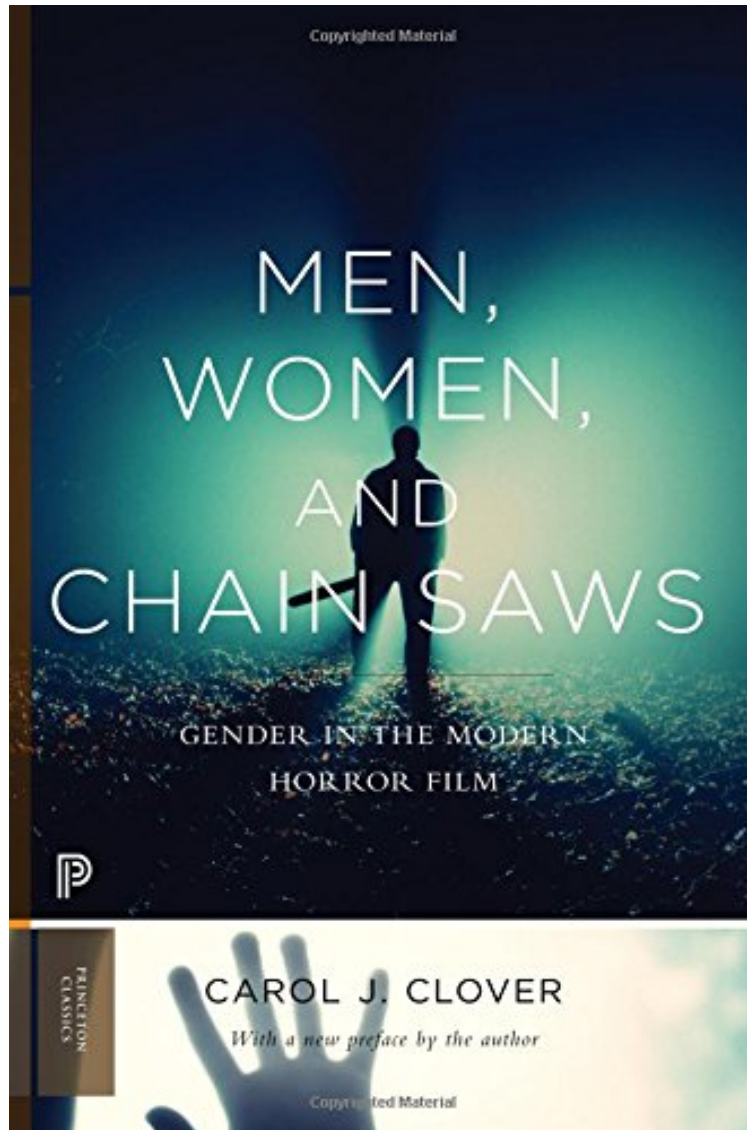


[Download free pdf] Men, Women, and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film (Princeton Classics)

Men, Women, and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film (Princeton Classics)

Carol J. Clover

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3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. An astute breakdown of horror subgenres in the 70's and 80's. By titania86

