

Review: Jean de Florette

French film one of the best!

by Lois Wadsworth

Claude Berri's first of two films based on the novels of Marcel Pagnol lives up to its advance billing as one of the best French films of our time. The film stars Gerard Depardieu as Jean, Yves Montand as Papet, and Daniel Auteuil as Ugo.

The story is simple enough: The great war to end all wars is over, and two very different men return to tend the earth in beautiful Provence where water (or lack of it) determines a farmer's fate. Ugo is an uneducated, unmarried, unattractive man whose burning desire is to raise long-stemmed blood-red carnations on his arid plot of land. Jean is a family man whose knowledge of farming comes from books, but whose sunny optimism comes from his love for the land on which he wants to live in peace with his wife (a former opera star) and daughter Manon.

Ugo's Uncle Cesar (called Papet) is a wealthy landowner, a man of unabashed ruthlessness who infects his nephew's simple mind with a plan to get at the water on the adjacent property. When the present owner of the land refuses to allow them access to an old spring, Papet and Ugo are responsible for the fall that results in his death. To keep anyone else from using the water they covet, they block the source



Gerard Depardieu and Daniel Auteuil are neighbors in the countryside of 1920's France, in the highly acclaimed film, *Jean de Florette*.

of the spring with cement. Meanwhile, Jean and his family arrive and begin to work unceasingly to create the paradise Jean envisions.

French playwright and director Marcel Pagnol made a five-hour-long movie entitled *Manon of the Springs* in 1952 and starred his young wife in the leading role. The film wasn't a success, however, and Pagnol did a strange thing with its failure. He re-wrote the story as a two-volume epic published in 1963 as *The Water of the Hills*. Director Claude Berri discovered the books in 1978, four years after Pagnol's death, but it took him another six years to secure film rights from Jacqueline Pagnol.

Jean de Florette is a superb vehicle for two of France's most renowned actors, Montand and Depardieu, as well as a showcase for the talents of Daniel Auteuil who won the 1986 French Oscar for Best Actor. Depardieu is endearing as the hunchback Jean whose child-like wonder has ill-prepared him for the duplicity of his enemies. Montand, the accomplished star of such films as *Costa-Gravas' Z* and *State of Siege*,

is utterly convincing as the conniving peasant whose greed blinds him to all human values. Auteuil is bewildered, torn between his ambitions and his emotions. "I am not crying," he says, tears streaming down his face, "my eyes are."

Jean de Florette and its sequel *Manon of the Spring* are the most expensive French movies ever made, and adapting works of fiction to cinema is always risky business. No doubt Claude Berri's successful production of *Tess* from Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* with director Roman Polanski helped assure him that Pagnol's novels could become great films. However, the physical task of filming two pictures at the same time on location over 36 weeks surely would have intimidated a less dedicated or able director than Claude Berri. His boldness paid off: Six and a half million French moviegoers saw *Jean de Florette* in 1986 and an additional five million saw *Manon of the Spring*. Financial rewards and critical and popular acclaim keep rolling in. As for those of us here in America, let me join the chorus: Bring on *Manon*.

Big Shots: Ricky Busker as a street smart kid and Darius McCrary, from the other side of the tracks, solve a mystery. With Paul Winfield, PG-13. Movieland (342-4142) and in double feature with *The Pick-Up Artist* at Springfield Quad (726-9073).

The Big Town: In 1957, country kid J.C. Cullen (Matt Dillon) comes to Chicago to challenge the illegal crapshooting scene. Stripper Diane Lane tempts him with another game, and Tommy Lee Jones steals scenes as a wicked gangster. Movieland (342-4142).

Dirty Dancing: Being compared to *Saturday Night Fever* and *Flashdance*, this musical/romance takes place in 1963 in upstate New York. Jennifer Grey plays a young woman who falls for older man Patrick Swayze. Movieland (342-4142).

Fatal Attraction: A one-night stand turns into a nightmare for a lawyer (Michael Douglas) and his family. Glenn Close plays the obsessed woman who pursues him. Thriller. Cinema World (342-6536).

Innerspace: In this sci-fi comedy about a secret government project, Dennis Quaid plays a macho brute reduced to miniature, then injected into grocery clerk Martin Short. Double feature with *Stakeout* at Cinema World (342-6536).

Jean de Florette: Yves Montand gives the performance of a lifetime in this half-serious, half-comic film which took 10 years to make—and the most money for a film ever in France. Filmed lushly against a southern France backdrop, circa 1920, Gerard Depardieu also stars. Bijou (686-2458).

Like Father, Like Son: Teen-age live wire (Kirk Cameron of TV's *Growing Pains*) and his straight-faced dad (Dudley Moore) accidentally trade brain parts connected to intelligence and personality, but not memory. Confusion reigns. Comedy. Movieland (342-4142) and Springfield Quad (726-9073).

The Living Daylights: Two firsts are in this new James Bond Flick: Timothy Dalton now plays Agent 007, and he is involved with a new intrigue—monogamy. Fantasy/adventure. Double feature with *Superman IV* at Movieland (342-4142).

Matewan: Re-creates an ugly incident in the 1920's in coal country, at Matewan (pronounced mate-one), West Virginia. Striking coal miners clash with their bosses through immigrant and Black scabs. Chris Cooper plays a union organizer, John Sayles (*The Brother From Another Planet*) directs. Valley River Twin (686-8633).

The Pick-Up Artist: Molly Ringwald and Robert Downey play lovers' games in this teen flick. With Dennis Hopper. Double feature with *Big Shots* at Springfield Quad (726-9073).

Predator: An unknown force pursues muscle man Arnold Schwarzenegger. Late-night feature at the Bijou (686-2458).

The Principal: A very tough principal cracks down on a very nasty school. With James Belushi, Louis Gossett, Jr., and Rae Dawn Chong. Springfield Quad (726-9073).

Stakeout: Emilio Estevez and Richard Dreyfuss are two undercover detectives. Comedy-adventure. Double feature with *Innerspace* at Cinema World (342-6536).

Superman IV: The Quest for Peace: Christopher Reeve again plays the Man of Steel, up against Nuclear Man. Gene Hackman plays a villain, with Margot Kidder as Lois Lane, and Mariel Hemingway. Double feature with *The Living Daylights* at Movieland (342-4142).

Tough Guys: Burt Lancaster and Kirk Douglas desert the retirement scene and turn to train robbery. Comedy, action. Double feature with *Adventures in Babysitting* at Springfield Fine Arts (747-2201).

Waterwalker: Director Bill Mason is also a painter, whose admiration for J.M.W. Turner's seascapes transfers into capturing the beauty of Canadian lakes. Music by Bruce Cockburn, narration by Native Americans—and transportation by canoe. Cinema 7 (687-0733).

Thursday, October 8 is the last showing for: *My Life As a Dog* at the Bijou (686-2458). Hellraiser at Movieland and Springfield Quad. No Way Out at Valley River Twin. Rolling Vengeance at Springfield Quad.

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