

QLH-S3E4M: La Llorona

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SPEAKERS

Jessi Chartier, Jen Myers

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

We talk about movies. So we're going to talk about parts of movies that may be spoilers. If that doesn't bother you, you can keep on listening. Or you can hit the pause button and go watch the films that we're talking about before you continue here. Consider yourself warned. Let's talk about La Llorona. The family of an ageing war criminal responsible for the genocide of Mayan people in the early 1980s is haunted by the specter of the wailing, vengeful La Llorona

J Jessi Chartier 00:49

I went into this movie, not knowing what to expect, Jen?

J Jen Myers 00:52

Oh, me, too. I really, I mean, I had the summary. And that was about it. I didn't really have any other context on the film.

J Jessi Chartier 00:59

Yeah, and I remember when we first started looking at doing a theme kind of around folk stories, or like, kind of ancestral things. And we were like, oh, you know, there's these. There's like, there were like a slew of law, Your Honor movies out, it was like, Wait, are we doing that all at the same time? Because in 20 version 2019

J Jen Myers 01:22

Version, yeah, there is The Curse of La Llorona and I believe The Legend of La Llorona. And neither one of those are the film that we were talking about here. We were talking just the plain La Llorona, which is a Guatemalan film from 2019.

J Jessi Chartier 01:38

Yes. And that was, I was really excited to see it because I don't think I've seen a Guatemalan film yet. So I was really looking forward to, to watching this and it did not disappoint. I loved so the setting for our audience members, the setting is that there's a war criminal who's been charged with war crimes, as you can see from the synopsis, and he ends up kind of held up in his own house kind of under house arrest, for his own protection, and his whole family is there. So his wife is there, his daughters, their granddaughters there and his bodyguard and maid and that's like it. Those are like the main characters in the film. And I love the fact that they took this, this beautiful, old story and place it in this really complex political scene. Because I think it just emphasized, for me at least it did two things. One, it made the savagery of the war crimes that much more potent, because this is such an old story. And it made it less boogeyman like and more. True, terrifying. I don't know how to describe it. Also,

J Jen Myers 02:55

Yeah, yeah. We shouldn't assume people will. But I'll let you. I think we'll talk more about this. But it also the story here is really not about this general at all. It's about his family, and specifically his female family members, and kind of what his actions have not necessarily brought I don't not brought on the sense that La Llorona is haunting them because she isn't she's very squarely focused on him and hurting him. And not so much the others, but you see what his actions over the course of his whole life have done to all the women around him and how they have to deal with it. And that's what's really going on there. Which is really interesting. I think that was something that surprised me a bit when I read the the synopsis originally before I saw the movie, and then I'm like, okay, honestly, I connect much better to stories about women and so part of it was like, okay, yeah, we'll watch this. It sounds good. But you know, I'm I don't feel very connected, or I don't feel a lot of empathy for an old, aging war criminal, you know, like, I'm not interested if he gets terrorized. That sounds great. You know, good, good for him. But that's not what the story is really about. And I was really pleasantly surprised is that got so so into the individual women's stories. Should we maybe summarize what the La Llorona myth? In the original, just kind of the story in general. I'll take a crack at it. So this and this is something I don't think I didn't know much of this about the story before all these films came out. And then I think that I looked it up because it sounded interesting. And it is very interesting. But I think if you are not from the American Southwest or Mexico or for an area in Central America, where they have these stories, you might not be familiar with what La Llorona is, so it is, I mean, obviously it's a legend so there isn't one correct version. There's lots of different versions. As far as I can tell. The most common version you'll find is basically a woman who married a rich rancher, and they had two children and then she caught her husband with another woman, and in revenge she drowned their two children. Which she, you know, immediately regretted, and then she drowned herself as well. But she could never like move on to the afterlife. So she roams around wailing and crying. And I read in a lot of

accounts, she will if she finds an unsuspecting children by bodies of water, she will drag them in and drown them. And that's the basic tale. There's, there's some other variations that I found were really interesting, including that it could have been from Conquistador times. And this is maybe an Indigenous woman who had children with a Spaniard. And then he abandoned her. And then she, you know, she killed a child out of either revenge or just not being able to have illegitimate children, which, you know, that brings in some of the power dynamics, that I think this film also gets into some things more like that. So it's a it's a really resonant story, and obviously a really sad story. There's so much sorrow in this story. So like you were saying, it's really a good mythological framework to tell the sort of story that we have in this film.

