February 25, 2020 (XL:5) Henri-Georges Clouzot: **THE WAGES OF FEAR/LE SALAIRE DE LA PEUR** (1953, 147m)

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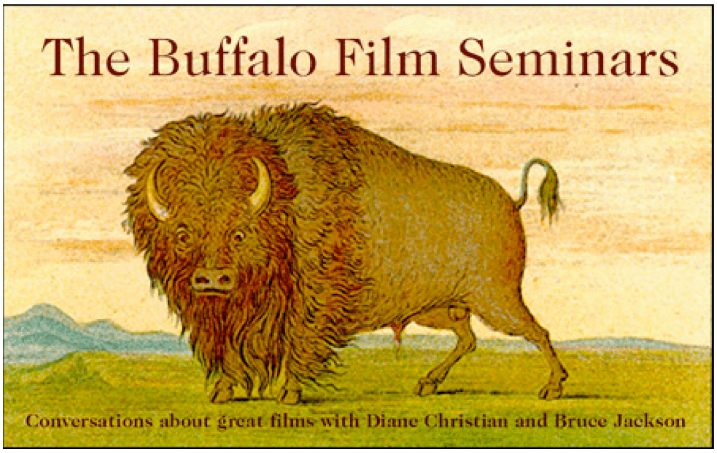
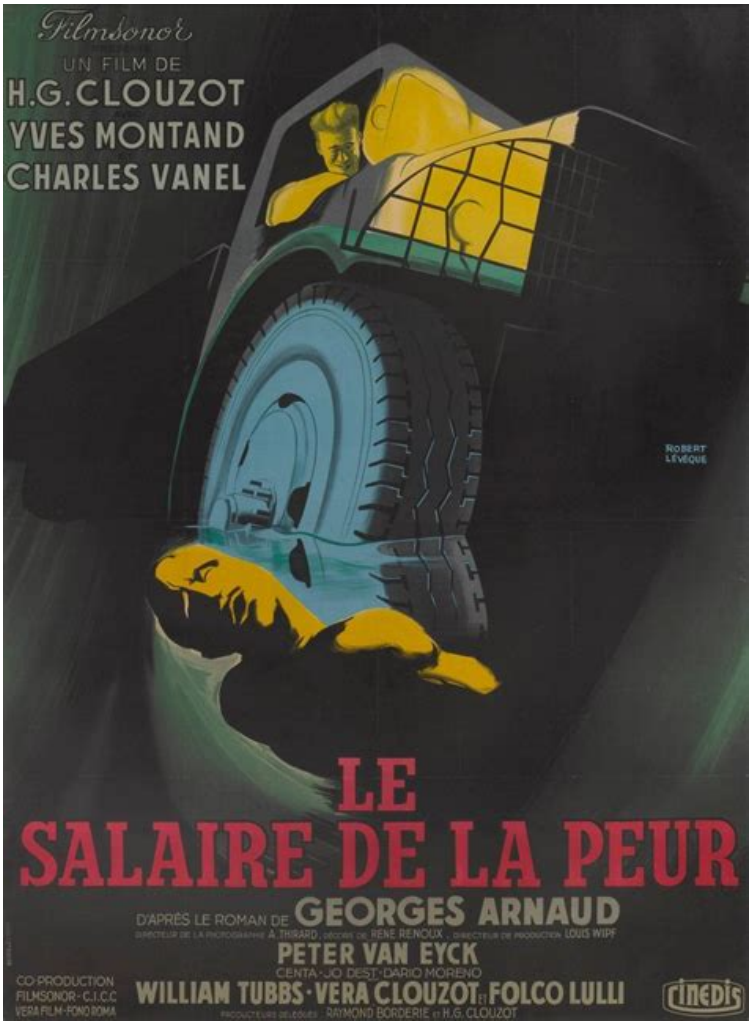
Spelling and Style—use of italics, quotation marks or nothing at all for titles, e.g.—follows the form of the sources.





Directed Henri-Georges Clouzot
Writing Henri-Georges Clouzot and Jérôme Géronimi adapted the Georges Arnaud novel.
Producer Raymond Borderie and Henri-Georges Clouzot
Music Georges Auric
Cinematography Armand Thirard
Editing Madeleine Gug, Etiennette Muse, and Henri Rust

The film won the Grand Prize of the Festival and a Special Mention for Charles Vanel's acting performance at the 1953 Cannes Film Festival.

Cast
Yves Montand...Mario
Charles Vanel...M. Jo
Folco Lulli...Luigi
Peter van Eyck...Bimba
Véra Clouzot...Linda (as Vera Clouzot)
William Tubbs...Bill O'Brien
Darío Moreno...Hernandez
Jo Dest ...Smerloff
Antonio Centa ...Camp Chief
Luis De Lima...Bernardo
Grégoire Gromoff
Joseph Palau-Fabre
Faustini
Seguna
Darling Légitimus...(as Miss Darling)

HENRI-GEORGES CLOUZOT (b. 20 November 1907, Niort, Deux-Sèvres, France—d. 12 January 1977, Paris, France) was "one of the most controversial film-makers of the postwar period. Clouzot's early activities were devoted to writing. After an early short (*La Terreur des Batignolles*, 1931), he began adapting thrillers in the 1940s, a genre he pursued throughout his career. The first was his debut feature *L'Assassin habite au 21* (1942). *Le Corbeau* (1943, produced by the German-owned Continentale) turned him into both a celebrity and an object of scandal. Its vicious portrait of a strife-ridden small town was deemed 'anti-French' and Clouzot was suspended from the film industry in 1944. Ironically, historians now read the film as anti-German. Clouzot resumed film-making in 1947, shooting a small but significant and highly successful body of films epitomizing (with such directors as Yves Allégret) the French noir tradition. Most, like *Quai des Orfèvres* (1947) and *Les Diaboliques* (1955), combine tight, suspenseful crime narratives with critical depictions of bourgeois milieux. *Le Salaire de la peur / The Wages of Fear* (1953), the ultra-tense story of two men delivering a lorry-load of nitro-glycerine, was a triumph at home and abroad. Clouzot directed one of Brigitte Bardot's best films, *La Vérité* (1960). His films also include *Manon* (1949) and *Les Espions* (1957), and a documentary on Picasso, *Le* Mystère Picasso (1955). Ironically for a film-maker who wrote all his scripts and insisted that a director 'be his own auteur,' Clouzot suffered at the hands of New Wave critics, who saw him as a mere 'metteur-en-scène' and disliked the black misanthropy of his vision. A reassessment of his

work is long overdue" (Ginette Vincendeau, *Encyclopedia of European Cinema*).

