



7-2000

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Binet, Marie-Jo. "Which Original Works? Tracking Sophocles' Narrative in 'Jean de Florette' and 'Manon des Sources.'" *Literature/Film Quarterly* 28.1 (July 2000).

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Abstract

Pagnol's two-part novel, *L'Eau des collines* (1962), was inspired by his own films, *Manon des sources* and *Ugolin*, released ten years before (1952). Much better known are Berri's 1986 films bearing the novel's titles *Jean de Florette* and *Manon des sources*.

In this essay I want to examine the architectural and thematic transformations between the three types of "texts:"

I will show that each piece is referring to a different diegetic universe. Pagnol's film is a celebration of provençal verbal activity, "joie de vivre," and of the Christian notions of redemption and forgiveness. The musical motif of *L'Arlesienne* by Bizet is a direct reference to the Christian Epiphany. The overwhelming, pervasive theme in Pagnol's novel is the unalterable life of the seamless feminine goddess whose multiple body flows in all women, in the earth, and in the water. Her special dwelling is in the hills where the priestess Manon operates. In Berri's films, the emphasis is clearly on fate and on the blindness of the tragic hero(es), and the soundtrack includes Verdi's *Forza Del Destino* as a haunting motif. [*excerpt*]

Keywords

Jean de Florette, Manon des sources, film studies

Disciplines

Film and Media Studies | French and Francophone Language and Literature

Which Original Works? Tracking Sophocles's Narrative in *Jean de Florette* and *Manon des sources*

Pagnol's two-part novel, *L'Eau des collines* (1962), was inspired by his own films, *Manon des sources* and *Ugolin*, released ten years before (1952). Much better known are Berri's 1986 films bearing the novel's titles *Jean de Florette* and *Manon des sources*.

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I will show that each piece is referring to a different diegetic universe. Pagnol's film is a celebration of provençal verbal activity, "joie de vivre," and of the Christian notions of redemption and forgiveness. The musical motif of *L'Arlésienne* by Bizet is a direct reference to the Christian Epiphany. The overwhelming, pervasive theme in Pagnol's novel is the unalterable life of the seamless feminine goddess whose multiple body flows in all women, in the earth, and in the water. Her special dwelling is in the hills where the priestess Manon operates. In Berri's films, the emphasis is clearly on fate and on the blindness of the tragic hero(es), and the soundtrack includes Verdi's *Forza Del Destino* as a haunting motif.

Rather than giving us one more psychoanalytical reading, Berri's interpretation brings into focus the very moments and characteristics of the "story" of Oedipus, retold, redistributed, and hidden in Pagnol's filmic and literary texts.

Firstly, we will look at ten comparable elements in the narratives of Manon's legend and Oedipus's myth. Secondly, the major implications of Pagnol's works will be presented. Finally, we will look at some aspects of Berri's montage, and the choices he made that either transformed or revealed particular aspects of the original texts.

Here is what one may read in the Oedipus myth and the Manon's legend.
Sophocles's *Oedipus*:

1. An unwanted child is born to the king and queen of Thebes. Attempts to kill him will result in a life-long mark and a name: "Oedipus" means "swollen foot."
2. The child will be taken away from his parents' town and will grow up in Corinth (a rival city of Athens and Sparta), without knowing his origins.
3. An oracle warned his parents and then Oedipus himself about his fate without giving him any meaning or means to avoid it.
4. Three geographical locations are crucial to the narrative:
Thebes, where the child was conceived and born, Delphi, where the oracle was consulted but not received properly by Oedipus, and Corinth, where he grew up in ignorance. A fourth would be the sacred "Gods" space where Oedipus is finally admitted.
5. The young man goes back to his parents' town thinking he is avoiding his fate.
6. Because the young man is able to decipher the Sphinx's riddle, the monster dies.
7. A father offends the gods and a son kills him unknowingly.
8. Ignorant criminals have an incestuous relationship.
9. An old blind seer, Tiresias, reveals the truth to Oedipus when the oracle's prediction

has been accomplished.

10. Upon learning that she married a son she had tried to kill, Jocasta hangs herself.

MANON'S LEGEND: *Jean de Florette & Manon des sources*

1. A child is born to a mother in spite of her attempts to interrupt her pregnancy. The marked child will be called "le Bossu" (hunchback). The unwitting father, César Soubeyran, is the most powerful and feared owner in the Bastides Blanches.

