

Hero's Journey Analysis – "Brokeback Mountain"

ORDINARY WORLD

Gorgeous scene at dawn

See a semi trailer driving

Ennis Del Mar(Heath Ledger) gets out – so clearly he's not a person of means. We see him take the ash off a cigarette and put it in his pocket.

Waits outside an office

Jack Twist (Jake Gyllenhall) arrives in a truck.

Nothing is said – this is Ennis's ordinary world. He lives inside himself, he doesn't his thoughts or feelings.

Jake looks at Heath in his rear view mirror as he shaves

4:08

Boss Joe Aguirre (Randy Quaid) arrives

Ennis and Jack go into his office

Aguirre wants them to go up and look after his sheep

One to stay at camp

The other to stay and sleep with the sheep

Can't make a fire – because they aren't meant to be there

Last summer

25% loss – doesn't want that again

Every week someone will come with supplies

Neither Ennis nor Jack has said a thing

6:27

Sheep are counted

Ennis says he doesn't want soup

Ennis is concerned that Jack isn't being careful on his horse – is this telling us that he cares about him?

They head off with their sheep

9:54

They look after some lambs

Beautiful scenery

When they're stopped, Ennis stays away from Jack and has a smoke on his own.

They saw timber together

They make camp

Jack takes the first stint with the sheep

Sleeps with them

Moon up

Gorgeous

11:10

Looks down into the valley at the fire where Ennis is

In the morning he's very tired

Can't wait until he gets his own spread – doesn't have to
put up with this shit. Not happy about having to sleep
with the sheep, no fire. It's against the rules.

Beans on the stove.

Heath whittles some wood

It rains

Jack says no more beans as he rides off

12:57

Big storm brewing

Jack tries to shoot something

Misses

Heath comes to get their supplies

No powdered milk, no spuds

He'd said he didn't eat soup

He's sick of beans

14:11

As he rides back

Comes upon a brown bear

Gets thrown off

Has to chase his mules

Jack arrives back at camp

Ennis is not there

15:09

He drinks by the fire

Finally Heath arrives

Jack not happy

Ennis wants whisky

Jack applies a compress to Ennis's wound – a CALL TO ADVENTURE

But Ennis takes it from him – REFUSAL

Jack suggests shooting a sheep
Ennis disagrees

Ennis shoots a deer
Jack slaps him
Getting tired of your dumb ass messin, says Ennis
This is a bit of flirting

They eat the deer
A very primal act, literally visceral

Jack complains about being out with the sheep
Ennis is happy to switch roles

18:34

Ennis says there's a big coyote up there
Balls on him like apples

Ennis gets stripped off the wash
Jack doesn't look – but does he want to

Jack's father was a good rider
But never taught him a thing
Never came to see him ride

Ennis only got one year of school
Brother and sister got married

21:09

Jack says that's more than Ennis has spoke the last 2 weeks
Ennis says it's more than he's spoke in the last year
This tells us that Ennis is becoming a different man in Jack's company – more able to share

Ennis's father thought that all rodeo guys were fuck ups
Jack goes a bit wild
Ennis says his Dad was right

22:04

They get into a talk about Pentecost
Jack says they're going to hell
Ennis says he may be a sinner
But he hasn't had the chance
FORESHADOWING

They get pissed
 Ennis too pissed to go up to the sheep

Jack wants him to come into the tent – CALL
 But Ennis says he'll sleep outside – REFUSAL

Wakes - is freezing
 25:07

Jack tells Ennis to come into the tent
 CALL TO ADVENTURE

Jack wakes
 Pulls Ennis close to him
 Ennis wakes up
 Not happy
 Jack goes to kiss him
 Ennis fighting it
 Jack pulls his jeans down
 Ennis fucks him roughly – CROSSING THE FIRST THRESHOLD

In the morning, Ennis wakes up
 27:17
 Looks at Jack
 Not comfortable
 Pulls his jeans up

He gets ready to ride off
 Jack comes out
 See you for supper, Jack says
 Ennis doesn't say a word – REFUSAL

Ennis gets up and finds that the coyote has killed a
 sheep
 29:55
 This is death is a consequence of the birth of his
 relationship with Jack.

