

00:00:00	Music	Transition	“Switchblade Comb” by Mobius VanChocStraw. A jaunty, jazzy tune reminiscent of the opening theme of a movie. Music continues at a lower volume as April introduces herself and her guest, and then it fades out.
00:00:08	Katie Walsh	Host	<p>Hello, and welcome to <i>Switchblade Sisters</i>, the podcast where women get together to slice and dice our favorite action and genre films.</p> <p>Every week here on the podcast, we invite a new female filmmaker. A writer, director, actor, or producer, and we talk—in depth—about their favorite genre film. Maybe one that’s influenced their own work.</p> <p>I’m film critic Katie Walsh, and today we have playwright, screenwriter, and showrunner, Mary Laws.</p>
00:00:30	Mary Laws	Guest	Hello!
00:00:31	Katie	Host	Hello, Mary, and thank you for being here.
00:00:33	Mary	Guest	I’m so glad to be here. This is a really cool podcast. I love women talking about films and talking about genre. That’s all I ever wanna do. <i>[Laughs.]</i>
00:00:43	Katie	Host	<p>I know, same here.</p> <p>So, a little bit about Mary. She is a Texas native, a screenwriter, producer, and playwright based in Los Angeles. She has a Masters in playwriting from the Yale School of Drama, and honestly a resume to die for.</p> <p>She co-wrote <i>The Neon Demon</i> with Nicholas Winding Refn and Polly Stenham. She’s also served as a writer and producer on AMC’s <i>Preacher</i>, and HBO’s Emmy-winning <i>Succession</i>. Folks, she wrote “Dundee.” Yes, that’s the episode where Kendall raps, “L to the OG.”</p> <p><i>[Both laugh.]</i></p> <p>I—honestly, I could do the whole podcast about that episode. Next time, next time.</p> <p>She’s also the creator, showrunner, and executive producer of <i>Monsterland</i>, an 8-part anthology series premiering on Hulu on October second, based on the book <i>North American Lake Monsters: Stories</i> by Nathan Ballingrud. I’ve seen a couple episodes, and it’s so good. I am obsessed with the writers and directors that you got to do this series. I mean, it—it is like—it is so good.</p> <p>Uh, today, Mary has chosen to discuss the 1965 psychological horror film <i>Repulsion</i>, directed by Roman Polanski and starring Catherine Deneuve. So, Mary, why did you choose, uh, <i>Repulsion</i>?</p>

00:02:00 Mary Guest Well, *Repulsion* is one of those movies that, ever since I've seen it, I've never been able to shake, and I think about it like, almost every time I'm starting a new project. And I—it's not really—that's not really an exaggeration. I think about it every time I'm starting a new project.

Because, to me, *Repulsion* is a great reminder that, um, you can bend and break the rules of screenwriting to create something extraordinary that is surprising, um, that will take people on a journey that they didn't know they were gonna go on.

*Repulsion*, like—the thing I—one of the things I love the most about *Repulsion* is the structure. And like, I remember, because I come from, like, a playwriting world, you know, in play writing. I studied under Paula Vogel, for any theatre nerds out there, who, uh love playwrights. Like she's—she's one of like, the finest, in my opinion. Both a playwright and a teacher, and she—she sort of imbues us with this idea that one of your primary tools as a playwright is structure. And that you, you know, what's the, like, expression? I think it's an Edward Albee quote. That con—content and form should fuck, or something like that?

[Both laugh.]

Um, and, like, I feel like that about, like, content and structure, you know? Content and structure, like—your structure should, um, uh—speak to what the story is that you're trying to tell, right?

And, so, you know, as a playwright, that was—it was a very, uh, freeing and just sort of like, open-ended idea that you can tell any kind of story that you feel like you need to tell, in any kind of structure that makes that story the strongest, right? And—and when you—when I sort of transferred as—from a playwright to, um, uh—to a f—a screenwriter, I was like, "Wait, what? There are, like, rules about structure?"

Like, that doesn't make any sense to me. It really doesn't make any sense to me, and it still doesn't. Um, that, you know, you should—like, what's that—what's that book, uh, *Save the Cat* or something like—

00:04:17 Katie Host *Save the Cat*, yes, the classic.

00:04:19 Mary Guest Yeah, like—I mean—I get—I know that learning about what has worked before is definitely important, but to say that there is one way to do things, that every film should have a three-act structure, is like, maddening to me.

Because, like, why—that's—that's just like saying, you know, every—every human being should have brown hair. It's just like, "No, why?" I don't understand that. That doesn't make any sense. No, it—but that is—it's just so maddening to me, because stories are so different, and they—they're so personal, and, like—

So, anyway, what I love about *Repulsion* is—is that it takes you on this almost two-act structured journey, right? There's—Carol, the

protagonist, and like, kind of the first half of the film is her out in the world, and that—and you know something is going on with her, and it's really hard to identify.

She has a—a strange relationship with men, but also in her sort of private, personal moments, she seems to be unravelling. But you see her like, walking—walking the streets, and having dinner with—with the—I can't remember his name but the guy who was trying to, like, court her. And—and—but then, the second half of the film is all internal.

