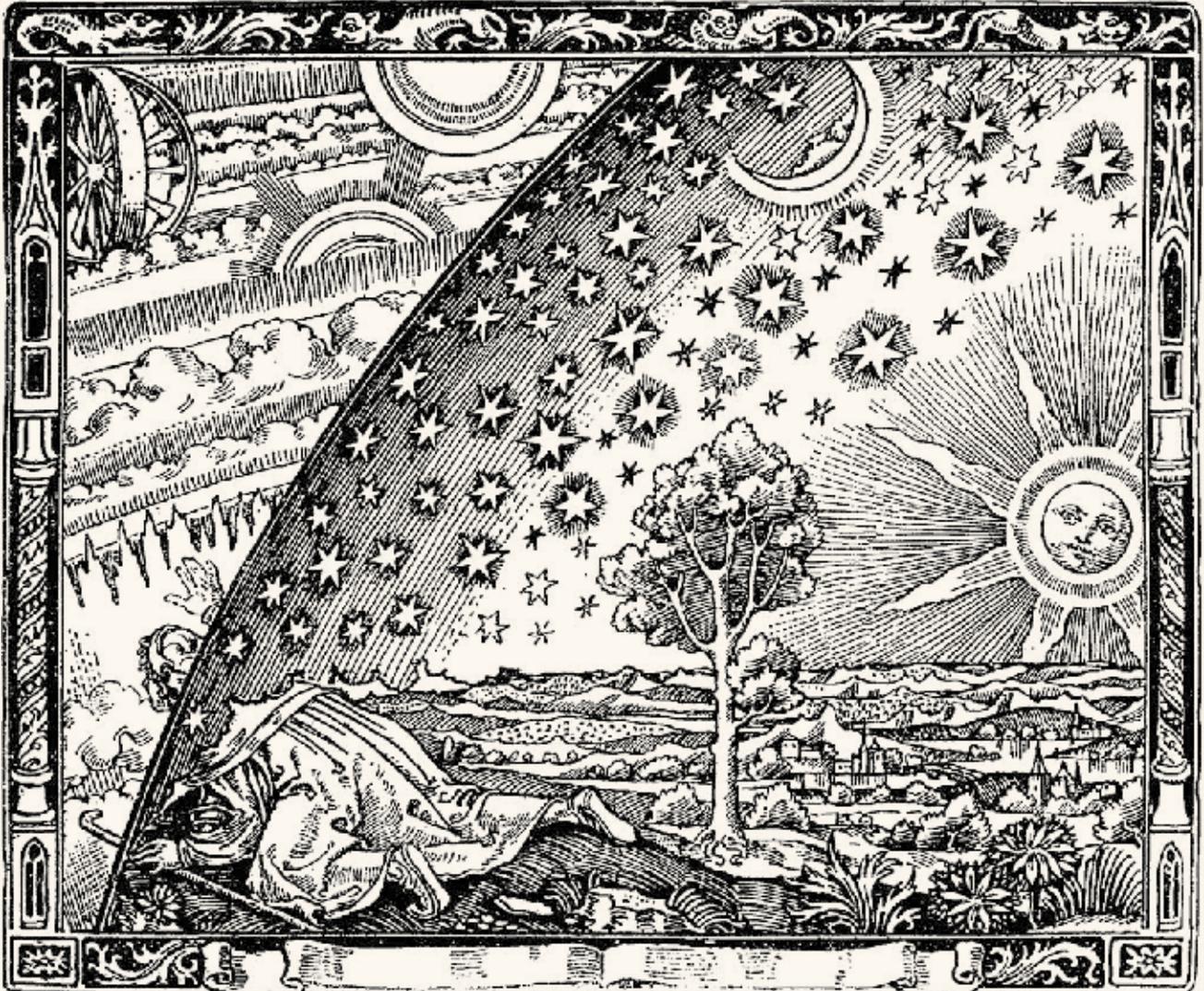


scottish justice ' matters

Volume 4 | Number 1 | March 2016

ISSN 2052-7950



REIMAGINING PUNISHMENT AND JUSTICE

FILM REVIEW

16 Years Till Summer.

Directed by Lou McLoughlan

Reviewed by **Nate Kunitskaya**



16 Years Till Summer directed by Lou McLoughlan premiered at Visions du Réel and then in the UK at Sheffield International Documentary Festival. The film was nominated for BAFTA's "Best Picture" and is represented by Taskovski Films. There were two screenings at the Glasgow Film Festival in February. At the time of writing no other screenings are planned in Scotland.

Filmed over four years, the film uses cinematic techniques - long takes of landscapes and close-ups - that deliberately blur the line between 'dreams of the heart and rational judgement'. *16 Years Till Summer* is a hybrid of heart and head; magic-realism and documented tragedy. The struggle of one man for redemption in a tale of forgiveness, self-discovery, of accepting the past and taking responsibility for one's mistakes.

McLoughlan expertly weaves fable into documentary. A folkloric atmosphere carries you through the film, subtly evoked by the natural landscape and accompanying music. From the majestic, breath-taking Highlands with their snow-capped peaks and mirror-still lochs, to the quaint and romantic portraiture of rural life, each human being becomes both part of the landscape and a landscape in their own right. The fabric of the film is melancholy with nostalgia, every minute is meditative and reflective but offset by a mellow, traditional score that, even when absent, seems to linger in your mind.

16 Years Till Summer tells the story of Uisdean who is faced with the consequences of a life sentence. We witness, from the inside, the repercussions of such an event on his family and small community. Uisdean's story is just as enchanting, tragic and cruel as any tale from fairy lore.

Uisdean wants to re-invent himself by becoming a full time carer to his elderly father. The quiet landscape, the isolated rural community, his father's home and silent company underscore Uisdean's social and mental isolation whilst his surprisingly romantic and pastoral attitude is continuously rebuffed by his father's remarks. This becomes