Ennis returns
 This is a one shot thing we've got going on here – great
 line. REFUSAL. I'm not queer, says Ennis
 Me neither, says Jack

Bed time
 Jack in the tent
 Ennis outside by the fire
 Ennis goes into the tent
 31:16

He again has CROSSED THE THRESHOLD
 More delicate this time

Kissing

Ennis still uneasy but he's fighting his instincts
They hug – the FRIENDSHIP, the LOVE is confirmed

They horse around

Aguirre watches from distance with his binoculars
He knows what's going on

He is an ENEMY

Aguirre rides in

33:05

Jack's uncle is ill – that's why he's come out

Big storm

Hail

The sheep have got mixed up

35:20

It's snowing

They pull the tent down

Jack says Aguirre came up again

Wants them to bring the sheep down

Big storm coming

Jack offers to give Ennis money

Ennis is offended – calls him a shit

But he's really reacting to the reality that they are
being separated before he had expected

ORDEAL

Ennis sits off by himself

37:10

Jack comes up and lassoes him

They have a tumble

Turns into a fight

Jack hits him

Then tries to kiss him

Ennis punches him

Blood all over his shirt

39:00

They bring the sheep back

Aguirre not happy

Jack gets his truck started again

40:12

Ennis can't believe he left his shirt up there
(We find out later that he hasn't)

Ennis says he won't be going back again next year
 He's getting married - REFUSAL
 Jack says he might be around next year
 See you around I guess

They part
 Jack looks at Ennis in his rear view mirror

ORDEAL
 Ennis stops and throws up with emotion
 Punches a wall
 In emotional pain
 What the fuck are you looking at
 This is the DEATH of the relationship

Ennis's wedding to Alma
 42:26

They slide down a mountain in a toboggan

In some ways, these sequences are a REWARD
 Although they might not be what Ennis really wants, they
 lighten the tone after the heaviness of the previous
 scenes.

Road gang
 Ennis

Ennis at the drive in with his wife

Jack arrives at Aguirre's
 43:59

Need any help this summer?
 Ain't got no work for you
 Asks after Ennis
 Found a way to pass the time up there
 Tells him to get the hell out of his trailer
 44:54
 This a WARNING

Ennis arrives home
 Baby crying - Jenny
 He's got a horse

Two children both crying - Alma Jr and Jenny

She comes and hugs him
 She wants to move to town
 Ennis says the rent in town is too high
 47:28

They make love
He turns her over – clearly telling us that it's Jack
he's really wanting.

Jack works in the rodeo
Gets thrown

Jack in the bar
49:20
Approaches a guy at the bar
But he's not interested

Some sort of county fair
Guys talking about pussy
Ennis tells them to keep it down
They say fuck you
Ennis takes them on
Not sure what this tells us

Fireworks go off around him
Wife a bit shocked
Is this a sign of the stored up emotion?
52:00

Ann Hathaway rides at a rodeo
Red hat
Jack picks it up
She's clearly smitten

Jack mounts a bull
She comes to watch him

He does pretty well
Happy with himself

Ann is in the bar
Her father sells big farm equipment
She comes over
What are you waiting for cowboy?

They dance
54:33
Jack pretty happy

They drive off in her red Thunderbird
Going too fast for you?
Fast or slow
I just like the direction you're going in – another great
line
Fuck in the car

56:22

Ennis comes in
 Drops the kids off with his wife at the supermarket
 He has to go out to the ranch for the birth of a calf
 Leaves the kids – now a few years old

Lureen (Ann Hathaway) has had a baby
 Father in law treats Jack like shit

At this point, they have each created obstacles to their relationship. The stakes are now higher. More people are involved, more people will get hurt, it is harder for them to continue to see one another without someone getting hurt.

Ennis arrives home
 Someone called Jack sent him a postcard
 Of Brokeback Mountain
 Says he's coming through town
 Want to hook up?

Cowboy friend?, Alma asks.
 No, we was fishing buddies.
 Replies to him – You bet!

1:00:04
 Jack nervous
 Drinking
 Waiting by the window
 He's now had several beers
 Car pulls up
 Excited, he runs down
 They hug

Pulls him next to the house
 They kiss
 The wife watches from above
 Shocked

1:01:45
 While we want Jack and Ennis to be together, we don't want Ennis to be hurt, so we feel her pain. This is not what your ordinary cowboy's wife has to deal with.

