



A woman with brown hair, wearing a brown jacket and a green scarf, looks out of a window. The window is divided into two panes. The left pane shows a blurred green landscape with trees and hills. The right pane shows the woman's face and upper body. The window frame is dark and appears to be made of metal or wood.

# CONTENTS

4 **Cast and Crew**

7 **Return of the Native (2018)**  
by Will Massa

18 **About the Transfer**

# CAST

Alice Bell **Ruth Wilson**  
Joe Bell **Mark Stanley**  
Richard Bell **Sean Bean**  
Susan Bell **Úna McNulty**  
David **Joe Dempsie**  
Young Alice **Esmé Creed-Miles**  
Young Joe **Aiden McCullough**  
Young David **Jake Hayward**  
Tower **Shane Attwooll**  
Matty **Dean Andrews**  
Rowan **Mike Noble**  
Jim **Steve Garti**  
Pete **Jonah Russell**  
Declan **Paul Robertson**

# CREW

Written and Directed by **Clio Barnard**  
Inspired by the Novel *Trespass* by **Rose Tremain**  
Producer **Tracy O'Riordan**  
Executive Producers **Lila V. Rawlings, Suzanne Mackie, Andy Harries, Lizzie Francke, Rose Garnett, Polly Stokes, Hugo Heppell, Meroë Candy**  
Director of Photography **Adriano Goldman ASC, AIC**  
Editors **Nick Fenton, Luke Dunkley**  
Production Designer **Helen Scott**  
Casting Director **Amy Hubbard CSA, CDE**  
Sound Designer **Tim Barker**  
Composer **Harry Escott**  
"An Acre of Land" Vocals by **PJ Harvey**  
Costume Designer **Matthew Price**  
Make-up and Hair Designer **Sue Wyburgh**  
Line Producer **Tracie Wright**  
Post Production Supervisor **Meg Clark**  
First Assistant Director **Tony Aherne**  
Location Manager **Beverley Lamb**





# RETURN OF THE NATIVE

by Will Massa

No sooner have we been introduced to the character of Alice Bell, shearing sheep and breaking bread with other workers on the international livestock circuit, than we discover she is set to return to her native Yorkshire. Her purpose is to claim the farmland promised to her by her father, who has recently passed away, and she delivers this news to her overseer tentatively, seemingly unconvinced that it is a desirable course of action. The bridging music that carries Alice from an idyllic lakeside to a rain-swept and isolated farmstead is 'An Acre of Land', a traditional English pastoral adapted into a haunting ballad by one of Britain's most celebrated musical visionaries, PJ Harvey, working in collaboration with film composer Harry Escott. Their rendering sets up the uneasy, elemental, ethereal pulses that course through Clio Barnard's narrative, with lyrics and imagery that evoke a pre-industrial agricultural era and conjure up folkloric nostalgia. There is something of childhood innocence, too, in the description of a sole acre of land that is "ploughed with a ram's horn", reaped with a "little tooth comb" and thrashed "with a goose's quill". It's an independent musician-filmmaker marriage made in heaven, prompted by the impact of Barnard's first two feature films; *The Arbor* (2010), a stylistically innovative exploration of the life of the Bradford-born playwright Andrea Dunbar; and *The Selfish Giant* (2013), a heart-wrenching reimagining of Oscar Wilde's short story depicting the friendship of two young lads making ends meet, also on the outskirts of Bradford. So moved was she by the latter that Harvey wrote to Barnard to see if there might be room to collaborate on any upcoming projects. Bookending the narrative, this musical contribution is the perfect thematic accompaniment to the stirring third feature from one of the UK's most distinctive filmmakers.

After the success of *The Arbor*, Barnard started to receive a substantial amount of material to consider from producers and agents. When a copy of Rose Tremain's novel *Trespass* landed on her desk, she felt a gripping affinity with the novel, specifically the quasi-biblical tale of Aramon and Audrun, a brother and sister locked in a bitter land dispute fuelled by unspoken family secrets. Relocating the action to her native Yorkshire allowed her to draw on her ongoing relationship to the area and develop the core themes. The result is a fable concerned with the protection of territory – emotional, physical and corporeal – and although the generic trappings in *Dark River* are fundamentally of melodrama, ominous whispers of ghost story, thriller and horror creep in around the edges.



