

## The Landscape of the Mind in *God's Own Country*

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*God's Own Country* is a British independent film which was released in cinemas in the UK in September of 2017. Francis Lee, who used to be an actor, wrote and directed the film, and this is his first feature film.<sup>1</sup> The budget for the film was small with the support of the BFI Film Fund and Creative England's Production Fund.<sup>2</sup> However, it may be this small production which enables the maker to free himself from any restrictions on the film, as he says, 'Tiny budget. Nobody commissioned me, just a story I needed to tell.'<sup>3</sup> Since *God's Own Country* premiered at the Sundance Film Festival it has received high critical acclaim, which brought the film many awards including the World Cinema Directing Award at the Sundance, Manner July Award at the Berlin International Film Festival, and Michael Powell Award for Best British Feature Film at the Edinburgh Film Festival. After its public release, it received Best Film awards at the British Independent Film Awards, at the *Evening Standard* British Film Awards, at the Empire Awards, and London Critics Circle Breakthrough British/Irish Filmmaker of the Year, in addition to several other domestic and international awards. In Japan, the film has not yet been publicly distributed, but was screened exclusively as a part of Rainbow Reel Tokyo in July 2018.

The setting of the story is contemporary England before the Brexit referendum. Although one of the main characters is a migrant worker, the film does not have any connotation of Brexit, as Lee states that he wrote the film in 2013 when he wasn't thinking about it.<sup>4</sup> The term 'God's Own Country' of the title commonly means rural areas blessed by God, designating specifically in the UK the countryside of Yorkshire.<sup>5</sup> As this suggests, the locations of the film are mostly a farm, a farmhouse, the moor and a nearby village in Yorkshire, apart from a potato farm in Scotland towards the end. Lee was brought up in this area and is now living back there. As with the protagonist, Lee belonged to a farming family, but, unlike the protagonist who decides to keep

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<sup>1</sup> Before *God's Own Country*, Lee made three self-funded short films.

<sup>2</sup> Creative England is a non-profit organisation which supports creative businesses and talents in England.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted from Lee's twitter feed. <https://twitter.com/strawhousefilms>. 11 Jan, 2018.

<sup>4</sup> The *Playlist* interview.

<sup>5</sup> Other than Yorkshire, the term can mean Ireland or other countries. In the OED, 'God's own country' is defined as 'country or region regarded as especially favoured by God; spec. (a) New Zealand; (b) the United States, or some particular part of the United States.'

living on his farm, Lee left home for college in London to be trained as an actor at the age of 20.<sup>6</sup>

The plot is not complicated. It is the story of a young sheep farmer who finds love, loses it and finds it again. Johnny Saxby (Josh O'Connor) makes a living from his unmodernised family-run farm with his father, Martin (Ian Hart), and his grandmother, Deirdre (Gemma Jones). Their life is austere, and the work on the farm is so hard and demanding that they cannot afford to relax and enjoy themselves. Martin was partially paralysed after a stroke, and he has difficulty in handling livestock. To forget his everyday frustration, Johnny throws himself into binge drinking at a local pub, and, being gay, into casual sex with men he happens to meet at a nearby town. After selling a beef cow at an auction, Johnny has a sexual encounter with a trainee auctioneer in his truck. When he returns home late, he learns that a cow had a breech delivery and Martin could not save the calf without Johnny. For the coming lambing season, the family employs Gheorghe (Alec Secareanu), a Romanian migrant worker, for a week. Rather reluctantly Johnny picks up Gheorghe at the station to drive him home. Gheorghe is given a small caravan in their lot as his temporary accommodation. Johnny first has an adverse feeling towards Gheorghe who handles the livestock better than he, and sometimes insults Gheorghe by calling him Gipsy, which annoys Gheorghe. For the purpose of vigilant lambing and repairing the wall, they go to Top Fell, another farm remote from the house. While they spend some days camping at a ruined barn, their relationship is changing. Johnny calls Gheorghe 'Gypo' again, but this time Gheorghe, by holding Johnny down on the ground, makes him promise never to use the word against him. This event leads them to an equal relationship. In delivering sheep, Gheorghe revives a new-born lamb from the verge of death. Gheorghe's protective nature reveals itself again when he takes Johnny's hand to see the injury that he gets while repairing the wall. At dawn, they have their first sexual encounter, which is triggered by Johnny's lust, close to wrestling on the muddy ground. Although the day after Gheorghe is embarrassed by Johnny's attitude as if nothing had happened, they begin to reach out to each other. Gheorghe clothes the motherless lamb with a wool jacket made of a dead lamb's skin and succeeds in getting the ewe that lost her lamb to mother the lamb, which pleases both men.<sup>7</sup> At night, they have a second sexual encounter, led affectionately and

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<sup>6</sup> The *Guardian* interview.