Brings Jack in and introduces him
 Says they're going out drinking
 Might not get back

Cigarettes
 It's been 3 or 4 years
 1:03:40

They lie together in a motel
 Surprised they've got back into it again

1:04:30

Jacks asks what are they going to do now?
 Ennis says they can't go do anything — he's stuck
 Making a living is all he's got time for

Again, this is a CALL and a REFUSAL

Wife is waiting for him
 She's been crying
 Ennis comes in
 Says they are going to go up to the mountains to fish
 Jack doesn't even come in for coffee
 Sure foreman won't fire you?
 Says foreman owes him
 His tune has changed from the previous scene

She cries as he goes off

1:06:55

Naked they dive into the river

They sit by the campfire
 Jack says it could be like this always
 Says they could get a ranch somewhere
 Ennis says no. It ain't going to be that way.

Jack questions his life with Alma
 Ennis says to shut up
 Warns that if this thing takes hold of them in the wrong
 place
 Tells the tale of two old guys living together
 Got pulled around until his dick fell off
 FORESHADOWING

Jack not happy about getting together every 4 years
 How long?
 As long as we can ride it
 Ain't no reins on this one

Music swells
 FANTASTIC SCENE

1:11:49

She runs off to work
 Ennis not happy

Jack sells farm machinery
 Ann's father slights Jack

Another post card arrives

Ann is doing the books

Asks about his friend in Wyoming
 Going up there 2-3 times year
 Clearly they have a routine now

Ennis prepares to leave
 1:14:58

Ennis almost takes off without his fishing gear
 Alma looks glum

Ennis arrives
 Jack happy

Jack has his son up in the big old farm machinery

Ennis watches TV
 Elma wants to go to the church social

They make love
 She doesn't want to do it without precautions
 She says she'll have children if he supports them
 They split

Divorce court

1:18:10
 Jack enters Wyoming
 King of the Road

Jack arrives
 They hug
 Got his message about the divorce
 His two girls now look about 9

Jack thinks the divorces signals that this means it can
 happen

He can't do anything because he's got the girls this
 weekend
 I'll see you next month then
 Jack drives off

CALL and REFUSAL

In the truck
 He cries

Heads to Mexico
 Has sex with a young man

ORDEAL
 Thanksgiving

His Father in law doesn't let him carve
 He tells his son he can't watch the football until he's
 had dinner – turns the football off
 Father in law goes over and turns the TV back on

1:22:58

Jack goes and turns the TV off
 Father in law goes to turn it back on
 You sit down you son of a bitch

Another great scene
 Father in law sits down

Son does as he was told
 Jack carves

Ennis has Thanksgiving with his girls
 His ex has hooked up with the guy from the store
 The girls want to know about his bronco riding days
 1:25:22

His ex thinks he should get remarried
 Does he still go fishing with Jack?
 She wonders how he never brought any fish
 She says she left a note which he never found
 He threatens her with his fist
 Leaves

Girls clearly love him

1:27:22

ORDEAL
 He drives to a bar
 Guy shouts abuse
 Ennis punches him
 Guy lays into him

REWARD
 Mountain scene

Jack and Ennis ride their horses together

1:28:43

Ennis asks about his relationship
 Lureen doesn't suspect
 You ever get the feeling someone looks at you
 Like they know
 Thinks Ennis should come to Texas
 Ennis thinks he's stupid
 Another good scene

CACALL and REFUSAL

Girls picks up Ennis
 Drags him onto the dance floor
 Clearly up for it

1:32:04

She demands a foot rub

Jack has dinner with his wife
 Another couple
 Pretty clear the two guys are keen on one another

Jack takes the other guys' wife up for a dinner
 Wife could talk the leg off an iron pot

Jack talks to the other guy outside

1:34:24

Talks about having a little cabin
 We ought to go down there some weekend
 Fish some – get away
 SUBTEXT

Ennis arrives to pick up his daughter
 She's not happy that he's with the other woman
 The woman asks if her father will ever settle down
 Not the marrying kind
 Or am I not good enough for him
 You're good enough

She takes him up dancing

His daughter wants to come live with him

1:37:27

He says he's not set up for that

1:38:24

Jack and Ennis up in the mountains
 All this time, never married again
 Tells about the girl he's been seeing
 Jack says they could do their marriage over the phone
 Says he's got a thing going with the foreman's wife
 Truth is sometimes I miss you so much I can hardly stand
 it

