

# QLH-S2E10M: Repulsion

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

film, trauma, movie, feel, deteriorate, sister, mental state, walls, starts, carol, scene, roman polanski, people, undershirt, societal norm, women, rosemary, connection, repulsion, hamper

## SPEAKERS

Jessi Chartier, Jen Myers

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**J** Jessi Chartier 00:04

Welcome to Quiet Little Horrors. Here we talk about the films that creep under your skin and take up residence in the dark.

**J** Jen Myers 00:17

Before we get started, as a reminder, when we talk about movies, we need to talk about everything in the movie. So there will be spoilers involved. If you haven't seen the movie or want to refresh your memory before you listen, you can stop now and do that before coming back.

**J** Jessi Chartier 00:33

Let's talk about Repulsion. The mental state of a salon worker in London deteriorates when her sister, the only touchstone for her sense of security leaves on a three month holiday. Jen, we came to this movie because I think it was on our lists of must watch just because it's Roman Polanski. And to me, I liked Rosemary's Baby, which we've done on this podcast. But I had never seen this one. And I didn't really know what to expect. But I was pleasantly surprised at how really good this movie was.

**J** Jen Myers 01:06

Yeah, I think I saw this first, just in the last year or two. And it was similarly where I had heard it talked about as a good movie, especially in the realm of psychological horror, which obviously, I'm into, but I don't Yeah, I don't think I was prepared either for how good it was, and how much I would like it and how intense it was. I rewatched it before we recorded this because like I said, I didn't feel like I was prepared to really take it all in the first time around. And I'm glad I did that, because there's a lot here to take in.

J

Jessi Chartier 01:37

There is so for those of you who like to listen to the podcast first and then go watch the movies. This movie is really interesting. It starts with this salon worker who just seems a little distant, a little removed. And you really kind of come to realize that she has a very frail connection with reality. And that it her really her only touchstone, as we mentioned in the synopsis, really her only touchstone to reality is her sister. And when her sister leaves on the this three month holiday with her, I guess her lover who's also with her lover is married, so this is like an affair, right? So they go for like three months. And she just kind of I don't want to see loses her grip on reality, because it's such a cliché term, but the thread bareness of her connection to the world starts to break, and it just starts to like deteriorate. It's almost like an acid is eating away at her.

J

Jen Myers 02:38

Yeah. And I would also say it's also there are, for lack of a better term, I feel like her mental state is in herself, or being attacked from the outside as well. I feel like she's only able to kind of keep it in balance with her sister around. And then yeah, everything kind of crumbles when her sister isn't there. But I also feel like yeah, it's not. Okay, like it is her mental state. It is kind of happening internally. But there's some external things that help it, I think,

J

Jessi Chartier 03:10

oh, yeah, for sure that they definitely fuel the fire, for sure. And for those of you who haven't watched there, this whole podcast needs to come with like trigger warnings, because there are a lot of rape scenes in this. And they're all not all of them. But I guess you're kind of like left questioning Well, which ones are accurate, which ones are not, but there is a sense of she has a very unhealthy connection to her own sexuality and her a very warped perspective of intimacy. And, I mean, we're not going to be spoilers and all this kind of stuff you come to realize, or the implication is that all of this started with her father, which makes total sense then, like the rest of the, the struggle with intimacy makes sense, because that's like her only form of connection. His understanding is like, Well, someone loves me, they're going to rate me right. Yeah. So she really struggles with that. But of course, society wants to put her in this little box and be like, Why can't you be just normal? Why can't you be this way, but then she's fighting against that because she's got her own internal demons. Like it's just a really complex story. It's not like your typical Oh, look, here is grief, represented as something or here is something that I am afraid of, that is going to represent itself as a monster is just she's has she has this huge internal battle going on. And that is in kind of conflict but also not with societal expectations. And so her ability to set boundaries and create movement to create this like sense of security and this life that she wants is impossible, because it is a constantly blurring line. There are are no walls, they start to deteriorate. I could go on and on and on, but I should stop. Yeah,

J

Jen Myers 05:04

I mean, essentially, yeah, I mean, that's your that's everything that's going on here. I think that it's kind of illustrates the way that trauma kind of builds on itself I think and like closes closes

it's kind of illustrates the way that trauma kind of binds on itself I think and like closes closes doors to your her obviously metaphorically speaking, where, because she never got over the original trauma, she develops unhealthy coping strategies. And then because of those things, other people seem to think that she's, you know, they either get frustrated with her because she's not conforming to, you know, kind of their expectations are how they think things should go or you know, how a healthy person would deal with things. And so their reaction is to kind of push back against her, which is obviously makes her situation worse. And then they just keep, you know, the I was gonna say building, but I guess a better metaphor is like, they can't just keep digging a deeper hole the way they're playing off each other.