GEORGES AURIC (b. February 15, 1899 in Lodève, Hérault, France—d. July 23, 1983 (age 84) in Paris, France) was a French composer, considered one of *Les Six*,

a group of artists informally associated with Jean Cocteau and Erik Satie. He composed for 130 films and television series, including: *Le sang d'un poète* (1930), *À nous la liberté* (1931), *Lake of Ladies* (1934), *The Mysteries of Paris* (1935), *The Messenger* (1937), *The Alibi* (1937), *The Red Dancer* (1937), *The Lafarge Case* (1938), *The Beautiful Adventure* (1942), *François Villon* (1945), *Dead of Night* (1945), *Beauty and the Beast* (1946), *Hue and Cry* (1947), *Passport to Pimlico* (1948), *Silent Dust* (1949), *The Spider and the Fly* (1949), *Orpheus* (1950), *The Lavender Hill Mob* (1951), *The Galloping Major* (1951), *Moulin Rouge* (1952), *Leathernose* (1952), *The Titfield Thunderbolt* (1953), *Roman Holiday* (1953), *The Slave* (1953), *The Wages of Fear* (1953), *The Divided Heart* (1954), *Lola Montes* (1955), *Rififi* (1955), *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1956), *Bonjour Tristesse* (1958), *The Night Heaven Fell* (1958), *Goodbye Again* (1961), *The Innocents* (1961), *The Mind Benders* (1963), and *The Christmas Tree* (1969).

YVES MONTAND (b. Ivo Livi, 13 October 1921, Monsummano Alto, Tuscany, Italy—d. 9 November 1991, Senlis, Oise, France) appeared in 7 films before this one, but this one made him a star. He died while filming *IP5: L'île aux pachydermes* (1992). "After his anti-fascist parents fled his homeland to avoid the wrath of Mussolini," according to Hal Ericks, "Montand grew up in the less fashionable sections of Marseilles, where he supported himself as a dock worker. He was discovered in 1944 by singer Edith Piaf, the first of Montand's many celebrity lovers. After working in Piaf's nightclub act and appearing with her in the 1946 film Star Without Light, Montand gained stature as a solo actor/singer, proving his dramatic mettle in Georges Clouzot's *The Wages of Fear* (1955). In 1951, Montand married actress Simone Signoret, a union that lasted until her death in 1985. Though he'd tended to keep his leftist politics out of his public appearances during the first half of his career, Montand was finally able to espouse his views in films via his many performances in the works of director Costa-Gavras, particularly *Z* (1968), *The Confession* (1970) and *State of Sie*ge (1973). The actor enjoyed a career renaissance as a character player in the 1980s. Universally honored as one of the greatest entertainers of his era (an assessment with which he heartily concurred), Yves Montand died at age 70, a scant few years after becoming a father for the first time" (*All Movie Guide*). Some of his other films were *Manon des sources* (1986, *Manon of the Spring*), *Paris brûle-t-il?* (1966, *Is Paris Burning?*), *La Guerre est finie* (1966, *The War is Over*), *Le Joli mai* (1963) and *Sanctuary* (1961, an adaptation of Faulkner's novel in which he plays Candy, the Popeye character, who winds up marrying Temple Drake. If you know the novel you know what I'm thinking and if you don't, it's too silly to explain.)

CHARLES VANEL (21 August 1892, Rennes, Ille-et-Vilaine, France—15 April 1989, Cannes, Alpes-Maritimes, France) was "An actor from the age of 16, when he appeared in a Parisian production of *Hamlet*, Charles Vanel made his screen bow in the 1912 film *Jim Crow*. He would eventually enjoy the longest movie career of any French actor, toting up well over 200 starring appearances. He was frequently seen in the films of screenwriter Jacques de Baroncelli; he also turned director on two occasions, helming 1929's *Dans la Nuit* and 1935's *Le Coup de Minuit*. His popularity diminished during the war years, but he was able to stage a comeback as a member of director Henri-Georges Clouzot's 'stock company'. He made only one appearance in a Hollywood production, playing a key role in Hitchcock's *To Catch a Thief*. The recipient of a lifetime achievement award at the 1970 Cannes Film Festival, Charles Vanel retired in 1982, only to making another wholly unexpected comeback at the age of 85" (Hal Erickson, *All Movie Guide*).

FOLCO LULLI (b. 3 July 1912, Florence, Italy—d. 23 May 1970, Rome, Italy) was an Italian film actor. He appeared in 104 films between 1946 and 1970. He was the brother of actor Piero Lulli. These are some of the films he acted in: *How I Lost the War* (1947), *Without Pity* (1948), *Crossroads of Passion* (1948), *How I Discovered America* (1949), *Vertigine d'amore* (1949), *Toto Looks For a House* (1949), *A Night of Fame* (1949), *Hawk of the Nile* (1950), *Love and Blood* (1951), *Lorenzaccio* (1951), *Shadows Over Naples* (1951), *Brief Rapture* (1951), *Tragic Serenade* (1951), *Nobody's Children* (1951), *Falsehood*

(1952), *The Wages of Fear* (1953), *The Count of Monte Cristo* (1954), *Maddalena* (1954), *Orient Express* (1954), *Fortune carrée* (1955), *La risaia* (1956), *An Eye for an Eye* (1957), *Pezzo, capopezzo e capitano* (1958), *The Sky Burns* (1958), *The Italians They Are Crazy* (1958), *The Great War* (1959), *Wolves of the Deep* (1959), *Sheba and the Gladiator* (1959), *Marie of the Isles* (1959), *Under Ten Flags* (1960), *La Fayette* (1961), *The Tartars* (1961), *Oh Islam* (1961), *Romulus and the Sabines* (1961), *Erik the Conqueror* (1961), *Rome 1585* (1961), *Warriors Five* (1962), *Il segno di Zorro* (1963), *Les Parias de la gloire* (1964), *Marco the Magnificent* (1965), *L'armata Brancaleone* (1966), *Lightning Bolt* (1966), *The Murderer with the Silk Scarf* (1966), *Le Grand Restaurant* (1966), *Le vicomte règle ses comptes* (1967), and *Between God, the Devil and a Winchester* (1968).

VÉRA CLOUZOT (b. December 30, 1913, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil—d. December 15, 1960, Paris, France) appeared in only three films, all directed by her husband: *Les Espions/The Spies* (1957), *Les Diaboliques/The Devils* (1955), and *Le Salaire de la peur/The Wages of Fear* (1953).