J Jessi Chartier 06:06

Yeah, yes, I agree. And I think that, like you mentioned it, it is a legend, which means that there is no one truth to the story. But the common theme among them all, is that this woman's children drowned. She drowned. And she now seeks out other children to drown. Like, that's like the common thing amongst all of the stories. And they turned that story, a little bit on its head here. Because in this movie, her name is Alma, like the the woman who plays law, Your Honor, is in the household as a maid, and her the maids name is Alma. But Alma talks to the granddaughter, and is teaching her how to hold her breath underwater. And if you know anything about law, you're gonna you're like, oh my gosh, she's gonna drown her. Because she's got to see well, you know, you have like this panic attack. But then, at the end, you realize that she had told this little girl don't drown. Like she had kind of turned the narrative a little bit on its head, and instead of stealing children to drown them, she is protecting the women. And she's, like you said laser focused on making sure that this war criminal pays for his horrible actions, which, by the way, we should tell, I mean, the actions are basically law, you're gonna you discover that Alma is the ghost of a Mayan what we believe my enrollment yet, right?

J Jen Myers 07:45

Well, there's, I think that there she is native to this. They are native there. I believe that name is Kaqchikel, but I probably mispronounced that. But yes, there they are. It is I think it is correct to refer to them as the native Maya people.

J Jessi Chartier 08:02

Okay, so apologies to anyone out there, I will look this up when we are done. So I'm not quite as an uneducated as I may sound, but the she is of the native people. And this general comes in, and there's like a lot of guerrilla warfare going on. And he threatens to drown her children if he if she doesn't tell him where the guerrilla army is. And of course, she doesn't know. And so he drowns her kids and shoots her. And so but that's not, of course, the only war crime he's done. I mean, it's clear that he has massacred and done clear genocide against the native people of the area. Like he's just, he's just not good.

J Jen Myers 08:51

Yeah. Well, and he is actually convicted originally because he is put on trial for war crimes, and

Yeah, well, and he is actually convicted originally because he is put on trial for war crimes, and he's convicted, and then the verdict is overturned, because they couldn't say, well, basically, you don't know. 100%, for sure, because also, this has happened in modern day and I think the genocide happened in the early 80s. So people basically I think there was some sort of like high court that said, we don't know for sure. So it's all cool. And then that's when the protesters come out. And basically that's what ends up barricading the family inside their their home is that there's protesters everywhere so I mean, the high court notwithstanding I think everybody is pretty certain they had this do did this stuff right. You know, the interesting thing I wanted to mention though, you mentioned we get to see what he did at that time, but we don't see it happening with Alma in there we see it happening through a series of dreams that the general's wife Carmen is having and she is the one that is actually going through all this in these dreams do not start happening until Alma arrives at the house as a maid, but then Carmen starts dreaming about these things that happen and actually living through it. Which is, yeah, it's so good. It's very good. It's also horrifying. It's good and horrifying.

J

Jessi Chartier 10:14

It is very Yeah, I agree. I agree. And spoiler there, because we do give a spoiler alert at the end. I love the ending scene where Carmen has a waking dream. And she is you see the whole conversation, you get the whole picture, then, like, you get bits and pieces of it up until then, but you get the whole conversation, then you discover at the end, the general has shot Alma. And the wife no longer Carmen is no longer in almost place, but is staring down at this dead body and she turns to her husband in the dream. And she strangles him. She's tax him and she strangles them. And then you cut back to real life, and you discover that she actually had killed like she had strangled her husband like actually really mean. Yeah, she was living this out. And it's just such a beautiful story. Because poor I mean, I have a lot of sympathy for a lot of the women in the movie, but really also for Carmen, because it's clear, she's in denial as a defense mechanism. But she also knows what's going on. She knows he's had illegitimate children, but like, she knows that he is a war criminal. And she has kind of convinced her she's done all the things that women in those situations have done for survival, like denial, defensiveness, isolation, incredibly, like, controlling, like all of the typical things that happen. And at the end, she just really becomes her own woman, like she's able to really lean into who she is, at least that was the take that I got, she got to stand up for herself. Like she was really Carmen at that point. She was no longer the general's wife. And I loved that about it.