<sup>7</sup> It is a traditional way for shepherds to make a jacket for a motherless lamb from a dead lamb's skin so that the dead lamb's mother will take it for her own lamb by its smell. James Rebanks, writer and sheep farmer, explains this economical way to use the dead lamb's skin: 'The skin of the dead lamb forms a tight-fitting waistcoat, with the orphan lamb's legs poking through the leg holes and its head through the neck. With legs and head in, the skin cannot come off. I put the lamb in a small pen with the grieving ewe and hold my breath in the hope that she will mother it. The ewe sees the lamb with the false skin on and glares at it suspiciously. Then she sniffs at it, and is confused. It smells just like the lamb she had a short while ago. She turns around in the pen a few times as it approaches her hungrily. She is not convinced this is hers. She gives it a head-butt or tow to knock it down, while

tenderly by Gheorghe. After returning home, they gradually cement their bond. While they enjoy bathing in a pond, Martin collapses from a second stroke, and gets hospitalised. Gheorghe offers to stay longer to help Johnny. Learning from Deirdre that Martin would not get any better, Johnny realises that the responsibility of the farm is all on his shoulders. Under the pressure, Johnny invites Gheorghe to go to the pub. He asks Gheorghe to stay much longer. Instead of replying, Gheorghe asks Johnny how he will cope with his farm and with their relationship. Gheorghe says to Johnny that they cannot keep the farm going as it is, because Gheorghe has had the same experience with his own farm at home. Then Johnny abruptly breaks off the topic and, to divert his mind from the frustration, he has anonymous sex with another man in the toilet as he used to do. Gheorghe happens to see that, leaves the pub, and leaves the farm on the same night. Left alone, Johnny strives to manage the farm by himself, but misses Gheorghe. Martin is discharged from the hospital, but is now completely confined to a wheelchair with a speech disorder. Johnny looks after Martin attentively, and Martin expresses gratitude to his son for the first time. On Top Fell, Johnny tells Martin his decision that he will go and get Gheorghe back, and declares that he won't be what his father wants him to be. Martin accepts Johnny's words for his son's happiness. With the help of Deirdre, who has the address of Gheorghe's new workplace, Johnny goes to Scotland, and finds Gheorghe at a potato farm. Johnny finally says to Gheorghe what he needs to say—he wants to get Gheorghe back and to be with him. Gheorghe accepts and they return to the house together by coach. At home, the caravan, now useless, is being towed away in front of Johnny and Gheorghe, and they both enter the house.

In *God's Own Country*, dialogue between the characters does not occupy much of the film, as Lee says, 'I am not a big fan of dialogue. So he [Johnny] wasn't going to have a conversation where he goes: "I'm feeling a bit like this now." I had to tell it visually.'<sup>8</sup> The Saxbys are all taciturn. The family dinner table is quiet, with their conversation mostly about work. Gheorghe, whose mother tongue is not English, speaks only about necessary things. After the second stroke, Martin suffers a speech disorder. Throughout the film, the dialogue is mostly short, curt, and direct. Even where they have dialogue, it is employed to emphasise the discord between the protagonist and other people. The dialogue between them often develops in a negative way—rebuke, retort, rejection, objection, interruption, and insult—emphasising a dissonance between Johnny and other characters around him. Martin and Deirdre often reproach Johnny for his poor way with work and his drinking habit. In the conversation at the pub between Johnny and Robyn (Patsy Ferran), a female friend who left home to go to university, Johnny's ironic and rude words discourage her.

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she tries to reconcile the competing urge to mother something that smells right with the suspicion that I have had something to do with this situation. And perhaps she knows her lamb is dead' (240).

<sup>8</sup> The *Guardian* interview.

Johnny has sexual encounters with two anonymous men, the trainee auctioneer at the cow market in the early scene and Robyn's university mate in the pub towards the end, initiated by a glance. After the sexual encounter, the auctioneer invites Johnny for a drink with him, but Johnny rejects it:

Auctioneer: How's you? Wanna get a pint or summat?

Johnny: No.

Auctioneer: Right. I just... You know, it were fun an' that. I thought we might...

Johnny: We?

Auctioneer: Yeah.

Johnny: No. (00:07:55-00:08:07)

Johnny is not only isolated geographically but also isolates himself from love, friendship, or companionship. He never has someone who can be 'we' with him. Dialogue in this film thus works to enhance Johnny's solitude rather than to connect Johnny and others, until Johnny and Gheorghe unite emotionally.

In contrast with the scarceness and unproductiveness of verbal communication, the visual expressions of the film are intense and productive. Lee's attempt to 'tell it [Johnny's feeling] visually'<sup>9</sup> is successful, and the audience gets more from what they see than from what they hear on screen.<sup>10</sup> And what is characteristic of the visual aspect of *God's Own Country* is that the internal situation of the characters is translated into landscape. Lee insists on the significance of landscape to himself and to this film.<sup>11</sup>

It [the idea for *God's Own Country*] basically started with the landscape. I grew up on the hills of Yorkshire, very similar to where the film is shot. My dad is still a sheep farmer there, and I now live back up on those hills. Growing up here, I always had this kind of notion that the landscape was very important to me. It felt as if it formed who I was, both

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<sup>9</sup> See the above-mentioned *Guardian* interview.

<sup>10</sup> In contrast, natural sound, such as birdsong, the cry of sheep, or the sound of wind, is rich and significant in the film, as Lee observes: 'Natural sound, I think for me, it's often as important as the visuals, sometimes more important. I think it can convey emotion, sense of place, it can kinda deliver all the things that a traditional film soundtrack can do' (The *Film Inquiry* interview).