*[Katie affirms.]*

It is all in that apartment, and it is her losing her mind, losing her grasp on reality. And so—and so it really puts—the whole movie puts you inside of her head, but it's because of that two-act structure. It is a hundred percent because of that two-act structure, um, and the way that it just keeps getting more and more and more and more internal.

And I was just like, “This is fucking brilliant.” And—and—I—I think about it every time I'm about to start a new project, because I—I won't do it. I won't subscribe to the idea that like, television is supposed to have a relentlessly forward-moving plot, or films are supposed to have three-act structure, or, “Where's the Dark Night of the soul?” I'm just like, fuck that. That's not original, and that's not interesting to me.

00:06:33 Katie Host

Well, I love that sort of um, I want to say anarchic attitude—  
*[Mary laughs.]*

—towards, uh, traditional structure. Because I do think that you know, there is something to the kinds of genre expectations that we might have in a film or television show, and playing with that. But then I also think, especially in a film like *Repulsion*, just going on this journey and not knowing where it's going to end is—is something so fresh and unique and exciting.

And I think that's what makes it feel—like, to me, I watched this film last night, and I was like, “This feels modern.” It feels totally fresh.

*[Mary affirms.]*

And um, I think that's really remarkable that it can stand the test of time. I mean, it's over fifty years old at this point in time. Um, but I am going to—maybe this is a good time to do a little plot synopsis.

00:07:25 Mary Guest

Great.

00:07:26 Katie Host

And, you know, like we always say here on *Switchblade Sisters*, if you haven't seen *Repulsion*, today's episode will contain spoilers, but that shouldn't stop you from listening before you watch. Like we say, it's not what happens, but how it happens that makes a movie worth watching. Still, if you would like to pause this episode and watch it, now's your chance.

00:07:45	Mary	Guest	<p><i>[Chuckling]</i> I think I may have already—I may have already given a few spoilers though, so maybe—</p> <p><i>[A small dog barks sharply in the background.]</i></p> <p>—you’ve missed your chance. <i>[Laughs.]</i></p>
00:07:51	Music	Music	Score by Chico Hamilton
00:07:52	Katie	Host	<p>No, nothing—nothing too—nothing too um, extreme.</p> <p><i>Repulsion</i> is a 1965 psychological horror film directed by Roman Polanski, co-written by Polanski and Gérard Brach. It is Polanski’s second feature film, and his first English language film, shot in London, and it’s the first installment of his quote-unquote “Apartment Trilogy”, which also includes <i>Rosemary’s Baby</i> and <i>The Tenant</i>. All three are horror films which primarily take place in apartments, as you may have guessed.</p> <p>Catherine Deneuve stars as Carol, a young Belgian manicurist who works in a beauty salon, and lives with her older sister, Helen, played by Yvonne Furneaux. She’s quite shy and reserved, and also quite beautiful, and she’s constantly pestered by men for her attention.</p>
00:08:35	Clip	Clip	<b>Workman:</b> Hello, darling. How about the other, then?
00:08:37	Katie	Host	Especially the persistent Colin.
00:08:39	Clip	Clip	<p><b>Colin:</b> Just a minute. What about tonight?</p> <p><b>Carol:</b> Sorry, I’m busy tonight.</p> <p><b>Colin:</b> You really make me feel wanted. Who’s the lucky boy?</p> <p><b>Carol:</b> I’m having dinner with my sister.</p> <p><b>Colin:</b> She a good cook?</p>
00:08:55	Katie	Host	<p>So annoying. I hate Colin. <i>[Laughs.]</i></p> <p>Played by Ian Hendry. She’s also quite disturbed by—</p>
00:09:02	Mary	Guest	He’s supposed to be like, the good guy, too.
00:09:03	Katie	Host	<p>I know! I can’t stand him.</p> <p><i>[Both laugh incredulously.]</i></p> <p>She’s also quite disturbed by the affair her sister is carrying on with Michael, a married Englishman, and especially how he invades his—invades <u>her</u> space.</p>
00:09:17	Clip	Clip	<p><b>Carol:</b> Is he going to stay here every night?</p> <p><b>Helen:</b> I really don’t think it’s any concern of yours.</p>
00:09:22	Katie	Host	His razor and toothbrush are always in her cup, and she constantly

has to hear their lovemaking at night.

When Helen and Michael take off for a holiday, Carol becomes more and more withdrawn, distant, and isolated. She's sent home from work and misses three days initially.

At the apartment, she wanders around, distracted by the invasiveness of Michael's personal items, and tormented by the phone, as Colin and the landlord won't stop calling.

