Universidad Zaragoza
1542

Undergraduate Dissertation
Trabajo Fin de Grado

Brokeback Mountain: Queering the Western

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2019

“We loved each other in the way men do

And never spoke about it, Al and me,

But we both knowed, and knowin' it so true

Was more than any woman’s kiss could be…

I wait to hear him ridin' up behind

And feel his knee rub mine the good old way."

“The Lost Pardner” - Charles Badger Clark

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1. INTRODUCTION

Brokeback Mountain (Ang Lee) was released in the US in December 2005 and was a remarkable box-office hit. Adapted from Annie Proulx's eponymous novel, the film won three Academy Awards—Best Director among them, four Golden Globe Awards, and four BAFTA Awards. It was the first Western which openly dealt with homosexual issues, starring Heath Ledger as Ennis Del Mar and Jake Gyllenhaal as Jack Twist. The two cowboys spend the summer of 1963 sheep herding in Brokeback Mountain, a fictional place in the state of Wyoming and both engage in an intermittent same-sex relationship. It begins that summer and spans through two decades. The movie portrays the difficult life both characters live since each of them creates his own 'straight' life far from each other. Jack is more inclined to having a life with Ennis, but Ennis' fear of being discovered leads him to refuse this option all along the film, which prevents them from having a life together and leads to Jack's fatal ending.

The movie created a lot of controversy, particularly in China and Islamic nations of western Asia. When Ang Lee, of Chinese origin, won Best Director in 2005 China congratulated him even though the film had never been shown there. According to Carra, "Israel was the only Middle Eastern country to release the movie uncensored" and Lebanon was the only Arab country releasing the film, in a censored format. It was officially banned in United Arab Emirates. Italy "aired a censored version of the film, removing all the scenes with homoerotic references. Viewers protested, saying the deletions made the plot impossible to follow". It was also criticised in the US among conservatives; one controversy was the decision from a Utah theatre owner of pulling the film at the last minute "despite having agreed to play the picture" (Gray). As stated by The Associated Press, Miller, the theater

owner in Salt Lake City pulled the film after learning that the plot included a same-sex romance despite of the fact that the film had already been advertised for. As Needham states, homophobic responses to Brokeback Mountain saw the film as a mockery to American values, instead of a Western movie (32). On the other hand, "film critics applauded the film because it 'brought a gay couple to the forefront of US genre cinema'" (Nelmes 102), which helped in mainstreaming queer culture. In doing so, it rewrote the conventions of the Western.

This dissertation will analyse the representation of queerness in a genre—the Western—in which making direct allusion to homosexuality has been traditionally 'forbidden'. I will start by explaining the etymology of the word 'queer' and its usage. Then I will frame the movie within New Queer Cinema, discussing how *Brokeback Mountain* fits in this category. My analysis will begin by exploring the issue of repressed homosexuality in the Western genre and then I will focus on *Brokeback Mountain* as a case study, discussing how the movie represents queerness and the repression of desire through three main elements: space, silence and violence. This will be followed by a short conclusion.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Etymology of 'queer'

The first evidence we have of 'queer' being part of the English language goes back to the 16th century, its original meaning being 'strange' or 'peculiar'. Today, however, it has a different meaning: "it's more commonly used to describe non-normative identities with regards to both gender and sexuality; it's an umbrella term used to define a spectrum of marginalised identities ranging from cis white gay men to asexual non-binary black individuals" (Hall). According to Hall, John Douglas - the Marquess of Queensberry - was the first person who used the term as a slur back in 1894. Apparently, he discovered that his son was having an affair with Oscar Wilde and being aware of the problems that that would mean he started prosecuting Wilde. He reached his goal and took him to court in a long court case accusing him of being obsessed with sodomy. It was this court case that established the term as a gay slur.

It did not take very long for American newspapers to start using the term 'queer' as a derogatory term highlighting "the fact that homosexuality was strange and abnormal" (Hall). Later on, in the middle of the AIDS epidemic, the term 'queer' was rescued and used as a symbol of anarchy: "Activists joined forces in the late 80s and early 90s to form organisations such as Queer Nation, a group whose provocative slogans sought to eradicate hate crime" (Hall).