<sup>11</sup> Saffron Vickers Walking reminds us of a photographer who influenced the film in her review: 'On the Film Programme Lee talked about the influence on *God's Own Country* of Fay Godwin's photographs, which had inspired and accompanied [Ted] Hughes' poems [in *Remains of Elmet*]' Just as the landscape in Godwin's monochrome photographs, the landscape in *God's Own Country* shows us another way of seeing landscape.

physically and emotionally. But I always had this odd feeling about it. On the one hand, it felt incredibly freeing and open and wild and creative and expansive. But, on the other hand, it felt kind of problematic and isolated and brutal. So my starting point, when I started to think about doing a film, was exploring this landscape that I felt to be totally part of me.<sup>12</sup>

It should be noted that Lee here uses the word *landscape*, not *nature*, nor *surroundings* nor *background* for what he is preoccupied with in the film. His remark suggests that the landscape in *God's Own Country* is not just the setting but is closely united with the characters both in an external and internal way. It may be said that the landscape is part of the representation of characters just as it was part of Lee.

Before discussing how the landscape in *God's Own Country* works, we should go back to the issue of what landscape means. One of the definitions of landscape in artworks that John Wylie cites is about perspective:

A landscape is thus not just the land itself, but the land as seen from a particular point of view or perspective. Landscape is both the phenomenon itself *and* our perception of it. In other words, while being linked in one way to what are usually called objective facts, to the real world 'out there', landscape is also found in the eye of the beholder. That is, landscape takes shape within the realms of human perception and imagination.

We can put this another way: landscape is not only something we see, it is also *a way of seeing things*, a particular way of looking and picturing the world around us. Landscapes are not just about *what* we see but about *how we look*. (7)

As Wylie suggests, landscape in artworks cannot exist without its viewer and his/her perspective of it.<sup>13</sup> What the artist and the viewer share through landscape, as well as through the artwork itself, is *how we look*. Although Wylie has in mind particularly the genre of paintings here, this definition of landscape holds good for films. It endorses that the creativity of all artworks including films originates in the perspective of things. Cinematic landscapes can be as creative as

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<sup>12</sup> The *Metro Weekly* interview. In several other interviews too, Lee similarly emphasises the significance of landscape for him: 'I just tell everything from a character point of view and I wanted to explore, first of all, the landscape. The landscape was the starting point for the film, that's where I grew up, that's where I now live, that's where my Dad is a sheep farmer' (The interview by Jacob Engelberg).

<sup>13</sup> Similarly, Graeme Harper emphasises that landscape involves the human view: 'Landscape involves isolation of a certain spatial extent and a certain temporal length. That is, all notions of landscape are produced by human interpretation which, simply due to human physiology or due to political or cultural bias, is selective' (16).

landscapes in paintings since they are created from the original materials through the imagination of the maker and such technical processes as camera work, framing, editing, sound and so on.

It may be useful here to pay attention to the difference between landscape and setting in films in order to clarify the meaning of the former. On one hand, setting is, as Martin Lefebvre defines, 'the place where the action or events occur' (21). The setting in films is necessary for the events in the story to be realised or performed in front of the audience. The meaning of setting is therefore already established before the audience views it. It is identified with, above all, *where* the events take place, which makes the interpretation of setting a limited one. On the other hand, the interpretation of landscape is open to the audience as far as it can respond to what the film suggests. Also, while setting exists in the exterior of the perspectives of the characters and the audience, as Lefebvre emphasises, 'landscape, at least in the visual arts, is *space freed from eventhood* (e.g., war, expeditions, legends)' (22).<sup>14</sup> The cinematic landscape is not devised for *where* the events take place, but it enters the story and affects it more actively, involving the perspectives of the filmmaker, the characters, and the audience. As Paul Newland observes, 'Landscapes can also be considered to be spaces that are experienced, worked and lived, as opposed to just things to be framed and "looked at"' (6). Through the perspective, cinematic landscape can be a bridge between the filmmaker and the viewer, a vehicle of their communication, in sharing the notion of what the characters are experiencing both within and without.

Concerning the perspective of landscape in his film, Lee observes:

I think we worked out pretty quickly that we wanted to see this world from Johnny's perspective, so we knew the camera was always going to be up close and personal to Johnny, and I was very keen on not depicting this landscape in big wide iconic impressive shots, I knew I wanted to see the effect the landscape had on the characters rather than the landscape itself. (The Interview by the *Film Inquiry*)

The landscape in *God's Own Country* corresponds with the characters in both a physical and an emotional way. Therefore Lee's landscape is densely contextualised into a human story. Joshua

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<sup>14</sup> To start his discussion on the difference between setting and landscape, Lefebvre refers to a statement about the notion of setting in Ancient Greece in *L'invention du paysage* (Paris: Plon, 1989) by Anne Cauquelin, French art historian, which itself may be worth quoting here: 'Herodotus and Xenophon are not miserly in their descriptions of "settings." Yet these descriptions do not constitute what we call "landscapes": instead they constitute the basic material conditions of an event, a war, an expedition or a legend, to which they remain subordinate (Cauquelin, 39)' (Lefebvre 20).

James Richards, cinematographer of the film, skilfully captures the landscape charged with this story. The landscape is neither fixed nor independent but fluid and metamorphosed in its meaning, synchronising with the mind and body of characters. In other words, the landscape is relativised according to them. Lee particularly places the landscape into relations—the relation between the characters, between the old self and the new self of a character, or even between the filmmaker and the audience. It is this use of landscape with context and relativity that makes *God's Own Country*, what Robert Bresson calls, *cinematography*. Bresson once defined cinematography as 'Cinematographer's film where the images, like the words in a dictionary, have no power and value except through their position and relation' (20). In *God's Own Country*, the images of landscape are intensely assimilated into a story and activated within it, emphasising and changing their relation to each other, just as the characters are emphasising and changing their relation to each other.