00:09:44	Clip	Clip	<p><i>[Phone rings twice, and then is picked up.]</i></p> <p><b>Carol:</b> Hello?</p> <p><b>Landlord:</b> Miss Ledoux?</p> <p><b>Carol:</b> Yes?</p> <p><b>Landlord:</b> How much longer are you going to keep me waiting for the rent?</p>
00:09:53	Katie	Host	<p>She experiences terrifying nightmares. Oh, also there's like, another creeper calling on the phone.</p> <p><i>[Mary affirms.]</i></p> <p>Doing some hang-ups. She experiences terrifying nightmares in which an unknown rapist attacks her in bed, and she hallucinates the walls cracking, and hands reaching out to grab her in the hallway.</p> <p>When Colin arrives at her door and bursts into the apartment—</p>
00:10:14	Clip	Clip	<p><b>Colin:</b> I'm sorry. I just had to see you, that's all. <i>[Sighs]</i> Honestly, it's been so—so miserable without you.</p>
00:10:22	Katie	Host	<p>—she bops him on the head with a candlestick, and leaves his body in the tub.</p>
00:10:26	Clip	Clip	<p><i>[Colin grunting after getting hit in the head.]</i></p>
00:10:27	Katie	Host	<p>When the landlord shows up looking to collect some rent, he propositions and then attacks.</p>
00:10:32	Clip	Clip	<p><i>[Rhythmic ringing sound plays continuously in the background.]</i></p> <p><b>Landlord:</b> You look after me, and you can forget about the rent.</p>
00:10:39	Katie	Host	<p>And she stabs him to death with a straight razor, leaving the apartment strewn with the dead bodies of her would-be suitor, the landlord, and, of course, the rotten rabbit corpse, which she has left out for days.</p> <p>When Helen and Michael return, they come upon the gorey scene, and find a catatonic Carol under the bed, and they gently take her away.</p>

And as the film ends, the camera zooms in on a photo we've seen already of Carol as a child, and we don't quite understand what it means. Very ambiguous. Um, but people have speculated that perhaps it means that she has some childhood trauma, and that is what is leading to her psychosis.

The other thing that we need to discuss, obviously, is that Roman Polanski is a very bad man. *[Laughs]* We are not going to skirt the issue of it, and the violent sexual crimes against young girls and women which he's been accused and convicted.

Um, and, you know, this isn't like, a—I don't intend to sort of like, land on a right or wrong answer here. It just—how can we sort of tangle with this idea of this man who has been accused of very bad crimes, who has done bad things to young women. He has assaulted young women, and how do we sort of like, hold that at the same time as loving this movie?

And the interesting thing I think about Polanski is that, I think women who are cinophiles and who are genre fans really connect with *Repulsion* and *Rosemary's Baby*, um, and identify with it. And it's this sort of like, brilliant—both are sort of like, brilliant depictions of what it means to be like, mentally tortured and gaslit. And, you know, so how do we, like—how do those things exist at the same time, and how can we kind of work our way through it?

So, I, you know, there's no right or wrong answer here. It's just—just to bring it up and put it on the table.

00:12:40 Mary

Guest

Well, I mean, it's something. You know, my girlfriend and I discuss this all the time, because she's also—like, Roman Polanski is like a huge filmmaker for me that I sort of return to all the time, and uh, Woody Allen is a huge filmmaker for her that she is like, "This is the reason—"

She's also a comedian and screenwriter. And um, she was like, "This is the reason that I got into comedy, because I loved his films so much." Um, she won't watch any. She doesn't watch Woody Allen anymore, and that's sort of been her decision. I *[Through laughter]* watch Roman Polanski all the time, um, because I—uh—*[She breaks off, sighing.]*

Because they're formative for me. They're really important to me. Um, and so for whatever reason, I have been able to separate art from the artist. I'm not terribly interested in seeing any of anything he makes now. I'm not terribly interested in watching any of his new work, or celebrating him necessarily. I don't believe that he should be given awards or lauded with uh, you know, any—any—any major awards or events by the industry itself.

Um, uh, but these things have been created, and I think that it's actually um, quite interesting for me to watch them through the lens of knowing exactly who he is and what he has done. Um, and so I don't know. I don't know what any answer is. But that's—and I don't necessarily have like, peace about any of it, but it's certainly an ongoing discussion that—that I have, we have, my partner and I

have in our household.

Um, but you know, *[Sighing]* I can't, like, unsee this movie.

00:14:42 Katie Host

I know.

00:14:43 Mary Guest

Or, or un-unlearn any of the things that I learned from it, because it is truly, in my opinion, a brilliant movie. Um, and it—he also is, especially his early work is, in my opinion, it's genius. And he—he was able to provide in the horror landscape.

Like, this and *Rosemary's Baby* in particular, I think, uh, he was able to give a female protagonist who was not just, you know, running around and being chased by a man with a knife. Um, he—he dug deep into female psyche.

And, I don't know, is that because he is the kind of person he is, or not? I don't really—I don't—I don't have any answers, so uh, and I—uh, yeah, that's all I really have to say about it is just that it's—his films have become a part of me, but it certainly is something that we continue to bring up and question in our house.

00:15:51 Katie Host

I think that's a great answer, because it is, you know, it's this idea of the ongoing discussion, and not skirting the issue. And I agree that both *Repulsion* and *Rosemary's Baby* were very formative for me as well. And like you said, it's like, I can't unsee that, I can't remove the influence that those films had on me. And I'm loathe to sort of give them up.