J

Jessi Chartier 05:56

Yeah, yeah. It's, it reminds me when we were talking about this earlier, we were, you had mentioned that that, oh, you know, trying to fit into the societal norm. And it reminded me a lot of Carnival of Souls, because that's like the underlying theme of Carnival of Souls. So for those of you who have been around with us since the very beginning, that was like our second or second, yeah, podcasts. And it just reminded me a lot of that where it was, like, just this looming threat, right to conform, it's just a looming threat here is not lumen, it's like, yeah, in your face, it's it manifests itself as the walls deteriorate, as people literally break her door down in her dreams. And in her kind of how she just kind of works her way through life, it really just manifests full. It's just such a great representation of her trauma.

J

Jen Myers 06:49

Yeah, well, and even like, in, for me a representation of just some of the little things that the way our society does push women to conform to certain things. So like I was telling you a little bit earlier before we started recording that, even though for somebody who doesn't have the kind of trauma that our main character is dealing with, even like there's an earlier scene where I think somebody who wants to be her boyfriend, I clearly they're, they're acquainted, but I don't, I don't doesn't seem to have like a really existing relationship, he sees her on the street through the window or bar tries her attention, doesn't, it fails in that, so follows her, she goes, she goes into a restaurant to eat on her lunch break. And he sits down on her table tells her her food sucks. And she should be eating better food and tries to convince her to go at another restaurant with him. And she keeps saying I don't have time, I don't want to do this, like no part, she doesn't want any part of this. And he just keeps pushing and pushing and pushing. And this whole scene just makes me personally, I just want to like scream, leave her alone, and just leave her alone, leave her alone. Like even without the trauma. Just this whole thing is such a familiar experience. To me, personally, of having just like being out in the world and doing your own thing, man just won't leave you alone. And so it just kind of like there, there's, there's levels of this that I feel like are very relatable, even without the deep trauma that we dig into later into the film.

J


Jessi Chartier 08:16

I'm glad that you mentioned that specificity because there is so much around that, that it's even pressure from the other women in the in the area. So like her salon owner, who is probably the most sympathetic out of all the characters, I mean, more so than even her sister, you know, sends her home early because she's not feeling good or etc. But kind of has a heart

to heart with her and is like what is going on? Like you have to tell me what's going on. And so she makes up a lie about how her antis or whatever. And that is when the empathy just or the sympathy just breaks and shifts back into societal norm, where the salon owner says, Well, I was back at work three days after having my baby. So I know how hard it is. It's like what, what?

 Jen Myers 09:02

Yeah, and then that's a really good point. So there's even pressure from other women on it like that, which is also another realistic thing, right? Where it's it. Sometimes it's hard to form bonds when you're all subjected to the same pressures and injustice. And like, you shouldn't have to be back at work three days after you give birth. And it's not a thing that should happen. But it is a thing that still does happen. And so it makes it hard for people who are struggling with those types of things to help each other out because they're all struggling so much. And I think women in particular, I would imagine this is the case for a lot of like disadvantaged groups of people, but I feel like there's a thing with women that can be like, Well, I had to deal with this. So guess what, you're going to have to deal with it too. And the idea of you know, somebody another woman getting, you know, more than they got out of it is a difficult thing for them to deal with. And I think you see a little bit of that here. I think that that's also kind of going 100 You mentioned her sister, her sister is not particularly compassionate. Like, I don't think her sister is trying to be mean to her. But I think there's definitely times where her sister seems very exasperated and dealing with her and just kind of like, like, just doesn't know what to do with her and just wishes she can kind of just be normal.

 Jessi Chartier 10:18

Yeah, exactly. Again. Yeah, exactly. It's like, like, you'll be fine. Everything's gonna be fine. So even the sister has a hard time with this and, and showing compassion to her sister. Great example, Carol comes home from work. Her sister's like, Hey, I'm making dinner. And then that flips on a dime because her boyfriend, the man she's having an affair with comes in and says, I want to go out and it's like, okay, I'll just abandon everything that I'm doing. Like, yeah, halfway through cooking.