In the early part of *God's Own Country*, the landscape is marked by desolation and stagnation. The bleak moor enclosed with dry-stone walls is a characteristic of the Yorkshire countryside. This moor landscape is oppressive, closed, despite its extensiveness, and broken as seen in the wall crumbled in one part. Not only emotionally but also physically the landscape is connected with Johnny. It is the moor and the farm work there that wear out Johnny with daunting toil and disconnect him from other young people and society. Only far away down the moor can we see the town, where there are people, enlivenment and alternative ways of living. Later, we learn Johnny's mother left home to be a hairdresser in a town down south. However, Johnny, who was born, brought up and who has worked here for most of his adult life, has no alternative other than taking over the family farm. In the opening shot, we are invited to see a farmhouse on the hillside with one porch light on, veiled by the darkness with the wind whistling just before the dawn. Then the day breaks, and a window on the second floor is lit. Led by the light into the inside of the house, the audience sees the back of Johnny who is retching after binge drinking the night before. This is how Lee shows us where Johnny is and how his interior is desolated with self-abandonment.

Johnny used to be 'nice' and 'funny' in his school days, as suggested in the conversation between Robyn and Johnny outside the local pub:

Robyn: You'd like my uni mates. They're a laugh. One of them's a real laugh.

Johnny: What do you mean by that?

Robyn: He's nice. You'd like him. He's funny. Remember? Like you used to be.

Johnny: Before I had to join the real world. (00:17:49-00:18:02)

As a sheep farmer, the farm on the moor becomes his 'real world' which he has to confront and get on with against every difficulty caused by weather, animals, and nature. The farm and the moor isolate him both geographically and emotionally from people other than his family. Johnny's loneliness and oppression are thus ironically attributed to his own home—the family business of sheep farming on the moor and, as we later learn, the absence of his mother.

Despite its extensiveness, the moor landscape also depicts Johnny's closed manner. The close-up shot of the barbed wire fence with a piece of fleece caught in it symbolises that manner. The first manual work that we see Johnny do there is roughly setting up wooden fences. The farms on the moor are enclosed by those fences and the dry-stone walls to confine and protect sheep. As this suggests, the fence and the wall represent not only his excluding others but also his protecting himself from the outer world. His refusal to be 'we' with someone—the refusals of the auctioneer's invitation to a pint, of Robyn's invitation to a night out in some nearby town, and rejecting Gheorghe's offer of work gloves—emphasises his self-protective mentality, which prevents him from being hurt by others. Furthermore, viewed from within, the wall and the fence signify not only protection but also entrapment. As the only heir to succeed to the farm, Johnny has no alternative but to become a sheep farmer. His life has been confined to the farm since he left school. A magpie trapped in a cage on the ground is also a symbol of the entrapment under which Johnny is placed.

Gheorghe entering Johnny's life transforms this landscape of desolation and stagnation. It vivifies the landscape by bringing about the emotional and physical recovery of Johnny. The audience witnesses the moment of the transformation of landscape through the interposition of the movements of hands—one hand reaching for the other. These hand movements contribute to giving a visual form to Johnny's restoring the connection with other people. The first landscape with outstretched hands is presented in Johnny and Gheorghe repairing the broken wall. Here Gheorghe grabs Johnny's injured hand and spits on it in order to protect it from infection. This physical and emotional contact provokes the melting of Johnny's stony mind against Gheorghe. Another example can be seen in the landscape divided by the wall as a boundary, with Johnny and Gheorghe placed on each side. Seeing Johnny handling stones barehand, Gheorghe takes off his gloves and holds out them towards Johnny over the wall. Although Johnny ignores his offer, when Gheorghe's hand crosses the boundary between them, the wall changes its meaning: earlier it represented Johnny's closed nature in terms of its function of dividing space, but now it prefigures the recovery of Johnny's mind which will be fulfilled through the connection with Gheorghe, just as the broken wall will be restored. In the sequences of their eating instant noodles or smoking the same cigarette, we can see again a landscape with the outreached hand: at this time Johnny holds out his hand towards Gheorghe mutely to ask for a sprinkle of sugar for his

noodles, or to offer his cigarette to Gheorghe. Their second sexual encounter in the ruin is also characterised with their touching hands. Furthermore, in the hospital where Martin was sent after his stroke, Gheorghe softly touches Johnny's hand. This shows that Johnny has now someone who makes them 'we' that share hardship. This physical connection through hands is paralleled with emotional connection not only between Johnny and Gheorghe but also between Johnny and his father. While Martin is in a coma in hospital, Johnny touches Martin's hand with his finger just as Gheorghe did Johnny's. When Johnny helps Martin in a wheelchair to have a bath, Martin touches Johnny's hand, saying with all of his effort 'thank you,' which is his first appreciative word to Johnny. With this physical connection with hands, Lee depicts how Johnny and other people around him restore their relationship and become reconnected.

