

# Anemone Review

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For the horticulturally challenged, the anemone is a delicate plant that closes its petals as a storm approaches. For a story about withdrawing from the world and becoming emotionally bottled up, the flower-as-metaphor title is perhaps the most on-the-nose thing about Ronan Day-Lewis' feature debut. *Anemone* is co-written with and starring his father Daniel in his first on-screen appearance since 2017's *Phantom Thread*. It is sad, absurdist, brooding, tender and intense. What were you expecting? Broad toilet humour?

The dark heart of the matter is the fractured relationship between soldier siblings Ray (Daniel Day-Lewis) and Jem Stoker (Sean Bean). Twenty years after tours of duty during the Troubles, Ray survives off the grid in a forest (where Ocado definitely won't deliver), living a life made up of solitude, the Shipping Forecast and tinkering with electronics. In his absence, the better-adjusted, religious Jem has become a husband to Ray's ex Nessa (the ever-excellent Samantha Morton) and father to Ray's twentysomething son Brian (Samuel Bottomley).

As they come together, the screenplay has the confidence to play early encounters without dialogue, perceptively revealing the strange, often silent bonds between brothers. Gradually and convincingly, the pair begin to connect. Bean is subtle and superb as the quieter Jem, coaxing his sibling to open up, the story exploring the impact of fathers on sons, the limitations of faith, and how violence only begets violence.

If it sounds talk-y and stage-bound, director Day-Lewis eschews kitchen-sink mundanity. While he may OD on drone shots that make tree tops look like broccoli, he's definitely one to watch. There is visual poetry at play, be it in an evocative use of slow motion (dancing, fighting, surprisingly similar), striking imagery (a stunning tracking shot through a countryside fairground) and a strand of Lynchian bonkersness that encompasses a freak hailstorm, a giant fish and, weirdest of all, a ghostly camel-like creature with a tiny dick. Mike Leigh, this is not.

When the story cuts back and forth to the worried Nessa and troubled Brian, it feels a bit like treading water until a fantastic dinner-table confrontation. But, unsurprisingly, the film is at its most compelling when observing Ray. With tightly cropped grey hair, tats and a Bill The Butcher-esque 'tache, Day-Lewis is by turns big and boisterous (marvel at him riffing on God's underpants, His testicles "swinging like church bells"), then small and shameful. Early on, he spins a stunning extended scatological tale that involves a priest and a Guinness-curry-laxative combo that is simultaneously funny and horrifying. It instantly takes its place in the DDL Monologue Hall Of Fame: some of that unexpected broad toilet humour at its best. Welcome back, sir.