

KINO LORBER

THE WELL-DIGGER'S DAUGHTER

CAST

The well-digger
Felipe
Mrs Mazel
Mazel
Jacques
Patricia
Amanda
Nathalie
Isabelle
Marie
Leonora
Roberte
Clerk
Waiter
Captain

Daniel AUTEUIL
Kad MERAD
Sabine AZEMA
Jean-Pierre DARROUSSIN
Nicolas DUVAUCHELLE
Astrid BERGES-FRISBEY
Emilie CAZENAVE
Marie-Anne CHAZEL
Coline BOSSO
Chloe MALARDE
Brune COUSTELLIER
Ilona PORTE
Jean-Louis BARCELONA
Patrick BOSSO
Francois-Eric GENDRON

CREW

Director
Producers
Based on the work by
Adaptation
Casting director
First assistant director
Script supervisor
Production manager
Location manager
Director of photography
Cameraman
1st assistant cameraman
Still photographer
Sound
Art Direction
Production design
Costume designer
Wardrobe
Chief makeup artist
Chief editor
Sound effects
Original score

Daniel AUTEUIL
Alain SARDE and Jerome SEYDOUX
Marcel PAGNOL
Daniel AUTEUIL
Elodie DEMEY
Alain OLIVIERI-AFAR
Marie LECONTE
Gerard GAULTIER
Francois MENNY
Jean-Francois ROBIN - AFC
BERTO
Olivier FORTIN
Luc ROUX
Henri MOREL, Jean GOUDIER and Thomas GAUDER
Bernard VEZAT
Jean-Marc PACAUD
Pierre-Yves GAYRAUD
Karine CHARPENTIER
Joel LAVAU
Joelle HACHE
Pascal CHAUVIN
Alexandre DESPLAT

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SYNOPSIS

Twenty-five years after rising to international acclaim in Jean de Florette and Manon of the Spring, Daniel Auteuil returns to the world of Marcel Pagnol for his first work as director with this celebrated remake of the 1940s classic.

Auteuil stars as the eponymous well-digger Pascale, a widower living with his six daughters in the Provence countryside at the start of World War I. His eldest, Patricia (the luminous Astrid Bergès-Frisbey), has returned home from Paris to help raise her sisters, and Pascale dreams of marrying her off to his loyal assistant Felipe (Kad Merad). But when she's impregnated by a wealthy young pilot (Nicolas Duvauchelle) who promptly abandons her for the frontlines, Pascale is left to contend with the consequences.

An exquisitely crafted, sun-drenched melodrama, set to a score by Academy Award-nominee Alexandre Desplat (The King's Speech), the film captures all the warmth and humanist spirit of Pagnol's original work.

Technical Info:

2011

110 minutes

France

In French with English Subtitles

Color

Aspect Ratio: Flat (1:85 - 1)

Sound: Dolby Digital

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Marcel Pagnol - By Matt Barry

Marcel Pagnol remains an influential figure in the traditions of French literature, stage and film. His literary roots in the novel and the stage were fused with a distinct visual style, often minimalist in its technique but rich and complex in composition.

Pagnol emerged during the 1920s as one of the leading figures in French theater. With his emphasis on naturalism, his films came to define the Poetic Realism movement of the 1930s along with the films of directors like Marcel Carne and Jean Renoir. Perhaps best known for his “Fanny” trilogy (consisting of MARIUS, FANNY, and CESAR), Pagnol's films are marked by his use of local actors, an emphasis on class, and a heightened concern with the image that imbues his literary and theatrical influence with a strong cinematic style. A late career turn to writing novels produced a series of literary works that continued in this tradition, revealing truths about his characters and their situations that have given his work a universal quality.

Born in Marseilles in 1895, Pagnol's childhood interest in reading and literature would serve as the model for his later career as writer and dramatist. As a student, he would oversee a literary magazine, “Fortunio”. Following his discharge from the army during the first World War, Pagnol studied English and subsequently taught at universities in France.