Even without direct touches, hands are an important representation of human connection. The audience is shown many instances of handwork on the farm carried out by Johnny and Gheorghe—delivering sheep, healing sheep with antiseptic, piling stones on a broken wall, building fences, and burning a field. In particular, Gheorghe whose name originates in the Greek word, γεωργος, meaning 'farmer' in English, is characterised by his skilfulness in farm work. Lee was very determined about the two leads doing this work with their own hands.<sup>15</sup> This work with the hands has to be authentic, because it is an important representation of the connection between the two, and also provides the film with a landscape of human connection that is vital to human activity. Lee's homage to the cooperative hands in agriculture is manifest in the old footage used for the backdrop of the closing credits, where villagers in Yorkshire, men and women, from the young to the old, are all working together for their harvest. Johnny's and Gheorghe's cooperative hands in farming make them share something productive and harmonious and the sharing itself makes them more connected. In the earlier scene in which Martin failed in delivering a cow due to his paralysis during Johnny's absence, the failure implied that their relationship at the beginning of the story is neither as productive nor as harmonious as the relationship between Johnny and Gheorghe. Martin criticises Johnny for not having repaired the broken wall one month before. This underscores that it is not until Johnny falls in love with Gheorghe that he can restore both the wall and the connection with others that Johnny originally had but lost.

In the process of Johnny's forming an emotional and physical connection with Gheorghe, the landscape starts to assume another phase than the phase of recovery. Through Gheorghe, Johnny discovers a newness in the landscape he has seen every day. While repairing the wall, Gheorghe looks over the moor spreading across the farm and says: 'It's beautiful here, but lonely, no?' (00:36:

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<sup>15</sup> The *Guardian* interview.

21). Gheorghe is the first person who recognises not only Johnny's loneliness but also the beauty of the moor. Led by Gheorghe, Johnny rediscovers spring—the season of new life—in the landscape. In the morning after their love-making in a ruin, refreshing sunlight streams through a crack in the ceiling. Looking up at it, Gheorghe says to Johnny, 'In my country, spring is the most beautiful. The sun. The flowers. The smells' (00:45:32-00:45:42). Now the landscape reveals itself to Johnny and the audience as the landscape of the rebirth of the world, coloured by newborn lambs, the sunlight, and flowers. The audience often sees Gheorghe wearing red or green clothing on the farm. As green, the colour of vegetation, symbolises the natural cycle of birth, death and rebirth, Gheorghe leads Johnny to his spiritual rebirth. The landscape of the moor spreading endlessly that Gheorghe invites Johnny to see is not the bleak, oppressive landscape any more. The landscape now assumes a sense of solemnity and even divinity, which reminds us of the title of the film. The moor has not changed, but Johnny's view of it has changed, and it is Gheorghe who brings the change.

In the moor landscape, one element in particular indicates the rebirth of Johnny symbolically: water. Now the moor can become a free, life-giving place that enables them to escape from Martin and Deirdre's sight. Like innocent children, they jump into the pond, splashing water with laughter. Water is a symbol of life, and that of baptism—acquiring a new life. While Johnny's attribute is alcohol, Gheorghe's is water. The postcard Gheorghe puts on the wall of his caravan has a photo of a waterfall in Romania. We also recall that Gheorghe often drinks water on Top Fell, and cleans himself with water from a river. He even refuses Johnny's offer of another glass of beer at the pub, saying 'I think I had enough' (1:11:05).<sup>16</sup> The landscape with water signifies that Gheorghe gives a new life to Johnny, just as he did to the motherless lamb.

From the components of the outdoor landscape such as the moor, the wall and water, I shall move to those of the indoor landscape. Walls, doors and windows are perpendicular partitions which provide places with the sense of an inside and outside. In particular, they are involved in the relationship between the Saxbys and Gheorghe the outsider. However, unlike static windows, doors are accompanied by two opposite movements and sounds—opening and shutting. As Bresson appreciates the sound of doors in films has a 'Rhythmic value of a noise' (52) or 'Noise of a door opening and shutting, noise of footsteps, etc., for the sake of rhythm' (52), the sound of doors creates punctuated effects upon the relationship between characters. Lee utilises the door to trace Johnny's internal journey to recover the connection with others, with the sounds of opening and shutting the door punctuating each developing process of the journey. In the film, shutting a

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<sup>16</sup> In the extended version of the second pub scene in the DVD, Gheorghe more clearly shows his dislike of alcohol, saying 'I don't really like alcohol' to Johnny, who offers him another glass of beer.

door produces not only a sense of exclusion but also that of inclusion. The former is shown in the scene in which Gheorghe is given a caravan to stay in, separated from the family. After a curt explanation about the facilities inside, Johnny roughly gives a shove twice to the door of the caravan to shut it, but it does not work. The two harsh sounds of the shutting in addition to Johnny's words, 'I told you, didn't I? Shitehole. Bet you wish you'd stayed in Romania' (00:13:15-00:13:20), endorse Johnny's exclusionary feeling towards the outsider.

