



the rot

a visual treatment

Introduction

“**The Rot**” is a modern folk horror with a socio-political angle. The film is about a young man struggling to make ends meet who becomes plagued with visions revealing the fate of a local man executed centuries before. The film’s more fantastical elements, such as ghosts and hauntings, are grounded by prescient subject matter such as rural poverty, drug addiction, and the after effects of the Covid pandemic. The film draws inspiration from a wide range of references, such as folk horror classics like “*Witchfinder General*”, “*The Blood on Satan’s Claw*” and more modern additions such as “*Enys Men*”.

The visual poetry, vivid details and sensitivity displayed by Lynne Ramsay, especially in regards to her portrayals of young people responding to life altering events, is another big influence. Her films “*Ratcatcher*” and “*Morvern Callar*” being particularly notable in the way they depict a certain social realism.





Story

The film opens during the early stages of the global pandemic. Being unable to care for his grandmother, 18 year old Freddie has had no choice but to place her in a nursing home. She is traumatically collected by key workers in hazmat suits as Freddie desperately apologises to her and promises to see her soon.

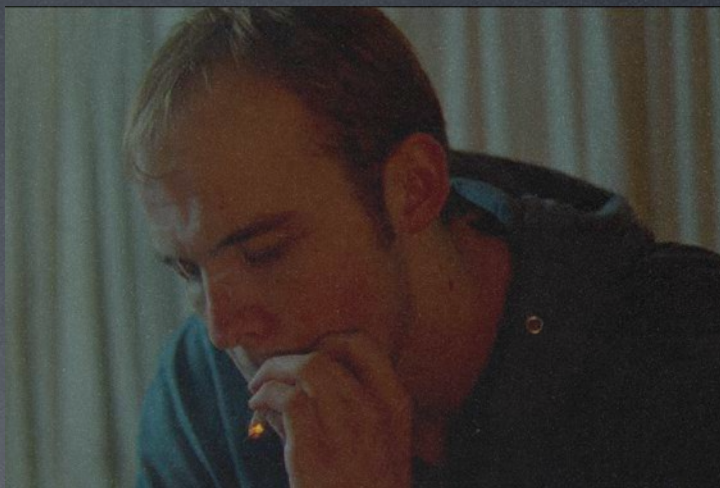
The film then jumps ahead to October 2023, the end of a summer marked by enquiries into how the government handled the crisis, culminating in the Gray Report, Boris Johnson's resignation as prime minister, and a final report finding him and his government guilty of misleading government.

It is immediately apparent that Freddie's grandmother has passed away, in her absence it is clear that Freddie is struggling to survive. Freddie has stripped and sold off anything of any value to the house and developed a reliance on cannabis to self-medicate. Freddie's commute to work at the local pub, which he takes on foot, takes him right past the old gibbet at Combe, which stands proudly on the brow of a hill, a grisly reminder of the old days of capital punishment. Freddie's shift as the kitchen porter ends disastrously when he flies into a rage after being accused of stealing food from the pub's walk-in freezer, and he quits in disgust. However, once home, it is revealed that Freddie has indeed resorted to stealing food to keep himself going.

In his desperation, Freddie looks in the attic to see if there is anything there that could yet be some value to him. He finds an old box within the attic and opening it up he finds a very old amulet with a portrait of a young man who looks strikingly like himself. The name on the amulet reads ABRAHAM WILLIAMSON, the same name as the very last man to be executed at the local gibbet. There is an immediate power cut, and when the lights finally turn back on Freddie takes the amulet.

Having pawned the amulet, and reloaded on groceries and supplies, Freddie cooks himself dinner, smokes a joint and falls into a fitful sleep. In his nightmare he sees the image of himself battered and beaten and tied to a chair, the sound of hospital ventilators pulsing away. His double screams a warning at him, punctuated by a terrifying vision of his grandmother in a covid mask hovering over the still sleeping Freddie. His dream is ended by the abrupt shooting of shotguns. Freddie, now awake, goes to his window and realises he has been awoken by a local pheasant shoot on nearby land.









Story

Freddie's new neighbour, a wealthy yuppie from London, is revealed to have been on the pheasant shoot. He brings a dead bird to Freddie's door as a way to introduce himself, and casually describes the plans for a tennis court and swimming pool to be built, before offering Freddie the chance to sell his grandmother's house to him. Freddie is repulsed by this notion, as the house has been in his family for generations and was left to him.