It was during the late 1920s, while living in Paris, that Pagnol turned his attention to writing plays. As a playwright, his early works included MERCHANTS OF GLORY (co-written with Paul Nivoux), JAZZ which opened in Monte Carlo in 1926, and TOPAZE, which opened in Paris in 1928 at the Theatre des Varieties. However, it was his play MARIUS, which opened at the Theatre de Paris in 1929, that would eventually launch his film career.

According to Raymond Pastans in his book, “Marcel Pagnol”, it was Pagnol's attendance at an early screening of talking films in London that would propel him to explore the potential of adapting MARIUS to film. It was eventually filmed in 1931, under the direction of Alexander Korda, but the film adaptation contained all of the earmarks of Pagnol's signature style.

Pagnol was that unique artist whose films bear his style even when directed by others (FANNY, the follow up to MARIUS, was directed by Marc Allegret, and his work has been adapted for the screen by numerous filmmakers over the years). FANNY was based on his 1931 stage play, and CESAR was subsequently produced on the stage in 1946 at the Theatre des Varieties.

Pagnol directed many screen adaptations of his own work, including the third film in the “Fanny” trilogy, CESAR (1936), and the 1940 film version of his story, THE WELL-DIGGER'S DAUGHTER. Between 1934 and 1940, he would direct such films as JOFROI, TOPAZE, REGAIN, and THE BAKER'S WIFE, among others.

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Later directorial works included *MANON OF THE SPRING* (1952), and adaptations from his “Letters from My Windmill” stories: *THE ELIXER OF FATHER GAUCHER*, *THE SECRETS OF MASTER CORNILLE*, *THE THREE LOW MASSES* (all 1954), and *THE PRIEST OF CUCGNAN* (1967).

Pagnol also published a number of essays, including “My Friend Rene Clair” (1946), “Notes on Laughter” (1947), “Critique on Critics” (1947) and “Report on Virtue Prizes” (1956). In addition to his writing, Pagnol also translated three great works, Shakespeare's “Hamlet” (in 1946) and “A Midsummer Night's Dream” (in 1971), and Virgil's “Book of Bucolics” (in 1958). Later, he wrote the historical essay “The Iron Mask” in 1964.

When Pagnol was elected to the Academie Francaise in 1946 (the first filmmaker to receive this honor), it reflected the high regard in which he and his work had come to be held. The New York Film Critics Circle would honor Pagnol three times, awarding their Best Foreign Film Award to Pagnol's work in 1939, 1940 and 1950 (for *HARVEST*, *THE BAKER'S WIFE* and *JOFROI*, respectively). But in the late 40s, Pagnol returned to his literary roots with a series of novels, which were based on the events of his own childhood growing up in the South of France. A second series of novels saw publication in 1962, dealing with rural life in turn-of-the-century France.

Pagnol died in Paris in 1974, leaving behind a vast body of literary, theatrical and film work. His final work, *UNRELEASED*, would be published posthumously in 1986. The enduring qualities of his work, seen in films like the “Fanny” trilogy and *THE WELL-DIGGER'S DAUGHTER*, have transcended the time and place in which they were written, as contemporary adaptations of Pagnol's stories demonstrate. The continued interest in Pagnol's work serves as a testament to his ability to depict real characters and situations with timeless and universal themes.

References:

Castans, Raymond. *Marcel Pagnol*. Librairie Generale Francaise, 1988.

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Had you wanted to step behind the camera for a long time or was it this particular subject that made you want to do it?

It was the subject. In fact, directing wasn't one of my priorities, because life was going too fast, there were too many encounters, I was far too spoiled as an actor... But then, when the idea of THE WELL-DIGGER'S DAUGHTER came along and we needed to consider a director, I didn't hesitate for one hundredth of second before saying that I not only wanted to play the part but I also wanted to direct the movie! This seemed self-evident to me and logical at the same time. As if one could not work without the other.