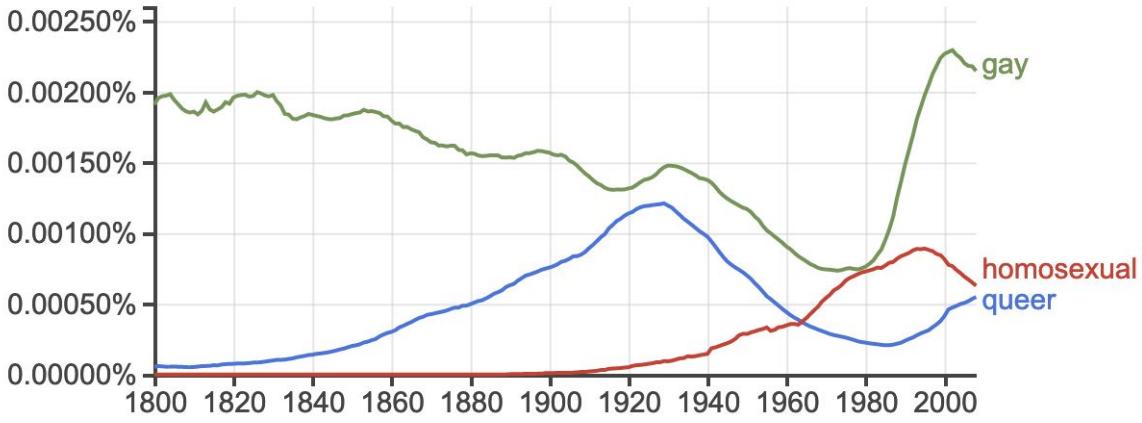

Fig. 1. Usage of words gay, homosexual and queer (Michel).

Fig. 1 shows the evolution in volume of usage of the words gay, homosexual and queer. The green line shows us how the word 'gay' saw a decline in its usage from 1800 to 1970 which back then meant 'happy', now being and old-fashioned term ("gay"). From 1980 onwards the term undergoes an abrupt increase in its usage with the meaning of homosexual. The rising trend for the word 'homosexual' shows how its usage undergoes a growth which starts in 1910 and experiences a decrease after 1990. The trend for the word 'queer' experiences an stable increase until 1930, then undergoes a drop until 1985 when it starts to rise again, which would coincide with the AIDS epidemic. As Rendón states the use of "queer" nowadays makes reference to gay or lesbian topics and it does not forcefully imply bad connotations as it did at the beginning of 20th century. It is also used to make reference to transvestism subjects (1).

2.2 Queer Theory

Queer Theory arises in the 1990s based on feminist studies and LGBT population. It builds on the ideas of Foucault's theory of sexuality, Jacques Derrida's deconstructivism, and Monique Wittig and Adrienne Rich's ideas about compulsory heterosexuality and lesbian

existence. According to Rendón, Queer Theory emerged in US universities and later arrived to Europe and Latin America, where different ideas also contributed to the development of Queer Theory (1).

'Queer' is everything that might be discordant with "the normal, the legitimate, the dominant." Not necessarily referring to anything in particular, it delimits a positionality against the normative (Halperin 62). So the question would be, what is the so-called 'normal'? The easiest answer for this is that a match between biological sex and sexual identity is commonly considered 'normal', in other words, heterosexuality. Judith Butler's ideas in *Gender Trouble* are considered the foundations of Queer Theory. The American philosopher tries to break the binary classification of man/woman, feminine/masculine, heterosexual/homosexual. She states that a heterocentric discourse shapes the sociocultural reality. She coined the term 'heterosexual matrix' as a way to refer to the set of discourses and cultural practices aimed at the production of heterosexuality. This way, the matrix produces an approximate idea of what gender is. In the Western world children must follow certain patterns since they are very young. Boys have to wear blue; girls pink. Boys have to be brave and physically strong and girls delicate and feminine. Of course, these gender patterns also determine your sexual partners. In opposition to this idea, Butler conceives gender as 'performance'. This gender identification aims at maintaining cultural coherence and continuity, which is achieved through acts, gestures and desires that are expressed on the "surface of the body". These acts are performative, which implies that the identity they want to express consist of fabrications, which are "manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means" (173). Then, the body can function as a regulatory fiction for maintaining heterosexual coherence but if the individual fails to accomplish such performance, he would transgress his own discourse and then lose his descriptive force. All in

all, gender is a cultural fiction and the multiple acts of gender construct the idea of it, acts without which gender would not exist (178).

Eve Kosofsky Sedwick's *Epistemology of the Closet* also played an important role in the development of Queer Theory. In her work she considers the dichotomy homosexual/heterosexual to be a simplistic one and she conceives "queer sexuality" as a third gender which encapsulates all the aspects gender can express. She explores the implications and consequences of sexual categories. The binary division homosexuality/heterosexuality is not sustainable, first, because homosexual and heterosexual are not equal terms. Homosexuality is 'second class', contrary to heterosexuality, which can be seen in the authority and prestige that the latter term holds. Secondly, the meaning attributed to heterosexual emerges from devalorising homosexuality. Sedwick developed a set of six axioms in order to help understand the importance of the different aspects of sexual sexuality and this way deconstruct the binary division: Axiom 1 says: "People are different from each other". She argues that there are a lot of labels to categorise people and that even so, it is still difficult to have a clear idea about how individuals are, but remarks the importance of being aware of the different types of people in order to survive. In Axiom 4 she talks about nature and nurture and argues about the risks of engaging in a debate such as whether sexual orientation is natural or cultural, since culture is seen as something alterable and that can be suppressed (and so could be sexual orientation) and nature is seen as something static. All in all, by these 6 axioms we can conclude that we cannot classify ourselves according to what we have been taught about gender over time because each person is different (Matos).

