

If Only Elope Was an Easy Choice: A Stylistic Analysis of *Brokeback Mountain*  
by Karl Lexter Dulce

Annie Proulx's short story *Brokeback Mountain* carved a void to the reader's hearts by this story of love and repression. On the surface, it tells the story of two cowboys, Ennis Del Mar and Jack Twist, who share a summer romance in 1960s Wyoming. Yet, beneath the apparent simplicity lies great narrative techniques, stylistic choices, and literary devices that create a story with heavy emotions. Proulx constructs a story that is both linguistically precise and emotionally resonant through writing the character, plot, setting, diction, syntax, imagery, symbolism, and rhetorical strategies.

## Characterization

*Brokeback Mountain*'s characterization was so enthralling that I found myself completely absorbed, because it is one of the most fascinating aspects of this analysis. In the story, Ennis Del Mar and Jack Twist serve as dual protagonists, their personalities have polar opposites yet intertwine well together. Ennis is cautious, reserved, and burdened by fear, whereas Jack is more expressive, ambitious, and willing to go against societal norms. Both characters function as antiheroes, flawed yet sympathetic, and their internal conflicts drive much of the story's tension. The narrative's third-person omniscient perspective felt like a guide to readers not just about what is happening in the story but also to understand their innermost thoughts to a degree of narrative distance. Proulx's use of direct characterization, such as in the description of Ennis as "twenty-four, had never been married, and had no desire to be," goes well with indirect characterization conveyed through actions, dialogue, and emotional response to create these psychologically realistic portrayals. Supporting characters, such as Alma and Lureen, are

presented more briefly; they function as flat characters whose presence accentuates the behavior and complicated situation of the protagonists. Ennis and Jack evolve subtly across the narrative, which make them dynamic characters, whereas minor characters, such as Joe Aguirre or their kids, remain largely static that fulfill traditional and stereotypical roles.

## Plot

The plot is a classic and follows a traditional trajectory. The exposition introduces the characters and their environment: a conservative and homophobic rural Wyoming in the 1960s. The inciting incident occurs when Ennis and Jack begin their summer work on Brokeback Mountain, during which their romantic connection develops. The rising action chronicles the challenges of sustaining a secret relationship, the intermittent letters and clandestine meetings feels like a flood of endorphins from the love they have long kept hidden. From their first night in the tent to the motel reeking of cigarettes and semen, the excitement radiated so vividly that, as a reader, it exceeded all I could have anticipated. The climax arrives when Jack expresses his desire to live openly with Ennis, revealing his fear of societal reprisal. As a reader, I felt as helpless as they did, especially when Jack confronted Ennis and spoke the hurtful words that spilled directly from his overflowing love "...You're too much for me, Ennis, you son of a whoreson bitch. *I wish I knew how to quit you.*" The falling action depicts the consequences of their separation that culminates in Jack's tragic death. The sudden and unexplained nature of his demise adds so much weight, it leaves the reader with a sense that what they had experienced together was still not enough. Finally, the resolution and denouement show Ennis' solitary reflection of his regret and relentless influence of social constraints. Proulx structures the narrative in chronological order interspersed with flashbacks and memories, these create a

circular effect that exposes the inevitability of the characters' tragic circumstances. Conflict operates on both internal and external levels: the protagonists' desires go against societal expectation and the tension between freedom and repression propels the story forward.

## Setting

The setting conveys not only the physical environment but also the characters' inner feelings and senses. The rugged landscapes of Wyoming, particularly Brokeback Mountain, function as both a literal and symbolic space. They evoke a sense of freedom and intimacy while simultaneously showing the characters' isolation. The story spans from the 1960s to the 1980s, it is a period marked by conservative American values and pervasive homophobia. I found it fascinating how I felt my own presence at the motel where they had sex. Despite the author's vivid description "The room stank of semen and smoke and sweat and whiskey, of old carpet and sour hay, saddle leather, shit and cheap soap. Ennis lay spread-eagled, spent and wet, breathing deep, still half tumescent; Jack blew forceful cigarette clouds like whale spouts" I did not feel disgust. Instead, I perceived it as a form of comfort, a private escape from a harsher system that prevented them from expressing their intimacy freely. I am impressed how Proulx's depictions of place and environment are both vivid and economical. It has allowed me and the other readers to feel the tension between the natural world's openness and society's restrictive norms.

