

QLH-S3E5: Gretel & Hansel

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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. Let's talk about Gretel and Hansel,

J Jen Myers 00:21

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.

J Jessi Chartier 00:38

After being kicked out from home, Gretel and her younger brother Hansel, go off to seek refuge with the local lumberjacks. However, on their travels, they encounter a lonely older woman who befriends them, giving them a safe place to stay and a sense of belonging. But as Gretel comes of age, the intentions of the older women start to show through. Alright, so we're talking about fairy tales this month, and we talked about Company of Wolves, which is Little Red Riding Hood. Now we get to dive into Gretel and Hansel or Hansel and Gretel?

J Jen Myers 01:13

The film is specifically Gretel and Hansel which makes sense as we get into the film. I think there's a reason for that.

J Jessi Chartier 01:19

Agreed. I was just gonna say there's there's purpose for that madness. And I did not know how I was gonna like this film. I remember seeing previews of it, and thinking, oh, good Lord, just

another fairy tale movie. But I was pleasantly surprised.

J Jen Myers 01:35

Oh, I have such strong feelings about how poorly this film was marketed and supported.

J Jessi Chartier 01:42

Do do tell Jen

J Jen Myers 01:43

Well, I mean, here's so and I'll give you a little bit of a background on this. So this is directed by Oz Perkins. And I was a big fan of his two earlier movies, which he directed *The Blackcoat's Daughter*, and *I Am the Pretty Thing that Lives in the House*, which are both very, like, you know, kind of kind of niche quiet atmospheric horror movies, if you love them, you love them. If you don't, you probably hate him, you know, it's the those type of things, I love them. So. And as we talked about in our mini, I love fairy tale stories as well. So I was like, all in on this film, but it got dumped at the end of January, a couple years ago, it was one of those things where I think a lot of studios if they have a horror movie that doesn't quite like land the way they want it to they dump it in January, right. And this was one of those. But, you know, I was like, I'm gonna go see it anyway, because I like this. And I loved it. And I was like, this is such a shame that they didn't take more time to find the audience for this, because there is an audience for this. You know, we talked about this again, in the mini, but this is another film that is a coming of age story of a girl and has a lot of like the kind of, you know, darkness and depth that those transitions sometimes have. It's totally in the form of this fairy tale. And I don't feel like anybody who marketed it had any idea what this film was really about. Because if you would have aimed this at, you know, the weird teenage girls, or the weird grown women, or you know, anybody kind of in the orbits of those, I feel like they could have made this more successful. But I don't think they understood what it was really about. That's my feeling anyway.

J Jessi Chartier 03:29

Yeah, I agree. I agree. I think that one of the things that I liked that they did with this is that they gave agency to the children. I think in every other rendition of the storyline, it's always been the children have always been very passive. And here, they're very active in their own destiny type of thing. Like they have choices. They can choose where to stay, where to go. And I agree with you, I think that they marketed it as just another retelling of a fairy tale but just darker. And I think that they that missed the point, the whole this I mean, the the the stated horror versus subtext is not very subtext, right? Like, it's very, the witches evil, she's eating children, but there's this undertone of coming of age with Gretel. And I think that's goes back to why they called it *Gretel and Hansel*, not *Hansel and Gretel* is they gave Gretel the agency here. And she is the maternal figure who has to look out for herself and her younger brother, and she looks out for the witch. And as she's coming of age, she kind of has to make a choice of what type of woman is she going to be? Right? You know, and it unfortunately kind of plays into the the, not the hag horror, but just like the stereotype of childless women are, something's

wrong with them. Something is off and they are evil of nature. They are ugly, they are all of these other things. And so I kind of as someone who chose not to have kids, that is very much something I saw where it was like, well, the the woman, the storyline of the witches, she had children and killed them and ate them in order to have the power of the devil, right? That's a very common theme, you get your power through, not through eating your children or not having children. And Gretel is kind of forced to make that same choice of what is she going to do? How is she going to use her power as she has come of age and she can use it for good or for bad. And then it's reinforced at the end when she sends Hansel off to be with the lumberjacks where she's like, Go forth, be and she thinks she's setting him free. But it's really emphasizing the idea that if you choose not to have children or be a caretaker, that you're going to become evil, because then she gets the the ink on her fingers, the black and fingers. And it was just like, Oh, come on?