Freddie visits Silas, his local drug dealer. Silas is middle-aged, and whilst initially it appears that he cares for Freddie in a fatherly way, even cooking his dinner and lending him money, things take a sinister and potentially violent turn when he threatens Freddie about the debts that he has accrued.

That night Freddie morosely sits in his bedroom getting high. Investigating a crash and footsteps, and initially thinking it must be a visit from his absent, drunk of a father, Freddie is suddenly knocked unconscious. The subsequent nightmare is far more clear and revealing than the first, as Freddie/Abraham is tied to a chair whilst being interrogated by men wearing clothing from the 1600s and speaking the vernacular of that period. His captors strongly resemble Silas and the yuppie neighbour. They torture him, pulling out a finger nail, and it becomes evident that despite knowing that Freddie/Abraham is innocent, they will pin this crime on him regardless, a crime of murder that he will hang for. A noose is tied and drawn around his neck and the trapdoor opens, dropping him to his death. At this point Freddie awakens from his dream, realising that he has been strangling himself with a cord and that one of his fingernails has been torn off. An otherworldly growl commands the traumatised Freddie to seek revenge.

The next morning, terrified, and broken by the combined stresses of his situation, Freddie looks through pictures of his nan on his phone. Possessed by a strange determination, he finds himself walking through his local town. In the faces of passers-by he sees flickers of possession and ghastly grimaces. A young boy wearing a party mask of Boris Johnson skips around him tauntingly. Freddie makes his way through the town and into the nearby fields, where he makes the journey to the top of the hill: Combe Gibbet. Stroking the wood of the gibbet, Freddie asks for guidance.





THE ROT





Director's Vision

My creative vision for this film is to make a work that feels angry and urgent, as well as being a fresh addition to the folk horror genre. I want to make this film now as I am concerned that with the passing years the hypocrisy and injustices of the pandemic, notably the Partygate scandal (an event referenced immediately in the film), are quickly being forgotten. In a year in which a General Election looms heavily, I think it is a highly important and timely reminder of the anger felt towards those in power who disobeyed their own rules and got away with relatively scant repercussions.

There are other topics covered in this film which dovetail with this theme of hypocrisy and injustice, such as rural deprivation, a post-covid mental health crisis and the gentrification of the countryside. The script uses the historic event of a man being framed for murder by powerful men and subsequently executed as a mirror towards the present day, asking the question of how much has really changed?

In terms of the creative vision, there are several motifs that I would look to really push, the time of year, Autumn, is an important motif that will be explored. The idea of rotten fruit on the ground will help to communicate the idea of waste and decay that persists throughout rural England and will be accompanied by images of a depressed modern high street, complete with closed down shops, bookies and charity shops. The colour palette of this film will also push this idea – muted browns and oranges where possible to align with the mould of fruit and emphasise the rot that has taken hold of many struggling rural towns and villages after years of neglect. The countryside depicted, whilst scenic, must also contain an element of menace; the memory of violence, both illegal and legal, simmering below.

A Pheasant shoot works perfectly as a symbol of the privileged classes, with the shooting of shotguns puncturing the bucolic countryside a great metaphor, whilst also highlighting the disparity of wealth in the rural South West. The shooting, plucking and gutting of the pheasant is brutal and signifies the darkness lurking just underneath the surface of rural bliss.









Director's Vision

As the film is a horror film, and we are looking to sustain audience suspense, dread and fear, we will use low-key lighting, creating dramatic shadows, to contribute to the mood. The camera will largely be static, or use dollies, to help sustain an unhurried tension and control that will compliment the story. It is highly important to me to maintain Freddie's point of view firmly throughout the story, as ultimately this film is a character study of one young man pushed to his limits by the circumstances thrust upon him. The editing will also contribute to this with extended close-ups and POV shots to help immerse the viewer in Freddie's experience. We have discussed the use of portrait lenses that keep the centre of frame in sharp focus but leave a soft focus look around the edges of frame, the logic being that we keep our protagonist firmly at the centre of story whilst also hinting at the danger that constantly lurks in the background.

Sound design will also be utilised, weaponizing the sounds of the countryside to amp up the tension and fear. Freddie's cannabis reliance will also be explored through sound design, distorting or amplifying sounds to reflect his state of mind. Every creak of the house, whistling wind, pheasant's call and burning of rizla paper will carry an ominous weight. Likewise the musical score should have the same ambitions.