To sum up, Queer Theory does not try to reinforce any kind of identity in particular but rather deconstruct the binary world we live in, questioning the dominant sexuality which

discriminates what differs from the norm. It therefore tries to deconstruct heterocentrism, which prescribes how individuals should live, behave or interact.

2.3 New Queer Cinema

According to Mennel (67), the scholar B. Ruby Rich coined this term, being "New Queer Cinema" the title of one of his essays, published in 1992 in *Sight & Sound* magazine. He captured "the sense of a radical political and aesthetic shift in films that appeared between 1990 and 1992" (67). He mentions *Young Soul Rebels* (Isaac Julien, 1991), *Poison* (Todd Haynes, 1991) and *Paris Is Burning* (Jennie Livingston, 1990), to name just a few. As he goes on to say, the attitudes of these movies totally broke with the portrayal of gays and lesbians in cinema (67). Its mainstreaming implied that the target audiences were heterosexual, thus helping in the process of acceptance and normalisation of non-heterosexual society.

As Hayward states, queer cinema film directors sometimes made motion pictures in mainstream genres and subverted the canons (330). That was the case in *Brokeback Mountain*, a film that could fit within the parameters of the Western genre. New Queer Cinema wanted to encompass a lot of different voices, sexualities and aesthetics within the movement. In the same way as Queer Theory considers human identity as a construction and as something unstable, so does New Queer Cinema when it comes to portraying sexuality. But apart from portraying it as something unstable, they often portray it as a "chaotic and subversive force, which is alienating to and often brutally repressed by dominant heterosexual power structures" (Mathew). This could help in considering *Brokeback Mountain* in the context of New Queer Cinema.

On the other hand, as Gee states, in *Brokeback Mountain* two men engage in a "socially unacceptable love affair", which he considers to give the film a public persona wrongly associated with New Queer Cinema since the film does not normalise their sexual orientation. As he goes on to say, there has always been homosexual or homoerotic traits in films "even if it was muffled as needed to meet industry standards". *Brokeback Mountain* unquestionably has more than 'homosexual/homoerotic traits", but the film rather than portraying the characters as openly homosexual, never makes a clear point about their sexuality. More specifically, after the first time they engage in a sexual relationship, we see Ennis telling Jack "You know I ain't queer" to which Jack replies "Me neither" and even though we see Jack looking for other male sexual partners along the film, contrary to Ennis, the film does not normalise their sexuality but rather portrays the socio-political problem that that relationship implies. As Gee states:

> The final scene shows Ennis smelling Jack's blue denim shirt, and looking at a photograph of Brokeback Mountain, which centers the audience on the emotional qualities of the film—the heartbreak of the situation, the unfairness, etc.—instead of taking an assertive, political stance on homosexuality. This stands in direct contrast to the New Queer Cinema movement that explicitly defined not only its political stance, but also its sexual orientation as a normalized, explicit structure that befuddled itself into generic conventions of the mainstream. Brokeback does not conform to such parameters, nor to such a political ideology, but instead presents itself as an examination of a homophobic culture wherein homosexuality did, indeed, exist and was not necessarily flamboyant nor overtly gay.

All in all, it could be concluded that *Brokeback Mountain* meets some aspects of New Queer Cinema, such as portraying homosexuality as chaotic and being repressed by heterosexual structures, and subverting the canons of the Western by placing two queer men in rural America, but it does not meet other aspects of New Queer Cinema such as making a clear political statement on homosexuality or normalising the characters' sexual orientation.

Instead, it just allows the story to develop by itself, showing the problems they are meant to encounter in a homophobic rural Western America.

3. ANALYSIS

3.1 Repressed homosexuality in the Western genre

Brokeback Mountain was a ground-breaking film in its open representation of homosexuality in the Western, but this issue was hardly a new one in the genre. Of course, homosexuality had never been explicitly acknowledged. As Tinkcom states, "Westerns have subtly managed to imply, but never confirm, physical attraction and intimacy between men in the Western narrative" (90). Many films such as *High Noon* (Fred Zinnemann, 1952), *Shane* (George Stevens, 1953) or *3:10 to Yuma* (Delmer Daves, 1957) lend themselves to a queer reading. In this section, I will take *Red River* (Howard Hawks, 1948) as a representative example to tackle the issue of repressed homosexuality in the Western.