J

Jen Myers 12:01

Yeah, yeah. That's amazing. I just, there's just so much in this. Also like Okay, can we talk about Margarita KenÃ©fic, I believe her last name is pronounced. It's she plays Carmen, she plays the mother. She's so good. And I think that so I just saw a thing on backstage that they were interviewing the director, and the director likes to hire real people and then train them as actors. So he said, and if I'm remembering this, right, he said something like, like, there are many actors in Guatemala, but there are few, there are few actors that remain in Guatemala. So he tends to cast local people and then do like training. Margarita was an exception. She apparently is a theatre actress. And then Julio Diaz is also a trained actor. But those were the only two trained actors in this film. Yeah, I also interpreted like, at the very ends that even though it might be it might have been triggered by the dream visions that she was going through and having, but I think it was actually a release of her own rage that she'd kept silent and bottled up for decades. And it all came out then. And then that's what you see. Like, you

can see the cracks forming throughout the film. And I think you see it more clearly in the the younger generation. So the daughter Natalia is much more obviously like it's, it's this is her father, and her mother and the very beginning of the film, Carmen, it says to her, she's doing all the dial and defensive tactics and things like that, right. And then the Natalia is much more concerned about the implications of this from the beginning. Like she's very uncomfortable with the fact that there are at the trial native woman described being raped, and things like that. And you know, Carmen says, Oh, they're just lying. That's just what they say. And you it's clear that Natalia is like people, you know, women don't lie about that. That's, that's not, that's not right. And so she is increasingly troubled by all of this. And then you have her daughter, Sarah, who is, you know, we don't see a ton of her but she seems to be a pretty strong free spirit, she doesn't really seem to know everything that's going on there. But you get the sense that she's not the silent type. And so you see these generations of women in different levels of you know, being willing to face the truth and speak the truth throughout the whole film and they're all turning towards you know, more truth towards the end. When the other thing that I think is interesting when Carmen actually kills her husband, is that the other women so Natalia and Sarah and then Valeriana, who is the primary maid at the household, and is implied later to be like Natalia's half sister, the general's illegitimate child, they all just sit there and they're just watching her. They're not stopping her. They're there. They're not doing anything. They're just watching her as she kills him. And they don't even seem horrified. They're it's obviously very somber, but there's kind of this sense of they're all kind of realizing this is what needs to happen and it almost is like they're they're all together then. And it's a really it's strangely lovely kind of moment at least I thought it was we're all these women kind of have some sort of another kind of set free and that moment well Alma is probably because she's fulfilled her goal of terrorizing and killing this man but in doing so, all these other women around also seem to be set free. Really, that's really interesting, because, wow, I mean, they're wonderful. But so is everybody else.

J

Jessi Chartier 15:55

Yes. Yeah. Isn't that crazy? Yeah. But I think that that added just a level of to Carmen's character. That was the care there was just such a beautiful, again, the relationship of the, the grandmother that Carmen so that Margarita place is so very put together, like so very controlled, so very proper. So very, like, walled off and different from and cold almost from the others in the in the family. Like, the Natalia is much more warm towards her daughter, and much more concerned about her father, but there's just like this sense of stature to Carmen that the other characters the other women don't have until the end. Right. And then it was just like, watching her collapse as or not even clicked wasn't a collapse. It was a, like a breaking free, a release? Yeah, it was a release. Yeah, is just so good. So I, you know, film directors out there. Take a look at Margarita, kind of, she's great.

J

Jen Myers 17:15

I know, and she does have to kind of carry the the major change in the film, right. So like, as Natalia is on her own journey of kind of, you know, discovering things, but like you said, the big change happens with Carmen, who at the very beginning of the film is yet complete denial. And then she gets, you know, has to start facing and working through her own grief and anger at her husband in the and then you're coming to terms with also what he's done. And she's the

one who makes the big change throughout the film, which is what like, again, you know, that's kind of not only what releases her but releases all the other women in there, too. It's like she ends up saving them all.