PETER VAN EYCK (b. Götz von Eick, 16 July 1911, Steinwehr, Pommern, Germany—d.15 July 1969, Zurich, Switzerland) last appeared as a German general in *The Bridge at Remagen* 1969. He was, according to Leonard Maltin, "The very epitome of the Teutonic-Terror type, Van Eyck started playing Nazis on-screen in 1943-the year he became an American citizen. A former musician who'd left his native land when Hitler came to power in the early 1930s, he was familiar to American moviegoers throughout the war years, and then afterward to international audiences in a plethora of films made on both sides of the Atlantic. Van Eyck was most effective (even when not playing Nazis) as cold-blooded, impassive heavies. Among his more notable performances: as one of the drivers of the nitro-filled trucks in *The Wages of Fear* (1952), the reincarnated villain in Fritz Lang's remake of his own 1932 classic *The Thousand Eyes of Dr. Mabuse* (1960), and in the leading role of *The Brain* (1965), a surprisingly good remake of *Donovan's Brain*." Some of his other films are *Action in the North Atlantic* (1943), *The Desert Fox* (1951), *Night People* (1954), *Tarzan's Hidden Jungle* (1955), *The Spy Who Came in From the Cold* (1965), and *Shalako* (1968).

Fiona Watson: 'Cluzot, Henri-Georges" (Senses of Cinema, 2005)

You think that people are all good or all bad. You think that good means light and bad means night? But where does night end and light begin? Where is the borderline? Do you even know which side you belong on? – Dr Vorzet, Le Corbeau

Anyone who can make Hitchcock uneasy deserves closer examination, and Hitchcock was nervous that Henri-Georges Clouzot might unseat him as "the master of suspense". Although not as prolific, Clouzot's is undoubtedly a comparable talent, and Wages Of ear (1953) and Les Diaboliques (1955) regularly make it into lists of the greatest thrillers ever made.

Born in Niort, France, in 1907, Clouzot was something of a child prodigy, giving piano recitals at the age of four and writing plays. He went on to study law and political science. Dogged by ill health, he spent four years in a TB sanatoria during the 1930s and described it as the making of him. "I owe it all to the sanatorium. It was my school. While resident there I saw how human beings worked." (1) Clouzot's brush with mortality marked him permanently and is probably also responsible for his coal black, baleful sense of humour.

Clouzot began as a director of dubbing in Berlin at UFA's Neubabelsburg Studios between 1932 and 1938. He then became an assistant director, working for Litvak and Dupont, among others. He moved on to writing, (Un Soir de rafle [1931], Le Duel [1939], Les Inconnus dans la maison [1941]) and it was in Germany that he acquired a taste for the work of Fritz Lang, whose unflinching view of the sordid side of life can be detected throughout Clouzot's oeuvre.

Thematically, sickness – mental and physical – also rears its head time and time again. Christina Delasalle (Vera Clouzot) in Les Diaboliques has a weak heart. The irony that this character was played by Clouzot's wife, who in reality also had fragile health and died comparatively young, can't be ignored. Then there's Inspector Antoine (Louis Jouvet) with his bad arm in Quai des Orfèvres, Kid Robert (Jean Despeaux) the blind boxer in L'Assassin Habite au 21, the lame Denise Saillens (Ginette Leclerc) in Le Corbeau along with her one-armed brother, not to

mention the suicidal cancer patient, and almost the entire population of the sanatorium in Les Espions.

The other topics that turn up in almost every film he ever made are marital infidelity and jealousy. In Le Corbeau, Dr Germain (Pierre Fresnay) is carrying on an affair with Dr Vorzet's young wife (Micheline Frances); Quai des Orfèvres has Maurice Martineau's (Bernard Blier) potentially murderous jealousy of his partner Marguerite Chauffornier (Suzy Delair); Des Grieux (Michel Auclair) is unable to come to terms with Manon's (Cécile Aubrey) duplicity in Manon; Les Diaboliques has Michel Delasalle's (Paul Meurisse) blatant betrayal of his wife with Nicole (Simone Signoret); in La Vérité, Dominique (Brigitte Bardot) is driven to murder by Gilbert Tellier's (Sami Frey) callous treatment of her; La Prisonnière has Josée's (Elisabeth Wiener) betrayal by, and of, her sculptor husband; and in his first feature, the comedy–thriller L'Assassin habite au 21, Mila Malou (Suzy Delair, Clouzot's long-term mistress) is jealous of her detective boyfriend's prominent position in the investigation of a serial killer, who leaves a calling card with "M. Durand" printed on it at the scene of his crimes.

In L'Assassin habite au 21 (1942) the titular murderer uses three different styles of homicide and his address is known to the police. The problem is sifting through the residents of Les Mimosas boarding house to find him. A policeman with the spectacular moniker of Wenseslas Wens (Pierre Fresnay) goes undercover as a priest, hindered (until finally saved) by the unsolicited interference of his wacky chanteuse girlfriend, Mila Malou (Suzy Delair, first seen singing a theatre producer into submission).

Adapted from a popular whodunnit by S. A. Steedman in the Maigret mold, superficially this doesn't resemble Clouzot's later work at all. It seems quite light-hearted, even if it is about murder, but on closer inspection contains all his usual corrosive elements – the black humour, the world in microcosm, the ineptitude of the authorities, the characteristic twist at the end (in an ingenious bit of plotting, Delair suddenly has a "Eureka" moment while singing a number called "Trio"), and the idea that the potential for murder lurks in all of us.

Clouzot even implicates the audience, as the opening of the film features a POV shot from the murderer's perspective (this may be the earliest subjective camera murder in cinema). Historian David Shipman wrote "Few directors made such a brilliant start – literally." (2) It's here that we see the first connection with Hitchcock, who had also been stylistically influenced by a stay in Germany. This sequence seems to echo the atmosphere in The Lodger (1926) as the camera creeps through rain-slicked darkened streets in a highly expressionistic fashion.

The film's comedy is dark, but it's brought into the light by the affectionate relationship between Wens and Mila. The fact that "good" triumphs over "evil" is only because they are as smart as they are, and nothing to do with the rest of the police or the politicians, who are all depicted as incompetent throughout. Although the film was made during the occupation, no mention is made of the war, as is the case with Le Corbeau, (1943) Clouzot's second feature.

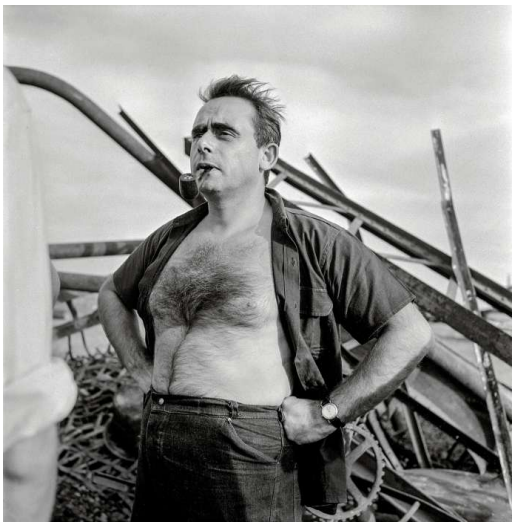
In The Films In My Life, François Truffaut admits to having a strange boyhood obsession with Le Corbeau, memorising the dialogue by heart, and it's with this film that Clouzot's dark, twisted worldview emerges, fully formed. Opening in the graveyard of a provincial town, it moves on to the aftermath of an abortion, performed to save the mother's life. Dr Germain, the closest thing we have to a hero, briskly informs the mother of the woman involved that he has no guilt about what he's just done and that her son-in-law can try again in about eight months time. Another relative mutters that he had enough trouble the last time, so they'll have to get a neighbour in to finish the job. This extraordinarily black but very funny opening scene introduces us to the universe of Le Corbeau.