In *Red River*, Thomas Dunson (John Wayne) leads a cattle drive, the end of more than fourteen years of work, to its goal in Missouri. However, his overbearing conduct en route causes a revolt, driven by his adopted son Matthew Garth (Montgomery Clift). *Red River* has a number of scenes that lend themselves to a queer interpretation. The first thing we notice about Matthew is his boyish looks and naïve features. There is one scene in the movie in which he is apparently looking at Dunson's crotch while sucking a straw. As Needham puts it "He plays with a delicately phallic piece of straw in a way that hints and suggests sex, an oral tease, which is undeniable in its capacity to be read as homoerotic" (61). Just after, there is a scene in which we see four cowboys on their horses. The queer thing about this scene is, apart from Cherry Valance (John Ireland) gazing all the time at Matthew while the two other men —Thomas Dunson and Mr. Meeker (Davison Clark)—are talking, is that he later decides to stop working with Mr. Meeker and go with Matthew and Dunson. It can be said that he made the decision after just a long gaze at Matthew; something about him seduced him. Just after this the film shows them in a 'playful' conversation which goes like this:

Cherry: That's a good looking gun you were about to use back there. Can I see it?

[Matthew turns, thumbs his nose and looks a bit surprised, then hands his gun over. Cherry takes the gun]

And you'd like to see mine.

[Cherry draws his own gun and passes it to Matthew. Cherry examines Matthew's gun]

Nice! Awful nice! You know, there are only two things more beautiful than a good gun: a Swiss watch or a woman from anywhere. You ever had a good Swiss watch?

Matthew: Go ahead! Try it!

[Matthew points to a tin; both fire at it and hit it]

Cherry: Hey! That's very good!

[Both shoot at another can]

Matthew: Hey! Hey! That's good too! Go on! Keep it going![1]

Fig. 2. Cherry is delightfully looking at Matthew after he hit a can.

Matthew thumbs his nose before the exchange of guns and looks downwards in the same way he did with Dunson in the straw scene. As Needham puts it, it is a "coquettish gesture in Clift's performance that is playful in terms of him being a tease" (63). The

[1] (Needham, 2010: 63). The dialogue was transcribed from the DVD version of the film (*Red River*, MGM Home Entertainment, 2007, Region 2).

mid-section of the dialogue is also worth commenting. By asking Matthew "You ever had a Swiss watch?" Cherry is eliding the obvious part which is homosexuality, further stressing the queerness of the clip (Needham 64).

As Needham says, "the Western is a homoerotic genre because its investments are rooted in the visual pleasure of male display—spectators looking at the cowboy and cowboys looking at each other" (60). *Brokeback Mountain* made a call to all those left out stories of homoerotic desire in the Hollywood Western letting us reconsider and look back to previous films. In this way, the movie allows us to "un-think assumptions about Westerns in relation to sexuality" (60).

3.2 Queerness in *Brokeback Mountain*

After showing how queerness was hinted at in a 1948 Western movie, *Red River*, I will focus now on another Western released fifty-seven years later, *Brokeback Mountain*. In the summer of 1963 that Jack and Ennis are sheepherding together. One night, when one is supposed to sleep outside the tent by the fire in order to take care of the sheep, the other one sleeps inside. Jack wakes up and listens Ennis outside shivering from the cold since the fire was over. He takes him inside the tent and tries to make him warmer. This ends up in them having sex for the first time, which continues sporadically for the rest of their lives (until Jack is murdered). Apart from their impossible love and after their first time in Brokeback, they create their own heterosexual lives apart from each other. The matter is that they really want each other and the film lets us see that in the scene where after four years without seeing each other they finally meet up in the porch of Ennis' house and fall into a brusque and passionate kiss against a wall, which makes it evident how much they missed each other. Homophobia and Ennis' own childhood trauma prevent them from being together, which could also lead to

Jack's tragic ending. In the following sections I will explain how queerness is portrayed through space and silences, and how both finally lead to violence.

3.2.1 Through space

We could easily argue that people who are in the closet express their love in closed spaces, which is not the case in *Brokeback Mountain*—putting aside the scene in which the lovers appear in the motel room. *Brokeback Mountain* lets Jack and Ennis be, but only outdoors. Years before the film was released, Kitses had already argued about the wilderness as a location where freedom and self-knowledge prevail, contrary to civilisation, which imposes restrictions, institutions and social responsibility (59).