Um, I saw *Repulsion* when I was maybe in my late teens, early 20s, and I was just like, "Woah, this is this revelatory film for me." Because it was about what it's like to be a young woman in the world—

*[Mary affirms.]*

—and the sort of terror of just being a woman on the street, and—

00:16:36 Mary Guest

Absolutely.

00:16:37 Katie Host

Um, and then the same with *Rosemary's Baby*, is like, I—I—that is—the way that he depicts gaslighting and um, mental manipulation in that, it's like, I almost don't want to get too far into what—what's he thinking, you know? All I can really do is—is, you know, take what I feel from it.

Anyway, I was also going to mention that in episode seven of *Switchblade Sisters*, April also addresses this issue really beautifully with Jessie Nickson-Lopez, who is a writer for *Stranger Things*. They talk about *Rosemary's Baby*. So if you want to get into it more on the Polanski of it all, *[Through laughter]* that's a good little sister episode.

00:17:14 Music Transition

"Switchblade Comb" by Mobius VanChocStraw.

00:17:19 Katie Host

Um, but I think we need to take a quick break, so we will be back in just a moment.

			<i>[Music fades.]</i>
00:17:32	Promo	Promo	<p><i>[Cheering crowd.]</i></p> <p><b>Danielle Radford:</b> Mmmacho man, to the top rope!</p> <p><i>[Thump!]</i></p> <p><b>Danielle:</b> The flying elbow! The cover!</p> <p><i>[Crowd cheering swells.]</i></p> <p><b>Speaker 2:</b> <i>[Distant; impact on each word]</i> One! Two! Three!</p> <p><i>[Ding ding ding!]</i></p> <p><b>Danielle::</b> We've got a new champion!</p> <p><b>Music:</b> Excited, sweeping music.</p> <p><b>Lindsey Kelk:</b> We're here with Macho Man Randy Savage after his big win to become the new world champion! What are you gonna do now, Mach?!</p> <p><b>Hal Lublin:</b> <i>[Randy Savage impression]</i> I'm gonna go listen to the newest episode of the <a href="#">Tights and Fights</a> podcast, oh yeah!</p> <p><b>Lindsey:</b> Tell us more about this podcast!</p> <p><b>Hal:</b> <i>[Continuing impression]</i> It's the podcast of power, too sweet to be sour! Funky like a monkey! Woke discussions, man! <u>And</u> jokes about wrestlers' fashion choices, myself excluded! Yeahh!</p> <p><b>Lindsey:</b> I can't wait to listen!</p> <p><b>Hal:</b> <i>[Continuing impression]</i> Neither can I! You can find it Saturdays on Maximum Fun! Oh yeahhh! Dig it!</p> <p><i>[Music fades out.]</i></p>
00:18:18	Music	Transition	"Switchblade Comb" by Mobius VanChocStraw.
00:18:23	Katie	Host	<p>Welcome back to <i>Switchblade Sisters</i>. We are talking with showrunner, writer, playwright, producer Mary Laws about <i>Repulsion</i>.</p> <p>And we've already sort of addressed... <i>[Through laughter]</i> everything to do with Roman Polan—not everything, but we've gotten that out of the way.</p>
00:18:39	Mary	Guest	We've—that was real tip of the iceberg, but—
00:18:42	Katie	Host	Exactly. Very tip of the iceberg.
00:18:43	Mary	Guest	I think we have some more exciting things to talk about than a, you know—

00:18:46 Katie Host Um, so—

00:18:47 Mary Guest —convicted pedophile.

00:18:49 Katie Host *[Chuckling]* One of the things that I wanted to um, ask you is that, I feel like with *Neon Demon* and the episodes of *Monsterland* that I've seen, I love that—and with *Repulsion* as well, it's like, the horror comes from this really grounded place of reality. And there might be supernatural things, or hallucinations, or things that are not in reality, but—but it starts from someplace real. And I just wanted to ask what your approach was to writing horror and fusing the supernatural with the realistic.

00:19:23 Mary Guest Sure. I mean, that's why I really love the horror genre, is because I feel like it, um, gives me a chance to talk about my world—my personal world and the world that I'm seeing around me—in a really visceral way. Which is how I feel it, you know what I mean?

Like, I think—I think the day that I write something that's just straight realism will be a surprise—a very big surprise to me. Because I think that I have um, I have an extreme emotional palette, and I think that I—I feel the horror of the world very deeply as a woman, as a gay person, as a person who was raised in the south, as a person who consumes the news, as a person who has, um, you know, who watches a diverse community of people around me be hurt and oppressed, especially in this like, current moment.

It is—it is painful. It is joyful, and it is painful to live in the world. And I think that what the horror genre does, for me, is that it allows me to express that pain in like, the truest way that I really, actually feel it. Because when you have moments of—of fear and endangerment as a woman, those are visceral.

Um, and that is really hard for me as an artist to express in a just sort of completely grounded and realistic way. I need that extra element of—of the supernatural, of the horror, of the unknown of that thing that we fear. Or that also astonishes, you know? 'Cause I also—I feel like—well, I'll go into that in a minute.