Soon a poison-pen letter writer, signing off simply as "The Raven", is causing chaos. Accusations fly around and everyone starts minding everyone else's business and peering through keyholes. In this atmosphere, skeletons tumble out of closets, catfights erupt during funerals, people either commit or attempt to commit suicide and all the while the cheerful psychiatrist Dr Vorzet (Pierre Larquey) passes amused comment on it all. Once again, as in L'Assassin habite au 21, what appears overwhelmingly bleak is balanced by the humour and the odd but touching relationship between the crippled Denise and Dr Germain. Both having been victims of tragedy in different ways, they find solace in each other.

With terrific use of sound in the "pursuit" and "dictation" sequences, and much use of expressionistic tilted camera angles, Clouzot's "who-wrote-it" speeds to its grim but satisfying conclusion and ends with a beautiful shot of a black-clad murderer wending their way down a

street as children play in the foreground. (Clouzot would later begin Wages of Fear using the same playground image.) Le Corbeau also makes provision for the director's continued fascination with institutional settings, in this case a school and a hospital.

Le Corbeau was funded by Continental, a film company with pro-Nazi interests, and at the time the film was interpreted as blatantly anti-French, leading to Clouzot and his co-writer Louis Chavance's denunciation as collaborators by the CLCF (Comité de Libération du Cinéma Français) and, according to Clouzot, threatened with execution on London Radio. Chavance was able to convince them that the inception of the project was long before the Occupation, but Clouzot did not fare so well. In October 1944, he stood before the committee, charged with the accusation that Le Corbeau had probably been shown in Germany under the title Province Français (French province). Clouzot responded with the statement that because the film had not been dubbed, it was only shown in Belgium and Switzerland. In May 1945, the committee condemned him to a lifelong suspension, which was later reduced to two years.



It's only with the passage of time that we can see the interpretation of the film as anti-French propaganda isn't correct, and that it is pure Clouzot in its misanthropy. Clouzot and Chavance always maintained that it was based on a real incident that occurred in the 1930s, rather than being a metaphorical statement about France under the occupation. Backing this up, it begins with the caption "A small town, here or elsewhere."

Outside of his association with Continental, Clouzot was in no way pro-Nazi, anti-French or anti-Semitic, but he was a supreme cynic and Truffaut wrote that "the film seemed to me to be a fairly accurate picture of what I had seen around me during the war and the post-war period – collaboration, denunciation, the black market, hustling." (3)

By 1947 Clouzot was back in business, making the noirish Quai des Orfèvres. Beautifully shot by his usual cameraman Armand Thirard, it explores the seedy underbelly of showbiz in the 1940s. Maurice Martineau (Bernard Blier) is a loser musician, madly jealous of his blowsy chanteuse wife, Marguerite, who is threatening to run off with Georges (Charles Dullin), a hunchbacked, millionaire film studio head.

Martin plots to murder Georges. However, the plan falls apart when someone else beats him to it. Not only that but his carefully planned but clumsily executed alibi fails when a thief steals his car at the murder scene.

Inspector Antoine (Louis Jouvet) – a cross between Columbo and Maigret – arrives, and we're introduced to the film's other microcosm, the universe of the police. The Inspector's seasoned instincts soon lead him down a circuitous path in this joyfully cynical character study masquerading as a murder mystery that has the most upbeat (some might say too upbeat and verging on the saccharine) ending of any Clouzot film

Once again it is a warm but unconventional relationship, that between the Inspector and his illegitimate son, that gives the film its heart, acting as an antidote to the other tortuous associations, and even they are not quite what they seem: Marguerite is immediately overcome by grief when she hears her lover might be dead, despite her flighty attitude in the rest of the story.

Quai des Orfèvres was a big success commercially and won Clouzot the Best Director prize at the Venice Film Festival. His next film however, would not be so warmly received.

Leonard Mosely described Manon (1948), a post war updating of Prévost's novel Manon Lescault (the source of Puccini's opera), thus, "Though I have been going to the pictures since I wore rompers, I do not recall a more horrible film." (4) It's hard to disagree, especially since the central character seems little more then a sluttish opportunist, yet she has an almost likeable passion and zest for life. As Clouzot was himself, Manon is accused of being a collaborator, and she flees with her ex-resistance fighter lover Des Grieux to Paris, where her appetite for luxury drives her to more and more squalid methods of acquiring it.

This pessimistically unsparing vision of love and greed managed to alienate audiences in the late '40s, but is much more palatable today. Clouzot based the relationship between Manon and her lover on his own with long-term mistress Suzy Delair. The film was one of his personal favourites and has a strangely romantic if tragic ending. He told Paul Schrader, "I directed it with all my heart." (5)

He also directed it with his fists. Clouzot had a fondness, shared by William Friedkin (who remade Wages of Fear as Sorcerer in 1977), for smacking actors upside their heads to create the emotion required. P. Leprohon recalled being on set at the time and saw Clouzot strike Cécile Aubrey, saying, "I haven't time to muck about. That character she's supposed to be acting, it's essential it come into being, whatever the cost." (6) Clouzot practiced this

philosophy in Quai des Orfèvres when he subjected Bernard Blier to a real blood transfusion, in Les Diaboliques when he presented his nauseated cast with rotting fish to consume, and in La Vérité when he had Brigitte Bardot drink whisky and pop tranquillisers to create the necessary air of emotional exhaustion.

Carrying on with the post-war theme, the survivor of a concentration camp (Louis Jouvet) in Clouzot's "Retour de Jean" episode of compendium film Retour à la vie (1949) finds a wounded Nazi war criminal hiding in his hotel. Instead of handing him over to the police, he interrogates and tortures him himself in an attempt to find out what makes a human being behave in such a way. The lesson he learns is that he has taken on the mantle of torturer himself, leading him to shelter the man from the police so he can die in freedom. This is a typically dark, emotionally draining, yet ultimately humane piece that makes no concessions to playing down Clouzot's association with Germany. Despite being only 40 minutes long, it achieves the same power as his best features.