J Jen Myers 05:58

Well, I mean, I think that what it's trying to do is not exactly reckoned with, but I don't know, I think I think just kind of work with the elements of as you grow up your decision, like, because I saw this also just like she's decides to be independent. And there are costs for that. I think that's what it really is. It's just kind of like, there, there are there are prices for and consequences for decisions one way or the other. And so she doesn't take evil actions at the end, like she chooses to not do that. But the fact that she chooses to use she chose to use that power. And to, you know, remain on her own in the woods means that she she did he use that power. And so she has to kind of deal with it. It's it's a mixed message, I think, but I kind of like it because I mean, what is more of a, you know, mixed bag than growing up?

J Jessi Chartier 07:05

You know, totally, totally, it's

J Jen Myers 07:06

like, there's always there's always something I guess,

J Jessi Chartier 07:09

yeah, I do like the message that, you know, one right action doesn't make everything right, the threat, another threat, but it's the choices will always be in front of you. You can't just make one good choice and be done. You can't just make one bad choice and be done you constantly it's a recurring thing. And so like the threat of it is always there, which I found very interesting.

J Jen Myers 07:34

Yeah, definitely. Especially because I think that is very against the grain of what we have made fairy tales into. Like it's it's a direct challenge to the idea of happily ever after. Its which, again, something else we talked about in the mini is that fairy tales didn't start out as these light

happily ever after stories, they started out a lot darker, and we made them lighter over the years and you know, easier to swallow and more comfortable and more in line with the social mores of the day. But they didn't like essentially start that way. And so I think the way this does not have a happy ending, I mean, the whole thing is, is very much in the face of simplicity and comfort and you know, kind of having a nice tidy story. And so I think that at the end, I like that you pull that out as the interesting thing, because I think it's very much like you don't just do one good deed and now happily ever after. And everything was great. There are complexities and consequences to things like that, which erases is a really interesting thing in the context of a story like this.

J Jessi Chartier 08:45

And what I mean, we're talking about the fairy tales, and the last the mini talked about was Company of Wolves. The what I like better about Hansel and Gretel and Hansel is that there is that level of complexity company of wolves was more dreamlike. And very focused on the external threats and alluring nature of that, which is always very, that is a subtext we didn't talk about in the last one is the real story of Little Red Riding Hood in the wolf is not about a wolf eating the grandmother. It's the arousal of sexuality within Little Red Riding Hood. And having that sense of danger and excitement, kind of with that. That's that's a lot of the subtexts and so the story of Little Red Riding Hood in regards to coming of age is very sexual in nature. It's very Yeah, this was very sexual in nature. You have the red, literally the Red Hood, you know, menstruation, you have the maiden hood, right, like or the Maidenhead and all of those things. And then you have this wolf that's coming to threaten that and penetrate it and all that other stuff. But here, there is the physicality, like she has her period. So there's the physicality of coming of age, but it's the sexual nature of it takes a backseat, which I think is was really refreshing because it's, it was just nice to see this path of what do I want my future to look like, with not having to be dependent upon a relationship with a man?

J Jen Myers 10:19

Yeah, no, this is a, honestly and again, something else we talked about in the mini was how we, as a society, don't have a lot of women focus coming of age stories for various reasons. But also this this is, this really is a coming of age. That's what this really is more so than a fairy tale retelling more so than a horror movie. Like, it's a very conceptual story of a girl. Yeah, determining what kind of woman she's going to be in a very real sense. And it's not like anything that she is being, you know, drawn into, or learned into, or even being pushed by her own urges. It's It's almost kind of not exactly intellectual, but more of a thoughtful value journey of her determining, yeah, who she really wants to be, what kind of person she wants to be. And also like, again, when we talked about that doesn't necessarily have an easy answer, either, which is part of it, which I think is really great. So she's going through a journey of trying to figure out what she really wants to be and then what is actually possible in the world, it's not that she can magically decide that she wants to be a certain type of person, certain type of woman. And then that just happens, because that's not how the world works, either. So it's a very conceptual mature consideration of what it means to grow up and figure these things out, basically.