As Todd states, *Brokeback Mountain* keeps with the familiar conventions of the Western genre in terms of privileging "outside over inside, wilderness over society, individual freedom over oppressive social networks and institutions" (4). The difference is that *Brokeback* introduces queerness into these familiar spaces. By displaying the queerness of its heroes, the film disrupts the conventional understanding of inside and outside space, bringing together characteristics typically associated with the closet with traits of the Western, making us reconsider the connection between those apparently opposed spaces (4). In this way it could be argued that if Jack and Ennis bring the closet out to the wilderness, this outdoor space would paradoxically become a claustrophobic space that could stifle them. The only thing they are doing then is moving the closet to another place: "By 'hiding themselves' in the open, as it were, Jack and Ennis not only transform the closet into a pastoral free zone but also undo the freedom of the Western landscape, transforming it into a site of confinement" (5).

Everybody, and more specifically Aguirre (Randy Quaid), the ranch owner, and Alma (Michelle Williams), Ennis' wife, let queerness be in the outdoors where it could be argued that freedom is allowed. Aguirre catches them rolling around in the ground in a playful manner (00:32:48), which obviously implies some homoeroticism. Apparently, he goes up to the mountains to tell Jack his uncle is in hospital and most surely not going to make it. From a distance, he observes the scene through his binoculars but does nothing about it. The homosocial bond between the main characters is readable for the social milieu within the film since it is acceptable for men in such conditions—the rural American West—to spend lots of time in the only company of men without it implying same-sex relationships (Tinkcom 70).

After not having news from each other for four years, Ennis gets a postcard from Jack telling him he is going to come over on the 24th (September 1967). That very day, Ennis is impatiently waiting while smoking and drinking beer looking through the window. He is already asleep in the sofa when Jack arrives in his pickup. When Ennis hears the pickup approaching, he stands up and goes to the window. When he sees Jack has arrived he proudly smiles and goes down the staircase to the street almost in a jump. When he gets to him they embrace with a lot of enthusiasm and Ennis tells Jack "Come here", corners him after checking that nobody is around and both fuse in a warm embrace and a very passionate kiss. This is the moment when Alma opens the door to welcome Ennis' friend as well, but finds the scene that would change her fate forever. In the same way as Aguirre allows queerness in the outdoors, so does Alma in this moment, allowing her own husband to kiss with another man in front of her. She will allow this all along the movie every time Ennis goes with Jack to one of their "fishing trips", which is the way they refer to when they retire to the mountains to be together.

In the movie, the Western landscape acts as a place where the protagonists shelter themselves from closed spaces that impose rigidly defined heterosexual roles on them. Nevertheless, these inside/outside spaces sometimes merge and as Todd says, *Brokeback Mountain* blurs "the lines between inside and outside" which manifests in subtle ways as the film's plot and character development (6). This can be seen in different moments, such as the moment in which Jack comes back to Aguirre's trailer the following summer looking for a job and he tells him that he does not have any work for him. Jack is about to leave the trailer when he comes back and asks "Ennis Del Mar ain't been around, has he?" (Figure 3) to what Aguirre responds "You boys sure found a way to make the time pass up there. Twist… you guys wasn't gettin' paid to leave the dogs baby-sit the sheep while you stemmed the rose. Now get the hell out of my trailer".

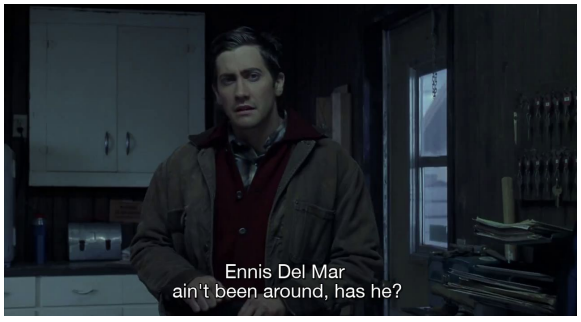

Fig. 3. Jack asking Aguirre about Ennis.

Fig. 4. Aguirre acknowledging he knew what they were doing in Brokeback.

In Fig. 4 we can appreciate Aguirre's 'I-know-what-you-did-last-summer' look, which would constitute the first acknowledgement we see of the break down of the boundaries between inside and outside spaces, between wild life and private life. We as spectators can see this information in the scene in which the two men are wrestling and embracing shirtless. The film portrays this image through a long-range shot that is slightly distorted: "The blurred image turns out to be the point-of-view vision beheld by Aguirre as he

gazes through his binoculars and it is the first confirmation we have of someone besides the two men knowing of their relation." (Tinkcom 99).

Another moment in which the lines between outside and inside spaces blur is the moment Alma confesses to Ennis that she knows the truth about his "fishing trips" with Jack, a term used by both Ennis and Jack to refer to their excursions to the mountains. In this moment (Fig. 5) Alma is the agent merging both worlds in an action that consists in the second acknowledgement of the break down of the barrier between inside and outside spaces. She tells Ennis how she discovered that they were not fishing at all by putting a note at the end of the rod's line to realise it was untouched still back after his trip.

