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ENTERTAINMENT

      **Katherine Waterston On Her Queer Frontier Romance, ‘The World To Come’**

The breathtaking film by Mona Fastvold follows a farmer’s isolated wife as she falls for her free-spirited neighbor in 19th century America.

By Leigh Blickley

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ILLUSTRATION: DAMON DAHLEN/HUFFPOST. PHOTOS: BLEECKER STREET

Katherine Waterston stars in “The World To Come,” an evocative film that depicts hardship, loneliness and female desire.

[Katherine Waterston](#) is a true chameleon.

The daughter of veteran actor Sam Waterston, she has been gracing the stage and screen for 15 years, making her feature debut in 2007's "Michael Clayton" before appearing in "Taking Woodstock," "The Disappearance of Eleanor Rigby" and the HBO series "Boardwalk Empire." However, it wasn't until her memorable turn as Joaquin Phoenix's ex-girlfriend in Paul Thomas Anderson's loopy comedy "Inherent Vice" that she merited attention.

As of late, Waterston has starred in projects ranging from the HBO miniseries "The Third Day" to the film "Alien: Covenant" and the "Fantastic Beasts" franchise — embracing the craft she loves.

Now she's in Mona Fastvold's "The World to Come," currently in theaters and on demand March 2, that Waterston has found another layer to shed.

The movie, shot on 16mm film in wintry Romania, follows 19th-century woman Abigail (Waterston), a grieving mother isolated on an upstate New York farm with her withdrawn husband Dyer (Casey Affleck). Just as she's craving connection, new neighbors Tallie (Vanessa Kirby) and Finney (Christopher Abbott) arrive and the women strike up a friendship that soon turns romantic. With breathtaking cinematography by Andre Chemetoff and poetic narration by Waterston, "The World to Come" is a rumination on hardship, loneliness and female desire.

Waterston was drawn to Abigail the minute she read the first page of Jim Shepard and Ron Hansen's script, based on Shepard's short story of the same name.

"I was so struck by the density of the script and the efficiency of the writing," Waterston told HuffPost in a phone call this week. "One of the very first lines of voiceover, which didn't make it into the film, was, '*At night I often wonder if those who have been my intimates have found me to be a steep hill whose view does not repay the ascent.*' And it told me so much about Abigail. Here's a woman who clearly was of very limited means and is kept up at night not by what she hasn't gotten from life but questioning what she has given. When I carried that notion through that first read, I was completely devastated."

Abigail is immediately described as "an asset" to Dyer, which Waterston found interesting considering the negative connotations of that word when compounded with marriage. But the chance to play around with the space in each scene and the mystery of the relational dynamics excited her. It's an ensemble piece that provides specificity for each character, allowing nuance to seep into every frame.



ANDRE CHEMETOFF/BLEECKER STREET

Vanessa Kirby with Waterston in "The World to Come."

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After the death of their young daughter, Abigail and Dyer are struggling to connect as they go about their day-to-day duties. They seem to be making progress until free-spirited Tallie captures Abigail's attention. The women begin spending time together, finishing chores while discussing the pressure of motherhood and their desire for education, among other matters. Eventually, they can no longer resist the urge for something deeper.

Dyer recognizes the spark between them, but Tallie's unhinged husband Finney is far less amused, becoming a danger to their blossoming love.

Many queer period pieces have hit the cinema recently ("[The Favourite](#)," "[Portrait of a Lady on Fire](#)," "[Ammonite](#)"), but "The World to Come" seems to address the fear of being "found out" more potently. It wasn't uncommon for women to be reprimanded, raped or

even killed for disobeying their husband's wishes in the 1800s, as Waterston noted is referenced in [Heidi Schreck's play](#) "What the Constitution Means to Me."

She appreciated that, despite the lack of knowledge around the marital experiences of working-class women farmers during this time, the film presented a varied perspective on acceptance.

"It is an interesting study of two very different men's responses to a system that's designed to serve them," Waterston said. "Without a doubt, both the men in the story are in the privileged position of being able to have the final word, be the decision-makers in control of their partners, make each and every final decision on any matter regarding the home or other desires. Obviously the whole thing is an imagined history, but I was moved by (the scriptwriters') choice to present one person who would've been permitted to be a much lousier husband [be more accepting]. The writers chose to go, sorry, there has always been a broad range of individuals and the individual does have the choice, regardless of how the system is set up. Dyer is flawed and doesn't have the tools to communicate well, but he does respect his partner. "

Affleck, who also produced the film, plays the quiet Dyer with vulnerability, once again giving a [powerful, grief-stricken performance](#). Abbott nails the villainous Finney and Kirby is radiant as fiery Tallie, who entrances Abigail with every glance. Waterston said that although her "chemistry" with Kirby was instantaneous, it was brought to life by the dialogue.

"I'm sort of toying with the theory that chemistry is bullshit or it's not what we think it is," Waterston said. "When a script is really well-written and there's tension built in the structure of a scene, it creates the electricity that we feel when we watch two people on screen."

"Vanessa thinks we can take credit for it, but I'm not so sure if we can," she added with a laugh.

Waterston did admit that all four cast members shared a similar passion and work ethic, which made the production experience a memorable one.

"We were immediately talking about what other projects we could do together because we all really did click and just had the best time working together," she said. "I think we all are pretty obsessive and hold ourselves to a high standard, so when you get with other people like that it's kind of a relief. It's a group of quite nerdy actors who really love to work at the scenes, so you don't feel like you're dragging someone to a Sunday rehearsal that they don't want to be at."

*"The World to Come" is now in theaters and will be on demand March 2.*