J Jessi Chartier 11:49

Yeah, and I love the complexity of that, and we keep talking about it. But let's talk about some of the tangibles around that. Like, one of the things that she learns while she's at the with the witch or the older woman, she learns basic medicine, she learns basic homeopathic care at the time, she learns how to read, she learns how to write like she learns these really valuable skills that were often only reserved for men. They, at least in that society, right, like, let's paint the picture, paint the picture, but even her little brother can't read. So she's given all of this huge opportunity. And you can see, I take that back. I take back the comment that I said that it doesn't have anything to do with sexuality. It does the opening scene has everything to do with it, where she's interviewing for what she thinks is a housemade position in what you clearly pick up pretty fast as a whorehouse is a I'm sorry, not a whorehouse, a house of prostitution, which was a viable, it still is a viable employment for many people. And it was a choice that she was like, I don't want to be a part of this. And she was insulted when the man she was in her who was interviewing her had said you still have your maiden hood. And she came back to her mother and was like, he didn't want a housekeeper and his mother or her mother was very insulted that she was rude to this man.

J Jen Myers 13:14


Yeah, I actually interpret that more just as he just wanted to take advantage of a maid. And just was like really clear about that from the beginning. That that was what he wanted to do. But yeah, you're right. She's like, Yeah, that's not really for me.

J Jessi Chartier 13:29

Right, exactly. Can we? So here's another thing that I never really understood. So she gets kicked out of the house. Because her mother cannot feed them anymore. But I feel like is that it? I feel like I missed something when watching with this.

J Jen Myers 13:44


I mean, I think I just like I interpreted that. The I mean, what we just described was, I think the inciting incident. Yeah, I think it's something that like her her mother. So in this in this version of the story, their father's dead, and their mother just I guess they don't have money for food. And so when Gretel turns down that job, I think her mom can like, blame her about it, then just like, oh, well, look, we if you're not willing to work, then, you know, get out of here, that sort of thing. So but I think that's pretty much it. I don't you know, obviously, like, this was where we can compare it to the original versions of the story, which is that the, the father remarries, and the stepmother doesn't want to take care of these children anymore, basically, and forces the father to take them out to the forest and abandon them. So I think this is just kind of working with the original versions of the tale, but I think, you know, it kind of goes back to an initial which was probably very much reality in earlier times, or he just literally cannot provide for all the mouths you have to feed. And I don't know I don't think a lot of people necessarily just cast their children out in the forest in that sense, but that's what their mother appears to do is basically just like, yeah, if you then again, I think that the whole deal with the housekeeping job means that she can turn that on Gretel. And be like, Well, okay, fine. If you don't want to work, then you have to leave. So it's like her excuse.

 Jessi Chartier 15:19


I have to rewatch the beginning, because I got the impression when I was first watching it, that she kicked her and her brother out, not only because she wouldn't work, but because she was afraid that she would eat them.

 Jen Myers 15:32


Oh, interesting. The only other thing that I remember picking up on is that I think they also imply that Gretel has these kind of witch-like abilities from the beginning. So I think there's also a sense of, I think, I thought the mother was a little afraid of Gretel's potential. But I mean, these are not mutually exclusive, either. So it could be that it could be her brother recognized the same thing. And her, you know, it's probably kind of a mix of those things.

 Jessi Chartier 16:02


Yeah, I want to go back now I gotta go back and watch the beginning. Because now that we're talking about it, I really remember there, I got the impression that there was a sense of like, you have to leave now are going to kill you. Because I'm that hungry?

 Jen Myers 16:14

That could be I actually don't remember specifically, but it has been a minute since I watched that scene.

 Jessi Chartier 16:19

So to go back. Alright, listeners go and let us know in the comments. I really every day, you know, the more I watched this, can we also talk about this as compared to Robert Eggers, The Witch

 Jen Myers 16:34

There's a lot of connections there. Yeah


 Jessi Chartier 16:39

I think that there were Yes, there was just so much so much in regards to that coming of age piece. Eggers was I don't want to say more subtle because it wasn't but but it was like they were. Explain it.