## Diction

Diction in Brokeback Mountain ranges across formal, informal, colloquial, slang, and jargon, that contributes to the story's authenticity and emotional resonance. The informal expressions appear in private dialogue such as "Sure as hell seem in one piece to me. You know,

I was sittin up here all that time tryin to figure out if I was—? I know I ain't. I mean, here we both got wives and kids, right? I like doin it with women, yeah, but Jesus H., ain't nothin like this. I never had no thoughts a doin it with another guy except I sure wrang it out a hundred times thinkin about you. You do it with other guys, Jack?" Although the language may seem confusing, it conveys the authenticity of Ennis's speech and his comfort in addressing his secret partner, while formal diction structures the narrative exposition which structures the storytelling and distinguishes the narrator's voice from the characters' intimate conversations. Colloquial speech and idiomatic phrases convey the conversational parts of rural life, and cowboy jargon, such as "ride the line," sets the story in occupational realism or the realistic and accurate portrayal of their job. It also has euphonious and subtle cacophonous phrases like "Yellow silk sashes," (euphonious) and "The ranch was a meagre little place, leafy spurge." (cacophonous).

## Syntax

In this story, it has short, telegraphic sentences such as "It's all yours." that seems lacking but is full of meaning. There are also longer, flowing narrative constructions like "A hot jolt scalded Ennis and he was out on the landing pulling the door closed behind him." And a kilometric sentence where emotions overflow through the characters' actions that intensifies the rush and urgency of their reunion after a long separation: "They seized each other by the shoulders, hugged mightily, squeezing the breath out of each other, saying son of a bitch, son of a bitch; then, and as easily as the right key turns the lock tumblers, their mouths came together, and hard, Jack's big teeth bringing blood, his hat falling to the floor, stubble rasping, wet saliva welling, and the door opening and Alma looking out for a few seconds at Ennis's straining shoulders and shutting the door again and still they clinched, pressing chest and groin and thigh

and leg together, treading on each other's toes until they pulled apart to breathe and Ennis, not big on endearments, said what he said to his horses and daughters, 'Little darlin.'". Declarative sentences dominate the exposition, while interrogative sentences appear in dialogue to convey their intimacy or doubt. The variation in sentence length and structure tells the tension and fragmentation inherent in the protagonists' lives which supports the story's thematic concerns.

## Imagery, Symbolism, Allegory, and Allusion

Vivid depictions of mountain landscapes, open skies, and tactile ranching life evoke both the beauty and isolation of the characters' world. Brokeback Mountain itself is a powerful symbol of forbidden love, freedom, and solitude, while objects such as guns and fences convey societal restriction and latent danger. Subtle allusions to Western tropes were also in the story such as cowboys, rugged terrain, and traditional masculinity, they became a part of the tension between societal expectation and personal identity in this story.

## Literary and Rhetorical Devices

As we look at it deeper than the surface, it has an antithesis that contrasts the freedom found on the mountain with the restrictions of town life. Juxtaposition further shows the tension between private intimacy and public repression, as their unfiltered kisses reveal the warmth of their love in stark contrast to the facades they present to society and their families. Repetition conveys longing and memory, particularly in the protagonists' reflections on lost opportunities "Nothing marred it, even the knowledge that Ennis would not then embrace him face to face because he did not want to see or feel that it was Jack he held. And maybe, he thought, they'd never got much farther than that. *Let be, let be.*"

In conclusion, *Brokeback Mountain* exemplifies the integration of stylistic elements that solidifies its place in the classic and emotionally impactful, timeless films. Proulx's has so many layers to serve in characterization, structured plot, evocative setting, precise diction, varied syntax, and judicious use of imagery, symbolism, and rhetorical devices that collectively produce a story that is at once intimate and socially conscious. The narrative's emotional impact resonates precisely because it balances linguistic precision with the theme's depth. The love constrained by societal expectation was beautifully and tragically executed, it does portray the real life scenarios of couples in the LGBTQIA+ community. With these impeccable writing techniques, Proulx delivers a story that is both a linguistic achievement and a deeply affecting literary experience for many.