

QUEERING THE SPHERE IN *BROKEBACK MOUNTAIN*: HOMOSEXUAL BODY IN NATURE

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ABSTRACT

Brokeback Mountain, written by Annie Proulx, depicts the lives of two gay men; Ennis and Jack. This study intends to discuss and refer to homosexual concepts by taking the nature as a primary concept in order to shed light both on the characters' love affair in nature and their alienated selves in civilization. It focuses upon two powers in the lives of people; nature versus civilization. Nature presents an egalitarian attitude destroying all restrictions, definitions, distinctions and classifications. Hence it stands for their free queer space as an opposition to the socially constructed traditional gender roles while civilization stands for their forced heterosexual space and idea of being stuck in the closet. The reason for being stuck in the closet is related to the fact that gay people are accepted as “‘foreigners’ in their own culture and are reminded of this fact at every opportunity” (Jay&Young, 1992, p.21). Homosexuality is seen as an attack on the ideal classifications of the patriarchal ideology and heteronormative qualities.

Key Words: *Trans-corporality, body, nature, heteronormativity, civilization.*

QUEERING THE SPHERE IN *BROKEBACK MOUNTAIN*: HOMOSEXUAL BODY IN NATURE

Brokeback Mountain, written by Annie Proulx, depicts the lives of two gay men; Ennis and Jack. They are hired for herding sheep in the summer of 1963 on Brokeback Mountain where their relationship turns into love. The story highlights their secret meetings, despair and anxieties through the years owing to the social oppression stemming from patriarchal ideology. Hence this study intends to discuss and refer to homosexual concepts by taking the nature as a primary concept in order to shed light both on the characters' love affair in nature and their alienated selves in civilization. Nature presents an egalitarian attitude destroying all restrictions, definitions, distinctions and classifications. Hence it stands for their free queer space as an opposition to the socially constructed traditional gender roles while civilization stands for their forced heterosexual space and idea of being stuck in the closet. The reason for being stuck in the closet is related to the fact that gay people are accepted as “‘foreigners’ in their own culture and are reminded of this fact at every opportunity” (Jay & Young,

1992, p. 21). The dominant group defines and categorizes people as ‘them’ and ‘us’, which hinders unity but creates estrangement and exclusion. Homosexuals are ‘the other’ in heterosexual culture in which sense of belonging, identity and ontological security are not created and they are seen as a threat on the values it produces. For instance; homosexuality is seen as an attack on the ideal classifications of the patriarchal ideology and heteronormative qualities since a man has to prolong his bloodline by being a father and he has to raise a family to serve the patriarchal ideology.

The story begins with the ordinary day of Ennis Del Mar whose name means island (Thenamemeaning). The names of the characters in the story are chosen symbolically, which depicts the relationship between two gay figures in nature. Jack means “any common fellow” (Online Etymology). His surname Twist means “to wind together so as to produce a single strand” (The Free Dictionary). Alaimo (2010) in her *Bodily Natures* refers to trans-corporeality and “explores the interconnections, interchanges, and transits between human bodies and nonhuman natures” (2). Through getting rid of alienations such as alienation from self and body, alienation from nature, people construct connection between body and nature. Human bodies enliven in nature. Hence Ennis stands for the island that Jack needs and acts as a part of the nature. Jack, any common fellow, comes to that island. They wind together to become one and liberate their gay identities. The liberation of their gay identities is related to attain autonomy and sovereignty. Brookes (2009) states “[g]ay liberation theory marks a change in the theorization of homosexuality in laying stress on the historical and social construction of identity” (12). Homosexuals need to denaturalize historical and social identity which is accepted as natural implying normal and being conformed to the society. They celebrate an opposition to the idea of heteronormativity and try to resist cultural marginalization in order to be free individuals with ability to choose, decide and act.

...on the mountain when they owned the world and nothing seemed wrong. The wind strikes the trailer like a load of dirt coming off a dump truck, eases, dies, leaves a temporary silence. ...he is suffused with a sense of pleasure because Jack Twist was in his dream (Proulx, 2005, p. 4).

