



L'ENFER (HELL)

Autumn
Season
2010

L'Enfer was originally scheduled to be directed in 1964 by Henri-Georges-Clouzot (*Les Diaboliques*, *The Wages Of Fear*), but following the director's heart attack, the movie was abandoned. For his version, Claude Chabrol decided to retain the broad outline of Clouzot's screenplay, whilst giving it a contemporary setting and updating some of the dialogue.

Review, in American 'Variety-speak' by Lisa Nesselson:

With *Hell*, Claude Chabrol brings to the screen a script about obsessive jealousy that the late Henri-Georges Clouzot was forced to abandon 30 years ago. The essentially two-character, husband-and-wife tale is winningly told, and fine perfs, including a patient-and-pulpy turn by Emmanuelle Béart, bode well for offshore arthouse sales.

Clouzot began shooting on July 3, 1964, with Romy Schneider and Serge Reggiani in the leads, but production stopped when latter fell ill on the third day. While rehearsing with replacement Jean-Louis Trintignant, Clouzot suffered a heart attack. Though helmer lived until 1977, pic was never resumed. His widow gave the orphaned script to Gallic producer Marin Karmitz, who drafted Chabrol.

Béart is Nelly, wife of Paul (Francois Cluzet), who's taken on massive debt to buy and manage an idyllically situated resort hotel he's worked at for 15 years. She's good-natured, devoted, vivacious. In a whirlwind, storybook opening sequence, the pair wed and become parents.

With her delectable combo of innocent face and killer contours, Béart plays the character's beauty to the hilt. Nelly enjoys her status as fulfilled young wife and mom, but once stressed-out Paul gets it into his head she's cheating on him with garage mechanic Martineau (Gallic singer Marc Lavoine), irrational jealousy sets in. He starts to hear nagging voices in his head, which he answers aloud.

Nelly is initially pleased at Paul's jealousy, which she sees as concrete proof of his love. But his volatile, apparently unfounded behavior soon renders their life hellish. His use of alcohol and sleeping pills fans the flames.

A stumbling block for offshore audiences may be the absence in the script of any acknowledgment that therapy has become widespread in the three decades since original was written. As the symptoms of Paul's mental illness pile up, viewers could be constantly tempted to shout, "Get professional help, already!" prior to the devilishly ambiguous conclusion.



A hard-to-swallow development occurs after Paul is finally diagnosed. Though he's clearly got a screw loose, plus a propensity toward violence, the doctor blithely sends the couple home to spend the night together, simply because the local loony bin hasn't got a room free till the next day.

In his fourth outing with Chabrol, Cluzet convincingly conveys his character's percolating paranoia, maddened by every move Béart makes. Jean-Pierre Cassel and Christiane Minazzoli are amusing as a flagrantly hot-to-trot elder couple.

Chabrol's buffish humor is in evidence in one sequence in which Paul advises a guest with a 16mm camera to get a camcorder instead, to be met with the reply, "Nothing compares with film and the big screen." The camera buff's viewfinder is sometimes used to give the audience point of view shots, a technique Chabrol also used in the opening sequence of his 1985 mystery-thriller, *Cop au vin*. Peppy lensing in the sun-drenched setting creates an ironic contrast to Cluzet's stormy outbursts.