Through the course of the film we come to understand that Alice was frequently raped by her father as a young girl and teenager, a ritual act abetted by her brother, Joe. As an adult, Alice still suffers from post-traumatic hallucinations and imaginings, psychic processes that represent a visual challenge for any a director committed to authentic representation in a broadly realist mode. In 2013, when Barnard was mid-development on the project, she was awarded the prestigious Wellcome Trust Screenwriter Fellowship, an initiative designed to connect filmmakers with Wellcome's broader mission of inspiring knowledge and understanding of bio-medical science. A principle benefit of the fellowship is having the freedom to research, over the course of one year, from within the Wellcome collection, and to pick the brains of leading scientific minds in whichever area is of interest to the awardee. Barnard was thus able to consult expert psychologists who work with perpetrators and survivors of sexual violence, as well as with survivors themselves.

Though this period helped to develop a thorough understanding of the long-term psychological implications of abuse, representing trauma still poses a distinct set of challenges for the screenwriter. Psychological episodes do not necessarily manifest visually and can present themselves in a whole range of forms that are difficult to convey understandably on screen – smell, for example. Moreover, cinema's toolbox is somewhat limited when it comes to exploring memory, and straight-up flashback is all too often a crutch for exposition, revealing information to an audience when other creative possibilities have been exhausted or discarded. In *Dark River*, however, the task is double: to develop incrementally the audience's understanding of Alice (and her relationship with Joe) as well as to move the plot forward. Barnard approaches the task by sewing a textured patchwork of flashback and intrusive memory, creating a past-present ambiguity that leads us gradually to unambiguous ends. The abuse is only referenced obliquely (and only really towards the end of the story), but Barnard's techniques nourish the dramatic under-tensions simmering in the present, playing to the strengths of her own medium.

Narratively, the literal and symbolic reverberate in neat harmony – representations of territory, boundaries, ownership, rights and possession all find their echoes in the shared emotional miasma of the siblings. Alice in particular is often to be found cleansing and purging. We meet her shearing sheep – vital for protecting against fatal diseases – and her first act upon returning to the farm is to bathe in the powerful waterfall nearby. From fumigation to sheep dips to powerful rain, the visual iconography of rural life underscores the character's deep need to wash away and start afresh. With her brother spiralling into patterns of increasingly destructive behaviour, however, and her father a ghost with whom there can be no reckoning, we realise long before Alice does that the possibility for new growth can only be forged in the ashes of violent confrontation. Indeed, the dramatic irony that helps to power *Dark River* is that there can be no satisfactory outcome for Alice's predicament; as Joe points out, even if she were to win the tenancy, she is still afraid every

time she steps foot in the house. At the last we recognise, with her, that the best she can hope for is a spiritual reconciliation with her brother, also undergoing his own dark night of the soul. There are many powerful silences in *Dark River*, but none as powerful as when Alice sits across the prison table from Joe. Now that everything can be said nothing needs to be, save an agreement that Alice can continue to visit Joe in prison. Of course, the subtext is a joint commitment to rebuilding a once-happy relationship, a treaty ratified by the passing of seeds from sister to brother.

At first glance, *Dark River* appears a more conventional proposition than Barnard's previous two features. And while the visual idiom of the film represents a further step into formal classicism by a filmmaker who emerged from an experimental practice, there are nevertheless stylistic and thematic echoes of her previous work reverberating. Closer inspection reveals a lingering preoccupation with the fragile nature of memory that was explored so fascinatingly in *The Arbor*, and Barnard's imposition of the ghostly on the real recalls the devastating final scenes of *The Selfish Giant*. Though she is often described as a social realist filmmaker, Barnard is also interested in how we co-exist with the imagination as it filters our perception of everyday reality. In *Dark River* we find a director less concerned with naturalism than with the emotional potential of lyrical and imaginative realism. But it's in the masterful balancing of surface and depth that we most detect a maturation of Barnard's directorial abilities. The portrayal of siblings grappling with the unsayable events of the past amounts to a masterclass in dialogue, and Barnard deploys silences, interruptions, pauses and glances that speak volumes above what is actually being said. Sibling rivalry on screen demands a unique blend of chemistry and physical inflection, and the performances she elicits from lead actors Ruth Wilson and Mark Stanley are superb. The challenge of communicating shared history and, in this case, grievance, without saying a word is met admirably by the pair, shackled inside their characters' mutually reinforcing cage of guilt and anger.

