commit “murder” in the wilderness—killing exists, but not murder. Murder is a civilized term and implies a division between types of killing. Killing with a right to kill is just. Killing without a right to kill is murder. Killing in the wild is a product of necessity (recall the killing of the elk for food). Killing in civilization is an attempt to alter (revolution) or reaffirm (reaction) the existing order. Violence might bring about a change or perpetuate the order, but order remains the defining aspect of civilization. Jack’s murder is civilization restoring the proper order, because civilization cannot tolerate Jack upsetting the proper order of sexual relations. Ennis foreshadows what happens when one attempts a dual condition of satisfying both the wilderness and civilization. On one of their camping trips, Ennis reveals to Jack one of the defining moments of his life: when his father shows him the body of Earl, who, along with Rich, “was a joke in town even though they were pretty tough old birds.” At

nine years old his “daddy, he made sure me and my brother seen it” and thus imposed upon Ennis a civilized definition of manhood from which Ennis finds impossible to break free. Jack ignores the warning and suffers the repercussion.

Jack’s death reinforces the struggle between the competing demands of the wilderness-civilization dialectic in Ennis’ life. Ennis has a tragic realization after Jack’s murder when he finally understands how empty his life will now be. The tragedy, from the perspective of the civilization-wilderness dialectic, is not so much Jack’s death as Ennis’ life, a life in which he is unable to surrender to the wilderness; unable to break free of the constraining influence of civilization. He is able to visit, but cannot live on Brokeback Mountain.

Ennis’ resistance against wilderness is clearly expressed through violence. The expectations of civilization (and his need to suppress the wilderness) push Ennis to violence when his manhood is challenged: he beats the biker at the Fourth of July fireworks display; when Alma finally confronts Ennis about his love for Jack:

Alma: Don’t try and fool me no more, Ennis. I know what that means. Jack Twist.

Ennis: Alma.

Alma: Jack “Nasty”! (pause). You didn’t go up there to fish. You and him

Ennis: (Grabbing Alma forcefully and leaning over her ominously). Now listen to me, you don’t know nothing about it.



Sue Byford
http://www.sx.chu/profile/sue_r_b

Ennis reacts violently to any attempt to name him and to impose upon him anything that names/defines his wilderness sexuality. The tough and violent dimensions of manhood, however, are only part of the constraints placed on manhood from which Ennis is never able to extricate himself. Ultimately, economics, the most civilizing of dimensions, enslaves Ennis.

In the early years, Ennis is willing to quit a job and drop what he is doing in order to be with Jack. He forsakes his civilized role as a ranch hand to return to the wilderness, but the economic imposition eventually takes its toll. Before their divorce, Alma interrupts Ennis as he attempted to have sex with her:

Alma: As far behind as we are on the bills, it makes me nervous not to take no precaution.

Ennis: If you don’t want no more of my kids, I’ll be happy to leave you alone.

Alma: I’d have ‘em, if you’d support ‘em.

This challenge to Ennis’ status as provider effectively neuters him and triggers the end of their marriage. When Jack comes to Ennis upon learning of the divorce from Alma, he expects this will be the start of their life together. Ennis still feels an obligation to his role as father and is unable to conceive of a world within which he may be with Jack, and with Alma Jr. and Jenny. The wilderness cannot encroach on his civilized role as economic provider.



At their final meeting, Ennis tells Jack he is unable to meet him in August because he cannot get free of his economic constraints:

Jack, I got to work. In them earlier days, I'd just quit the job. You ... You forget what it's like bein' broke all the time. You ever hear of child support? I'll tell you this, I can't quit this one. It was hard enough gettin' this time. The tradeoff was August.

Ennis has a duty to his civilization-imposed economic self, and his need to fix and establish a place in that order, which ultimately leads him to refuse Jack. Jack believes Ennis will never break free of civilization.