Miquette et sa mère (1950), however, was not one of his best features, and was Clouzot's least favourite of his own works. Something of a journeyman job, this frothy belle époque comedy tells the story of a stage-struck young woman who is offered dubious encouragement by an older ham actor. Clouzot himself said, "It is extremely difficult to adapt a light comedy created for the stage, without having to reconsider it completely. For me this was the entire problem with this film. From the moment one tries to transfer to the cinema an essential quality of the theatre – i.e. the close collaboration between spectator and actor – one finds oneself in front of an extremely deep ditch. And I, for one, did not find the bridge necessary to cross it." (7) But he was straight back on track three years later when his path would cross with Hitchcock's for the first time.

Hitchcock attempted to buy the rights to Le Salaire de la Peur, a novel by Georges Arnaud, but lost out when the writer announced he wanted them to go to a French filmmaker. Coincidentally, Clouzot was looking for a Brazilian-set project. Three years earlier, he had married Brazilian actress Vera Gibson-Amado and honeymooned in her native country. So fascinated was he by the place, that he wrote a book, Le Cheval des dieux, set in the region.

Clouzot opens Wages of Fear in a hellish Central American town where the American manager of an oilfield offers a bunch of down-at-heel, desperate characters, including Mario (Yves Montand) and M. Jo (Charles Vanel), big money to drive trucks carrying nitro-glycerine through a not-exactly-smooth jungle, in order to put out an oil well fire.

Wages of Fear contains several typical Clouzot-isms: the deliberately unlikeable yet oddly sympathetic characters, the way these characters are reduced to childlike demonstrations of emotion in the face of extreme situations, and the classic twist in the tale. Although the opening section of the film is arguably overlong, the rest resolves itself into scene after scene of gut-wrenching suspense, during which the audience feels like they've driven a truck full of explosives through the jungle themselves– sweaty, grubby and terrified. The film can be, and was, read as an attack on imperialism, capitalism and greed, and Clouzot found himself in the unusual position of having been vilified as a fascist and a communist.

Unlike many film writers, I've endeavoured not to give away the endings of Clouzot's films, but let's just say that it's Mario's bravado that has kept him alive and it's this very impetuousness that creates the flippant but memorable ending quite in keeping with the maker's sardonic world view.

Wages of Fear was Clouzot's first worldwide critical and commercial success and this may have made Hitch hot under the collar. His anxiety must have been exacerbated when Clouzot beat him, for the second time, to the rights of a novel he wanted. Les Diaboliques by Boileau and Narcejac, inspired by the hard-boiled crime fiction of James M. Cain, became one of the finest thrillers ever committed to the screen. The put-upon wife (Vera Clouzot) and abused mistress (Simone Signoret) of a sadistic headmaster (Paul Meurisse) plot to murder him, but afterwards the body disappears and his presence continues to haunt them.

Les Diaboliques has one of the most famous and influential twist endings ever, and the film was a huge commercial success, something unprecedented for a foreign-language film at that time. It had a memorable ad campaign stressing refusal to the theatre of anyone turning up late and urged viewers not to give away the ending, something that Hitchcock would later emulate for Psycho (1960).

Psycho is usually credited with changing the entire landscape of thriller/horror cinema, but in fact that honour rightfully belongs to Les Diaboliques. With its everyday setting, dark psychological overtones, black humour (in a little personal "in-joke" Clouzot has the headmaster killed in a hotel in Niort, his birthplace), hints at the supernatural, and the plot twist that alters the audience's entire perception of what has gone before, the film paved the way for numerous attempts based on the same template, some anaemic (William Castle's Macabre [1958]), others strong enough to stand on their own merits (Seth Holt's Taste Of Fear [1961]).

Intriguingly, although the film has a lushly orchestrated score for the title sequence, there is no incidental music for the rest of the film, throwing us jarringly into what appears to be a piece of "realist" cinema. But Clouzot also adds many other genres to his pot, including horror, murder mystery and film noir. The emotional centre of this little stew is Vera Clouzot, as the faint-hearted murderess. We actively want her to murder her appalling husband and she is completely sympathetic all the way through. We experience the plot twists and shocks alongside her, as (until the very end) we see everything from her viewpoint.

As in Wages of Fear, the film takes its time to establish the characters, seemingly at the expense of plot, but we are in the hands of a master and everything is there for a reason. Atmospherically, there is an overwhelming air of decay, symbolised by the overgrown weeds clogging the pool, and the extraordinarily Byzantine architecture of the school itself. Containing all his characteristic elements, the microcosm of the school, the dispassionate view of the murder plot and the twist in the tail, this is probably the apex of Clouzot's career, with everything working as a symbiotic whole.

Hitchcock was brazenly light-fingered with this film and Psycho borrows its main elements – the dead seem to have risen from the grave and a highlighted murder takes place in a bathroom. The films even share identical close ups of swirling water going down the plughole. Hitchcock also appropriated the swinging overhead light casting eerie shadows from a scene in Le Corbeau where Vorzet and Germain discuss "light" and "night", for the climactic unveiling of Mrs Bates. Later, he felt compelled to snap up Boileau and Narcejac's other work, D'Entre les morts, which he adapted as Vertigo (1958), arguably his masterpiece. Interestingly, the writers had heard about Hitchcock's interest in Les Diaboliques and set about writing D'Entre les morts specifically to appeal to him.

Sadly, Clouzot had to abandon two projects after this, due to illness (one of them, L'Enfer, the story of a hotel keeper driven mad through jealousy of his wife, was later made by Claude Chabrol) and followed up Les Diaboliques by making the documentary The Picasso Mystery (1956). The film used the technique of filming Picasso painting on a semi-transparent canvas with ink, causing the image to show through clearly on the other side. Clouzot filmed this process and the entire shoot took three months, after which Picasso destroyed all the pictures, making the film itself the art. Black and white, colour, and widescreen film was used to complete the mosaic and the result was declared a national treasure by the French government in 1984. Catharine Rambeau called it "the twentieth century equivalent of watching Michelangelo transform the Sistine Chapel" (8) (though logically it could only be called that if Michelangelo had burned down the Sistine Chapel immediately after painting it).

In Les Espions (1958), spies from different countries converge on a psychiatric clinic where an atomic scientist is being hidden. Clouzot may have been trying to appeal to the international audience he'd gained with his two thrillers by casting Martita Hunt, Peter Ustinov and Sam Jaffe. If he was, then the attempt failed and the result, remarkably after his previous form, is quite low key. It's not without interest however, and contains his usual flourishes: the microcosm of the sanatorium, the preoccupation with illness, and, like many films of the 1950s, it was concerned with the nuclear threat. It would be his wife Vera's last acting collaboration with her husband. Her final contribution to his career was co-writing La Vérité (1960), and the film has an almost proto-feminist vein running through it in its dissection of Left Bank sexual mores. She was terminally ill when Clouzot began filming the courtroom drama.