Fig. 5. Alma breaking the line between inside and outside spaces.

Two other moments in which there is a breakup between private and public life is after Jack's death. First on the phone, when Ennis calls Jack's wife Lureen (Anne Hathaway) to see what happened. She tells him he wanted his ashes scattered on Brokeback Mountain admitting she did not know where that was, to what Ennis replies that it was a place where they herd sheep one summer back in '63.

Fig. 6. Lureen realising what Brokeback meant.

In Fig. 6 we see Lureen listening to Ennis telling her that Brokeback was where they herd sheeps one summer back in '63. When she hears that, she contains herself from crying, which is this still of the film consisting on the close-up of Lureen. After it she replies that Jack used to say it was his favourite place. In my opinion, this very moment let us as viewers know that Lureen now is totally aware of what Brokeback meant.

Ennis goes to Jack's parents' house to offer himself to scatter the ashes. It is in this moment that Jack's father (Peter McRobbie) tells him that Jack used to talk about them two going to live in their ranch, build up a cabin and help run the place. Just after telling him this he spits in a cup in a disgusting close-up which could be considered to portray the rejection that Jack's father feels about those ideas. This gesture could be read as 'my tongue is dirty after pronouncing those words so I spit to clean my mouth'. It recalls Butler's arguments about defiling the other by ejecting something from within the body. This way, the inner becomes outer and by means of that expulsion an identity-differentiation is remarked, as well as exclusion and domination (170). Then, the father expresses his rejection of queerness by both not respecting Jack's will to have his ashes scattered on Brokeback and by spitting after having talked about their queer plans.

Fig. 7. Jack's father tells Ennis where the ashes will remain.

Jack's father does not allow Ennis to scatter Jack's ashes on Brokeback but instead says they will remain in the family plot. I consider this to be another acknowledgment of someone knowing about the eternal lovers' secret in this case, Jack's father. This could be considered the last of the breakups between outside and inside spaces in the film. By not respecting his son's final wishes to have his ashes scattered on Brokeback, he wants to keep him in a closed space forever, becoming; he is the very last person in the film to not let him be free even after he is dead.

After having spoken mainly about open spaces, it is the time now to deal with the opposite. Closed spaces in *Brokeback Mountain* encapsulate the main characters, who become oppressed. The town works as a mirror for the mental entrapment faced by Ennis and Jack, who are "cabined, cribbed, and confined" (Todd 3). In classical Hollywood Westerns such as *Stagecoach* (John Ford, 1939), the town regulates sexual behavior and expel sexual 'deviants' from within its borders" (4). As we can see after the first half of the film, after Ennis and Alma's divorce, the town expels Ennis from town and makes him live in the outskirts. He is not completely aware of the main reason for the decline in his marriage yet, but Alma's realisation about his queerness marks a turning point, being the main reason why he 'is expelled' from town, because queerness is only allowed in the wilderness, not in town

where strong heterosexual rules predominate. He will only learn that Alma is conscious of it all in the Thanksgiving dinner, after they have already divorced.

The highest point in the film in what refers to merging places occurs when at the end of the film we see Ennis looking at a picture of Brokeback Mountain pinned on the inside of a closet door while we also see the Western landscape through the window, closing the closet door just afterwards. There are two possible interpretations of this scene: on the one hand, it could mean that the opened closet door implies that Ennis has allowed his sexual identity to move out from the closet into the open space of the Western landscape (10). On the other hand, it could also mean that the closing of the door suggests that he is still trying to "sanction off his identity, to impose spatial boundaries on that which cannot be contained" (10).

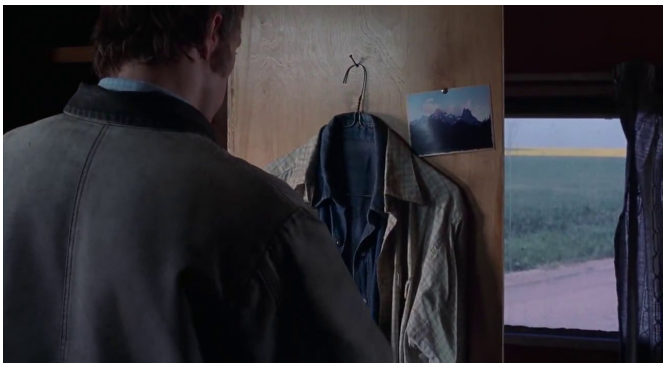

Fig. 8. Ennis looking at Jack's clothes and a photo of Brokeback.