Were you the one who had the idea of adapting THE WELL-DIGGER'S DAUGHTER?

No, it was the Pagnol family. We had stayed in touch after JEAN DE FLORETTE. It so happens that, at the same time, I was talking with Alain Sarde about roles that I could play, projects that we could try to set up. I was thinking a lot about the films that Marcel Pagnol made of Jean Giono's novels because those are stories and characters that mean a lot to me, that touch me, but things are rather complex where the rights are concerned.

And then, one day, the Pagnol family said to Alain, "Don't you think THE WELL-DIGGER'S DAUGHTER might interest Daniel? He's the right age now..." I immediately jumped at the idea - the well-digger is one of Pagnol's finest characters - and when Alain said, "Who do you think could direct it?" I answered, "Me!" Alain didn't bat an eyelid, he simply fell silent for a second, then said, "Why not?" He immediately trusted me, as if this were self-evident. Then he went to see Jerome Seydoux who placed his trust in me too.

What touches you in this story?

Everything! With Pagnol, you're in the realm of emotion right away. Each time you read his work, it strikes you with the same power. In this case, from the outset, there was the desire to tackle the text and to play the part. The wish to make those words and emotions heard again today, as if they were being expressed for the first time.

Especially as, apart from its title, THE WELL-DIGGER'S DAUGHTER, is not Pagnol's best-known work. Then, what touched me most deeply was that I was going to be able to take over the story completely, that I was going to be able to talk about people that were familiar to me, that I knew or had known, about feelings and values that I cherish, that made me what I am, and that sometimes are almost taboo today. That's where the power and beauty of Pagnol's work lie. It's a magnificent story of love, tenderness, sorrow and forgiveness...

When we watch the film - and this in some way adds to the emotion that it gives off - we cannot help seeing it as, if not a debt, at least a tribute you are paying to Pagnol, Ugolin, Claude Berri and also your parents ...

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It is obvious that the film is also addressed to my parents and to the young man I used to be, to the life that I have been able to have thanks to the education I received. It speaks of the past through the eyes of the present. It's true, my parents are everywhere.

In the images, in the landscapes, in the arias sung by Caruso and that my father also sang, in the characters... Mrs Mazel is my mother. When she explains why she didn't give Jacques's letter to Patricia, she says: "They all wanted to take my son." That's my mother all over! In fact, the beautiful thing in Pagnol's work is that there is no judgement... Paying tribute to Pagnol, yes, of course...

As for the rest, I don't think so. *THE WELL-DIGGER'S DAUGHTER* doesn't tell the same story as *FLORETTE*, the stakes are not the same, even the Provence shown is not the same... This is my Provence, where I grew up, where I lived... At the same time, it's true, this film would probably not exist if I had not made *JEAN DE FLORETTE*, without my ties to the Pagnol family, without everything that Claude Berri's film brought me, recognition and the freedom to follow my own path, but I would say that it is there more as an echo than a reference.

How did you work on the adaptation?

I saw the film again, then I took my starting point as the book Pagnol wrote after the release of the film, telling the same story. That was a great opportunity since the book contains many additional indications, scenes that Pagnol hadn't shot and which I was able to use. I sifted through all that and kept only the nuggets, the things that are universal about Pagnol's work, the things that mean that 70 years on it still entertains and moves us. Whatever the period, feelings are always the same, lovers are always the same, parents are always the same, rich and poor folk too. I based my work on that text in order to give it a contemporary rhythm or, more precisely, my own rhythm...

What was the hardest part about writing?

Sensing just how far I could go, to what extent I was allowed to make this story my own. It was several weeks before I dared to but then I started to remove things, slowly, then to remove others. After that, I started adding elements, for instance bringing the mother back to life when the girls listen to a song as they talk about her...

And, in the end, I took it over completely to the extent that I occasionally have the feeling that these characters have escaped from the written page to come to life. How would you define the well-digger and what touches you most about him? What touches me most is the almost maternal relationship that he has with his daughters. He is both a father and a mother.