 Jen Myers 16:56

 Jen Myers 16:50


I know what you're saying though. Yeah, I don't know if maybe subtle is not the right word. But I can't come up with another one either. I think that this film, Gretel, and Hansel is a little bit because it's dealing with a fairy tale. I think it is a little bit more about metaphor, and symbolism and how it's using those metaphors and symbols where I feel like the witch kind of subsumed everything.

 Jessi Chartier 17:21

That's a really good point. Yeah, this one is much more metaphor based, and the much more subtext.

 Jen Myers 17:26


Exactly. And that's what I noticed. And we talked, obviously, if, if any listeners are new here, we talked about The Witch and our very first episode, so I feel like The Witch does not necessarily get treated as a coming of age film, even though I am completely convinced that it is a coming of age. I don't think that that's something I think there are things that are so subtle in The Witch that even people who enjoy that movie, maybe don't quite see that or they see it from a different perspective. But ya know, the the which is the the spiritual sister of Gretel and Hansel.

 Jessi Chartier 18:05

Mm hmm. I mean, they both got younger brothers who are very connected with them. The with the older women in their family are very threatened by them. Yeah, there's just it's so interesting that the coming of age in fairy tales, and just in general often comes with a sense of being evil, right? Like you look at Carrie, Carrie is a great example. Because Carrie is also Firestarter is also a coming of age story it is. And it's kind of the same thing. It's that sense of bewilderment, and external and internal threat all happening at once.

 Jen Myers 18:44

Well, and it's in this is something else that we got into a little bit in the mini but it we've talked about how it's interesting that these type of stories that have a girl at the center, tend to all be in the realm of horror. Because there's this I think there's a sense in society that when girls mature, and come into their own power, so to speak, in many different ways. That's not something that societies has ever really been super cool with. Especially, I mean, to put it lightly right, and especially like the, the Western, American societies that we're in now, like you, they everybody did everything they possibly could to tamp that down, like there are all the rules, all of the standards, all of that you can't do this, you can only do this is all to contain women as they grow up because it's scary and threatening. And you know, we have to keep everything in this box. And so the only way that we've been that's why it lends itself so well to war, because we're like terrified of women coming of age, basically and coming into their powers,



J Jessi Chartier 20:03

Absolutely a great example. So I mean, it's one of the reasons that there was, it's one of the reasons that marriage laws for so long allowed younger women to be married than men, women had a different marriage age than men did is because you wanted to marry them before they kind of had that they're at their own agency, you wanted to break that spirit before they got it.

J Jen Myers 20:28

Train them up in the way you want them to be.

J Jessi Chartier 20:30

Trained them up in the way you want them to be. Exactly, but and I think that that's where like, I for me, that's why horror and sci fi are so fascinating because both of those genres Don't, don't buy into that. Alien is the perfect example of that of a main character, who is female, who has her own agency, who knows what she wants, and is able to get it and is strong. And I just, there's, we could do a whole episode on the maternalism and feminism of alien. Like, I could go into that.

