

# SUNDANCE REVIEW: 'The World to Come' (2021) Tells a Beautiful Tale of Yearning and Desire

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**"Kirby and Waterston are truly captivating, portraying the romance between the two women in a way that is so tender and pure."**

Amidst the difficult farmland and frontiers of upstate 1850s New York, Dyer (Casey Affleck) and his wife Abigail (Katherine Waterston) struggle to maintain and profit off their modest farm, facing harsh winters and poor conditions for their crops and livestock. Though Abigail is initially tasked with keeping a ledger to record information involving the farm, it becomes a sort of diary in the form of quiet, poetic voiceover, as she relays her most personal inner thoughts and day-to-day experiences in a flowery manner not too far off from Shakespearean soliloquy. Her steady narration is what brings director Mona Fastvold's *The World to Come* to life, aided by the words of co-writer Jim Shepard (with Ron Hansen, respectively), who penned the original story the film is adapted from.

Abigail has more to write about in her personal ledger once she is introduced to Tally (Vanessa Kirby), the flame-haired, clever wife of a new neighboring pig farmer, Finney (Christopher Abbott). A spark is ignited between them instantly, burning through every stolen glance, kind act, and shared thoughts that bond them. A mutual disdain for their husbands and feeling generally unsatisfied with the roles they play in their lives makes it easier to connect with each other, often discussing the future as something that is wholly unknown.

Both Dyer and Finney guilt their wives for not fulfilling their "duties" to them

and their respective farms, establishing environments for the women that feel cold, shameful, and aching lonely, even when they're in the presence of their spouses. Dyer is more quietly resentful, expressing his disappointment in Abigail with his body language and in mumbled, off-handed comments. Although they are both still reeling from the loss of their young daughter to illness, Dyer extends no understanding to Abigail and her hesitation toward trying to have another child. Finney similarly is upset with Tally for being unable to conceive, and uses harsh examples from the bible to repeatedly shame her for not being a better wife to him.

These dynamics between husband and wife add fuel to the fire, as Abigail and Tally are drawn to each other in not just a desperation to cling onto something that feels genuine and exciting, but in an earnest attempt to find reasons to be hopeful. The romantic yearning is evident – in the way Tally looks at Abigail like she's the only person in the world who matters, and in Abigail admitting that there's something between them that she can't unravel.



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In an especially poignant scene set against the gorgeous backdrop of rolling

hills and lush, towering trees on the farm, Abigail walks with Tally and tells her about her grandmother who grew up on and worked the land in the late 1700s. She expresses how difficult that must have been, and how she doesn't know how her grandmother did it. Tally's answer is that "maybe they had more hope than we do," a simple but profound recognition of the limitations they have as women in that place and time, and as lovers. This theme carries on throughout the film, as Abigail and Tally relish in the earnest and joyful love they have. Aware that although their relationship won't last forever, they have at least – for a time – managed to create their own perfect world with each other.

Kirby and Waterston are truly captivating, portraying the romance between the two women in a way that is so tender and pure. There's a consideration for their characters and the situations they're in that shows in how they navigate difficult scenes, particularly in quiet and tense moments when you can tell Abigail and Tally are on the edge of breaking.

With *The World to Come*, Fastvold has given us a story of female desire that feels honest and tangible, crafting moments of bliss among historically accurate disappointments and tragedies. While it could understandably be compared to other historical romances from recent years that are between two women, such as *Portrait of A Lady On Fire* or *Ammonite*, this film can still be recognized for its own strengths and what it contributes to this subgenre that we are obviously enraptured by.

**Dir:** Mona Fastvold

**Prod:** Casey Affleck, Whitaker Lader, David Hinojosa, Margarethe Baillou, Pamela Koffler

**Cast:** Katherine Waterston, Vanessa Kirby, Casey Affleck, Christopher Abbott

**Release:** February 12, 2021 in select theaters, March 2, 2021 on VOD



THE WORLD TO COME | Official Trailer | Bleecker Street

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