The Final Scenes

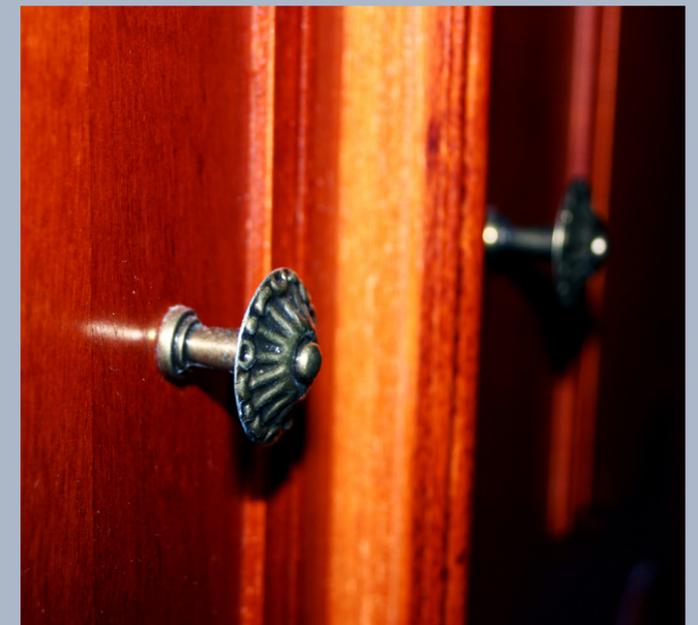
We argue the wilderness-civilization dialectic is uniquely conducive to polysemic interpretations which permit and invite the reader's subjectivity. As our analysis approached the final scenes we struggled to find a consensual civilization-wilderness reading but failed. We found some common threads, but then would diverge on other points. In what we believe is an appropriate multi-interpretative approach, we offer three different civilization-wilderness readings.

Blood-Stained Shirts, a Trailer, a Closet

In the film's final moments, Ennis discovers the blood-stained shirts in Jack's childhood closet—Ennis inside Jack. Ennis visits Jack's parents to pay his respects after Jack's death. The visit indicates the beginning of Ennis' overt acceptance of the pair's wilderness. He takes the shirts from Jack's parents' house and the dialectic shifts. Ennis is accepting the core of himself, and it includes wilderness. He later hangs the same shirts in his closet, reversed this time with Jack inside Ennis.

We understand this final moment as a tragic statement. Ennis is at last aware of what his life has been missing. He realizes that society's fences prevent him from ever being free and happy. The fences of civilization have continually worked to restrain his sexual and emotional happiness and freedom.

The scenes demonstrate the continued double bind Ennis must confront as he tries to find a middle ground between the expectation of civilization and the call of the wilderness. Ennis still lives his day-to-day life in the grip of civilization. Think of the scene when the reader sees Ennis standing outside trailer. He's carefully putting house numbers on his mailbox, and appears to be a little proud of completing this simple task. How much more of a label of civilization is possible than a mailbox and fixing your address to a mailbox?

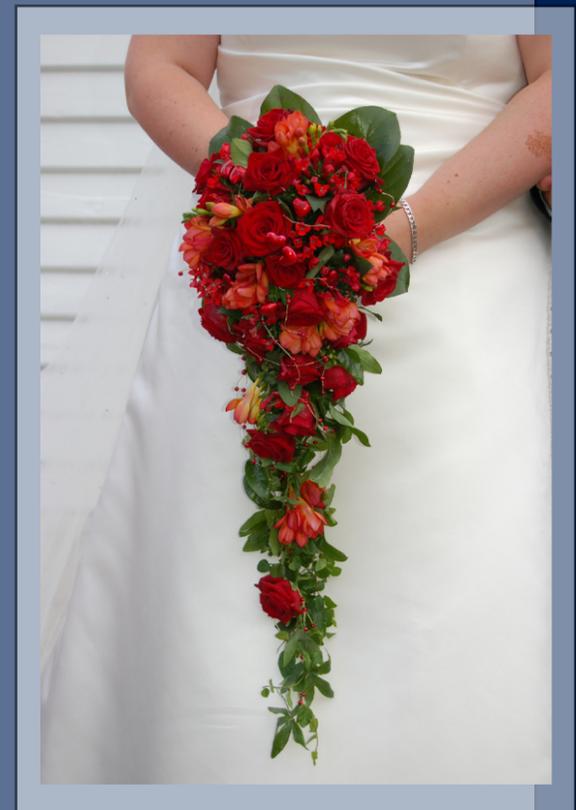


A Daughter, a Marriage, a Sweater



In the film's final moments, we see Ennis re-establish a connection with his daughter, Alma Jr. When she tells him she's getting married and she hopes he'll be there, he responds, "I think I'm supposed to be on a roundup down near the Tetons." But, after an extended silence throughout which he and Alma Jr. are not able to meet one another's gaze, he says, "But you know what? I reckon they can find themselves a new cowboy. My little girl, gettin' married. Alma Jr. leaves, but forgets to take along her sweater. Ennis puts his daughter's sweater inside his closet, showing the shirts.