2. The pregnant mother runs to Crespin (a rival village of the Bastides) to get married and to raise Jean who does not know who his biological father is.

3. ORACLES: a.) An unreceived message: A letter was sent by pregnant Florette to César in Africa. b) Most names serve as oracles, foreboding unavoidable roles that only spectators are able to decode: As Rebecca Pauly remarked, "Papet," the nickname given to César who laments for being childless, means either "little dad" or "grand'pa." "Florette" means "little flower" and "conter fleurette" is to court a lover. I will add that Florette is the one whose son will die for Ugolin's flowers. Moreover, the name "Manon" is obviously from a word meaning "hand." She will literally take control, and may also be read as "the hand of God." Finally the name of Delphi/ne (blind old woman) is quite clear.

4. Three geographical locations are also crucial to the narrative. One is the Provençal Bastides Blanches where the child is conceived. Crespin is a rival village where the child grows up. "Africa," the other continent, is where a message was sent to César who never received it. A fourth would be the Christian "heaven" where Jean has become a god-like figure, and where Papet believes he will go as well.

5. The young man Jean goes back to his parents' native town without understanding "why was he ostracized."

6. Because Jean is unable to decipher the riddle of a two-headed monster (the spring hidden by Ugolin & Papet), he dies.

7. There are two figures of Oedipus. They are both blind. One is criminal and the other one is innocent but stubborn.

8. Papet laments about the incest in his ancestors, and Ugolin is in love with Manon without knowing she is his cousin.

9. An old blind woman called Delphi/ne reveals the content of the unreceived message to Papet without knowing that he has already let his son die.

10. Phil Powrie has brilliantly discussed the "feminization and hysteria" of Jean, César, and Ugolin (296-305). I will point out that Ugolin is further feminized by his nickname "Galinette" (such ending is a feminine and infantilizing marker in French), and by stereotypes coded as "feminine": he is weak, emotional, submissive and easily manipulated by César, occupying in this strange couple the subordinate place. He hangs himself without knowing the true identity of his beloved.

The list could probably be twice as long and any spectator of the Berri's films who is well familiarized with the myth will notice several elements used directly, or reversed or multiplied.

Pagnol's Film

In the film originally made by Pagnol, the Greek myth will go totally unnoticed. Pagnol's long piece is now in two videos—*Manon des sources* and *Ugolin*. A young woman is seeking revenge on the villagers who caused the death of her brother and father. The past will be revealed thanks to the efforts of an innocent "detective" who is fascinated by mysterious Manon. With this serious topic and the tragic figure of Ugolin, Pagnol keeps us laughing.

The provençal humor is rooted into a sensual enjoyment of verbal activity and a "joie de vivre" mentality. We do not SEE much happen because this film is mainly made out of colorful gesticulated and theatrical conversations. Baptistine casts spells on the village in her own language, Manon is a teasing and laughing creature, the women are all in touch

with each other and in fear of Manon, and the men never take themselves seriously. At the end, sensing a marriage, the mayor explains he has to find his uniform and just remembers he let the chicken play with it. Men enjoy "role playing," an aperitif and a language game: "jouer au poil." When hearing someone talk, you want to make rimes with some of the speaker's words by saying "hair to" any part of the body which has a similar sounding name. Vulgar words are not allowed and they are, naturally, on everybody's mind.

This game is a motif woven through the whole movie until the very end, carried on especially by retired notary from Paris, Beloiseau, even in highly emotional scenes.

A second major theme in Pagnol's filmic text is the emphasis on the value of forgiveness and the Christian concept of Redemption. Baptistine is a fervent catholic witch and Manon signs herself faithfully. The musical motif is a famous piece from *L'Arlésienne* by Bizet, celebrating the three kings coming to greet another kind of king. The movie opens with this music which is heard a few other times, especially toward the end. The village is still without water and all the villagers go up to the Plantier where Manon lives with her mother. Reminiscent of the nativity scene, they all bring gifts to the two women after hearing the priest's sermon about crime and supportive silence. If several Oedipus figures are recognizable in Berri's work, many Christian icons are easy to identify in Pagnol's film.

We may read Jean as the first unrecognized "Christ" figure, rejected by his own people, but also as the messenger, Jean the Baptiste, announcing the coming of a new order. The second Christ figure, highly visible Manon, directly causes major changes in this village petrified in xenophobic mania. Just before the "Procession" to St Dominique, Manon wants to confess to the priest that she has blocked the spring, and then unblocked it. The water is on its way back to the village, and all the villagers will believe in a "miracle" performed by St. Dominique. The priest takes his time to explain that everything Manon did and what happened to her and to the village is all part of the same miracle anyway, and she should not feel so responsible.