However, after Johnny starts accepting Gheorghe, the audience sees that Gheorghe is placed on the same side of the door as Johnny. Lee inserts in some scenes a spatial hint that prefigures Gheorghe's belonging to the family. On their returning home from Top Fell, we see a quick composition of the frame in which Gheorghe opens the door and happens to position himself between Martin, who still bears an unappreciative expression, and Johnny, who is embarrassed by it, at the entrance to the house. This composition suggests that Gheorghe can be a go-between for Johnny and Martin's reconciliation. Another landscape with a door can be seen when Johnny and Gheorghe are in the living room, watching the news on TV, with Deirdre ironing behind them. The news reporter announces that Yorkshire wool will be used for ceremonial uniforms of the Defence Ministry for the 50th anniversary of Winston Churchill's death. This news functions as a subtle hint of a hopeful prospect of reconstructing the farm which may be brought about by Gheorghe's belonging to it. With the excuse that he will take over the ironing from Deirdre, Johnny gets her out of the room and shuts the door. Here we notice that Johnny allows Gheorghe to be on the same side of the door as himself. This inclusion of Gheorghe into the home can be regarded as a preceding process for Johnny to transform the home, where his father and grandmother have dominated him, into a new home that includes Gheorghe. However, Johnny needs to make further progress to be able to share his life with someone else. Gheorghe insists that Johnny should come to his caravan for them to make love. It is necessary for Johnny not only to draw Gheorghe into his place, but also to take himself into Gheorghe's place. Accepting Gheorghe's insistence, Johnny opens the door of the caravan, which Gheorghe had already transformed into a homely place by putting a postcard of a waterfall in Romania on the wall.

Lee thus portrays the transformation of the protagonist's internal distance to someone with whom he falls in love through the movements of doors. Johnny's final failure in connecting with Gheorghe is also depicted with a closed door. In the second pub scene, to escape from the confusion and pressure brought about by his new problem about managing his farm with Gheorghe, Johnny again turns to anonymous sex in the toilet. Gheorghe, insulted by a xenophobic customer, also escapes into the toilet, and realises what is happening beyond the closed door of the stall. This shut door is a symbol of the disconnection of Johnny and Gheorghe. Johnny again places himself on the opposite side of Gheorghe both physically and emotionally.

Like the door, the window divides the landscape, both physically and emotionally separating the one outside from the other inside and the opposite way around. The first pub scene emphasises this function of the window. At night on the day of Gheorghe's arrival, Johnny, drinking at the pub alone, comes out to smoke, and stands by one of the windows. There he comes across Robyn, who invites Johnny to a night out in Bradford with her new friends from her university. However, as mentioned above, her invitation meets his cynical refusal:

Johnny: That's what I love about folk like you. You fuck off to your posh colleges an' that and swan back here on your holidays, thinking you know it all. Some of us just have to get on wi' it, like.

Robyn: Alright, it's just a night out.

Johnny: Aye, to you. I'll tell me cows they can go without their teas shall I cos I'm off gallivanting around Bradford? (00:17:33-00:17:45).

Discerning Johnny's unapproachable demeanour, Robyn leaves him and enters the pub. Johnny sees her hugging her local friend through the window, which creates a clear contrast between Johnny's closed nature and Robyn's openness towards people. For Johnny, the inside of the pub where people are cheerful and enjoy their friendship is not the place he belongs to, because their way of life is so different from his. The world beyond the window is as far away from his world full of toil from handling animals all day long, as the bright bustling town he sees beyond across the moor every day. Robyn thus fails to interpose herself in Johnny's life. The window here functions to reveal that Robyn can no more place herself on the same side as Johnny.

In contrast to Robyn, Gheorghe is depicted from the beginning as a character who does not stay on the opposite side of Johnny. Late the same night, Gheorghe sees through the window of the caravan Johnny coming home by taxi from the pub, dead drunk. Then Johnny is roughly dragged out of the taxi by the driver. In the following shot of the next morning, in which Johnny is lying on the ground with a blue plastic seat over him, we discern that Gheorghe got out of his caravan and covered Johnny with the sheet during the night. Gheorghe can thus easily cross the boundary to Johnny's side beyond the window.

Thus the wall, the door and the window in the film work as a double-edged device: they represent the relationship between the characters, and at the same time they are used to develop their relationship. To thus interact with the story is a significant role of the landscape of the film and this role is what differentiates landscape from setting.

We should also note the transformation of the more domestic landscape within the house such as that with meals, for eating meals is as vital an activity as farm work. During the absence

of Martin and Deirdre, Gheorghe begins to enter the dining room and the kitchen in order to prepare meals for Johnny. He cooks pasta, which provides a contrast with the traditional British dishes of chicken cooked by Deirdre at the beginning of the film. He also prepares the table with a vase of daffodils, a representation of spring, and makes sheep's cheese as a sample for merchandise. Gheorghe adds tenderness and newness to the landscape with meals in the Saxbys' home. However, Deirdre's accepting Gheorghe is a necessary step for him to be truly admitted into their home. We recall her cold watchful stare through the window upon Johnny and Gheorghe on a motorcycle, when they return home from Top Fell. It showed that to her Gheorghe was still an outsider who should not violate her family's territory other than through farm work. However, the time comes when Deirdre realises that Johnny needs someone at home to replace her. When Deirdre says, 'He's a good lad' (01:07:36), to Johnny who informed her that Gheorghe cooks breakfast for him during her absence, and when she keeps silent on her discovering the relationship between them, she is admitting Gheorghe into her home.