Dominique, a young woman from the provinces, comes to Paris, succumbs to a Bohemian lifestyle, becomes obsessively involved with a young composer, Gilbert, and in a classic crime passionelle, shoots him. At her trial her lifestyle is scrutinised and found to be immoral. Bardot would later claim it was one of her favourite films but her relationship with the director was a tempestuous one. Clouzot complained of her childishness and resorted to doping her with tranquillisers and giving her shots of

whisky to get the performance he wanted. At one point he grabbed her by the shoulders and shook her violently, saying, "I don't need amateurs in my films. I want an actress." Bardot's response was to slap him and shout, "And I need a director, not a psychopath." (9) All this drama only served to make the press think they must have been having an affair, but they were barking up the wrong tree. She was in fact seeing her co-star, Sami Frey.

David Thomson describes La Vérité as "strident but unfeeling" (10). I would take issue with this stance, as there is no more emotionally devastating moment in Clouzot's work than when Gilbert shoves Dominique's head down out of view as they pass his concierge's window, embarrassed at being seen with her. It never fails to illicit a gasp from any audience watching it.

As the story unfolds, we begin to see that although Dominique is initially presented as unlikeable, she is in fact quite tragic and vulnerable, and that Gilbert, introduced to us at first as an innocent, serious-minded young musician, is a cold-hearted narcissist incapable of trust. We are given this understanding through the efforts of the defence lawyer, Guérin (Charles Vanel), against the simplistic accusations of the prosecution (Paul Meurisse). His common sense rebuttals bring "the truth" into focus.

With this film, Clouzot seemed to be very much on the side of youth and new ideas, which was ironic since all the young directors of the nouvelle vague, aside from Truffaut, would condemn the classical style of filmmaking used here, as outdated. The ending is, in its own way, as brutal as anything that he concocted for his thrillers.

Clouzot's swan song was La Prisonnière(1968), a curious excursion into voyeurism and emotional game-playing, exploring a love triangle involving Gilbert, a kinetic artist (Bernard Fresson), Josée, a film editor (Elisabeth Wiener) and Stanislas, a photographer/gallery owner (Laurent Terzieff). This was the only film Clouzot made entirely in colour, although he had been planning to shoot L'Enfer in a combination of B&W and colour to differentiate reality from lurid fantasy.

La Prisonnière is pure Clouzot thematically – a jealous wife is driven into the arms of a control freak photographer (something of a self-portrait for Clouzot) whose private library of S&M pictures both attracts and repels her. The film is shot quite classically for the most part, until it erupts into a long psychedelic sequence towards the end. At the opposite extreme it includes one spectacular, almost parodic scene by the seashore that looks likes something out of a Sunday supplement.

Although bleak, the film is not unsympathetic in its exploration of the three characters' motivations. Josée has been betrayed by her ambitious husband Gilbert. Lonely and under-appreciated, she makes the initial moves towards Stanislas, who is at first reluctant, due to his friendship with her husband, but succumbs when he sees her interest in his S&M photographs. Incapable of having a normal reciprocal relationship, he abandons her when he discovers she has fallen in love with him. Gilbert is then thrown into confusion when he discovers the truth about the affair, and the two men thrash around attempting to resolve the mess, while Josée, in despair, drives her car into the path of a train. They are all equally responsible for the outcome that sees Josée in hospital, calling out Stanislas' name, with her husband by her bedside. This ending seems to echo another quintessentially 1960s film, Richard Lester's Petulia (1968).

It would have been fascinating to see how Clouzot would have responded to the new permissiveness in what was allowed on screen, but after this he would restrict his work to television documentaries of orchestral performances, conducted by Herbert von Karajan, who ironically had also been associated with the Nazi regime.

Hitchcock wanted to explore the new sexual frankness with Kaleidoscope–Frenzy (a rapist/murderer on the loose in San Francisco) but the film was never produced due to its content of perversion and violence. It had parallels with La Prisonnière in its intended use of pop art imagery. Universal head Lou Wasserman believed it would damage the studio's reputation irreparably. Instead Hitchcock went on to make Frenzy (1972). Its one horrifyingly explicit murder scene is directed with such relish that it still leaves a bad taste in the mouth over 30 years later. While Hitchcock was pandering to his own worst instincts, Clouzot had gone to ground.

In 1976 Truffaut sent Clouzot a letter pleading, "Why not go back to work? Why not shout 'Action'?" (11) It never happened and he died a year later at the age of 70, shamefully under-appreciated in his own country. In the years since, however, Clouzot's reputation has been somewhat restored and we can see his legacy for what it is – a priceless collection of masterfully made films

including the progenitor of the modern psychological thriller.

Sadly, at the time of writing, there is no existing English language volume solely dedicated to Clouzot. Perhaps this omission is due to the way he has been largely misunderstood. Seen as a whole, what first springs to mind about Clouzot's films is their cruelty and cynicism, but this director was nothing if not contradictory, and if you dig deeper they also contain little touches of tenderness, either in the form of unconventional relationships, or in the candid way he views his characters' flaws. Thomson describes Clouzot's work as a "cinema of total disenchantment" (12). In his mind "good means light and bad means night", but he has neglected to look into the twilight world that Clouzot inhabited, a place where good and evil coexist. In this place we have room for humanity and empathy as well as despair and nihilism. It is a world very much like our own.

Dennis Lehane: "The Wages of Fear: No Exit (Criterion Notes, 2005)

I first saw Henri-Georges Clouzot's masterpiece The Wages of Fearwhen the restored version was released in the U.S., in 1991. But my awareness of it began a bit earlier, when I was twelve and saw the unfortunate American remake, Sorcerer, which sent me investigating articles about the original and searching out what Clouzot films I could find: the grim, sublime Le corbeau (1943); the strangely touching police procedural Quai des Orfèvres (1947); the tingly, unforgettable Diabolique (1954). Throughout this process, The Wagesof Fear was available on video only in truncated form, shorn of all political undertones that the U.S. distributor had deemed "anti-American" during the film's original U.S. run, in 1955 (two years after the French premiere), so I held out for the unpillaged original.

Even so, nothing could have prepared me for the seismic assault of it. Here is a film that stands alone as the purest exercise in cinematic tension ever carved into celluloid, a work of art so viscerally nerve-racking that one fears a misplaced whisper from the audience could cause the screen to explode. As obsessively attentive as Clouzot is to the narrative spine of the story—four men drive two trucks of nitroglycerin three hundred miles across a hellish landscape of potholes, desiccated flora, rock-strewn passes, hairpin turns, and rickety bridges with crumbling beams to put out an oil fire raging on the other side of the mountain—he is just as savage in his commentary on corporate imperialism, American exploitation of foreign cultures, the rape of the land, and the ridiculous folly of man. Critics at the time charged that The Wages of Fear was virulently anti-American (Time magazine, in 1955, called it "a picture that is surely one of the most evil ever made"), but this is missing the ravaged forest for the blighted trees. As director Karel Reisz pointed out in a 1991 Film Comment article, the film is "anti-American," but only insofar as it is "unselectively and impartially anti-everything."