The scene is an indication that Ennis is still responsible to the obligations of civilization. Marriage is a dimension of civilization, not the wilderness. The requirement for a father to be at a marriage is a powerful force of civilization. His love for his daughters (and Alma, Jr. in particular) has never been in question throughout the film. Ennis is merely shifting his civilization priorities from "economic provider" to "father of the bride." He can disappoint himself financially more than disappoint Alma Jr.'s need for his presence as the bonds of civilization are imposed on her new marital status. Thus, the still evident pain and quandary when Ennis puts his daughter's sweater in the same closet as the shirts. The shirts and sweater are markers for the people and complexities of love in his life. Even though his love for Alma Jr. and his love for Jack are different forces, he recognizes the commonality between them. In one sense, of course, we understand this final moment as a tragic statement. Ennis is at last aware of what his life has been missing.



A postcard, a window, "I Swear ... "

Tacked inside the closet near the shirts is a picture postcard of Brokeback Mountain. The final image shows the sweeping prairie as seen through the small window of the trailer and Ennis, tears in his eyes, breaths the final words of the film: "Jack, I swear ..."

We, the readers, do not know what he swears. The sentence is left open. A desire to change the past? A desire to move forward into the future? The image of the prairie through the window hints of the possibility of wilderness. But Ennis' view of the wild is filtered and framed by civilization. Ennis, as he has throughout the film, is still, and always will be, torn by the wilderness-civilization dichotomy. Like Jack and Ennis, we must eventually come down from Brokeback Mountain and, although we may return, there is, in Jack's words, "... never enough time. Never enough." The possibility of wilderness, of undefinedness, lies within. In a space inside us we keep to ourselves and jealously guard against the encroachment and imposition of the civilization.

Conclusion

Brokeback Mountain is a powerful film and appears in the cultural-political-social sphere at a moment when LGBT concerns are at the forefront of the public dialogue. *Brokeback Mountain* is part of the dialogue and is read by—and ignored by—those who are, to one degree or another, participants in that dialogue. As a film, it inspires, informs and entertains. As a rhetorical text, it shapes our voices within the current public dialogue.

On November 6, 2012 voters in Maine, Maryland, and Washington approved same-sex marriage joining Iowa, Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Vermont, New York, and the District of Columbia in marriage equality. When *Brokeback Mountain* was released in 2005, there was only one state (Massachusetts) where same-sex marriage was permitted. While not fair to give *Brokeback Mountain* credit for changing the discourse, the film inarguably changed the way we talk about same-sex relationships. As time passes, we wait to see whether the film will take its place among great cinematic achievements or pass into obscurity. We hope *Brokeback* can continue to contribute to a dialogue which challenges heteronormative assumptions about sexualities.

Perhaps, more appropriately, *Brokeback Mountain* touches us with a view of the wilderness. The wilderness space may be deep within—confined and restrained, but still there. Our ethical duty, our obligation, is to find it.