 Jen Myers 10:46

I was literally in the middle of making dinner. Yeah, yeah. And was just like, cool.

 Jessi Chartier 10:51

I'm out. Peace out. Sorry, Carol. You got to fend for yourself. And we shouldn't even say that. She's just like, I'm going out for dinner. Why can't you be hiring me? And it's like, yeah, you promised it like, this is like anyway. So there's that. And I think that there's just this she's constantly struggling to feel safe. Yeah. And

 Jen Myers 11:09

Jen Myers 11:00

I think another thing with Helen's boyfriend, who as you mentioned is a married man. And so I think that how one interprets Carol's, you know, displeasure at the fact that she's leaving, and all of that as judgment on her. I think Carol has that defensive thing of judgment, and I get that, to a certain extent, it's not fun to be judging you do people make their mistakes and all that, but also Yeah, this dude is not a charming dude. Like a he's not, he seems to like, tease Carol. And also just like is there all the time, like, that's another thing to bear. Even if I were, you know, completely un-traumatized and a relatively stable person, I would not be super cool with my roommate, sisters, married boyfriend, like just, you know, taking things over or leaving things around. Being there all the time, when I'm up in the mornings, like that would be super annoying. And that's something that Helen does not seem to understand or care for care about at all.

J Jessi Chartier 11:13

Exactly. That's exactly right. Can we talk a little bit about the the actual craft of the film because I feel like it's so good. So good. So the use of walls, there's two things I really want to talk about the use of walls, and the undershirt, I feel like those two things were just really nicely done. So in the film, the walls soften for a hot minute, which her when her mental state starts to deteriorate, I guess. But it's just a great metaphor of like, the the barriers and the things that kept her structured, are now starting to soften, which makes them vulnerable, right. And then throughout the film, they the walls will crack apart. With this like ooze underneath it, the hands and arms will come through and grab her. And then the I mean that they had, there's only one scene where everything feels so long or so big, right? There's a scene where all of a sudden, her living room is like twice the size, the path from her bedroom to the bathroom is like twice as long. And that's like a single 45 second scene, and they built an entire set for that. So like this idea that she is, she's not shrinking, but the space is growing. And that's scary. To have so much open space is kind of scary. And the there's a point in time where things start to the walls literally start to close in on her the ceiling starts to come down on her. Like it's just this great metaphor of how her own sense of structure is

J Jen Myers 13:55

definitely yeah, there's a lot of things and I think those are the definitely the most interesting parts, everything that you described there, but even just kind of the overall feel of it the way it's usually so close on her when she's like walking around the streets and things like this and in like, gives a handheld feel. Everything is always a little wobbly, a little there's a lot of things off kilter. It just gives you a sense of everything being kind of immediate and like yeah, just not stable.

J Jessi Chartier 14:25

Yeah, exactly. It's everything. Nothing is stable. Everything is potentially harmful. You feel exposed, and also claustrophobic at the same time. And I think that that was one of the things I really like about Roman Polanski and just all of his film making is that he uses that cinematography and set design and everything to really represent what's going on inside the heads of his characters. Yeah,

J Jen Myers 14:50

Rosemary's Baby does that also really well, which we talked about in another mini, which has a lot of the same themes, but yeah, it shows up there too.

J Jessi Chartier 14:59

Yeah, it really does. It really does. There's also something aside from the walls I want to just mention is this the undershirt, which is just such just a, just beautiful, okay, so the first time she finds it and it's Michael's undershirt we're left to believe. So she finds an undershirt, a man's undershirt on the floor, in the bathroom, and she picks it up disgusted, is about to put it into the hamper, pauses, smells, it drops it, which happens to land in the hamper and runs over to the toilet and vomits what a great scene like, it's like, okay, so there's clarity that she is, she wants something that is intimate. She wants a connection to a healthy sex life. She wants these things. Or at least she's curious about them. But the moment they come within reach she, she rejects them, she's repulsed by them. Hence, the title of the film, that undershirt appears at least two other times throughout the film, not in the same location, which I think is just, I hope it was intentional, because it's just a beautiful literally it was I would have business, if you will. So the next time you see it, it is folded hanging on the edge of her bed, like one of her like the foot board, as if it had just freshly been laundered. And then the final time it appears is at the very end of the movie, where it's on an ironing board in the kitchen as if it was being tended to like it was ironing. So there's just this, like, it's such a great little bit of business, because there's this little reminder of her desire to have these things, but her inability to have them. And in all of the rape scenes, he's wearing that underwear. Yeah. So there's just such great. It's just, it's so subtle, and yet such a great representation. And I have no idea how Roman Polanski got this so accurate.