particularly poignant when he discusses his plans for the future - sharing his dreams of becoming a shepherd and setting up a small Bed and Breakfast.

Uisdean wants forgiveness and is distressed to find himself being described as an 'assassin' and 'murderer', acutely aware that society has withdrawn its trust from him. Even though the justice system has given him another chance he is unable to restore his 'trust credit' with the local community. Uisdean is bewildered even by the familiarity of his own home, as a captive creature would be upon being released into the wild. Enclosure has starved him not only of social contact but also of the ability to adapt himself: he is bewildered by his 'freedom' and grows uneasy as the idleness of his father's home comes to feel like another form of confinement, and the hostility of the locals begins to wear down his spirits.

This brings to the fore the absence of a system to manage the assimilation of a recently released individuals into their local communities. Eventually circumstance brings Uisdean to make a mistake and he is returned to prison. When he is released for a second time, under stricter conditions, he moves in with his partner to her remarkably isolated home in the Highlands. He is dispossessed, his father has passed away and his remaining family have alienated him. In six months' time Uisdean makes another mistake which sends him back to prison to complete his life sentence.

16 Years Till Summer is not partial to Uisdean's perspective nor is it dispassionate. McLoughlan's eyes do not judge. Instead, the camera is a patient observer of the unfolding events. The most evident message that transpires from the film is the fugitive nature of truth and justice, especially with the passage of time. Memories blur and our understanding of events change as we reconstruct them over and over in our mind. Entire narratives are left out, many voices are ignored. *16 Years Till Summer* gently delivers this heart wrenching tale of one man's experience with the nature of justice and truth as he begins, but never comes to accomplish, the hard graft of re-inventing himself. One is bound to take heart to Uisdean's story and find themselves dismayed at the conclusion.

Nate Kunitskaya is a MSc student at Napier University, Edinburgh, studying magazine publishing and is currently an associate with *SJM*.

Read more of Nate's work at www.kinomanicfae.wordpress.com.