- ¹ Richard Schneider, Jr., "Not Quitting *Brokeback*," *The Gay & Lesbian Review* 1 (2006): 10.
- ² Sue Brower, "'They'd Kill Us if They Knew': Transgression and the Western," *Journal of Film and Video* 62.4 (2010): 47-57; Jim Kitses, "All that *Brokeback* Allows," *Film Quarterly* 60.3 (2007): 22-27; Erika Spohrer, "Not a Gay Cowboy Movie? *Brokeback Mountain* and the Importance of Genre," *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 37 (2009): 26-33.
- ³ Davin Grindstaff, "The Fist and the Corpse: Taming the Queer Sublime in *Brokeback Mountain*," *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 5 (2008): 223.
- ⁴ Mark Hain, "You Don't Know Jack: The Closet, Silence, and Knowledge in *Brokeback Mountain*" (paper presented at the annual national meeting for the National Communication Association, Chicago, Illinois, November 15-18, 2007).
- ⁵ We use the term "reading" rather than "viewing" to the extent the latter presumes a passivity on the part of the auditor. We contend that to read a text is to engage it as one who conceives her/himself as an agent active in the production of meaning rather than a passive recipient of the meaning intended by an author/producer-god. The primary text in this case is visual rather than verbal is relevant but does not essentially alter our stance as readers.
- ⁶ David Ingram and Julia Simon-Ingram, editors, *Critical Theory: The Essential Readings* (St. Paul, Minnesota: Paragon House, 1992), xx.
- ⁷ Raymie E. McKerrow, "Critical Rhetoric: Theory and Praxis," *Communication Monographs* 56 (1989): 91-111; Roland Barthes, *Image Music Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978); Michael Calvin McGee, "Text, Context, and the Fragmentation of Contemporary Culture," *Western Journal of Speech Communication* 54 (1990): 274-289; Celeste Michelle Condit, "The Rhetorical Limits of Polysemy," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 6.2 (1989): 103-122.
- ⁸ Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 216.
- ⁹ Lloyd F. Bitzer, "The Rhetorical Situation," *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 1 (1968): 11.
- ¹⁰ Brenda Cooper and Edward C. Pease, "Framing *Brokeback Mountain*: How the Popular Press Corralled the 'Gay Cowboy Movie,'" *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 25.3 (2008): 250.
- ¹¹ Cooper and Peace, "Framing *Brokeback Mountain*," 250.
- ¹² DOMA Watch, *DOMA Watch: Latest News*, accessed October 15, 2006, <http://www.domawatch.org/index.php>
- ¹³ Hain, "You Don't Know Jack," 3.
- ¹⁴ David Kupelian, "'*Brokeback Mountain*: Rape of the Marlboro Man" In WND: Commentary, (2005, December 27), accessed October 8, 2006, from WorldNetDaily, http://www.worldnetdaily.com/news/article.asp?ARTICLE_ID=48076, para 2.
- ¹⁵ Andrew Holleran, "The Magic Mountain." *The Gay & Lesbian Review Worldwide* 13.2 (2006, March/April), accessed September 23, 2006, <http://www.glreview.com/issues/13.2/13.2-holleran.php>
- ¹⁶ Christian Draz, "Lost in Adaptation," *The Gay & Lesbian Review* 13.3 (2006): 13.
- ¹⁷ Grindstaff, "The Fist and the Corpse," 226.
- ¹⁸ D. A. Miller, "On the Universality of 'Brokeback Mountain,'" *Film Quarterly* 60.3 (2007): 50.
- ¹⁹ Cooper and Peace, "Framing *Brokeback Mountain*."
- ²⁰ Cooper and Peace, "Framing *Brokeback Mountain*," 263-265.
- ²¹ David Zirin, "Chris Kluwe and the Greatest Political Statement by Any Athlete Ever," *The Nation*, Sept 8, 2012, para 6, accessed October 26, 2012 from <http://www.thenation.com/blog/169818/chris-kluwe-and-greatest-political-statement-any-athlete-ever>.
- ²² McKerrow, "Critical Rhetoric," 91.
- ²³ Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge*, 216.
- ²⁴ Kitses, "All that *Brokeback* Allows"; Spohrer, "Not a Gay Cowboy Movie?"
- ²⁵ Harry Brod, "They're Bi Shepherds, Not Gay cowboys: The Misframing of *Brokeback Mountain*," *The Journal of Men's Studies* 14 (2006): 252-253; Michael Dreher, "Revealing the Heart of the Heartland: Exploring the Rhetorical of *Brokeback Mountain*" (paper presented at the annual national meeting for the National Communication Association, San Antonio, Texas, November 16-19, 2006).
- ²⁶ Roger Ebert, *Brokeback Mountain* in Movie Reviews, December 16, 2005, para 5, accessed October 15, 2006, <http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20051215/REVIEWS/51019006/1023>
- ²⁷ Daniel Mendelsohn, "An Affair to Remember," *The New York Review of Books* 53 (2006, February 23): 12.
- ²⁸ Mendelsohn, "An Affair to Remember," 13.
- ²⁹ Miller, "On the Universality of 'Brokeback Mountain,'" 51.
- ³⁰ Joel Penney, "Punchline: The Politics of Joking about Gay Sexuality" (Paper presented at the annual meeting for the National Communication Association, Chicago, Illinois, November 15-18, 2007): 7.
- ³¹ David Letterman, "Today's Top Ten" on *Late Show with David Letterman*, performed by David Letterman (December 13, 2005, Columbia Broadcasting System), http://www.cbs.com/latenight/lateshow/top_ten/index/php/20051213.phtml.
- ³² "Brokeback Goldmine," on *Saturday Night Live*, performed by Alec Baldwin and Will Forte (December 13, 2005; National Broadcasting Company); *Date Movie*, Motion Picture, directed by Aaron Seltzer (2006; United States: Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corporation).
- ³³ Brian Ott and Cameron Walter, "Intertextuality: Interpretative Practice and Textual Strategy," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 17