In Fig. 8 we see Ennis watching the picture of Brokeback pinned on the inside of the closet. Next to it there are the clothes that Jack used the first time they met, which he has taken from Jack's bedroom when he went visit Jack's parents after his death. In my opinion, Ennis does not allow himself to be free. There are two things that make me think this: first, the shutting of the closet door with these two props (Jack's clothes and the photo of Brokeback) leaving them inside the closet as a memento of what he could have had. Second, that mise-en-scène allows us to see the Western landscape but through a window from Ennis'

cabin (a closed space). I think the final statement of the film is that he will remain in the closet and keep Jack's memory forever in his mind.

3.2.2 Through silence

Another way of representing the queerness at the core of *Brokeback Mountain* is by means of silence. Ennis is not able to verbally express his love for Jack but on one occasion we see him asking Basque (David Trimble) to bring the tins of soup that he knows Jack prefers instead of beans. This gesture replaces speech for him and constitutes Ennis' non-verbal way of showing affection (Needham 54). It is very relevant since before the camp scene, Ennis had told Basque he does not like soup.

Another relevant moment in which Ennis shows affection for Jack by means of actions instead of words is the following one: Ennis is coming back to the camp and falls from the horse because they step onto a bear and it throws him to the ground. He lost the food and only has beans left. Then Jack proposes Ennis to kill a sheep but Ennis says he will rather stick to the beans, as he is afraid of Aguirre realising they had killed a sheep. Then Jack answers he will not stick to the beans and the following shot we see is Ennis taking aim at an elk (Fig. 9) and shooting it to death. In the following scene we see them grilling the meat and eating it. This act would constitute another moment in which Ennis changes his will in order to please Jack's.

Fig. 9. Ennis aiming at an elk. pleasing Jack so they can eat other food than beans.

The film is full of silences. This concealment of information is performed by both the protagonists and other characters such as Alma and Joe Aguirre. In the case of Alma and Aguirre, they are aware of queer information involving Jack and Ennis but they just do not talk about it until it is inevitable for them to do so. As for example happens with Alma in the Thanksgiving dinner in her new husband's house. She cannot take it anymore and bursts, as we see in Fig. 10.

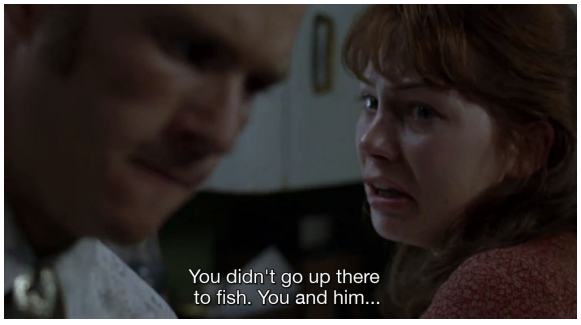

Fig. 10. Alma about to tell Ennis she is aware of what the "fishing trips" mean.

Fig. 11. Ennis making Alma shut up.

In Fig. 10, we see that Alma is about to open up and tell Ennis what she knows about his relationship with Jack. But as we can see in Fig. 11 the response from Ennis is to try to shut her up so silence keeps on ruling his private life. Ennis not letting Alma speak is an attempt to make silence be permanent.

Also, social muteness about queer issues allows Jack and Ennis be queer in the Western landscape. In Foucault's terms there is little regulation or biopower of sexuality in the rural world in which they live, which allows them to establish a bond they would not have imagined (qtd. in Tinkcom 69). Men having sex with each other was not explicitly prohibited or denied to them, even if it was vilified. There was an underlying understanding that it was forbidden but the failure to express this leaves open their sexual exploration since this ban was never specified (70). As time passes by, they can always return to Brokeback thanks to their non-disclosure (71).

The farewell scene which goes from minute 00:39:30 to 00:40:35 is a clear example of how silence and non-disclosure rules the life of Jack and Ennis. They are not able to verbally express their feelings, they do not have the words to say it. They just do not know how to do it or even, what they are feeling. In this scene in Signal, the place where they first met and where they have come back now and they are saying farewell, Jack asks Ennis if he will come back next summer, to which he responds that he will probably not but he guesses they will see each other around. Neither of them says he loves the other. They do not say this with words but thanks to performance we can perceive their feelings and that separation hurts them.

Fig. 12. Jack driving his pickup after the farewell.

Fig. 13. Ennis vomiting after the farewell.

In Fig. 12 we see Jack driving his pickup after the farewell conversation ends without even having said a proper goodbye. We can see the distress in his eyes. Fig. 13 is a screen capture of the scene in which Ennis weeps and vomits after Jack leaves. It is very telling how in this scene actions replace words and to what extent these actions speak for them. Here silence overcomes Ennis and he is left to mere bodily functions, which speak for him. This represents “the denial of even language to those most in need of it” (78) and how the lack of language makes emerge a shared language which will be the ground for their sexual relations.

This shared language is mostly made up of silences, silences which along with what comes out of these silences will allow their mutuality to come to life (78).