A key concept in this film is about "miracles" of love and forgiveness, replacing the old order of fate and revenge. The movie ends with good news: a love scene and Bizet's music.

Pagnol's cinema has been accused of being too verbal and theatrical rather than filmic. According to Beylie, who also complains about the lack of *mise-en-scène* in *Manon*, Pagnol's screen work is still unique for its creative freedom, and remains misunderstood by academic criticism (135). Bazin explained that Pagnol "dared verbal plenitude" and compared him to Chaplin for being "the only independent writer-director-producer" of his day (Piette and Cadullo's translation 206). For Yves Allion, *Manon des sources* is mainly a celebration of verbal pleasure. In time, this unique visible language becomes a valuable document (39). Jean-Marie Apostolidès develops a convincing argument. Pagnol is considered a second rate filmmaker because of his "popular" films. A reason for such popularity is Pagnol's ability to verbally and structurally deliver cathartic mythical figures (287-304). Apostolidès study is about *La Femme du boulanger* (*Baker's Wife*) and may be applied to the 1952 film as well.

Pagnol's Novel

In 1962 and 1963 appears *L'Eau des collines*. To his film, Pagnol adds a "pre" history: *Jean de Florette*, and a fully developed ending with Manon's wedding and life in the village. A year later, on Christmas night, a child is born and at this very moment Papet dies in a Christian manner. Pagnol fully develops the theme of the Christian Redemption as the beginning of a new law. In his 1986 film, Berri will keep this scene and another one echoing the New Gospel, when Manon discovers a new spring, the tool for her revenge, thanks to a lost sheep. But he will not show us the most powerful page in Pagnol's *Manon des sources*, where Bernard, in order to help Manon unblock that spring, has to undress because the passage leading to the cave is too small for his body (Pagnol, II 329). The two youth follow each other in the narrow passage, crawling inside the earth, making love to the earth to free the village and being born to love. (330-31).

Nature is the main character in the 700 pagelong novel. Rebecca Pauly compares Pagnol's

Manon to the heroine of *Manon Lescaut* and she adds: "Pagnol's Manon is a mystical being, a goddess of the hills, of the springs, a wood and water nymph, a wild child who hunts and gathers in nature with ease and who has extraordinary powers of perception and physical strength" (210). Manon is also Diane the huntress, standing naked, aiming her slingshot at Ugolin (Pagnol, II 78). A young male goat accompanies her dance (76), and she has long conversations with a tree and a special communication with a gigantic lizard, the "Limbert" (110).

The overwhelming surabondant theme in *L'Eau des collines* is the connection between feminine power and water. There are several conversations between Ugolin and Papet where they talk interchangeably about the spring (blocked or available) and woman (Pagnol, I 392). This connection had appeared at the end of Pagnol's film in Ugolin's "testament" where the pronoun "she" refers either to Manon or the spring. "L'Eau des collines" ("The Water from the Hills") IS Manon and women are and have water. The feminine goddess is the law.

Naturally, women are fully fleshed major characters in the novel. After Jean's death, the Plantier becomes a community of women in the hills. Manon and her mother Aimée live from nature with Baptistine in her strange palace (Pagnol, II 15-24). Manon has inherited from her a language, a culture, secrets, and a savvy alliance with animals, plants, and the elements.

In the village, women are life protectors and they are feared as powerful. Only three times, in seven hundred pages, do we see César Soubeyran respect his nephew's ideas. Immediately after Jean's death, Papet is in a hurry to send Aimée and Manon away from the Romarins. He wants to unblock the spring, buy the property and start the carnation business there right away. Ugolin objects in vain that it is inappropriate. "Listen Papet, if we kick those women out immediately, people will talk. Men's talk, I don't care. But women in the village, you know them. They will spit when we walk by." This stops Papet (Pagnol, I 379).

Pagnol describes Amélie's antics, throwing a whole pot of lambstew from a window onto her husband's head because he made comments about Manon's beauty (Pagnol, II 53-56). Délie is Ugolin's housekeeper who also stays with him on Saturday nights, and finds a strategy to both make extra money and maintain her respectability (Pagnol, I 23). Magali, the teacher's mother, largely contributes to Manon's integration into the village community after becoming accepted herself as a Bastidienne (Pagnol, II 32-33). She is the fearless person opening the conversation when she and her son invite the men to make them admit the "crime," after the priest's sermon.

