



# Afflicción



# *Logline*

An independent, young woman has her faith tested by an ever more paranoid community in the midst of the deadliest witch trials in history.



# *Inspiration*

*Medical misogyny in diagnosis  
and pain treatment*

*Experience of chronic illness as a  
woman*

*The origin of the witch & Scottish  
witch trials*

*The intersection between politics,  
religion, and medicine in 16th-17th  
century Scotland*



# *Synopsis*

Blair is a stubborn woman. Her only priority is the care of her sister - Mavis - even as her own health begins to deteriorate, having a seizure in front of the whole community.

Desperate to retain some control over her, as well as to salvage his damaged ego, her father brings her to the local minister, Father Sherman, who puts her illness down to a lack of devotion.

As her condition continues to worsen, paranoia overtakes her community, and rumours spread that she is possessed - or worse, a witch. Matters only worsen as, the day before her wedding, she awakens in the forest, dress ruined and hands blackened with mud.

Certain, now, that she is in commune with the devil, Father Sherman sets about his dirty work.



*Affliction*



# Context

Affliction is set during The Great Scottish Witch Hunt of 1597. The Witchcraft Act was passed in 1563, and as a result thousands died as any offence was punishable by death.

From March to October 1597, there were witch trials across Scotland. Margaret Aitken, known as The Great Witch of Balwearie, identified strangers as witches in exchange for her life. Aitken travelled Scotland accusing strangers of witchcraft, with as many as 400 persecuted for witchcraft and half of the accused executed.

She claimed to be able to identify witches by a special mark in their eyes. When she identified several people she had already cleared as witches, her credibility came into question, and she was burned at the stake. Aitken's lies brought the witch hunt of 1597 to an end. Scotland would not see a similar scale of witch hunts until 1661.

The Scottish witch trials occurred for cultural, political, and religious reasons. The Scottish Reformation, King James VI of Scotland and the Protestant Church played key roles.





# *Blair*

Blair's disability does not define her. Suffering from epilepsy that has led to reduced mobility, frequent seizures and hallucinations, she is considered unwedable by most.

But even in spite of this, she is fiercely loyal, intelligent, and protective of her younger sister, Mavis. She runs the accounts for her household and manages business dealings for her incompetent father after her mother's death. She is true to her faith and to her household, but even then, it is not enough.

Her dominating personality, fierce protectiveness, and stubborn independence make her a target for those who would see existing outside of the norm as a threat.







# *Father Sherman*

Father Sherman is a dangerously devout man. Abject in his belief, he lives to better the community - and if that means driving out the devil, he will do it. The only Englishman in a community of Scots, the Father did not win the favour of his parish easily, but through his natural charisma and wit.

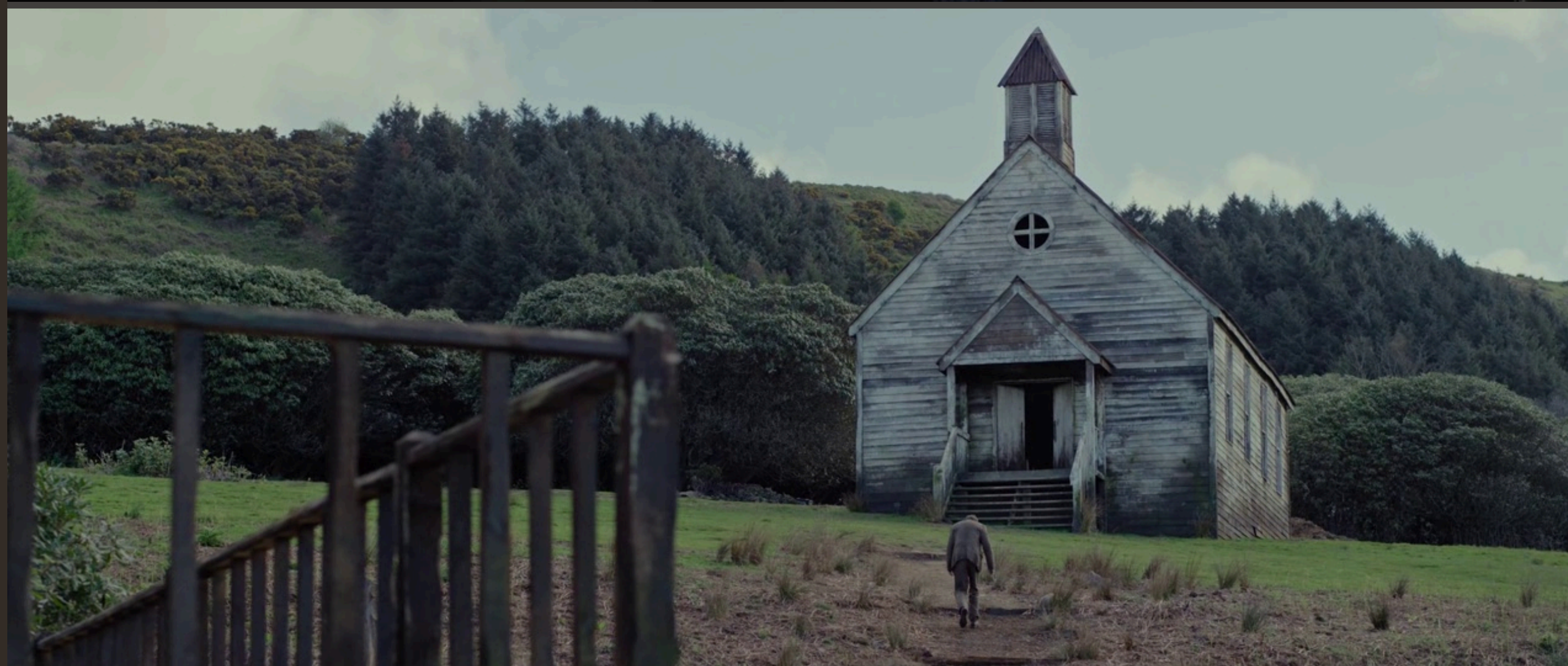
On the surface, Father Sherman is everything a local leader should be; Charismatic, Intelligent, Devout... but below the surface lies a contempt for the Other that can only be brought on by the radical belief in an Old Testament God - one who believes in destruction and damnation.