Johnny loses Gheorghe because of the unintentional betrayal caused by his weakness. The shot of the dead moth at the windowsill which failed to fly away out of the window signifies that Johnny failed to cross the emotional boundary to reach Gheorghe. The landscapes showing the absence of Gheorghe—the emptiness of Gheorghe's caravan, the red jumper left there, and the bathtub without Gheorghe—makes Johnny realise what he is missing in his life. It is thus through Gheorghe's absence that Johnny realises that he needs Gheorghe to revive his life. On Top Fell, Johnny tells Martin his decision to get Gheorghe back:

Martin: You...fenced...all back paddock.

Johnny: [*nods.*]...I'm sorry. I can't do what you want me to. I can make this work but...the way that I want to do it, not you.

Martin: [*imperceptibly nods.*]

Johnny: I've got to go get him. I want to go and get him.

Martin: Me...T'farm. [*Looking over the farm*] This.

Johnny: I've caught up. Nan can do t'beasts. I'm not going for good. Dad, listen to me. I am coming back. But I'm coming back and I want it to be different.

Martin: Make you happy?

Johnny: Yeah, I think it could.

Martin: [*trying to show a smile awkwardly.*] You did...good...on t'paddock, lad.

Johnny: [*nods.*] (01:24:13-01:26:07)

In this landscape of the farm of 'Saxby and Son',<sup>17</sup> we recognise Martin, who still rules over the

farm, admit Gheorghe into his farm. When Martin accepts Johnny's decision about Gheorghe and the future of the farm and praises their work of repairing the wall, the farm starts to transform itself into the place where Johnny and Gheorghe finally belong together.

However, for the two persons to be connected equally, they need to accept each other mutually. The landscape of Johnny's acceptance of Gheorghe is being transformed into the landscape of Gheorghe's acceptance of Johnny. Johnny's wearing the red jumper that Gheorghe left in the caravan is a symbolic deed to signify the exchange of their roles. Through the journey to get Gheorghe back, Johnny has to experience what Gheorghe had experienced to come to him. Sharing each other's experience is what they need to reconnect with each other. It is now Johnny's turn to cross a border physically and emotionally to reconnect with Gheorghe. In Gheorghe's first appearance, the audience had seen a landscape: At the entrance of the station of Keighley, the nearest town from where the Saxbys live, Gheorghe was standing in front of the wall smoking, and waiting for Johnny to pick him up. He was a stranger there who had crossed the UK border to start a new life. Leaving his native country which is 'dead' ('My country is dead' [01:09:10]), Gheorghe was about to enter a conventional English farming family as a farmhand. In contrast with Gheorghe's mobility, the Saxbys are characterised by their immobility. It is emphasised in the conversation at the dinner table on his first night at the Saxbys:

Martin: I hate train journeys, me. I always end up gipping my guts up.

Deirdre: When were you last on a train?

Martin: I'm just saying. (00:13:48-00:13:55)

It is this immobility of the Saxbys that has brought Johnny not only basic stability depending on continuity from the past but also his apathy towards creating his own life.

Johnny needs to go through a new landscape to revive his old one. In Johnny's journey to reach Gheorghe, we can see an elaborate reversed landscape of the landscape Gheorghe experienced on his journey to reach Johnny. The jacket Johnny wears for the journey is red, like Gheorghe's jumper. Red, according to Lee, is the colour of hope.<sup>18</sup> To find Gheorghe, Johnny goes to Scotland over the Anglo-Scottish border by coach. Johnny and Gheorghe both cross borders to seek for hope, shifting from their familiar place to a place unknown to them. The landscape Johnny sees from the coach window is flat, open without walls, different from the moor landscape, and transiently passing from his sight. During the journey, Johnny subjects himself to the

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<sup>17</sup> 'M. Saxby and Son' is what the farm is called at the cow auction.

<sup>18</sup> Lee stated that red is the colour of hope for him at the Q and A after the screening of *God's Own Country* at Everyman, Leeds, UK on 22 March, 2018.

unfamiliarity, uneasiness and uncertain potentiality of the hopeful future, all of which Gheorghe once experienced during his journey to Yorkshire. They both experience the landscape of anxiety in order to gain the landscape of hope and a new life. As the door of the coach opens, Johnny alights at a bus stop in Scotland. The camera angle captures the letters of 'National Express Coach' painted on the vehicle body in red, a colour of hope.<sup>19</sup> Johnny comes to a potato farm just as Gheorghe came to the Saxby's farm, although the farm is huge and modernised, a contrast to Johnny's own farm. Waiting for Gheorghe to come out of the workshop, Johnny is sitting on a crate, smoking, while slinging a bag crossbody, just as Gheorghe was at Keighley Station. On the farm, many migrants from Eastern Europe are working. Two workers pass by Johnny and say something about him in Bulgarian. Here it is Johnny who is a stranger, as Gheorghe was in Yorkshire. The only difference between these scenes of waiting is that Johnny is asleep while Gheorghe is awake. With the touch of Gheorghe's shoe on his, Johnny is awakened:

Johnny: I must've fallen asleep.

Gheorghe: ...

Johnny: I tried to stay awake, but I was dead tired, like. (01:30:46-01:30:56)

Johnny is asleep until Gheorghe shows up, which symbolically presents a landscape of the re-awakening of his love. Johnny's long tiring journey provides a reminder of Gheorghe's first night at the Saxbys, when Gheorghe declined Martin's proposal for a pint, saying 'No, please, it's OK. I've been travelling a long time. It's best I will just go to sleep tonight' (01:15:12-01:15:18).