In Pagnol's novel, women are powerful as individuals and as a group, and they are clearly connected to the mysterious powers of water. César literally rapes the female, the life-giving element of Jean's land, thereby killing him, to make his nephew's fortune. Whoever dares to steal water, tampering with the sacred value of life, kills himself as well. Here lies the implied lesson in *L'Eau des collines*.

Berri's Films

Choices have to be made when adapting a long novel for the screen. The three critical decisions made by Berri have to do with his treatment of the "blindness" leitmotif, his treatment (i.e. elimination) of women, and his rendering of the priest sermon which occupies no less than fifteen pages in Pagnol's second volume, a long and entertaining series of stories.

The concept of fate with its blindness component is appropriately and maybe excessively translated into countless close-ups on voyeurism. *Jean de Florette*, a cinematographic lesson on point-of-view, tells the story of Jean's family from the perspective of Ugolin, a voyeur working for Papet. The two-headed sphinx is playing god, and we, as spectators, watch the suffering of the blind victims.

In *Manon des sources*, there is a transitional voyeurism before it changes hands. Ugolin starts working for himself, watching Manon, then Papet watches Ugolin, and eventually the young woman becomes the voyeur, usually shot perched on a high spot (a tree, a hill top or

a rock). Manon's voyeurism in the second film mirrors Ugolin's voyeurism in the first. Watching voyeurism on the screen produces an awareness of point-of-view in the spectator. The power of the gaze as a threat is cinematographically demonstrated in Berri's films. It is connected to death and blindness, and it plays the role of gods manipulating blind humans. Verdi's music emphatically underlines the teasing power and irony of fate.

Another decision made by Berri is a major cut in the narrative. Most of the characters eliminated are the women. Baptistine is hardly noticed once in each film. Aimée is in Bordeaux. She will show up for the wedding only to disappear again. There is no more female community at the Plantier. There is no more Magali, no more Délie. There is one mute woman working for Papet and Ugolin. Her only role is to be a shadowy metaphor of silence and voyeurism. We never see "fat Amélie." One unidentified woman informs the village that the fountain does not look good. A characteristic of Berri's films is the absence of women. The only ones left are mythicized figures rather than characters. They are the Mute Woman, the Blind Woman, Beautiful Manon, who hardly ever says anything, Baptistine, who is just a smile, and that voice saying the water fountain is sick. Manon's mother is a postcard and a voice.

Another noticeable reduction touches the priest's speech. Obviously, Berri could not give us a fifteen page sermon. Furthermore, except for the extraordinary rendering of a remarkable dialogue through a keyhole (in *Jean de Florette*) and of the rural engineer's speech to the grossly ignorant (in the second film), nothing indicates any attempts of revelling in verbal pleasure in the 1986 films. Berri kept three short paragraphs from the sermon: 1. An introduction about the fake piety of the villagers. 2. A comparison between the contamination and punishment affecting the village of the Bastides Blanches and a Greek city who had to pay for its king's crimes. 3. A conclusion about repentance and Christian redemption.

Turning Pagnol's novel into a story of men (starring exceedingly famous actors), where the spectators are made to feel as voyeurs of the tragic hero(es), might be a way to give us the perfect angle from which to focus on the bare shapes of a striking ancient pattern. The hand of a "new?" purifying Christ/sanity order appears at some point, in the form of a virgin who needs the help of a man to finish her task, get married, and give birth to a child right on Christmas night. François Bilodeau expresses his disappointment with Berri's second film, complaining that the wild rebellious girl submits very quickly to her new role as a good citizen ready to become a mother (65). In Pagnol's film, and even more in his novel, Manon's character is not so easily domesticated. In Pagnol's novel, women want and choose their own pleasures, and live on their own terms. Separately and together, they are the water of the community. The Oedipus figure happens to be one among many others.

Berri has created a hauntingly beautiful cinematographic piece, but if it is from Pagnol's novel, it is quite dehydrated. Berri's ostentatious emphatic gesture pointing at the Oedipus myth definitely distorts and reduces the untranslatable world of Pagnol's *L'Eau des collines*. However, he indirectly does justice to Pagnol's didactic style and mythical figurations.

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