Men, Women, and Chainsaws is a film theory book that I've heard referenced since I've been getting more interested in gender and horror. I couldn't get it for years because it was out of print and/or super expensive, but now it's reprinted and accessible. I was daunted at first because I know from literature that theory books aren't always the most entertaining read, but the majority of the book is easily readable and engaging. Carol Clover lays out the formulas for three different horror subgenres and references numerous films (mostly in the 70's) to support her claims as well as other film theorists, Freud, 17th and 18th century views of gender, among others. The first chapter, focuses on the formula for slasher films. The villains are typically frozen in development in some way like Michael Meyers or have some sort of muddled sexuality like Leatherface. Most of them have an overbearing mother or some sort of obsession with their mother like Norman Bates. Their choice of weapons are knives and chainsaws instead of guns. Their victims can be male or female, usually young adults, but the final one is always female. This final girl is more aware of her surroundings, less distracted, and usually romantically unavailable. Clover theorizes that she's more masculine so the male audience can relate more to her than the other more feminine and frivolous teen victims. Sometimes the final girls only survive by sheer chance, but others survive due to fighting back. Clover calls her the victim-hero because she suffers through the whole film watching her friends die, being hunted, and knowing that she's being hunted. Looking at this formula in the present, I see plenty of films that follow it, but in recent years, many break out of or mock this formula like Tucker and Dale vs. Evil and Cabin in the Woods. The second chapter illustrates the formula for possession films. The person (or thing in the case of Christine) possessed is almost always female because they are more vulnerable to the supernatural and underneath all their decency, they still could become witches. They are usually possessed by male entities and act in horrific ways outside of how women should act, like grotesque sexuality and foul language. These possession stories are never actually about the women being possessed, but about what that possession means to a man in the situation. I don't think I realized this was a feature in every film in this subgenre and it makes sense why it's one of my least favorites. The women are violated and essentially raped, only to serve as a journey for the man on the outside rather than one for that woman. A prime example is The Exorcist where Reagan and her possession serve as a spiritual epiphany for Father Merrim in his crisis of faith while Reagan remembers nothing of her ordeal. I haven't seen a whole lot of change in this genre in recent years. The possessed tend to be more violent rather than sexual, but the possession as a vehicle for male character and plot development still happens all the time. The third chapter focuses on rape revenge films, which is a genre I'm honestly not very familiar with. Clover talks about how along with the gender conflict, a country and city conflict that goes along with that. The country folk are poor, unhealthy, uneducated, and unemployed. They might also have sexually depraved relationships with animals or their own family members. They blame their impoverished situation on city people due to industrialization destroying nature and big businesses crushing their smaller businesses. The city people are either women or considered feminized men. The country people attack and violate city people for revenge, only to have those people come back to exact revenge as well. The lower versions of rape revenge films have women exacting their own revenge, which gives them agency and power. It also often criticizes the justice system that rarely works in favor of these rape victims. The more celebrated versions like The Accused have the justice system come out in their favor and obscure that criticism. The remade versions of these films seem to be glossier versions that don't bring anything new to a modern audience. Although these films can be exploitative and uncomfortable to watch, I have renewed interest in watching them because of Clover's analysis. The last chapter is about meta horror films. More obviously meta films like New Nightmare, Scream, and Cabin in the Woods hadn't been made yet, so Clover's focus is the film Peeping Tom. Mark films his female victims while he kills them, making the audience view the scene through his eyes. He recreates scenes reflected from his own abusive childhood. Clover puts forth that this film critiques the masochistic viewer looking at the sadistic filmmaker's violent production. This chapter as a whole is more scattered and less focused, mostly because of the state of meta horror at the time. I would love to see her or anyone else take a second analytic look at these same (plus more) genres and analyze how they have changed or stayed the same.

Men, Women, and Chainsaws has an illuminating look at horror genres still alive and well today. Clover has some strong arguments and views films and subgenres. I don't always agree with her rationales or citations. I don't agree with Freud's psychoanalytic theories and I don't think a single sex model (where men and women are essentially the same gender) is an accurate representation of cinema. She talks a lot about how cameras and weapons of various types are phalluses that the final girls then take for power at the end of the films. In some cases, like the sexually charged scene

in Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2 between Leatherface and Stretch, I can see how it would be considered to be that, but I think it's overreaching at times. Overall, this film theory book offers a solid breakdown and analysis of different subgenres and how men and women are treated in them. 5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. Darkly RewardingBy kathari1349This was a book that I read in its original release in 92, and I can say that I have found few analysis of the horror genre that is as engaging, and thought provoking as this. I would rank it along side some other exceptional works, such as Lovecraft's essay "Supernatural Horror In Literature". (Though, of course, the two address different artistic modes of the horror genre.) Much academic discourse on film can come across as contrived and affected; often doctrinaire as well. But, Clover's tone is never comes across like that. Though, her language is academic, her approach is, in my opinion, more existential. She aims at not only intellectual analysis, but grapples with the visceral impact of images and moods invoked in these films. Her feminist approach, in my opinion, enhances her dialogue, rather than hampers it. I found this refreshing, in that any kind of ideological commitment can sometimes compromise intellectual honesty. But, what Clover has to say goes beyond any bare, dogmatism, without compromising any integrity. I was very pleased that in her new introduction she deals with something that I have observed myself. Namely, that the "Final Girl" concept has become somewhat distorted by pop-culture handling of it. Clover's original formulations on this were more ambivalent, and detailed, than the simple notion that the Final Girl was an unequivocally positive template. Though, she was one of the first authors to acknowledge that the generalized condemnation of the horror genre as misogynistic was a mistake, it did not prevent her from dealing with the real misogyny that does appear in the genre. And, yes, she did point out that the Final Girl focus of so many horror films was capable of generating empathy with the female character. But, these are only the broad outlines. The devil is in the details as they say, so I encourage any horror fan who has gotten to the know the Final Girl idea through second-hand sources, to buy this book, and get the real picture. One thing that I would particularly like to point out here, is that Clover's area of academic expertise is the Norse Sagas, Germanic Myths, etc. I am of the opinion that the tragic, and gender themes of the Sagas helped her in appreciating certain nuances of horror films. I have often observed that many horror stories closely parallel tragic themes. And, in some cases, the dividing line between a horror story, and a tragedy is not always clear. A great example would be Stephen King's "The Dead Zone". Though, there are certainly a great number of horrific images and ideas, the rendering of John Smith is that of a tragic hero. As well, when we look at past examples of great tragedies of the theater, we have the often terrifying images that occur in plays such as "Macbeth", with its pandemonium of blood, monstrous and haunting apparitions, and black nightmares. As to the subject of gender, the Sagas present some worthy oddities, there as well. Though, profoundly misogynistic in many ways, the ancient Germanic legends, and the Norse myths also reflected a great deal of ambivalence about gender. More often than not, in its critical mode, the Norse Saga was apt to be more misanthropic than misogynistic. It should be recalled that the play "Hamlet" was modeled off a Norse legend of a Prince Amlethus. And, it is in from the mouth of Hamlet that we hear not only caustic condemnations of female character, ("frailty thy name is woman"), but equally damning appraisals of male character, ("We are errant knaves all; believe none of us.") The only regret I have is the I really wish that Clover would release a new edition. Given what she had already written in the original, about the slasher genre in particular, it would be fascinating to see her take on the many changes in the genre. I would love to see her deal with the meta-movie idea, ushered in by the "Scream" franchise, and the other permutations that horror films have undergone. At any rate, I say it again. If you're a horror fan, get this book; read it. You will come away with a enhanced appreciation for the genre, and the detailed themes it can invoke.