So you had decided to play the well-digger... What made you think that Kad Merad was the perfect actor to play Felipe Rambert, the worker in love with his daughter?

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I thought of him at a very early stage because Kad has the ability to be what you ask him right away and, above all, because he can be instantly identifiable as a nice guy. Basically that is what Felipe is: a guy totally incapable of hurting anyone. And I knew that Kad would bring the note of humanity and humour - and strength too - that I was looking for.

In Pagnol's film, the two characters were played by Raimu and Fernandel respectively. Are you not crushed by the weight of such legends when you think about how to approach the roles?

Of course, you think about it but you leave all that behind fairly quickly because it's a different project, another age and you have different personalities. And, above all, you tell yourself that such roles, like the great roles of the stage repertoire, are written to be played time and again. It would be a pity to deprive yourself of that...After all, actors continually perform Marivaux, Moliere, Feydeau and Shakespeare...For me, it's no different from when I play Scapin on stage.

How did you go about selecting the rest of the cast?

I looked for people I knew or liked and who would immediately seem right in their roles. I'm very keen on the idea that we immediately identify the characters and what they are. For young Mazel, I thought fairly quickly of Nicolas Duvauchelle. First, because he is a wonderful actor. And then, because he is handsome and, at the same time, there's a slightly rebellious, slightly dangerous side to him. He immediately gave Jacques Mazel the rather thuggish air of a well-off family's son who insolently believes that he is allowed to do as he likes.

I then looked for his parents and offered the parts to Sabine Azema and Jean- Pierre Darroussin, both for their comic potential and their emotional power: they seemed to be the obvious choice to me. For young Patricia, things were a bit more complicated but we did auditions. And we were lucky enough to meet Astrid Berges- Frisbey. She has a grace, a poetry and a way of elevating feelings that are very rare...

Moreover, the couple that she forms with Nicolas is magnificent. These two young people together are simply miraculous. A role that was also a bit difficult to cast is that of Amanda's sister, Patricia. I wanted to avoid all cliches and I was very lucky to discover a young actress with as much charm, talent and personality as Emilie Cazenave at an audition. Finally, to play my sister, I thought of Marie-Anne Chazel. There too there was something self-evident, if only because of the proximity that we share through our age, experience, our beginnings...

How did you approach directing?

Firstly, I worked a great deal on the film's preparation. For many months, I scouted for locations; I travelled all over the Provence of my childhood...The Alpilles, Saint Remy, Eygalieres where I used to go walking with my parents. At a very early stage, I asked Jean-Francois Robin to be my director of photography. We have known each other for a long time, since Claude Sautet's QUELQUES JOURS AVEC MOI. I knew he would be the ideal partner.

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I put together my crew just like in *THE MAGNIFICENT SEVEN*, choosing people whom, over the years I've been doing this job, I have enjoyed frequenting and with whom I wanted to spend more time. People whom I trust and who would support me as we worked all together on this film that I wanted to be a gem! Be it Pierre-Yves Gayraud for the costumes, Bernard Veizat for the sets, Joelle Hache for the editing...

I talked a great deal with Jean-Francois, had lengthy discussions and visited a lot of locations before the problem of directing per se arose. As if, while I was working on the adaptation of the screenplay, while I was preparing the film, I did not want to think about the transition to the image. As if it were something that, deep down, was still taboo, or even forbidden! In fact, it's amusing that, until now, as an actor, I had never once asked myself the question, "Now, where would I put the camera?" In fact, I simply think I didn't want to create the images artificially. I wanted the camera direction to come from the text. That's how I prepared the film. Each shot was born of the words, the situation, the emotions...

How did it go on a practical level?