J Jen Myers 17:04

I mean, like, yeah, we think I went on this rant during the Rosemary's Baby episode, I just will never understand. I just can't get it.

J Jessi Chartier 17:14

Talk more about it, because I think that we can revisit it.

J Jen Myers 17:16

How did he Yes, I just especially, I mean, it's bad enough with Rosemary's Baby, but looking at Repulsion like, I feel like Repulsion it does it gets this right, it gets this feeling right. And I like I said, even if you you know, if you don't have the same, you know, traumas and things like that, that that poor Carol does. I think that there are a lot of women who recognize aspects of moving through the world as a woman in this film. And it's just so accurate. It's so accurate. And I don't know how Roman Polanski of all people managed to get this. So right on film, I, I will never understand this, I will never understand it, especially in this particular film, where we

have a main character who was traumatized and brutalized early in her life. And that the whole movie is about how that crystallized her and made it unable for her to grow, to move on to evolve, that she's stuck in that trauma that she had when she was young, and she can't move past it. And it has ruined her entire life. And that's what the movie is about. And this movie is made by Roman Polanski. I just I don't get it. I don't get it. But it is but it is. So I watched this movie and I'm like this gets it. This gets what it feels like to have, you know, fears of the world fears of intimacy. And like I said, I feel like even without the trauma in there, this will ring true for anybody who has, you know, had any kind of experience of moving through a world that is not made for you.

**J** Jessi Chartier 18:55

Yes, yeah, I think I think you nailed it on the head. And I got to give a shout out to Roman Polanski as a filmmaker because he does that in so many of his films. Mm hmm. Like I think about *The Pianist*, for example, or *Officer and a Spy* like or *the Tenant*, right or even *Chinatown* like if you go all the way back. Yeah, some of his earlier stuff. Like he has done a really nice job of his films do a really good job of putting the film in the character's mind like you see it through the character. He's I feel like most some of his films not all of these, I'm not going to make grandiose statements against anyone and their their artistic approach, but he does a really nice job of leading into that idea of if I am telling this story from this character's point of view. Everything is going to be from this character's point right so like, the businesses are in the background and by businesses I mean, like little things here or there like the the undershirt, the walls coming in. I'll talk specifically about this film, the the rotting rabbit, like there's just oh gosh, such a great metaphor for who Carrol is, right? Like, it's just he does a really great job of that. And I think that that's why I like a lot of his films.

**J** Jen Myers 20:10

Yeah, no, definitely. I mean, he's, he's an incredible filmmaker. He's made incredible films. Like, I feel like that's, that's an indisputable fact, you know, beyond whether somebody even likes the film's not to, you know, nothing, not even anything about him. But yeah, and *Repulsion*. This is it's so well made, like everything, you've already covered a lot of the reasons you but it's so well done. That it's not it. It's impossible for it to be an accident, because it's so carefully done. So deliberately done that, you know, everything we're talking about are, these are the things that we we are picking up on, because that is what we're meant to pick up on. Like it was all designed this way. And it it does it wonderfully. So yeah. I mean, if anybody can ever explain to me the paradox of how he can do that, I would love to hear it, because I can't explain it. But this the film is great.

**J** Jessi Chartier 21:04

Mm hmm. Agreed. Agreed. Well, we watched this movie, in anticipation of our main film for this, this upcoming episode, which is *Last Night in Soho*. So if you want to hear more about kind of our thoughts around how women react to the world they're in definitely listen to the next episode, because we talk a lot about how that works for something that's a little bit more modern of a film. And that's an Edgar Wright film. So I'm interested to talk about that, because I really like his stuff. Yeah,



Jen Myers 21:41

I think it's gonna be a good discussion.



Jessi Chartier 21:43

I think so too. I think so too. All right, Jen, any final thoughts for our listeners out there on Repulsion



Jen Myers 21:50

just if they haven't seen it, go see it, because it's really good. And it's on a lot of streaming services available to rent or not sorry, not like streaming but a lot of digital rental services. So go watch



Jessi Chartier 22:02

it. Absolutely. All right, Jen. We'll see you in the next episode. All right. Bye.