# Andrew

Andrew is not the father a man should be. Weak-willed and driven by shame - at having to marry up, at the death of his wife, at having only daughters, at relying on them so heavily - he uses his position as the head of his family to score any triumphs he can get.

It is only as the climate begins to change, as Father Sherman enters the village and religious fervor overtakes Scotland, that his shame begins to fester into something more desperate and violent. God planned more for him, he is sure of it, more for his family than death and sickness - but to be sure he must weed it out and follow the lords teachings to the letter - fire and brimstone to all.





# *Production Design*

Set during the end of the 16th century, *Affliction* is a period drama with tonal and visual elements of folk and religious horror. We want to use witchcraft imagery, religious iconography, and elements of nature to illustrate the themes of paranoia, religious fervour, and mistrust and suspicion in Blair's sickness.

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My goal with *Affliction* is to create an unsettling environment by blending images of religion, nature and folklore to evoke the terror the witch trials gave to women. Twisting these images that people typically associate with love, peace and faith into a dark gothic style will create a sense of mistrust and paranoia. *Midsommar*, directed by Ari Aster, is a prime example: instead of applying a dark tone in his film to convey the bizarreness of the cult, he adds bright colours to create a mistrusting illusion that mirrors the nature of the cult and creates an unsettling environment. We went for this tone in the film to address the issues in our world this story aims to display—the hardships and mistrust a woman with chronic illness encounters in the system which should help them get better, but doesn't.





A dark, atmospheric photograph of a forest with bare trees and a cross in the distance. The scene is dimly lit, with a blueish-green tint, creating a somber and mysterious mood. The trees are silhouetted against a slightly lighter background, and a simple cross is visible in the lower center of the frame.

# *Sound*

Sound has the unique ability to completely change how we perceive the image on the screen.

With *Affliction*, we hope to build the world by creating a layered soundscape, particularly through the use of natural sounds, folklore, and religious elements like prayers, chants, and incantations.

The soundscape will become more layered and distorted as the film progresses as we dive deeper into the two main male characters' paranoia and religious harpings and how this affects Blair.

Allowing the soundscape to build gradually allows audiences to feel the narrative closing in on Blair as we feel our way through this story.



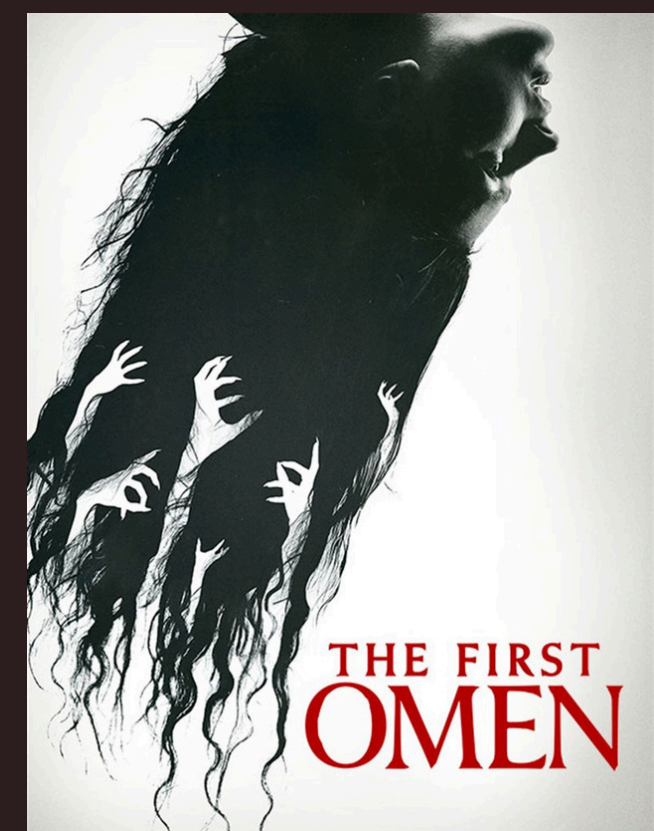


# Édit

A limited amount of pre-production can be done by an editor.

As this film is historical fiction with folklore and horror elements, it is important to first develop an understanding of the two genres and create a list of editing conventions that are relevant to both.

I would very much like to use a horror-based editing style, but I will use this appropriately once I see what I am working with.





# *Development*

## Next steps for *Affliction*

Drafting the script - 1st draft complete!

Location scouting across Lothian.

Start the casting process by looking at talent agencies.

Visit the Scottish Witch Trial Museum in Leven for development and research. It is the first museum in the UK dedicated to the history of the Scottish witch trials.

Contact Erica Monde, who directed the documentary *There's Not Much We Can Do*, to discuss how she used the invasive Japanese Knotweed as a metaphor for endometriosis.

Work with Napier graduate and remote producer Kate McGarry to get pre-production underway.

- Continue searching for an in-person creative producer!

