

AFFLICTION – PITCH

Hi everyone, I'm Sophie, the writer-director of *Affliction*. *Affliction* is a period drama set during the Scottish witch trials.

It follows Lydia, a young aristocratic woman with a vibrant life, the week before her wedding. Lydia begins to experience symptoms of a mysterious, unknown illness. To avoid suspicion and risk her marriage, she attempts to conceal her symptoms from her family and fiancée, who suspect a jealous witch has cursed her. Lydia is subjected to cruel experiments and taken to the local minister to inspect her state of mind.

Lydia tries to live as before but struggles to adjust to her new reality. Despite her efforts, her fiancée finds out about her illness. To her family's dismay and horror, she is accused of being a witch and sought out by the Church of Elders to be tried under the Witchcraft Act. To avoid persecution, Lydia and her younger sisters flee from their father's patriarchal rule and Lydia's trial. Once fearful of the accused witches, they find a new home with them who accept Lydia as she is.

Affliction uses the witch trials as a narrative device and metaphor for how women are treated when they become sick and are no longer conventionally able-bodied. The story began with my experience living with a chronic illness for nearly two decades and the dismissal and misunderstanding from medical professionals and society itself. This topic is close to me, so I want to write and direct the complex emotions and visually translate the story on-screen.

I created mood boards to show *Affliction's* visual inspiration and style. Dark romanticism focuses on our tendency to self-destruct, judge, and punish what we don't understand. The Baroque and Renaissance periods are stylistic influences with their compositions and use of lighting. Religious iconographies like Joan of Arc, The Virgin Mary, and churches also inform the story thematically. Witchcraft imagery is at the core of *Affliction* and will feature throughout. Finally, we have some film references.

Affliction covers subject matter such as chronic illness, medical misogyny, and patriarchal society and how these intersect in our lives. Each of us can relate to experiencing mental or physical illness or have had a family member who has, so I want to write the script with the experience of others and their creative input.

Affliction is not just a story about how we treat sick women. It is about how we treat sickness in general and destigmatising sharing those experiences. Medical misogyny is a historical and modern-day issue. Women, on average, experience longer waiting times for a diagnosis, dismissal of their pain and suffering, and ineffective treatments.

Films do not focus on chronic illness, especially if you are a young person and/or a woman, so I want to change that through the story of Lydia. Audiences want to see films that explore the complexities and nuance of the female experience, particularly the unseen, uncomfortable aspects of a changing body, such as in *Poor Things*.

We attach the value of women to their bodies, how conventionally attractive and healthy they appear, and their ability to reproduce and become mothers. I want to create a story that detaches our worth from our bodies and encourages empathy and empowerment towards the misunderstood and invisible experiences of those around us. I want the audience to feel seen and less alone in their hidden battle through Lydia's acceptance of her condition and hope when she decides to go where she feels a sense of belonging.