I agree with Reisz about this impartiality—Clouzot's camera may as well be the eyeball of a lizard, for all the emotion it shows the humans who enter its field of vision—but the charge of "anti-everything," while certainly valid on a surface level, fails to take into account one of the basic tenets of cinematic humanism as employed by Clouzot and John Huston and Stanley Kubrick, among others: that by removing all hint of subjectivity from the point of view, one thus removes any stain of sentimentality. This erasure of sentiment does not cancel out empathy. In fact, in that very void, we, the viewer, are forced to decide what our capacity for empathy is. What remains in Clouzot's chilly remove from his main characters is a fascinatingly odd mixture of contempt and love, one akin to that of a father who has closed off all outward displays of emotion for his children because he fears the heartbreak that could destroy him should anything tragic befall them.

"If I've gotta be a corpse, I want to be presentable."

If so many of today's "bleak chic" auteurs seem to have fashioned their dire worldviews by skimming Cliffs Notes of Friedrich Nietzsche while listening to Trent Reznor in well-appointed suburban basements, it's important to note that Clouzot didn't come by his pessimism in a vacuum. Clouzot's career in film was just beginning when Germany invaded France, and one can't help but imagine the effect it had on him to toil at his craft in a suddenly subjugated homeland, while all around him stood the worst aspects of human nature—not only the genocidal bloodlust of the Third Reich but also the soiled moral lassitude of the Vichy government and various everyday collaborationist Frenchmen.

It was in this atmosphere that Clouzot would make Le corbeau, a film that managed to outrage both the Nazis—under whose auspices it, like many other French films during the occupation, was made—and the French. The Nazis, apparently, were appalled by its bleakness and by its depiction of their behavior during the occupation. The French, similarly, found their representation (as

provincial informers) offensive, and deemed the film collaborationist. After the war, it would be four years before the blacklisted Clouzot was allowed to direct again. With Le corbeau, however, he had managed to commit the artist's most triumphant miscalculation: he had made a work so unsettling in its archetypal truths that it offended everyone. All sides assailed him and none would champion him. From that point on, Clouzot would consistently attack the hypocrisy built into every "decent" society, the moral bankruptcy disguised as moralism that is so often the grimy engine that chugs relentlessly underneath otherwise gleaming bodywork.

Plagued by shaky health that would force him off projects throughout his life, ostracized by some in French society who never forgave him for Le corbeau, and intimately associated with the identity crisis that plagued most of postwar Europe, Clouzot would bring to bear in all his subsequent films a uniquely ironic disappointment in man's inability to fulfill his own potential. But it was never more extravagantly crystallized than in The Wages of Fear.

"It's like prison here. Easy to get in. 'Make yourself at home.' But there's no way out."

When we enter the world of The Wages of Fear, we do so by way of an opening shot (later appropriated by Sam Peckinpah for the opening of The Wild Bunch) in which cockroaches are tied together and casually tortured by a half-naked child on an oily, muddy street in the oily, muddy village of Las Piedras. A flavored-ice vendor passes by, and the child abandons the cockroaches to covet treats he can't afford. But still he has to look, to lust after the unattainable. Once the vendor passes, the child returns to the roaches, but a vulture has already taken his place. With a single stroke, Clouzot has set in motion his primary theme—that men are constantly searching the horizon to the detriment of all else in their immediate world. Men are "goal oriented," addicted to the "quest," itching for the "heroic" opportunity. Or so we tell ourselves. Clouzot says no. Men are wanderers. Adrenaline junkies. Mortally terrified of home and hearth.

How else to explain how our four "heroes" ended up in a hellhole like Las Piedras? They weren't born there, and no one would live in Las Piedras by choice. While we'll never discover what has driven them there, we know it must have been sins of a particularly unforgivable nature, because no one opts to live in hell unless the alternative is demonstrably worse. But since nothing is worse, the men have long since found reason to rue their decision and pine for escape. The four men are Mario (Yves Montand), Jo (Charles Vanel), Luigi (Folco Lulli), and Bimba (Peter Van Eyck), and Clouzot presents them as if the poverty and hopelessness of Las Piedras have already stripped them of many of the attributes Homo sapiens like to believe separate them from their simian forebears.

"Even w*hen they guillotine you, they dress you up first."*

The four men are hired by the Southern Oil Company, a ruthless, American-owned multinational that has already laid waste to Las Piedras and, by extension, Central and South America. The company is personified by O'Brien (William Tubbs, reminding one of a puffier Lee J. Cobb), who hires the men for the suicide mission and makes a blustery speech about how they should be paid a top wage, even as one suspects that he assumes only two, at best, will survive. To co-workers who argue against hiring "bums" to do the job, O'Brien counters: "Those bums don't have any union or any families." When informed that the Safety Commission is coming to investigate the fire, he replies, "Put all the blame on the victims. They're done for." And yet even as one perceives Clouzot's icy rage at the callousness of Western corporations ("If there's oil around, they're not far behind," one character quips about the Americans in town), one can also feel his seething despair at the men who would willingly hand over their lives for such a pointless mission.

Mario, in particular, is an extremely dislikable protagonist. He treats his lover, Linda (the "perfect woman" in an emotionally stunted man-child's fantasy, and played with knee-knocking sensuality by Clouzot's wife, Véra, in all her dark-eyed, languid uncoiling), as if she were a dog, literally petting her on the head as she crawls to him on all fours in their first scene. Linda, it must be said, is a willing accomplice. She is all sexual supplicant to Mario, no matter how repeatedly she's debased for her efforts, and is last seen lying prostrate, her eyes closed, awaiting the return of her lover.

Mario's treatment of her, however, speaks to a man consumed with self-loathing, so much so that he is incapable of seeing that the sole good thing in his life, maybe in the entire history of it, kneels before him, willing, as Linda says, to rob for him, kill for him. That Mario rejects this so flatly speaks, as others have noted, to his repressed homosexual bond with Jo, but even more so to

Clouzot's mortification at the treasures men leave behind in order to pursue goals of far more dubious value.

The other men are depicted just as unsentimentally. Jo, a strutting, petty tyrant, attracts or repels all around him with his casual cruelty yet will later be revealed as the weakest of them all. Bimba, looking like a poster child for Hitler's Aryan ideal, is so tightly wound and fatalistic that he's expecting death before he even gets behind the wheel. And Luigi, ostensibly the warmest and most humane of the quartet, seems at best a holy fool, because even if he survives the trek, he'll most likely die from diseased lungs, ravaged by exposure to cement during his tenure with the Southern Oil Company.