J Jen Myers 21:02

Or maybe we could do a quick side note on some Yeah, another film that I like to pull into this. So there's a film, this is not a great film, let me just say this straight up. This is there's a film that they made, which is clearly a Carrie rip off. It was made like a year after I think it was released literally a year after Carrie. And I came across this because it's called Jennifer, which is my name. And I'm like, I Okay, I want to check this out. It was it. You know, it's just like weird. And I love weird 70 horror movies, right? So I saw this movie. And it's not a great movie, like I said, but one of the things that I really loved about it was that I'm sorry, spoiler alert. But again, it's not a great movie. So it's okay. So I mean, it is very, very light carry in the sense that there's this girl, she's from West Virginia, and she's in this fancy boarding school, and everybody's picking on her all the time, right. And she has this kind of religious background. You see in flashbacks, she used to handle snakes. And she actually has a psychic connection, and she can like, control snakes, basically. But then there was this incident that happened. And so she and her father had to like flee and now they're no longer there. And now she's in this fancy boarding school and getting picked on all the time and everything and you know, slowly configuring out or trying to figure out what she can do with her powers of controlling snakes. And it kind of culminates in this very kind of tense the, the people picking on her basically are like, I don't know if they're actually gonna try to kill her. But they're, they basically go after her. And she just like, loses it. And guess what, it's not very clear what happens, but because of the power of snakes, she like, kills a couple of them. But at the end of the movie, like she goes into the head office, and the headmistress of the school is basically like, I know you did this, but I can't prove it. And Jennifer, the character has just totally changed from this, this quiet, shy girl the whole time. She's just like, totally like, Yeah, I know, you can't prove it, and I'm good. And then she, she, at the end, she just walks out of there. You hear the headmistress screaming because they're snakes in her drawer, and takes a hand of this, this other girl who was just part of the gang, but she had been mistreated, and they just like, skip off laughing. And that's the

end of the movie. And I'm like, That's awesome. Yeah, that is awesome. Isn't it? Awesome? Like, the whole moral of the movie? Is that okay? This, this young girl figured out that she has this destructive powers, she used her powers to destroy the people who were hurting her. And now she's gonna go off and live her life. And this, that's fantastic. And I'm like, this is the best ending of a movie ever. I'm so I'm so thrilled with this. But it was also like, one of the things that really made me feel like I was like, I never I don't remember seeing that Carrie doesn't end like that, you know, most of these stories, they end on these really, you have to have something at the end to kind of like bring it back to status quo, right? It's like, oh, yeah, she's got power, but she's been punished for it. And the thing that I loved about this, this weird, not super great, or rip off of Carrie, was the fact that in the end, they're like, there is no comeuppance she just like she fully came into her powers. And now she gets to go live her life of that and like, that's really awesome. And I wish that happened more often.

J Jessi Chartier 24:23

I agree. That's great. That's that's a happy ending film, you know, right.

J Jen Myers 24:28

And I know that's a little bit of a departure from we're talking about, but just to kind of bring that into the discussion and this movie Gretel, and Hansel like we said, does not have a happy ending. It's it's very complex and ambiguous, and there's it's not somber, exactly, but it also doesn't have the same type of carry of like, well, now she's, you know, clearly the villain here doesn't have that either.

J Jessi Chartier 24:51

No, no, no. Yeah, you don't know it's left ambiguous and it's really left up to Gretel. Like what her fate is, is really left up to her. And that's what I really like about it is there is that sense of agency. And that is true is like when you have choices, you, you are the one that makes those choices. That's true for for men and women. You know, it's a, it's just it's, I do really enjoy, I enjoyed the ending in a certain light. And it also just kind of I, I wish it wouldn't have been as dark as it as it kind of came across. I think they could have done it in a way that was a little bit more ambiguous and less threatening, but it's fine. It's fine.

J Jen Myers 25:38

Yeah, I get that. Well, and I think also, though, we haven't really talked about this. But if we talk about the film as a whole, it's a very dark movie, that I mean, both literally, physically, and conceptually, but it also is a very, this is a really stylized very artistic film. And so I think that it also it's, this is a lot weirder of a film that I think a lot of people know or understand. And I say that in a good way. I think by this point, people realize when I say weird, it's a it's a positive thing. But I think but it is also like, I think one of the reasons nothing in this film is necessarily going to be simple. So you know, everything is designed and set up in a way for it to be like its own particular thing. And it's sometimes striking, but it's not beautiful. And it's sometimes touching, but it's not, you know, happy. It's just this, it's its own unique thing all over, like

visually narratively, in terms of the characters and everything, at least how I feel. And I feel like the ending kind of is in keeping with our it's just, it's very much its own thing. And it's it's not really any other one thing, right, which is probably one of the reasons that this film didn't really become a huge popularity thing. It didn't become hugely successful, because it's the type of film that is so carefully not compromised, that I don't think it could appeal to a large amount of people, it's going to find its audience. So I think eventually,

J Jessi Chartier 27:14

I think so too. I mean, I kind of it feels the, the tone. And the atmosphere of it reminded me a lot of his earlier movie, the black coats daughter in regards to that, like the lighting is very used in very similar ways. But it's more rich in Hansel and Gretel, or Gretel. And Hansel, I always get it wrong and his freedom within the fairytale, he uses that to create these really cool set designs. In a way that wasn't possible for a Blackcoat's Daughter, or frankly, the Company of Wolves.