3.2.3 Through violence

Lastly, the representation of queerness through space and silence dovetails with the last idea: violence. In this respect, there is a significant moment starting in minute 00:37.15 where boundaries are broken. This is when Jack and Ennis are going to part ways because the job is over. What starts in a playful embrace ends up in punching each other until they bleed. In this scene we see Jack trying to lasso Ennis' ankles with a rope and both falling to the ground later. After this, we see them wrestling in the ground in a very similar scene to the one in which Aguirre starts being suspicious about them. This dissonance results from the character's movement out of the mountain and back to the social world of impositions they had left behind. "Their reentry into the community life of humans results in their physical abuse of each other" (102).

In *Brokeback Mountain*, violence is connected with the division of space previously explained. In the movie, when the inside/outside border collapses or threatens to do it characters tend to react in violence, trying to restore that border (Todd 6). A very accurate illustration of this takes place when they are celebrating Independence Day in the field. Two drunkards are talking about 'pussy' and Ennis complains but these men, far from just ignoring him, they joke about Ennis not having sex with his wife. This remark makes us think about how the power of compulsory masculinity, the heterosexuality it implies and the capacity of being part of masculine language lead Ennis (as well as Jack) to get married and reproduce (Tinkcom 77). This is remarkable because their queer behaviour is at odds with the heterosexual life they are supposed to take part in (77). When this is said aloud ("Probably

quit givin' it to his wife after his kids was born") the drunkards are putting Ennis' masculinity on the spotlight, which he cannot allow since non-disclosure is one of the main reasons why he is able to go back to Brokeback anytime he wants. Then we can understand why he reacts in violence, he cannot allow a minimal break into his private life.

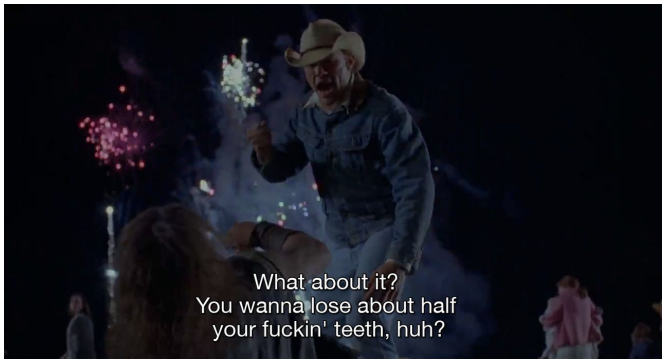

Fig. 14. Ennis losing control before punching one of the guys that were making fun of him.

In Fig. 14 we can see a raging Ennis reacting violently in a night of fireworks and celebration that could have been otherwise. He does not control himself, disregarding her wife who is calmer in this situation and who is telling Ennis to just move to another spot. *Mise-en-scène* help us see the consequences of his violence, shown in a low-angle shot of Ennis with rockets in the background. "The intensity of the bipolar opposites contained in the cultural oxymoron 'gay cowboy' are ever-present beneath Ennis's surface presentation of self" (White).

To conclude this section, I will discuss the most violent event of the film, which is Jack's death. When Ennis learns about Jack's death after being returned the postcard he sent to Jack with a red inscription saying 'deceased' he calls Lureen. While she is explaining how he supposedly died because of a tyre exploding and hitting his face, Ennis' imagination flows and we see it on screen. We see Jack being beaten by men on one side of the road. Ennis cannot help but think this because his father showed him a neighbour who had his penis ripped off. They did that to that neighbour because he was cohabiting with another man and

society could not permit that at that time. Jack may have been killed on one of his trips to or from Mexico, where he goes to have sex with male prostitutes. Therefore, we can assume that Ennis' fear of people knowing about their relationship prevented them from having a life together and also led Jack to death.

4. CONCLUSION

In this dissertation I have analysed how queerness is obliquely represented in *Brokeback Mountain* through space, silence and violence. The film opposes inside and outside spaces, allowing Ennis and Jack to express their love only in open spaces. Following the conventions of the Western, the film privileges outside over inside but brings the closet to the outside, where the protagonists are free to express their love, escaping from closed spaces governed by heterosexual rules were they feel confined. However, sometimes both inside and outside spaces merge and this creates conflict.

Another means of representing queerness in the movie is silence, both the protagonists' and other characters'. Non-disclosure is what allows them to maintain their queerness in a hostile environment. Love is expressed through silence or displaced onto the small gestures they have for each other, especially in Jack's case, who is always willing to go further than Ennis in their relationship.

Finally, when silence can no longer be sustained and threatens to break, this leads to violence, which also results from the merging of both closed and open spaces, thus leading to a tragic ending for a love story whose representation on the big screen constituted an important step in the normalisation of homosexual relationships in film for a mainstream audience.

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