00:21:17 Mary Guest But like, I—I think that—so I think that my combination generally in writing is of that sort of groundedness, so that you recognize the world as your own, so that I can recognize the world as my own, with some kind of otherness. Because that otherness fills in the gaps, for me, of—of uh—er, that otherness acts as like, a sort of, um, representation of like, the emotionality that I feel about things in the world.

I just think that the horror genre is so exciting in that way, and um, and it's the only thing that I have seen—you know, a play is—I come from playwriting. A play is so interesting, because you can be there and it's all uh, you know, it's in person. You're breathing together with the actors, the same air. And so there are some things so palpable, the energy in the theater is so palpable. And there are lots and lots of bad plays in the world, but when you see a really, really good one, it changes your DNA. It completely alters you. And when I came to film and television, the first thing I wrote was *Neon*

*Demon* with Nick Refn. Like, I—I was a little bit like, well, he is a filmmaker that I have seen give me that same kind of feeling that I have in the theater on screen. I am so obsessed with his movie *Bronson*, about Charlie Bronson.

00:22:40 Katie Host Yes, I love *Bronson*.

00:22:43 Mary Guest Yes, it's so good, and I—I'm always shocked when people have seen *Drive* and they haven't seen *Bronson*, because to me, if—and I used to say this to him. I would always be like, "Yeah, *Drive* is good. [Chuckles] You know, *Bronson* is where it's at, though."

Like, because it's so—it's so visceral, and it jumps off the screen, and it makes you, as an audience member, sweat. And for me, like, [Sighs] that is an experience that I have had in life and in the world. And for me, the horror genre is the only other—it's the only real genre that has done that.

When people can do that in other—in other kinds of genre on screen, I just like, bow down to them. But for me, I just feel like I always am returning to horror, horror, horror, because it just gives you that same—that feeling, you know?

00:23:31 Katie Host Yeah. It's so interesting, because yes, I mean, that's the thing about film. When you can elicit a physical reaction out of someone, whether it's crying, or laughing, or screaming, or vomiting. I mean, I've never vomited from a film yet, but it does happen.

00:23:47 Mary Guest Oh, I totally have. Um, when I was young, I—I threw up when I watched—was it *If These Walls Could Talk*, or—yeah, *If These Walls Could Talk*. During the knitting needle abortion scene.

00:24:00 Katie Host [Laughing] Oh my gosh.

00:24:01 Mary Guest I—it totally—I was maybe too young to know what that film was about, but I watched it and I completely threw up. And I just was like—I think about that all the time too, because, not that I necessarily want to experience that all the time, but I also kind of do. Because I love any kind of art that really makes you feel, right?

00:24:22 Katie Host Oh, absolutely.

[Mary affirms.]

Absolutely. I watched—I rewatched *Neon Demon* this week, um, you know, to talk about this—to talk to you. Um, but it was a joy to rewatch, because I'm obsessed with *Neon Demon*, and I—it was the third time I had seen it, and I was sitting on my couch, and instead of being horrified I was sort of like, squealing in pleasure at like, certain compositions, certain line readings. I just think that movie is so amazing.

And there is a direct through-line—I mean, there is a reference to *Repulsion* in *Neon Demon*. And I think that those two films would make an insane double feature. You know, just the way that you're dealing with women who are looked at and objectified, and then their internal experience of it, and the horror of that, and what that

objectification means for them.

Um, was that—was that a conversation that you were having with Nick Refn while you were in the writing process? I mean, were you saying like, “Oh, this is like *Repulsion*,” or was—were there any references or things that you guys uh, referred to while you—

00:25:30 Mary Guest I mean, I think we watched it together. Nick and I did. Yeah, we watched a bunch of films together, um, and *Repulsion* was definitely one of them. Um, uh, *Don't Look Now*, I think I remember us watching together.

And so absolutely, we referenced it all the time. All the time. Because we were really interested in, um, the internal experience of these women, and like—because I think that movie is very much about both the internal experience of women, and then the sort of objectification of the women, and like, the switching between both of those. Like, points of view, and how they then—how the women become to be—began to objectify themselves as well.

You know, I think the whole movie is shot really like, through a sort of male gazey kind of lens, which is really exciting. Natasha Braier was the cinematographer on that, which, she's—

00:26:25 Katie Host She's amazing.

00:26:26 Mary Guest Brilliant. Oh my god. She is so brilliant, and um, and so yeah, we definitely—we definitely talked about *Repulsion*. It was always in our conversations as we were developing this film together.

00:26:42 Katie Host I feel like *Neon Demon* is kind of a little bit of a twist on *Repulsion* in the sense that men feel constantly like, this threat in her life. I mean, the Keanu character, the photographer Jack character. It's constantly like, worry about men, and then the real danger is the women.

[Mary affirms.]

Um, and so that, I think, is just this interesting sort of twist on the ideas that are brought up by *Repulsion*.