The depictions of the atmosphere and the setting are important in terms of the relationship between Jack and Ennis. The mountain enabled them to get rid of all their burdens, and it was the time when they owned the world and nothing seemed wrong. Gender is perceived as limitation upon choices and possibilities to exist in an autonomous way. Homosexual culture distorts gender concept since “... gender identity is not fixed in nature but is fluid and relies on culturally constructed signification...attached onto the body through socialization, and not something that is fixed at birth” (Bentley, 2008, p. 99-100). While nature destroys all differentiating limitations and presents an egalitarian ideology, urban life draws boundaries with its ideologically created values. For instance; in civilized society, Ennis is a poor man, and he feels inferiority complex and alienated from the society because of his social class. “...They [Jack and Ennis] were respectful of each other’s opinions, each glad to have a companion where none had been expected” (Proulx, 2005, p.12).

People need someone to realize their essence and existence. We cannot see and evaluate ourselves as 'the other' does and we need the eye of 'the other' in order to be consummated since we cannot see ourselves from every angle and lack seeing. We need dialogism in our life and this is created through the connection with the other. Having good time together enables Ennis to be happy, glorified and strong in nature. The harmony that has been lost between mind and body is regained. Ennis gets rid of his burdens and inferiority complex. Jack and Ennis can perceive their true nature, and thus they eliminate their self-hate and accusations related to not creating an idealized heterosexual self. "...Jack, in his dark camp, saw Ennis as a night fire, a red spark on the huge black mass of mountain" (Proulx, 2005, p. 9). Red symbolizes life, and Jack needs Ennis whom he sees as source of life. They are in a dialogical relationship by consummating each other rather than mastery and subordination relationship.

Proulx depicts the love story of two gay men by using nature and colours as metaphors explaining their relationship. The nature, *Brokeback Mountain*, and the colours are conformed to each other and indeed, colours depict the history of homosexuals. Jack and Ennis were under "the lavender sky" (Proulx, 2005, p. 11) and "...they moved off the mountain with the sheep, stones rolling at their heels, purple cloud crowding in from the west..." (Proulx, 2005, p. 16). Lavender sky and purple cloud depict gay pride that make Jack and Ennis feel intimate and integrated individuals (Color Wheel Artist). Historically, this pride is related to Lavender Scare which refers to "the persecution of gays from the late 1940s to circa 1969" (Wiley & Burke, 2008, p.1). As gays were seen as a threat to the government, the society, and military forces, they were dismissed from their works. They were depicted as perverts, alienated from the society, and they were foreigners in their own culture. Thus, they preferred to be in the closet rather than coming out. In 1969, there was a Stonewall Riots which were started by gay communities for gay liberation and rights of gay people. Plummer (1992) asserts that "...homosexual is to be 'degraded, denounced, devalued, or treated as different' and ends with a person relatively happy with her/his sexuality, acknowledging this to self and to others..." (p.75). Due to such fears and denial of his desires and expectations, Ennis goes on living with the contradictions and dilemmas in his nature. Plummer (1992) adds that homosexuals "know what it is like to keep the closet door firmly shut by pretending not only to be heterosexual but also to be homophobic" (p.305).

Ennis suppresses his feelings and lives as a heterosexual man. However, when Jack insists on his attitude towards Ennis, Ennis accepts his homosexuality and enters into a mutual and dialogical relationship with Jack. Jack invites him to sleep together and "...they deepened their intimacy considerably...They were only the two of them on the mountain flying in the euphoric, bitter air..." (Proulx, 2005, p.15). Nature gives the energy, and they enter into a dialogic relationship. They are away from the prejudices and restrictions of the society which looks down on gays. Nature destroys the boundaries that are created by culture and civilization. It is the place where people can dive into their unconscious by getting rid of their social masks since there is no pressure of social norms and rules. As Sharon Cameron (1985) asserts that "to write about nature is to write about how the mind sees nature, and sometimes about how the mind sees itself" (p.44). As nature enables reconciliation between conscious and unconscious parts of the psyche, people become true and honest to themselves.