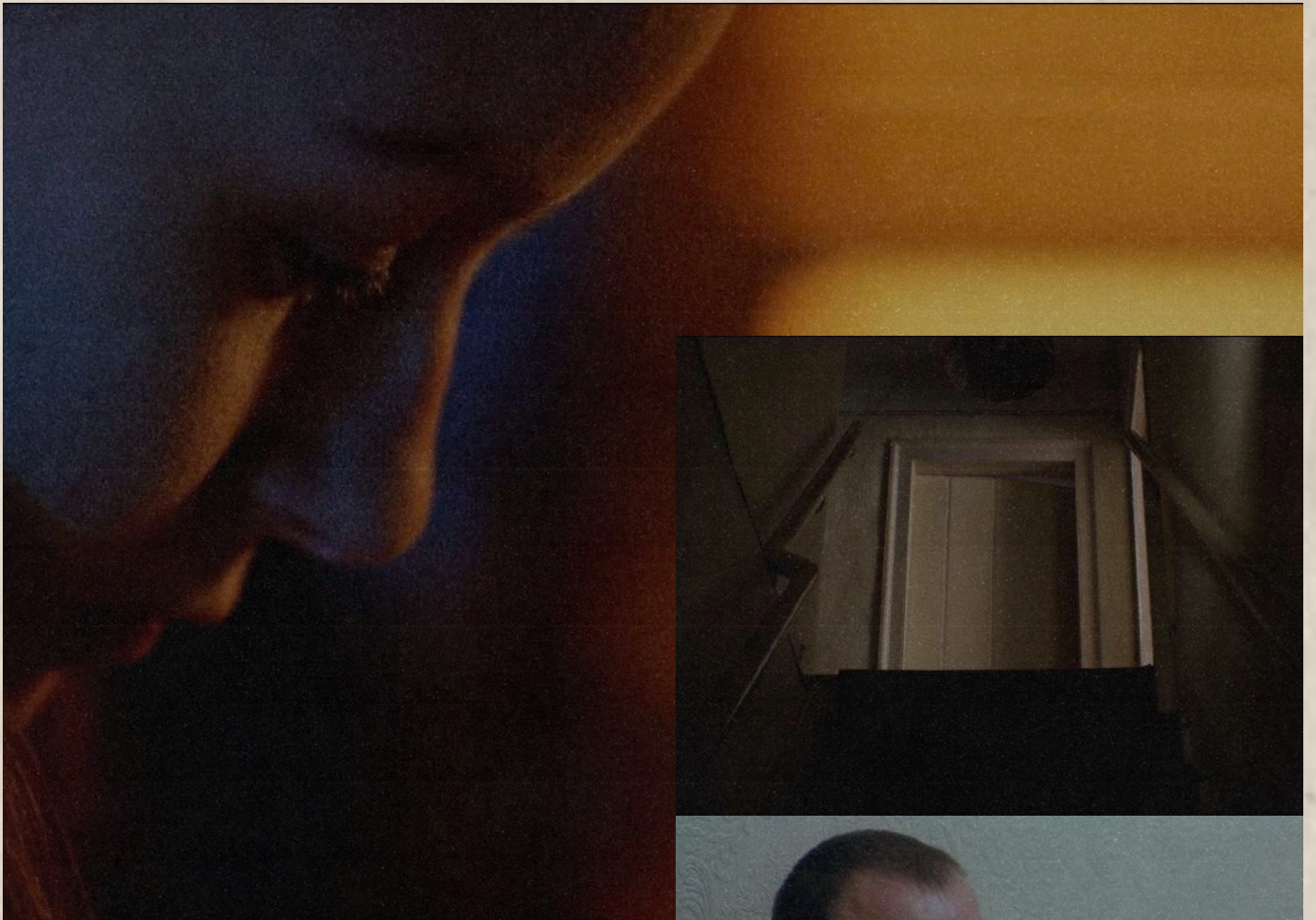
Ultimately the film must have a largely naturalistic and gritty look that reflects the reality of rural living that I intend to portray.





Director's Vision









Summary

In summary, “The Rot” will be a powerful commentary on the malaise of the countryside, wrapped up into a visually arresting, frightening and highly original story. The film will urge viewers to remember the hypocrisy we all suffered at the hands of the government, whilst also seeking to highlight the social disparity simmering below the surface of one of the UK’s most affluent regions, with the hope for change and a steely determination to not let it happen again.

Through evocative cinematography, disturbing sound design and score, this unpredictable and original storyline aims to totally engage with the audience, empathise with our protagonist and provoke contemplation on a different side to the countryside that is rarely given a chance to be seen.

Thank you for reading.