From its first publication in 1992, *Men, Women, and Chain Saws* has offered a groundbreaking perspective on the creativity and influence of horror cinema since the mid-1970s. Investigating the popularity of the low-budget tradition, Carol Clover looks in particular at slasher, occult, and rape-revenge films. Although such movies have been traditionally understood as offering only sadistic pleasures to their mostly male audiences, Clover demonstrates that they align spectators not with the male tormentor, but with the females tormented—notably the slasher movie's "final girls" as they endure fear and degradation before rising to save themselves. The lesson was not lost on the mainstream industry, which was soon turning out the formula in well-made thrillers. Including a new preface by the author, this Princeton Classics edition is a definitive work that has found an avid readership from students of film theory to major Hollywood filmmakers.

"[A] brilliant analysis of gender and its disturbances in modern horror films. . . . Bubbling away beneath Clover's multi-faceted readings of slasher, occult, and rape-revenge films is the question of what the viewer gets out of them. . . . [She] argues that most horror films are obsessed with feminism, playing out plots which climax with an image of (masculinized) female power and offering visual pleasures which are organized not around a mastering gaze, but around a more radical "victim-identified" look."--Linda Ruth Williams, *Sight and Sound*"Carol Clover's compelling [book] challenges simplistic assumptions about the relationship between gender and culture. . . . She suggests that the "low tradition" in horror movies possesses positive subversive potential, a space to explore gender ambiguity and transgress traditional boundaries of masculinity and femininity."--Andrea Walsh, *The Boston Globe*"Clover makes a

convincing case for studying the pulp-pop excesses of exploitation' horror as a reflection of our psychic times."--Misha Berson, San Francisco Chronicle "Clover actually bothers (as few have done before) to go into the theaters, to sit with the horror fans, and to watch how they respond to what appears on screen."--Wendy Lesser, Washington Post "In her reading of both particular horror films and of film and gender theory, Clover does what every cultural critic hopes to: she calls into question our habits of seeing."--Ramona Naddaff, Artforum "Clover, takes the most extreme genre, horror flicks, seriously. There is no condescension in this significant and probing discussion of psychology and sexuality and their role in lurid fantasy."--Desmond Ryan, Philadelphia Inquirer "Fascinating, Clover has shown how the allegedly nave makers of crude films have done something more schooled directors have difficulty doing - creating females with whom male viewers are quite prepared to identify with on the most profound levels"--The Modern "It's easy to see why this book is considered such a landmark in film analysis."--Rod Lott, Flick Attack

From the Back Cover
Gender In The Modern Horror Film. Do the pleasures of horror movies really begin and end in sadism? So the public discussion of film assumes, and so film theory claims. Carol Clover argues, however, that these films work mainly to engage the viewer in the plight of the victim-hero - the figure, often a female, who suffers pain and fright but eventually rises to vanquish the forces of oppression.

About the Author
Carol J. Clover is the Class of 1936 Professor Emerita in the departments of rhetoric, film, and Scandinavian at the University of California, Berkeley. She is the author of *The Medieval Saga*.