They fall asleep in one another's arms

ORDEAL – GREAT SCENE

1:40:20

Ennis says it will be November before he can come out
 again – can't do August

Jack not happy

Never enough time – never enough
 Unsatisfactory situation
 Ennis says he can't get away
 Says Jack doesn't understand
 Better idea?
 Jack says he did once
 Tells him about going to Mexico
 Ennis not happy
 Says they could have had a real good life together
 I wish I knew how to quit you - great line
 Ennis cries
 Jack tries to hug him
 Ennis tries to push him away

Again, CALL and REFUSAL

BRILLIANT, BRILLIANT SCENE

REWARD

They cuddle
 In a replay of their first meetings

Then Jack watches Ennis drive away

1:47:00

Ennis in a bar
 His ex comes in with another guy
 Clearly she would still prefer to be with him
 I don't get you Ennis Delmar
 I was probably no fun anyways
 Girls don't fall in love with fun

Gets a postcard back

DECEASED

Calls Jack's wife, Lureen

RESURRECTION (CRUCIFIXION)

She tells the story that the tyre exploded
 We see guys attacking him with a tyre jack

He wanted his ashes scattered on Brokeback
 He said it was his favourite place

Ennis broken up

Ennis goes to Jack's parents place
 Father says that Jack used to see he'd bring Ennis up
 Then this spring it was going to be some other guy
 Neighbour

Like most of Jack's ideas it never came to pass

1:55:06

You're welcome to go up to his room

Ennis goes up to the room

Opens the window

Sits, turns

Comes through to his wardrobe

Finds his shirt

Blood on it

Jack's own blue shirt outside it

Holds it to him

Smells it

Brings down the shirt

Father says he's got a family plot

He's going in it

Mother asks him to come back and see them

The shirt is the ELIXIR

We return to a scene similar to the one that opened the film

Jack puts his number on a letter box

Car arrives – it's his eldest daughter

1:59:47

Flash car – it's her boyfriend's

Curt works in the oilfields

He's living in a trailer

She says he needs more furniture

She says she's getting married

Wants him to be there

Says he's supposed to be on a roundup

But says they can find themselves a new cowboy

Is that character growth? Maybe

2:02:57

Music starts up

He closes the curtains

He opens the cupboard

Looks at the shirt

Tears in his eyes

Jack, I swear

Picture of Brokeback by it

SUMMARY:

Brokeback doesn't really follow the shape of the monomyth but it does share some its elements.

It's a tragic love story in which the protagonist, Ennis Del Mar, is constantly presented with the opportunity of love – gets persistent CALLS TO ADVENTURE – and yet resolutely, stubbornly REFUSES THE CALLS.

In the traditional story structure, the hero is forced to address his character flaw in order to fulfil his inner need but in a tragedy there is no character change and the inner need goes unsatisfied. The message for us in the traditional story is "Be a hero – change and be rewarded with the elixir". The message for us in a tragedy is "Don't be like the hero and don't change" otherwise you too will screw up your life.

The story brings the two of them together, establishes their love, but also makes clear that the taboo nature of the love is an insurmountable obstacle for Ennis. From then on, we see the two of them build separate lives but Jack is ready at any time to leave that safe world for Ennis. Alas, Ennis doesn't share his reckless courage and remains either married or alone. Jack pursues his sexuality and it costs him his life. But it's Ennis whose life is a greater tragedy because while Jack died bravely being himself, Ennis will die a lonely coward.

I'm not generally a fan of the tragic form because I don't typically like seeing someone falling predictably towards a sticky end but this film is an exception. You fully understand Ennis's reluctance because of the real danger their homosexuality would involve for them. So you feel his pain when the man he loves but can't live with dies without him. It struck me in trying to see how (and if) the film conforms to the hero's journey that at the point of resurrection in a tragedy, you actually have a crucifixion. Rather than the hero being reborn at this moment, they die in order that you can be reborn.

So many great scenes between them, leading up to that poignant climax with the shirt, with the emotion heightened by one of the finest soundtracks in modern cinema. Not a prime example of the use of the Hero's Journey but the film resonates for us because we all understand fear and longing. And it should have beaten *Crash* to the Best Film Oscar.