

Katherine Waterston on her 19th-century LGBTQ romance *The World to Come*

[Samantha Highfill](#) January 12, 2021 at 02:00 PM EST

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Based on Jim Shepard's story of the same name, *The World to Come* is a story of forbidden love. Set in the 19th Century, the film follows two neighboring couples played by [Katherine Waterston](#), [Vanessa Kirby](#), [Christopher Abbott](#), and [Casey Affleck](#). As both couples battle hardships, Tally (Kirby) and Abigail (Waterston) begin to fall in love.

The World to Come premiered at the Venice International Film Festival where it took home the Queer Lion for best LGBTQ-themed film. Below, Waterston talks about her experience on the film, which will be released on February 12.

ENTERTAINMENT WEEKLY: How did you first get involved with this film?

KATHERINE WATERSTON: I feel so lucky that this happened to me.

[Director] Mona [Fastvold] asked me to do it. I was sent the script and it was one of those experiences where you feel like there's been some kind of mistake because it was just so good. I wasn't even halfway down the first page and I knew I needed to play this character. There were a few lines of voiceover on that first page, and a description of her that was so compelling and so complete, even just there on the first page, that I just knew that I had a really great script in my hands. So, then to discover all the places that I would get to go with this character and the harrowing journey I would get to go through was the icing on the cake. But I knew on that first page.

What was it about your character that made you feel like you were the

person for it, that you connected to?

The first thing that really interested me was that she's described as an asset to her husband. And for the first time, I really thought about that word and what a fascinating word it is. It comes with both incredibly negative and very positive associations, connotations, right? To be an asset. And it unlocked the period of the film for me, because a marriage was very much also an economic relationship, not simply romantic, if even at all a romantic contract, but actually mostly an economic arrangement. So, what does it mean? What does it mean to be a person in that kind of arrangement, in that kind of life? That was the first thing that got me really curious about the character and her world. But I don't look at what I've done, or what I think I'm capable of as an actor, to decide whether or not I'm the right person to play a part. I think it's just about a level of interest, and if I feel completely gripped and fascinated by a character, that's when I feel I need to be the one to play this part because I'm just certain no-one will be more interested in her than me.

Had you ever worked with Vanessa Kirby before?

No, but I'd watched her in stuff and I didn't want to do this film with anybody else. I just felt it had to be her. And so it was a very good day when she said yes. Mona has a gift for casting, I think. I loved this cast. We are all very different performers and have very different qualities but really worked well together. I think she put together a bunch of people who really like to play scenes like tennis matches. There are basic rules to the thing, there's a structure to the scene, but within that, there's room to play. That's why it was so important to me that it was Vanessa because I really felt like she was someone who was strong enough and creative enough to really play the scenes with me. And the script is just so rich.

I can't imagine you were able to do much research for a story about an LGBTQ relationship in the 19th century. Were you able to dig into the time and what it must have been like?

Yeah, there's very little research you can do because there's so little written about the LGBTQ community of that period, about love stories between two

women. There's the Anne Lister diaries, which I pored over while we were working, and there were a few things in there that I found really useful. However, she was a very privileged English woman, and I was playing a farm woman in New England. So there's a great difference there in terms of access, access to education and time, too — time to oneself, time to think and develop your identity. I think Abigail, my character, is a woman whose life was never really her own to choose in any way. There was basically nothing about my life, my experience, that prepared me for playing Abigail, she is of another world. It's fascinating to explore her world, and what her life would have been like. It all starts with the script, and they did a lot of that work for us by creating two women who were just fully-fledged individuals.

What would you say is the tone of the film?

In a way, I might describe it as, and I don't know that I even came up with this line in the first place, but like a Western about interiority. It feels like a female perspective of a world and an experience we've known very well from the other side. It's like another piece of a story that we've seen, if that makes any sense. That's more if we're talking about the vibe, but I really think it's about love and vulnerability, and that's true for all four of the characters. It is an ensemble, and though these two brilliant male actors have done a cool thing of supporting female leads, they too are shown in this refreshingly multi-dimensional way. It feels like a missing puzzle piece to the story of this period and this part of the world.

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