J Jessi Chartier 17:59

Yeah, that's a great way to put it. Yeah.

J Jen Myers 18:01

Yeah. Which it's a really good thing to see. Because she's not a particularly pleasant character earlier in the film, you know, like, you can tell from the very beginning that like, oh, yeah, she's wrong about this, you know, she it's just denial, you know, it's just survival, you know, that, like, she's not she, she's, yeah, she says these horrible things about the woman who testified about being gang raped, you know, and she calls them liars and whores. And, you know, it's like, even though you see it's denial at the same time that doesn't justify it. Like it's a horrible thing that she does horrible things in the beginning. And so you know, it's about her redeeming her own self by having to face what she's been denying all this time. But yeah, and the act of doing that she's able to help out her the rest of her family, which is really lovely.

J Jessi Chartier 18:48

Yeah, she just has like these beautiful moments where like, thematically are just so powerful in the film like for example, Enrique the the general ends up kind of sleepwalking but not really he's like drawn to Alma and there's a scene where he enters into the the quarters where her and I forgotten her name already to be honest.

J Jen Myers 19:14

Valeriana.

J Jessi Chartier 19:15

Thank you, Valeriana, are sleeping and he enters into the bathroom where Alma is washing her clothes and so she's naked. And there's this like very surreal obviously she's been drawing him there. But then like, immediately switches to like, what are you doing here? Like, why are you here getting me out? Stop harassing me. Bla bla bla bla, right. Yeah. And Carmen swoops in. And to save the day. Her. She comes in and she says, the dress or the the Maya outfit you're wearing is too tight, put on your regular clothes. And she uses a different phrase, but that basically is saying to Alma che edit the Western idea and return and don your your it's not native but like don your own clothes Yeah, your own clothes right like disregard this stuff. And it was just such a beautiful thematic thing that happened that it and the way it was delivered was just so brilliant because Carmen's character. It's clear that Carmen's like you need to wear baggy or stuff, so don't wear the maid's outfit. Like, it's very, like, delivered that way. But it's

like subconsciously, I don't know if that was purposefully in the script. I think it was a beautiful thematic thing. If it was, it was just like, yes, yes. Disregard. Don't, don't be westernized. Like own who you are.

J Jen Myers 20:44

Oh, but I see your point there. Because you're right, though, that like her first. Her action is her old reflex of blaming this woman, right? She's like, right, it's your fault, because you're too sexy. Like that. But it's also like before that, wow, like, how dare you. But it's also like you see like right before then. So when it's still the night before you see her and her daughter Natalia and granddaughter Sarah are all like, huddled together on the steps. It's actually very tender. And it is Carmen starts to break down a little bit there. And she's, you know, revealing the pain or she's like, he's always done this. He's always been after other women like this. And you start to see it's not angry. It's really sorrowful, you get to see like the pain it has caused her all this time. And so then later in the morning, it's a little bit of her saving face. Oh, and Natalia is very, Natalia apologizes, and she said this, she goes when they both go to Alma. But Natalia says this will never happen again, you know that this will not happen again. She's like, apologetic, she's trying to make sure Alma feels safe, that she knows this isn't gonna happen. And then Carmen comes in is like, you got to dress different. And so yeah, the first inclination is like, that's this old reflex of it's your fault. I'm blaming you, you change it, but I liked it, I don't think you're wrong, that there could be something else underneath the surface where it's like, you know, going, lets you know, or giving her permission, almost permission to go back to who she is, and not be in this this one mold. And it's really like the connection the way. So Carmen is already having those dreams. Because all I think almost giving her those dreams, right. So I think that what you're saying here is you're pointing out that there is some some kind of maybe subconscious connection between the two women. Maybe that's something Alma is deliberately doing to open Carmen up. And that Yeah, so I think it's interesting on the surface, it sounds like it's old Carmen giving orders like that. But I think you might be right, the underneath, there's this connection growing the connection between the two of them. And it's because whenever we see what happened to Alma, we see it with Carmen in that place.