00:27:10 Mary Guest Well, I think it's really interesting. You know, *Neon Demon*, when I was writing it, I went around and I interviewed a lot of women. Some—a couple of like, models, um, a few of the women in the movie are models. Abbey Lee is a model. Um, and then also just friends. Just like, women that I know. And I was like, “Let's talk about beauty. Tell me about how you think about you think about your own beauty. Tell me how you think about your own body.” And it was always so interesting to me, because [Scoffing] the fear—and this is not news—but like, every single person, it was like, the fear of their own body was just about the fear of men not liking their bodies anymore.

And I just—I think that part of *The Neon Demon*, for me, was just about that sort of um, that ingrained patriarchy. That ingrained male gaze that we, as women, just sort of accept from an early age, and then we become our own villains. Which is just—it's crazy. And I

think that that's, you know, a lot of how the women in the film operated.

Um, at the end of the day, the men weren't important at all. They sort of disappear from the movie, and it's just about the women's desire to like, literally consume this young, new, fresh blood. This new model who is getting the eyes on her, you know, and how cold and how dark it feels when you—when you age, and you've subscribed to that kind of belief, right? That—that the male gaze is everything to a woman, and that thinness is everything to a woman, and that you will eventually just sort of implode and that you will become that villain as well.

Anyway, I was really interested when I was having those kinds of conversations with my female friends. And so certainly that became a part of the film as well.

00:29:19 Katie Host

In *Repulsion*, what I kind of appreciate about it, watching it as a woman, is there's this expectation of peril. That she should be receptive to these men, and she should make them feel like she likes them.

You know, I think there's a line that Colin says, where he's like, "I don't think you like me very much," or something. Or she has to make him feel comfortable. I think, as women, we constantly sort of feel this—this like, oh, I have to make this man feel safe or comfortable in order for us to protect our own safety, in a way.

*[Mary affirms.]*

And she just sort of rejects that. And I think, you know, it's funny, because Polanski, in a couple of interviews, and like, on the Criterion commentary, he says, "She has a problem." But the way I interpret is the whole world around her is the problem. You know? So—

00:30:13 Mary Guest

I mean, definitely.

00:30:15 Katie Host

Yeah. So it's interesting, because I look at, even though Carol turns into this murderer, I'm like, "Girl, I get it. Relatable."

*[Both laugh.]*

00:30:27 Mary Guest

I've been there.

00:30:28 Katie Host

Like, when she's all disheveled in the house, I'm like, "That looks like me. That looks familiar."

00:30:34 Mary Guest

Yeah. Definitely. What's the—there are these tiny, tiny scenes in the film where she's looking out the window at um, it's like a group of nuns.

00:30:46 Katie Host

Yes, the nuns! I love when she's looking at the nuns.

00:30:48 Mary Guest

So, I think about that all the time, too, and what—I mean, what I love about Polanski's films—Heather and I just watched um, *Knife in the Water* the other day. And like, every shot is some kind of

symbol, you know? There's some kind of like—you can look at a shot and you can read like, ten things into it, and I love that.

And I think about the nuns all the time, and I think you can interpret that in a number of different ways, but I think it applies to what you're saying, which is that, here is a group of women who have chosen to live outside of like, the rules of the—the traditional rules of the world for women. They're virgins, and they don't necessarily have to deal with men on a day to day basis. They're cloistered together as women.

And I think that that's really interesting, her just gazing at them. And I've always wondered if that's Carol's personal longing, for that kind of life where she doesn't have to make men happy, or where she—it's almost like a symbol, she's gazing at a symbol of innocence.

Um, where she—because I—my interpretation of the film is generally that she does have some kind of sexual trauma, and I think that that last image of the photograph is what sort of seals the deal to me. It's like, um, it just feels like that sort of rope-a-dope punch at the very end, where you've just been like, fighting the whole movie, and it's just like, "Boom, there. There it is."

It always knocks my socks off when I see it at the very end. So that is always—that has always been my interpretation. But her gazing at the nuns always feels to me just like, um, like that—wouldn't that be nice, you know? I'm sure there are a million other interpretations, but—

00:32:41 Katie Host

Oh, I absolutely think she's looking at the nuns longingly. And the nuns are laughing, and they're playing. They're like, playing soccer or something.

*[Mary affirms.]*

And there's this real sense of innocent play that I feel that, yes. I think Carol is childlike, and that she might be stunted in her sort of emotional growth, which could be due to childhood trauma.

Um, and I would also, you know, make the argument that she is suffering from childhood trauma, but um—you know, based on the photograph. But yeah, it's like she doesn't get to play. And I think that's just what she wants is to be in this like, safe environment of women, that's not invaded by men, and it's not invaded by men's intentions.

And I think there's some really interesting performance choices with the men, of like, grabbing her hair, and grabbing her arm. And then the—um, Michael, who's having the affair with her sister, is pinching her sister's butt. You know, it's just like, you have no space.

00:33:48 Mary Guest

Autonomy, yeah.

00:33:49 Katie Host

And you're supposed to grant that. In this world, that's what you're supposed to grant. And I do have to, you know, I have my own, obviously, interpretations of what that means. And I'm like, does

Polanski like, is he showing this like, “Ugh, look at this girl, you know, she can’t hang.” Or is he saying, look at this, like I take it as, look at the oppression of this world where men won’t leave you alone. You can’t walk down the street, or eat lunch, or do your job, or do anything without having to like, cater to their attention.”

