

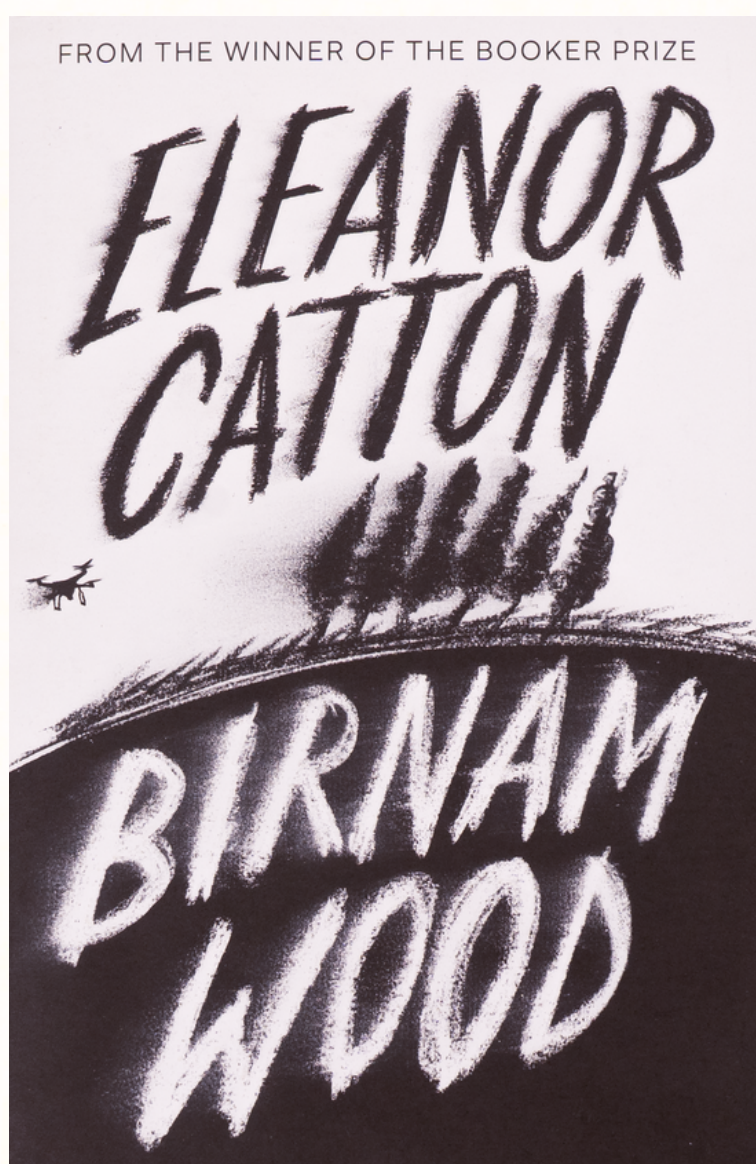
NERO

BOOK AWARDS

Reading Guides

Fiction Shortlist

Birnam Wood by Eleanor Catton



Eleanor Catton is the author of *The Luminaries*, winner of the 2013 Man Booker Prize and a global bestseller. Her debut novel, *The Rehearsal*, won the Betty Trask Prize, was shortlisted for the *Guardian* First Book Award and the Dylan Thomas Prize, and longlisted for the Orange Prize. As a screenwriter, she adapted *The Luminaries* for television, and Jane Austen's *Emma* for feature film. Born in 1985 in Canada and raised in New Zealand, she now lives in the UK.

'This is a witty, thought-provoking and beautifully written character study exploring politics, greed and our relationship with the environment which builds into an incredibly tense thriller.' - Fiction judges, 2023 Nero Book Awards

'Shouldn't that tell you something? Shouldn't that ring any bells, that maybe you aren't as progressive as you think you are, that maybe there's some other power structure at work? This is just what I've been saying the whole time! I mean – intersectionality, neoliberalism, what's the difference? It's the same old bullshit.'

Guerrilla gardening collective Birnam Wood seize upon a recently abandoned farm on New Zealand's South Island. Led by Mira Bunting, the collective plant crops where no one will notice, their strategy for achieving radical social change. But they are not the only ones with designs on the farm: American billionaire Robert Lemoine has also earmarked the land as the ideal location to build a luxury bunker, although this is just a cover for his real plan - extracting rare-earth minerals from the protected land of Korowai national park. When Robert catches Mira on his property, he is intrigued. He invites Birnam Wood to come and work the land, giving the collective an opportunity to secure its future. But can they trust him? Will they uncover his secret? And, as their ideals and ideologies are tested, can the collective trust each other?

Intricately plotted, *Birnam Wood* is a gripping psychological thriller that holds a mirror up to some of our most pressing

challenges: environmental catastrophe, alarming technological 'advancements', the ever-widening gap between rich and poor, and the sorry state of contemporary politics. Also a witty satire, Catton sends up the idealism of progressive idealists and the arrogant entitlement of one-percenters alike.

An unflinching examination of the human impulse for survival, readers will want to follow the story to its conclusion to see if good will triumph over evil, if the good even are good, who will survive, and what will be left of them?

Discussion points:

- One of the key themes of *Birnam Wood* is betrayal. In what ways do the characters in the novel betray each other?
- Is Jill Darvish the heroine of this novel?
- In the book, another character says of Mira that she is "rebellious for the sake of it, like she had always done, acting as though the rules that bound the little people were just too tiresome and ordinary to apply to her." Do you agree?