Movie analysis of “Brokeback Mountain“

At the beginning of this essay, I will analysis Ang Lee’s Brokeback Mountain from several aspects.

Firstly, it is not hard to find out the denotations of the signs:

Background: Blue sky with a large cloud, a mountain range and a forest, the reflections of the mountains and the forest in a river.

Protagonists: Two young men in denim jackets and hats looking downwards and facing away from each other.

Secondly, the signs hold a range of connotations as the following items:

Mountains, forests and lakes are specifically related to vast, open countryside, which connotes not only nature, but also freedom.

The costumes seem to indicate a western genre film. However, some other signs used are not like a western. For example, the colors associated with a western are gold and brown as the landscape used is often a desert.

The facial expressions of the characters are serious, gloomy and the way they look down connotes some problems – may be a conflict, shame or sorrow, as far we still don’t know. The way they are positioned suggests that the conflict is between them but it is not a conflict based on anger and violence as they are positioned close together.

The growing desire:

Key scenes for illustration: protagonists’ mutual gazing:

At the beginning of herding life on Brokeback Mountain, we see the beautiful sunset and golden clouds as if we see their golden years with enthusiastic. But when the night draws near, Jack is staring at Ennis’s campfire in the distance, smoking in the cold light of the full moon. We can read his loneliness, his curiosity about Ennis, and also his desire for his company from the close-up face shot. Later in a day scene, just like an echo, when hears thunder, Ennis looks up at the heights of the mountain above him, seeing Jack riding amid the herd with the clouds of storm beyond. Again, a close shot of Ennis’s face conveys a sense of concern.

Actually, when they are watching each other across the far distances of the mountain, the image itself as a sign in a symbolic manner has built up the connection between them.

Another important shot of gazing in this mountain life sequence is, when Ennis is taking a bath, Jack averts his gaze from naked Ennis. His eyes subtly flicker as if he has the unconscious of seeing and unseen. This close-up shot also can be seen as symbolic to connote the growing desire for Jack.

The images that appearance in this film have represented those desires cannot be seen without a word.

Mountain- Iconic, symbolic and indexical:

In this mountain life scene, the Brokeback Mountain plays an important role. We notice that, the mountain comes up many times in the film in various forms of the real landscape, a postcard picture, the only place they can be together, the precious memory in their hearts and so on. The director Ang Lee put forward the idea that the mountain itself is an essential role which is a sign to symbolize their long and disillusion for love. We can understand that, to them, the Brokeback Mountain is not just magnificent landscape but an escape into nature as a refuge from society’s ignorance and brutality; it also indicates the naturalness of their desire.

Reticence and violence: Repression of Ennis’s desires

Key scene for illustration: childhood memory of Ennis

Four years later, when they meet again and have a post-motel weekend trip, Ennis tells the story of his witness of a man killed for being gay, during a nighttime campfire.

The full moon represents their desire to stay together. Almost every time Jack and Ennis are together at night, there is the full moon. The full moon signifies emphasize that only when they meet and belong to each other, can they fell their life real and complete.

Ennis’s trauma- reticence and violence

The witness of a dead gay is absolutely a trauma for him. Deep inside him, he has phobias about the trauma, upset and anxious about his sexual orientation which he knows is not allowed by the west world. So his identification is rough with many conflicts. As for Ennis’s mind, he is constrained by education. He does not identify himself as ”homosexual” in order to escape from the violent attack and murder trauma that has haunted him since his childhood.

There is another important scene that I forgot to mention: finally Ennis found their two shirts nestled in Jack’s cupboard.

Ennis’s costumes are almost in brown, the color of earth, which conveys his suppression. As a symbolic, Ennis’s shirts are all plaid or striped, which signifies his mind is always being constrained, while Jack’s are in pure colors, free at heart.

Colors are also representing some meaning. Blue, which represents love and ceremony. Jack’s shirt and car are blue, similar color tone to the skies of Brokeback Mountain. Ennis’s eldest daughter has her earrings in blue, noticeable in an image of last sequence. So do the tents they use for gathering on the mountain, the flowing river aside and sky over head, which blue symbolizes freedom and naturalism. Blue signifies not only the romance but also all the beloved of Ennis.

After the two shirts scene, as the ending, Jack’s mother is in blue, and some furniture is blue. Although it seems that the surroundings inside the house are tend to fade into white, blue is still the major. When she helps Ennis put her son’s blue shirt into his brown paper bag, a “ceremony” with special meanings completes: her acceptance for the love between her son and another man, silently but confirmedly.

Conclusion

As for us, the Brokeback Mountain will always a myth even though we tried to interpret it. The magnificent visual design, the psychological states of characters, and the social phenomenon that reflected in this film deserve to be remembered.

Even though both kind of gender expectations are all represented in this movie. Jack’s wife and Ennis’s wife Emma all hope to have a happiness family, which never accomplished. Finally, Emma chose to divorce. Jack’s wife still cannot believe that her husband has a homosexual affair, which makes her crazy.

I think this movie itself is a great challenge in gender expectations. In general society, two men fall in love is almost forbidden. Like the director, I believe there are two kinds of love, one is childhood friend; one is love at first sight. So the first meet of Jack and Ennis impressed me. I think Jack has a crush on Ennis at his first sight, which is a huge challenge for his character. At least I think so. When Jack looked Ennis secretly through the rearview mirror, then he began to arrange his appearance. I clearly saw a cardiac youth and then, for some reason, these two men who want to live by themselves go together to the Brokeback Mountain- the place that they will take a lifetime to recall.

Actually, two protagonists’ were struggling in their mind throughout the whole movie. Ennis said to Jack that he is not gay. He is not defense with Jack, but with his inside, his mind. But at night, Ennis went into Jack’s campfire with some hesitation. But Jack said it does not matter with soothing voice. Ennis feel he has seed be inclusive and accepted. In Brokeback Mountain, they have nothing to worry about; there is no taboo here. So they fell in love.