J Jessi Chartier 23:01

Mm hmm. Yeah. Because, you know, they're wealthy in a family. There, there could have been many other options, like, wear a different outfit. Let me buy you something different. But she doesn't do any of that. She says, wear what you brought you. And I just thought I just thought that was really kind of cool.

J Jen Myers 23:18

You know, the only thing I want to kind of want to mention, if we want to kind of start maybe wrapping this up is that, you know, I just wanted to mention, too, when we're talking about the original story, like you said, there are common elements and all the different versions of the story. And I think the only other common element is that in I think it's kind of they're all triggered by a man mistreating a woman who trusts him and I think that that's another thing that this film really fix on that point and say like well, let's let's turn the legend to focus on punishing the man then, not the women or the children who are hurt by him. And I think that's

what this film did does. And then we mentioned how low La Llorona is fixated on Enrique but what's Enrique is dispatched we see at the very end I saw his funeral right? There's another military man I don't know if it's another general whatever, at his funeral goes into the bathroom and then the bathroom begins to be flooded. And so you see that okay, she's she's on to another one. And he hears the woman wailing as the water builds up in the bathroom. And I think it's a really Yeah, it's really clever to be like, Okay, so all like he's taking care of the Enrique is taking care of the women that have you know, suffered with the consequences of his actions have been released, she almost didn't go after them while you're gonna basically release them and let them go. And now she's on to another man, which is where, you know, the revenge really needs to be trained, and it's a really elegant way of bringing the myth into the storylines, I think.

J Jessi Chartier 24:55

I think so too. That was great. And my my final thought is that one The pieces the bits of business that I really liked to drive home, the pain of Carmen was that Enrique was starting to suffer onset Alzheimer's or dementia, which means that he probably doesn't remember the pain that he caused all of these people. And there is almost like a sad lack of justice there because there can't be remorse. Right and you and so like Carmen's reaction at the end of killing him is, again, it goes back to that sense of release. Like, I don't I can't explain it any other way.

J Jen Myers 25:39

There's a sense that yeah, there's a sense of justice in the way that the only justice that's possible in the situation, and it is like, yeah, that's what La Llorona is bringing about, and the only way that she can, which is that so yeah, even though it's obviously a dark, sad story, this particular film, it feels like it is working through all of these different issues, the, you know, the reality that the horrible history in with this legend, to try to reach some sort of emotional, you know, catharsis and justice in the only way possible, which is, you know, basically, not only is that what we do with film, it's what we do with stories, right? And I think that's why this film works so well with, you know, using this mythology, because that's kind of what mythology is for, and folklore is for, is to find a way to reconcile all these these and messy things in human the human world. We have to make sense of them and try to get justice the only way you can. And that's what we do with stories.


J Jessi Chartier 26:43

That's exactly right. And in the next story that we talk about, there's a whole different taking that idea of justice and turning it on its head. So we're gonna continue this conversation of all of this in our next, our next podcast, which is going to be about the medium. And we're looking forward to seeing you there any final thoughts on La Llorona?


J Jen Myers 27:04

I think we covered it all, this is, other than just like, go watch this movie, this one flew under the radar. And I think that it's I think maybe because it's a very, very, it's not a horror movie


the road. And I think that it's I think maybe because it's a very, very, it's not a horror movie. It's not an art house movie. It's like squarely in between the two, which frankly, I think works out perfectly for us, because that's our sweet spot, right? So I think there's a reason that the two of us were like, yes, this, but I get the feeling that it was too horrific for the arthouse crowd and not horrific enough for the horror crowd. So but I feel like if you appreciate things in that intersection, or you're willing to stretch yourself one way or the other, I think that you would really enjoy this film, and I think it should get more attention.

 Jessi Chartier 27:44

100% I agree. Go watch it, my friends. All right. Well, if people want to find out more about as Jen, where do they go?

 Jen Myers 27:51

We have a website at quietlittlehorror.com and that's got all of our episodes, streaming and links to where you can find us on different podcast providers. And you can also follow us on Twitter at [quiethorror](https://twitter.com/quiethorror) and on Instagram at [quietlittlehorror](https://www.instagram.com/quietlittlehorror). And you can send us email at hello@quietlittlehorror.com

 Jessi Chartier 28:11

Thanks for joining everyone. See you next time. Bye