In this landscape of their reunion, Lee expresses the distance between the two men corresponding to their emotion. Outside the workshop, Johnny laconically explains to Gheorghe that he came to 'make things better' without mentioning that he wants Gheorghe to come back:

Gheorghe: Is that it?

Johnny: ...

Gheorghe: Nothing else?

Johnny: [*shakes his head awkwardly.*]

Gheorghe: I should...

Johnny: Yeah. OK.

[*They walk slowly away from each other. Then Johnny suddenly turns around, walks to Gheorghe and grabs the back of his overalls.*]

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<sup>19</sup> Lee reminded the audience of this at the Q and A at Everyman, Leeds, UK on 22 March, 2018.

Johnny: I'm trying to do this. Don't you see? I'm...I'm trying to sort it out.

Gheorghe: ...

Johnny: And I've come all this way up here, on a coach and everything. And I want you to come back. [*weeping.*] With me. And I want us to be together. ... I don't want to be a fuck-up anymore.

[*Gheorghe is trying to hold Johnny's hand, but Johnny brushes his hand away.*]

Johnny: No, leave me. I'm fine. I want to be with you. And that's what I needed to say. (01:32:26-01:33:49)

By thus returning to Gheorghe after walking away from him once, Johnny again symbolically retrieves the distance he had made from Gheorghe. The shot of their embracing each other is framed by the quadrilateral entrance of the building. In this composition, the two are located beyond the shaded building which appears as a tunnel they had to get through to reach each other. Simultaneously, the opening of the building plays the role of a huge opening window through which the audience sees their reunion.<sup>20</sup> By being an observer before this window with the same horizon as theirs, the audience is drawn into their landscape, which connects this story with that of audience members' own. On their journey back home to Yorkshire, the audience sees Johnny sleeping with his head leaning against the window. Then turning his head away from the window, he leans his head on Gheorghe's shoulder, who is also sleeping. This movement, too, metaphorically demonstrates that Johnny is retrieving the distance he created between himself and Gheorghe. Crossing the emotional border to reach Gheorghe, he can thus locate himself on the same side as Gheorghe.

The final landscape shows us the caravan being removed in front of the house. Gheorghe opens the door of the house, Johnny enters it, and Gheorghe follows him. The sequence of these spatial movements bears significant meanings. From Gheorghe's view, the caravan was a metaphor of the Saxbys' excluding him and also of his mobility without settlement. Now he is included by the Saxbys, and his mobility is replaced by the settlement. The home where the older generation has predominated is renewed by the younger. Gheorghe's opening the door for Johnny symbolises that Gheorghe revived Johnny and made Johnny revive his home into their home.

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<sup>20</sup> Tom Gunning reminds us that "[Leon Battista] Alberti inaugurated the theory of Western painting by defining a picture as something traced within a quadrilateral that served as a window onto the world" (33). The frame of the cinematic screen itself may be interpreted as a window in front of the audience. Then the audience here sees a double window: a window formed by the silhouette of the building and the crates and a window created by the frame of the cinematic screen. However, the window formed by the building and crates places the audience in the landscape of the film.

Here Johnny and Gheorghe are placed on the same side of the door permanently as members of a family. Lee secures the hope for their future with this final landscape with the home as its centre. We hear the last sound of the film: Gheorghe's shutting the door. However, it is not heard within the landscape on screen, but directly sounds to us through the blackout of the screen. The sound of the shutting door tells us that we have to find our own landscape of connection with someone in our life.

*God's Own Country* may be categorised as an LGBT film,<sup>21</sup> but it does not mean that the film restricts its theme to a certain sexuality. The problem which the protagonist confronts is not his being gay<sup>22</sup>—although he does not dare reveal the fact to people around him—but his self-abundance and disconnection with others. The film depicts how he connects with someone with whom he falls in love and with his family, and how he revives his self through these connections. The landscape both creates and shows this process in a visual and spatial way. The outdoor landscape of the moor, walls and water, the landscape of human hands, the indoor landscape of doors, windows, and meals, and the landscape of a journey crossing the border, they all embody Johnny's experiences and relationships with other characters. These landscapes contextualise themselves and converge into the story of Johnny's spiritual journey. The landscape of *God's Own Country* thus does not just mirror the experiences and relationships of the characters, but itself intensely shares in the story. It is always interacting with *what is there* in both the mind and the body of the protagonist.

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<sup>21</sup> The *Evening Standard* singles out *God's Own Country* as one of 'the 11 best LGBT films of all time.' <https://www.standard.co.uk/go/london/film/the-10-best-lgbt-films-of-all-time-a3799746.html>. 15 Jun. 2018.

<sup>22</sup> Lee articulates this by saying 'I guess I knew I didn't want to tell a coming out story and I guess I didn't want to tell a story about the difficulties of being gay, I think because that had never been my experience' in the interview by Jacob Engelberg. Alex Davidson calls the film 'post-gay' film comparing it with Ang Lee's *Brokeback Mountain*: 'Fifty years after the Sexual Offences Act partially legalised male homosexuality in Britain, the parallels with *Brokeback Mountain* show how far attitudes towards LGBT people have changed—the sensibility of *God's Own Country* is decidedly post-gay' (65).

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