Brokeback Mountain becomes queer space for Jack and Ennis. Queer space is a “space of difference”, an arena of doubt, self-criticism, and “the possibility of liberation” (Betsky,1995, p. 201). After they have a sexual intercourse on the mountain, they start to question their identities and redefine themselves however it is a difficult process for them to accept themselves as homosexuals by destroying the heteronormative understanding of the heterosexual culture. Ennis said “I’m not no queer,” and Jack jumped in with “Me neither. A one-shot thing. Nobody’s business but ours” (Proulx, 2005, p.15). Indeed that one-shot thing triggers them to question and find a harmony between mind and body. Social body that they pretend to show gets rid of its burden and acts freely. Jack and Ennis do not have to be responsible for the socially and culturally created heteronormative qualities and traditional gender roles since they are not totally formed by biological reasons. Those qualities are acquired values and thus in nature, Jack and Ennis deconstruct the phallogentric understanding.

...they shook hands, hit each other on the shoulder, then there was a forty feet of distance between them and nothing to do but drive away in opposite directions. Within a mile, Ennis felt like someone was pulling his guts out hand over hand a yard at a time. He stopped at the side of the road and, in the whirling new snow, tried to puke but nothing came up. He felt about as bad as he ever had and it took a long time for the feeling to wear off (Proulx, 2005, p.18).

Jack, an object of desire, penetrates into Ennis’s self so much that Ennis is afraid of parting when they turn into civilization and society. Parting, namely absence of object of desire, creates a traumatic experience and fear for Ennis, and thus he feels like someone is pulling his guts out. It is separation of body and self. The fact that they turn into the civilization and society forces them to hide their emotions and feelings. Ennis knows that he will not be happy, safe and secure in civilization, and he has to hide his emotions and feelings. Their next meeting is after four years and they go to a hotel room. The description of the weather outside illustrates their relationship in urban and society. “...A few handfuls of hail rattled against the window followed by rain and slippery wind banging the unsecured door of the next room then and through the night” (Proulx, 2005, p.23). While wind, rain and other weather events in nature make them feel good, the weather events in urban when they meet disturb them since banging of wind reminds them oppression of the society. Unsecured door stands for their unsecure situation and unsafe gay identity. Hence, they escape into nature to reveal their homosexual identities rather than meeting in city. Plummer (1992) states that homosexuality is seen “as an attack on the ‘ideal’ model of heterosexual nuclear family” (p.20). In order to disguise their homosexual identities, they marry, have children, and prolong their bloodlines by adopting roles of the heterosexual culture.

Adopting the heteronormative qualities disturbs Jack and he says to Ennis “...[t]hrow your stuff in the back of my truck and let’s get up in the mountains. Couple a days...give me something a go on ”(Proulx, 2005, p.30). Jack is more brave and emotional than Ennis who has fears about their relationship. Ennis is haunted by an anecdote that his father told him when he was a child. When Jack

offers him to live together, Ennis rejects since he has to keep his sexuality and identity as a secret otherwise when it is discovered, it may not be tolerated.

...We can't. I'm [Ennis] stuck with what I got, caught in my own loop. Can't get out of it. Jack, I don't want a be like them guys you see around sometimes. And I don't want a be dead. There was these two old guys ranched together down home, Earl and Rich...I was what, nine years old and they found Earl dead in irrigation ditch. They'd took a tire iron to him...Two guys living together? No. All I can see is we get together once in a while way the hell out in the back a nowhere—(Proulx, 2005, p.29).

Ennis asserts that he has no choices rather than raising his family and being a father. He also talks about the violence against the homosexuals by referring two men living together, and one is killed with a tire iron. The anecdote that Ennis talks about tire iron flashforwards Jack's death when he repairs his tire on the road. As they do not feel themselves safe and secure in society, in 1983, Ennis and Jack spent a few days together in nature. "...[T]he day was fine...Ennis, weather-eyed, looked west for the heated cumulus that might come up on such a day but the boneless blue was so deep, said Jack, that he might drown looking up" (Proulx, 2005, p.36). They turn into their old days on the mountain. Nature and their relationship are integrated again. They re-form their space as queer on the mountain which becomes a place of liberation of their homosexuality. They feel themselves drown looking up the blue sky which symbolizes serenity that they need. "...Twenty minutes on they surprised a black bear on the bank above them rolling a log over for grubs...the startled bear galloped into the trees with the lumpish gait..." (Proulx, 2005, p.36). Their encounter with the bear is a symbolical one since bear is important figure for gays. "Bear as a gay male self-identity developed in the late 1980s and 1990s" (Haggerty, 2000, p.105). Ennis and Jack's homosexual relationship is approved by the nature and bear, which forms a queer space.