(2000): 429-446.

³⁴ Ott and Walter, "Intertextuality," 435.

³⁵ Robin Wood, "On and Around *Brokeback Mountain*," *Film Quarterly* 60 (2007): 28.

³⁶ Wood "On and Around," 28.

³⁷ Robert M. Entman, "Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm," *Journal of Communication* 43 (1993): 52.

³⁸ Entman, "Framing," 52.

³⁹ Karen Callaghan and Frauke Schnell, "Assessing the Democratic Debate: How the News Media Frame Elite Policy Discourse," *Political Communication* 18 (2001): 185.

⁴⁰ Callaghan and Schnell, "Assessing the Democratic Debate," 186.

⁴¹ Barthes, *Image Music Text*, 146

⁴² Richard M. Weaver, *The Ethics of Rhetoric* (Davis, California: Hermagoras Press, 1985; 1953).

⁴³ Deborah Mutnick, "Time and Space in Composition Studies: 'Through the Gates of the Chronotope,'" *Rhetoric Review* 25 (2006): 42.

⁴⁴ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes (Phenomenology of Spirit)*. trans. Arnold Vincent Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977).

⁴⁵ Peter Travers, "Reviews in *Brokeback Mountain*," *Rolling Stone*, December 1, 2005, para 5, accessed December 4, 2007, http://www.rollingstone.com/reviews/movie/6169704/review/8878365/brokeback_mountain_movie_review.

⁴⁶ Stephanie Zacharek, "Movies/Reviews. *Brokeback Mountain*," *Salon*, December 9, 2005, para. 5, accessed December 4, 2007, <http://dir.salon.com/story/ent/movies/review/2005/12/09/brokeback/>.

⁴⁷ Matthew Kennedy, "Men in Love on *Brokeback Mountain*," *Bright Lights Film Journal* 51 (2006): para. 5, accessed December 4, 2007, <http://www.brightlightsfilm.com/51/brokebackmatt.htm>.

⁴⁸ Carl Talbot, "The Wilderness Narrative and the Cultural Logic of Capitalism," in *The Great New Wilderness Debate*, ed. J. Baird Callicott and Michael P. Nelson (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1998), 330.

⁴⁹ Emile Durkheim, "Division of Labor," in *Small Groups: Studies in Social Interaction* ed. A. P. Hare, E. F. Borgatta and R. F. Bates (New York: Alfred A Knopf, Inc., 1955), 5-9.

⁵⁰ Durkheim, "Division of Labor," 5-6.

⁵¹ We argue this ambiguous distinction is an apt metaphor for homosexual-heterosexual dialectic.

⁵² J. Baird Callicott and Michael P. Nelson, *The Great New Wilderness Debate* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1998); Yrjö Haila, "'Wilderness' and the Multiple Layers of Environmental Thought," *Environment and History* 3 (1997): 129-147; Michael Jackson, *Allegories of the Wilderness: Ethics and Ambiguity in Kuranko Narratives* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1982); Ben Ridder, "The Naturalness Versus Wilderness Debate: Ambiguity, Inconsistency, and Unattainable Objectivity," *Restoration Ecology* 15 (2007): 8-12.

⁵³ And when he arrives at the herd the next morning he discovers one of the sheep has been killed and eaten by a predator, a physical reminder one cannot live in both worlds. A price must be paid for abandoning civilization for the wilderness.

⁵⁴ The term "stemmed the rose" is in itself ambiguous. A debate erupted on the internet over the term. A fairly thorough discussion may be found at www.languagehat.com. Common consensus is Proulx invented the term—thus heightening ambiguity about the metaphorical properties of the expression.