J Jen Myers 27:45

I think that I would have loved if Company of Wolves have been made in a time when they could really go to this extent with it. Because I don't know. I just really dig it basically.

J Jessi Chartier 27:55

Yeah, I think I agree. I am excited to see what he comes up with next. I like that we did this after the folk tales or the folk horrors as well. Like, I think that this this did a really nice job of kind of like playing off of that because you know, fairy tales are a form of folklore. Right? So it is it was absolutely just wonderful. Well, if people so if you for those of you out there that watch this, there's always the we talked a little bit about this in the mini episode, too. But we've been talking a lot about how both company of wolves and Gretel and Hansel were fairy tales, but also coming of age for women. I, if you know, of a horror film out there, that's the coming of age of men. I'd love to see it. Hmm. Like the male equivalent of coming of age, the female coming of age almost always deals with some kind of menstruation some kind of extra power of agents, but I'm kind of curious to see if there's a co innovation in the male side of things. Yeah, that's

J Jen Myers 29:02

a good question. I think that there's some elements of that in a lot of films that deal with kind of transformations, vampires, werewolves, things like that. But I'm not sure if I can think of off the top of my head one we're really makes it front and center a coming of age metaphor like this film does. So that's something we can think about some more,

J Jessi Chartier 29:21

we'll have to look into it. Well, I know that if people liked this film, I'm going to recommend Blackcoat's Daughter and the witch I think that those are two that will do. Do you really

Blackcoat's Daughter and the Witch I think that those are two that will do do you nicely.

J Jen Myers 29:29

Definitely. And I would throw in director Oz Perkins's other film before this, I Am the Pretty Thing that Lives in the House is that once again, you have to really be into this atmospheric horror because that's a way on the fringes of that so you know, be be forewarned that if that's not your thing, you may not be into this. I mean, I think also like we mentioned, if you are into this film's themes then and you haven't seen Carrie for some reason, you should probably go watch Carrie and related to that I wanted to throw in Ginger Snaps which is a film I'm, I've like very, very much. And let's

J Jessi Chartier 30:03

just say you've mentioned Ginger Snaps,

J Jen Myers 30:06

Ginger Snaps, so, so much. And I also because I think that it did get, it's another one that got overlooked at the time it was made like 2000, where it came out as a Canadian film for anybody who's not familiar. And it is very much a it's about two sisters, and one of them hits puberty and turns into a werewolf. And but it's not only about her transformation, but the relationship between the sisters. I love it. I love that film. It's a great film that is kind of like a you know, it's not necessarily an art film, like some of the other films we might be talking about. It's a little bit more of a straightforward horror movie, but it has that at its center. And I just love it. So if you've never seen Ginger Snaps you should definitely go see Ginger Snaps

J Jessi Chartier 30:49

Awesome. Yeah, that's definitely one that's on my watch list for sure. Well, I'm really glad everybody joined us for these fairies Hill conversations. If people want to find more about us, Jen, where can they go?

J Jen Myers 31:03

We have a website at quietlittlehorror.com and we have all of our episodes there streaming and the links to where you can find us on other podcast providers. I also just as a note, recently added transcripts for every episode. So if that's something that yeah, you you want, they are there now for all the old episodes. And of course, we'll be adding them for every new episode that we publish as well. You can also find us on social media. We're on Twitter at [quiethorror](https://twitter.com/quiethorror) and on Instagram at [quietlittlehorror](https://www.instagram.com/quietlittlehorror). And if you want to email us, you can send us an email at hello@quietlittlehorror.com

J Jessi Chartier 31:38



Awesome. Thanks for joining everybody. We will see you next time. Bye