Though Barnard could not have predicted it, her film was released onto cinema screens at a time of heightened anxiety and damning revelation about widespread sexual assault and abuses of male power in the film industry and in society more generally. Barnard's own exploration of these themes is all the more interesting for its setting inside the world of agriculture, where dynamic on-screen representations of women are extremely rare. More broadly, *Dark River* is one of the three independent feature films produced over the last year that insist on unsettling bucolic representations of country life. Hope Dickson Leach's *The Levelling* (2017) also portrays a strong, embattled female character pitted against her father and an ailing family farm, while Francis Lee's *God's Own Country* (2017) beautifully repudiates hetero-normative configurations of masculinity within a typical rural setting. In *Dark River*, Alice is astute, skilled and experienced, but when she returns home she has to contend, yet again, with the damaging effects of male weakness. In a tantalisingly telling





line she tries to persuade Joe that she'll get the farm back "to when Nanna and Mam ran it", hinting at a recent family history dogged by male ineptitude and stubborn pride. In the fifteen years Alice has been away Joe has become a threat not only to himself and to the survival of the family farm, but now to Alice herself, who has to fend him off with shearing blades and prevent him from setting fire to her Land Rover – her only means of escape. Apart from the young daughter of a benevolent family friend, there are no other women to speak of in *Dark River*. Alice stands alone in this landscape, a force to be reckoned with grasping for an opportunity that is persistently frustrated by the stultifying male forces around her.

Much has been made by critics of the phenomenon of this recent 'farm trilogy' in contemporary British cinema. Take the films as a trio and a clamour can be heard: we need to find new ways of looking at and understanding 'the rural'. If *Dark River's* more personal themes chime with a specifically gendered cultural moment, then Barnard's depiction of the countryside – like those of her rurally-minded peers – speaks to something altogether more nebulous: our psychological relationship to the land. For as much as she researched abuse and its legacies, Barnard also immersed herself in the detail of contemporary farming life. Her Yorkshire is a canvass populated by £20-a-pop 'knacker men', rusting machinery and farmers who drive trucks at night to make ends meet. A common misunderstanding she is keen to rectify is that all farmers own the land they work on. The case with Alice and Joe's farm, and many others like it, is that it is tenanted, rented over decades from private land owners and privatised utility companies. And the uncomfortable modern reality is that the land tenanted by the Bells is now worth less as a farm and more as a property development site. Farmers have to contend, therefore, not only with day-to-day financial survival but with the existential pressure of long-term historical erasure. So, when Joe spits, "I've been grafting on this land since I could walk", it's because the blow struck by an impeccably faux-rural land agent pronouncing on his ability to maintain a farm that's been in his family for generations is a real one. Not only is it hard work, it's rarely pretty, and Barnard cautions against the drift into an abstracted, myopic view of the countryside, reminding us that death and decay and are as much a part of life as new birth and growth.

As a nation we are long overdue a period of serious introspection about our relationship to agriculture. As the UK edges ever closer to possible atomisation, our filmmakers are urging us to reimagine the countryside and consider anew what it might provide for us. To this end, Barnard's inverted romanticism is a sobering and timely provocation, a valuable marker in British independent filmmaking that connects with audiences at a moment of increased sensitivity about representations of sexual abuse and male power, but also with something more deep rooted in the national psyche – our place in the land.

**Will Massa is the curator of contemporary fiction in the BFI National Archive**



# ABOUT THE TRANSFER

*Dark River* is presented in its original aspect ratio of 1.85:1 with optional 5.1 and 2.0 audio. The master was prepared in High Definition by Protagonist Pictures and delivered to Arrow Films.

# PRODUCTION CREDITS

**Discs and Booklet Produced by** James Blackford  
**Executive Producers** Kevin Lambert, Francesco Simeoni  
**Technical Producer** James White  
**Production Co-ordinator** Liane Cunje  
**QC Manager** Nora Mehenni  
**Blu-ray Mastering** Digital Cinema United  
**Design** Obviously Creative  
**Artwork** The Poster House

# SPECIAL THANKS

Alex Agran, Clío Barnard, David Bartholomew, Daniel Battsek, Dave Bishop, Sue Bruce-Smith, Phil Cairns, Lizzie Franke, George Hamilton, Ben Luxford, Will Massa, John McKnight, Anthony Nield, Tracy O'Riordan, Bridget Pedgrift, Lila V. Rawlings, Vanessa Saal, Jon Sadler, Hannah Saunders, Mark Stanley, Tom Stewart, Ruth Wilson





ARROW  
  
ACADEMY  
FCD1750