Gays seek for affirmation of their identities by other men, and they enter into relationships with other men to try to meet their needs. They need to be loved and respected. The fact that they desire to attain autonomous selves that are valued by other men makes them feel secure. Although Jack becomes a rich man respected by the society, he does not feel himself integrated individual, and he is not interested in value that the society shows to him. He needs Ennis for love, security, affection and friendship. Marrying is not solution for their emotional satisfaction and authentic identity because they seek identity, respect, and affection from males. Furthermore, marrying is one of the symbols of heteronormative qualities, and it increases the feeling of gender insecurity. Marriage becomes an obligation for them in order not to be persecuted by the heterosexual society as homosexuality is a threat to the traditional family understanding. Plummer (1992) states that "revelation of homosexuality is a basis for expulsion from the home and the economic as well as psychological security provided by the family..." (p.32). Ennis is afraid of both being expelled from and persecuted by the society.

Jack wants to live with Ennis and have a good life together and he says "[y]ou know, friend, this is a goddamn bitch of an unsatisfactory situation... Tell you what, we could had a good life together...you wouldn't do it, Ennis, so what we got know is Brokeback Mountain. Everything built

on that. It's all we got...(Proulx, 2005, p. 42). It is obvious that Jack tries to legitimize his queerness while Ennis is afraid and cannot make his own choices due to social oppression and the story that his father told him about two gay men who were killed. Self-hate and impossibility to live with Ennis with whom Jack consummates himself overwhelms so much that Jack says “ [y]ou got no fuckin idea how bad it gets. I'm not you... You're too much for me, Ennis...I wish I knew how to quit you...” (Proulx, 2005, p.42). Jack seems to fight against gender issues, deep, cultural and traditional norms about being a masculine because “[e]very person who comes to a queer self-understanding knows in one way or another that her/his stigmatization is connected with gender, the family, notions of individual freedom, the state... deep cultural norms about the bearing of the body” (Warner,1993, p.xiii). Jack dies when he repairs a tire, which also stands for a metaphorical death of gay identity in heterosexual culture. Ennis thinks that Jack is killed by homophobics:

...Jack's old shirt from Brokeback days. The shirt seemed heavy until he saw there was another shirt inside it, the sleeves carefully worked down inside Jack's sleeves. It was his own plaid shirt, lost, he'd thought, long ago in some damn laundry, his dirty shirt...stolen by Jack and hidden here inside Jack's own shirt, the pair like two skins, one inside the other, two in one. He pressed his face into the fabric and breathed slowly...hoping for the faintest smoke and mountain sage and salty sweet stink of Jack but there was no real scent, only the memory of it, the imagined power of Brokeback Mountain of which nothing was left but what he held in his hands (Proulx, 2005, p.51).

The way Jack puts the shirts together signifies their defragmentation and integration of two selves with the shirts. Ennis tries to remember those old days on Brokeback Mountain by smelling Jack's shirt. The only thing Ennis has got about Jack is the memory of the mountain and their free happy days away from the civilization and heterosexual society. Sullivan (2010) asserts that “[b]odies are permeable and trans-corporeal, or open to the world and environmental flows around them, and they are also our material selves living enmeshed with their environments” (p. 1). Throughout the story, the mountain is one of the most important figures in the lives of Jack and Ennis because according to the trans-corporeality, Jack and Ennis enliven and animate on the mountain. Their bodies connect on the mountain, and they achieve to attain harmony between mind and body.

In conclusion, to come out as a homosexual being and having a homosexual identity by deconstructing traditional compulsory gender roles is not tolerated in many cultures because it is seen as a threat to the heterosexual family understanding, to governments and social institutions. The fact that homosexuals who are persecuted by the society experience insecure gender identities leads them to marry and have children as Jack and Ennis do. It is a psychological violence and threat to their individuality. Their behaviours, their choices and their individualities are inhibited by the civilization however their entrance into nature which becomes a queer space enables them to face their own homosexuality. Nature is the queer space which enables a transition period from heterosexuality into

homosexuality. Queer space and time in nature are different from conventional time and space. Nature is not a limiting space but frees homosexuals and animates them.

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