00:34:28 Mary Guest Yeah. That’s always my interpretation of it, too. I mean, again, coming from a place of her sort of internalized childhood trauma. Like, looking at those nuns and seeing them play, I think is a really good point. But like, if you—if you’re looking at the whole film as a lens of like, she had some kind of sexual abuse as a child, or some kind of childhood abuse, then she was a person who never got to play, right? And—and so I think that that’s really interesting. I think even the fact that she works at a beauty salon is really interesting, because there are those like, up close shots of her painting women’s nails and making them beautiful. And again, it’s all for um, the benefit and the joy of men—

00:35:11 Katie Host Yes.

00:35:12 Mary Guest —in the film. And so um, yeah.

00:35:16 Katie Host Yeah, no, the—the customers that she has repeatedly, these older women who are constantly getting those facemasks and stuff. And it’s not, you know, plastic surgery or anything, but you’re like, “Gosh, this lady’s back again.”

*[Both laugh.]*

00:35:28 Music Transition “Switchblade Comb” by Mobius VanChocStraw.

00:35:29 Mary Guest It’s a lot of work to be a woman for a man.

00:35:32 Katie Host Exactly!

Okay, well, let’s take another really quick break, and we will be back in a minute with Mary Laws.

*[Music fades.]*

00:35:46 Promo Promo **Music:** Straightforward, thump-y electric bass guitar beat with light drums.

**Jackie Kashian:** Hi, I’m Jackie Kashian.

**Laurie Kilmartin:** Hi, I’m Laurie Kilmartin.

**Jackie:** Aaand we have a podcast called, “*The Jackie and Laurie Show.*” Who are you, Laurie Kilmartin?

**Laurie:** Oh, my God. So much pressure. Uh, let’s see, I’m a stand up. I’ve been doing stand-up since 1987. Uh, I’m a writer for *Conan*, I’ve written a couple books, have a couple CD’s out, have a special out. Who are you, Jackie?

**Jackie:** Well, I too am a stand-up comic, since 1984. And, uh, I do the road like a maniac and, uh, don’t have a cool writing job, but I

have four albums out. Working on a new album. We talk about stand-up. We talk about, uh, all the different parts of stand-up comedy. So, that's *The Jackie and Laurie Show*, and you should subscribe on MaximumFun if you want to hear that.

**Laurie:** *[Chuckles]* And I would encourage you not to.

*[Jackie laughs.]*

*[Music fades out.]*

00:36:31 Music Transition "Switchblade Comb" by Mobius VanChocStraw.

00:36:37 Katie Host And we are back, *Switchblade Sisters*, with Mary Laws, talking about *Repulsion*.

I wanted to also ask, because, thinking about the apartment trilogy, they're films that really could be, um, plays, because they're all set in one setting. And I was wondering, you know, when you transitioned from playwriting to stage and screen, I mean, do you have a different approach to writing, and obviously writing horror, for stage and screen? I was reading about your play, *Blueberry Toast*.

*[Mary affirms.]*

Which all takes place in one house, I think.

00:37:14 Mary Guest Mm-hm. One room.

00:37:15 Katie Host And, I mean, it sounds amazing. I would love to see it at some point. But, uh, you know, what is your—like, how do you—is this idea of like, all-in-one setting—I mean, that can be a trope for horror films as well.

Or not even a trope, but like, something that people do, um, to create that kind of sense of claustrophobia. I mean, is there a—is there a change that you've had to make to your writing, or not necessarily?

00:37:44 Mary Guest Oh yeah, I mean, they're completely different art forms, and there are certainly skills that you learn from one that you can apply to the other. But um, you know, like, if I'm talking about *Blueberry Toast*, like, that's a play that, I think, had—it's not a horror play, but it had elements of like, high tension and of, um, of uh, like sort of, uh, the horrific way that a household, um, or marriage can disintegrate into violence.

Um, and I—I think that—but it unfolds in real time. You know, the whole play is about an hour and ten minutes long, and it really just tracks from a to z in totally real time. There's no intermission. It's all one scene, there aren't interruptions.

Um, I think that, you know, if we're talking about *Repulsion*, the difference would be that you—you can't track that play in realtime. And I think that one of the beautiful things about that play is that once she's there in the house and truly unraveling in the house is, you know, visually unravelling as sort of uh, symbolism of her

internal monologue as her brain is, um—you lose track of time completely. And I think that that is—that’s something that film can do that theater can’t do. You can never lose track of time in theater, not really. Although, I mean, I’d love for someone to try, or tell me how. But I just feel like what’s beautiful about theater is that you yourself are going on that real time journey.

But in film, you know, you can play. There are cuts.

[Laughs]

And um, and I think that that’s really exciting, because I think then you can take a character on, you know, a different kind of journey. Um, I—I wrote an episode of *Monsterland*—which is, I think, our third episode—set in New Orleans, Louisiana, about a woman who is in a house and sort of losing her mind, um, in this sort of like, third quarter of the episode.

