



FILM: **DIABOLIQUE**

FDG RATING: 3.3 ☺☺☺○○

Film Discussion Group (FDG) Scale is 1-5 (5 is best)

Henri-Georges Clouzot: *director*
Simone Signoret: *actress, Nicole Horner*
Véra Clouzot: *actress, Christina Delassalle*

DATE: August 23, 2020

DISCUSSION SUMMARY: **DIABOLIQUE**

A masterful French horror film in the 1950s, as evidenced by one film discussion participant who said she dropped her bag of popcorn in fright at the bath tub scene, when she saw the film at a very young age. Watching it in 2020, *Diabolique* has lost much of its thriller punch but still has an intriguing plot and unexpected twist ending. (Alfred Hitchcock had wanted the screen rights to make an American version, but being denied, admitted the film inspired his suspense thriller, *Psycho*, with its famous, still cringe worthy shower scene.)

At a second-rate boarding school in a French provincial town, run by the tyrannical and cruel headmaster Michel Delassalle, the crime is conceived by his frail wife, Christina, (who owns and teaches at the school) and Michel's headstrong mistress, Nicole, a who is also a teacher. The two women have an interesting relationship, based on their mutual hatred of Michel, who is physically and emotionally abusive to both, as well as unkind to the children.

It was great to see two female leads (starring the famous French actress Simone Signoret) plotting a murder and dominating the screen for the entire film. They conspire to drug Michel, drown him in the bathtub, then dump his body in the neglected algae infested swimming pool so eventually the corpse would rise, and everyone would assume he accidentally fell in the pool and drowned. However, the corpse doesn't rise, the women panic, so Nicole "accidentally" drops her keys in the pool causing it to be drained, expecting to find the corpse, but lo and behold, Michel's body has mysteriously disappeared. Without giving away the remaining unexpected plot twists, the appearance of a retired senior policeman now working as a private detective becomes involved in the case, much to Nicole's chagrin.

A couple discussion participants had a hard time watching it because it was so obviously stylized and dated. Another countered that the film was an exceptional accomplishment considering when it was made, and added that the popping eyeballs was an especially memorable scene. Others commented that they enjoyed being pulled along as the plot thickened. We definitely liked the detective character, who added an unexpected twist.

In the 1950s, we might have all rated this film a 5 on our scale of 1 to 5 (5 is the best) but even recognizing the tremendous influence it has had on the horror/crime/thriller genre, *Diabolique* scored a not so hair-raising 3.4.



See you at the movies!

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www.filmdiscussiongroup.com