"You don't know what fear is. But you'll see. It's catching. It's catching like smallpox. And once you get it, it's for life."

The journey section of the film begins at the hour mark, and from that point on—for eighty-seven minutes of Homeric obstacles and knuckles so white you expect them to burst through the skin—it never relents. Each man who, as Jo puts it, rides with a "bomb on his tail" attempts to adapt to the never-ceasing thump of sheer terror as the trek begins with a full-out dash across the "washboard," a road so ungainly, slick, and rutted that the only way to drive it without vibrations is at under six miles per hour or over forty; a turn so tight that to make it, they must back up onto what remains of a rotting bridge that hangs, as if by hope alone, over an abyss; and a gut-scouring set piece in which they must use some of the nitro to blow up a fifty-ton boulder in their path, and still make the fuse long enough to reach safety.

The entire journey, in fact, is a primer in what Clouzot and Alfred Hitch-cock understood above all others—and something I always felt that I, as a budding novelist, learned at their knees: that tension exists in the absence of shock, in the suggestion of dire possibility, as opposed to any presentation of calamity, which often ends up looking rather pedestrian. After the boulder, there is a pool of oil to drive through, in which Mario, determined not to get stuck, purposefully crushes the leg of Jo, who is guiding him . . . and still gets stuck. As each crisis is averted, the toll on the men's nerves (particularly Jo's) grows worse. It's a refreshingly authentic concept—that exposure to terror does not make one less fearful, as most heroic films purport, but more so. You can't conquer fear, only temporarily elude it. So each encounter represents merely another wink from Death. But the four men know all too well that Death, sooner or later, will open his eyes.

"Mario, my darling, why are you doing this?"

A film in which one character dies saying, "There's nothing!" is bound to be attacked (as this one was and continues to be) for being both misanthropic and atheistic, but I've never felt that Clouzot was saying, "This is the world," but rather, "This is the world we've made." (A vision that condemns what man is, in despair over what man could be, is, perversely, a hopeful one.) It was we, after all, who helped make a world in which men risk all for the simple need to do so, are willing to lose all because it confirms their self-defeating interpretations of "fate," destroy all because all is, well, destroyable. These men are, one can't help feeling with a tragic sense of waste, children—torturing bugs to kill time while they wait for the vendor to come hawk delicacies they can never afford to purchase.

Danny Perry: "The Wages of Fear" (Criterion Notes, 1991)

One of cinema's most revered thrillers, Le Salaire de la Peur or The Wages of Fear is the acknowledged masterpiece of the brilliant French director Henri-Georges Clouzot (1907-77). It is also the film that made popular music hall singer Yves Montand into a movie star. Clouzot's sixth film and the predecessor to his terror classic Diabolique, it was voted the Grand Prize at Cannes in 1953 and Best Film of 1954 by the British Film Academy. Unfortunately, it was excessively trimmed for United States distribution, in part because of scenes that denounced American business interests for exploiting workers in Latin America. As Parisian critic Pierre Kast protested at the time, "It is impossible to remove a single episode without distorting the ultimate significance of the film." Now, thirty-seven years later, Criterion proudly presents the full, reassembled picture, Clouzot's stunning original cut. In this version, the early sequences have their clarity restored, the characters are more fully developed, and the film comes across as being much more political.

Clouzot's ironic suspense films are often compared to those of Alfred Hitchcock. But Wages of Fear more recalls John Huston's 1948 Mexico-set The Treasure of the Sierra Madre, another grim adventure about penniless men who seek quick riches to escape their deadend existences. Clouzot's picture is also about courage and cowardice and the expendibility and precariousness of human life. Sordid and despairing as are the director's other films, Wages of Fear was adapted from a novel by George Arnaud. Whereas Arnaud set his story in Guatemala, Clouzot's

existential film takes place in an unspecified Latin American country and a fictional village, Las Piedras. The refuse of the earth find themselves in this hellhole, though it's hard to figure out how anyone could wind up here. Now everyone dreams of fleeing, but they haven't the money. Four tough vagabonds—Corsican Montand, aging Parisian Charles Vanel, German Peter Van Eyck, and fatally ill Italian Folco Lulli—get the opportunity to escape the squalor when an American fuel company offers them $2,000 each to hurriedly transport two truckloads of nitroglycerine over 300 miles of hazardous mountain roads. The firm figures that since these aren't union men, no one will squawk if they don't survive the suicidal task.

The journey, which comprises the second half of the film, is heartstopping. Three sequences rank with the most nerve-wracking in movie history: the trucks must back onto rotting planks over a mountain ledge; Van Eyck uses nitro to blow up a giant boulder that blocks the road; Montand drives his truck through an expanding pool of spilled oil while Vanel swims in the black liquid, clearing a path and trying to get out of the way. Georges Auric's score and Armand Thirard's cinematography, which dramatically opposes light and shadow, add to the tension. And Clouzot's editing style "based on constant shocks," punctuates the narrative perfectly. Consequently, as the New York Times critic Bosley Crowther wrote, "You sit there waiting for the theater to explode."

Clouzot considered Wages of Fear to be an epic about courage. On the surface it is about how these four men test themselves for money on the dangerous, death-defying drive. They try to exhibit grace under pressure, be equal to their companions, be brave, be "men." They all succeed but Vanel, who loses his nerve—Jean Gabin turned down the part because he was afraid to portray a coward (Vanel won the Best Actor award at Cannes). They reveal admirable traits on their journey, convincing us that even the lives of the dregs of society have worth. Still they don't warrant our respect—though Montand, Van Eyck, and Lulli extend it to each other -- because they were irresponsible to have accepted this assignment. Brave or cowardly doesn't matter: Death comes to everyone and is heroic for none. In this film, Clouzot viciously attacks corporations that continually exploit individuals—especially non-union workers in Third World countries—and let them gamble with their lives sop the company profits. But he's equally disappointed in men such as our "heroes" who risk their lives for all the wrong reasons. Ironically, placing money and machismo over their own well-being puts them in complicity with the vile companies that exploit them, and will thrive long after these men have been blown to smithereens.

BUFFALO FILM SEMINARS SPRING 2020, SERIES 40

Mar 3 Luchino Visconti, *The Leopard* 1963
Mar 10 Masaki Kobayashi *Kwaidan* 1965
Mar 24 John Schlesinger *Midnight Cowboy* 1969
Mar 31 Alan Pakula *Klute* 1971
Apr 7 Robert Altman *McCabe and Mrs Miller* 1971
Apr 14 Martin Scorsese *King of Comedy* 1983
Apr 21 Wim Wenders *Land of Plenty* 2004
Apr 28 Wes Anderson *Isle of Dogs* 2018
May 5 Pedro Almodóvar *Pain and Glory* 2019

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