And definitely *Repulsion* was an inspiration when I was writing that, but it too has a lot of cuts, and it feels like endless night. And I don’t think that that’s something I’ve ever really seen in theater. I think, of course, anything is possible, but I love that, um, that in film you can stretch and disorient time. And that feels, like, again, very real to me. That feels like a real experience of like, having a night full of anxiety, you know? It feels like endless night. It feels like you don’t know if it’s twelve in the morning, or if it’s 4 A.M. And so I think that’s a really exciting thing that *Repulsion* does very well.

00:40:44 Katie Host Um, one thing that I also wanted to talk about. We haven’t touched on *Succession* yet, but that is probably the thing that you’ve worked on that is not horror.

Although, [Laughing] could an argument be made that there are elements of horror.

00:40:58 Mary Guest Certain kind of horror.

00:40:59 Katie Host Certain kind of monsters on *Succession*.

00:41:03 Mary Guest Yeah, definitely. Um, yeah, um, I mean, *Succession* was such a pleasure to work on. I was only with those writers for one season. It sort of worked out perfectly, um, as I was transitioning off of *Preacher*, and I was developing *Monsterland*. And I had this sort of window of time, uh, and go to go to—to London and hang out with um, I mean, I call them the X-Men. Those writers are so fantastic. I hung out with the X-Men for three months. Um, and um, I mean, I’ve never been in a smarter room, um, of human beings, or a funnier or even more casual room of human beings. I think I learned a lot by watching the way that Jessie Armstrong runs a room with, like, short hours and a lot of grace. And it’s a huge room. Um, you know, *Monsterland*, I had a writer’s room of—

[Exactly one soft and gentle boof from a small dog.]

—four people, plus me. And I think when I was in the *Succession* room, there were like, ten or something. It’s a really, really a lot of—

a meeting of a lot of different minds. Um, but I, yeah, it was a very generous place to work. It was so out of the box for me. It was—I almost, I think like, you know,, when they were asking me to come in and talk to Jessie about the job, I think I called my agent, and I was just like, “Are you guys sure?”

[Laughs]

Like, this really doesn't feel—this doesn't really feel like me. But, um, you know, I think—I think the thing that did really resonate for me was the exploration of like, a really good character study. Because I think all those characters are just so um, uh, really well drawn, and so defined, and so um, that was fun. I think certainly there were times when I would pitch sort of [Through laughter] wild ideas that they would be like, “No!”

- 00:43:10 Katie Host No hands crawling out of the wall to grab Kendal.
- 00:43:14 Mary Guest Yeah, really, why? Um, yeah, Kendal doesn't take drugs and have like, a wild manic panic dream. But um, I think that, you know, I love anything that challenges me. Anything that challenges me makes me better, and it was certainly a challenge to access that part of myself as a writer. Um, and also, I mean, it really functions a lot like a comedy room, because they're all, for the most part, comedy writers. Like, a lot of those writers came off of *Veep*, or were actually still working on the last season of *Veep* while they were working on the second season of *Succession* with me. And so it was just a fast room, too. I mean, my girlfriend is a comedian, and so she's really quite used to comedy rooms. But I would call her on my way home and I'd be like, “I can't think of my jokes fast enough!” You know?
- [Katie laughs.]
- Um, and—and when I—when I tell people that *Succession* is really a comedy, they all sort of like, laugh, but I think it is.
- 00:44:17 Katie Host Oh, it is. It is.
- 00:44:18 Mary Guest It totally is. It's a—it's a dark satirization of um, these like, very real, well-drawn people. Um, so, anyway, but yes. It was nothing—nothing but a joy to work on, and I think that anything that challenges you just stretches you and it makes you so much better.
- 00:44:37 Katie Host Well, that's a great note to end on. Mary, thank you so much for talking to us about—about *Repulsion*, and *Neon Demon*, and all of these amazing things that you're working on. And everyone watch *Monsterland*. I cannot stress enough, it is so good.
- 00:44:52 Mary Guest Aw, thank you so much.
- 00:44:53 Katie Host If you want to let us know what you think of the show, you can tweet at us @SwitchbladePod or email us at [SwitchbladeSisters@maximumfun.org](mailto:SwitchbladeSisters@maximumfun.org).

Please check out our Facebook group. That's [Facebook.com/groups/switchbladesisters](https://www.facebook.com/groups/switchbladesisters).

Our producer this week is Jordan Cowling. Our senior producer is Laura Swisher, and this is a production of [MaximumFun.org](https://MaximumFun.org).

*[Music fades.]*

00:45:23	Clip	Clip	<b>Speaker 1:</b> You really make me feel wanted.
00:45:24	Music	Transition	A cheerful ukulele chord.
00:45:25	Speaker 1	Promo	<a href="https://MaximumFun.org">MaximumFun.org</a> .
00:45:27	Speaker 2	Promo	Comedy and culture.
00:45:28	Speaker 3	Promo	Artist owned—
00:45:29	Speaker 4	Promo	—Audience supported.