In fact, I did a great deal of work on the locations prior to shooting with Jean- Francois. We went there in every season, in all kinds of weather. We'd go with Gerard Gaultier, the production manager, and my fabulous first assistant, Alain Olivieri. They all had the patience of saints with me, they were amazing. When they asked technical questions, the only answer I could give them, at the start of scouting in any case, was to act out the scenes for them by inventing a camera! As an actor, while I never wondered where to put the camera, I could however sense when it was not well positioned on me.

Proceeding like this allowed me to sort things out, clarify my desires, and refine the shot breakdown that was altered continually. In exploring the locations, I was looking for movement and rhythm; I had a general idea of what I wanted but this allowed me to clarify it. I wanted something fluid, I wanted movement, but I didn't want effects with a crane or a Steadicam...

I wanted both lyricism and simplicity; I didn't want the film to be starchy or mannered. I also knew that simplicity is the hardest thing to obtain. We thus set ourselves a whole series of challenges - and the crew loved that! We did miles of tracking shots, we decided to film the lovers together always in the same frame - life was going to part them so I didn't want to part them too! I asked Berto, with whom I have worked numerous times, to handle the camera.

Usually he carries it but not here. He made a terrific contribution to the fluidity that I was looking for... He's someone with whom I'm totally comfortable, I know that I can do very few takes and that he won't miss a thing that needs to be filmed. All this knowledge and all this experience helped me a great deal. But every time I wanted to invent a shot or had a problem with the direction, I would refer back to the text and it provided me with all the answers. The direction is in fact guided by the power of the emotions.

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What did you tell Jean-Francois Robin to define the lighting you wanted?

I told him, "I'd like something that gets me as close as possible to life, I want to feel the light outside and the dark inside, I want to see the actors' skin, I want to be able to sense the actress turn pink and blush..." And he gave me all that! My obsession on this film with both the technicians and the actors was life. Life, life, life! Everything that took us away from literature and reconstruction... That was our challenge. The literary text had to be a tool, not a burden. My obsessions were related to life, truth, the precision of feelings, nature...

Indeed, nature is present in a both very vibrant and a very lyrical manner...

There too, if I had brought in wind machines, it would not have had the same effect! For the film, we had planned on four or five weeks of interior shooting but had to do it at the beginning of filming, contrary to the shooting schedule, because it never stopped raining! The day came when we had completed all the interior scenes and had to start on the exterior ones.

Fortunately, the rain stopped and, as it had rained for five weeks, the wind began to blow, the way it blows in the South! It made things difficult for the sound engineer but I didn't realize. I was borne up, I was carried along, I thought that the Mistral sent by the heavens was a blessing, that the actress's hair flying in the wind was beautiful, that the sight of the reeds bending and the old plane trees shaking was magnificent... They were important for me; those reeds in the wind and the plane trees were my childhood, my adolescence coming back...

You are also always very close to the characters and so to the actors...

Oh yes, I wanted that. I wanted to be as close as possible to the emotions and so as close as possible to the actors because, basically, the only thing I knew well about the cinema were actors. Although on the first day, I realized that I did not know what to say to actors because I have heard so much myself. And such paralyzing things!

However, I know that actors are always afraid and need to be reassured and made comfortable. Once they are reassured and comfortable, they give you the very best. My main preoccupation was therefore to ask myself how, despite my slightly impatient and abrupt side, because I'm in a hurry and not calm, I could manage to control myself in order to obtain that. I had to start directing to discover, after all this time, that working with actors is both more magical and much easier than you think. Well, easy... You need to be carried along by a story. And I have to say that, on this film, there was a lot of warm energy, natural concentration, a form of grace...

In any case, I saw what real gifts the actors were and that directors had every reason to be friendly with them and to be thankful to them! That was one of my greatest pleasures on this shoot.

You usually have a fairly close relationship with your directors. On this film, when you were acting, did you not miss that exterior eye?

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No, it was like Spartacus finding himself free, it was the slaves' rebellion! My big surprise in this new line of work has been to attain something that I thought totally impossible: complete self-abandonment. I never imagined that one day on a film set, the actor that I am would move into the background to such an extent for me. When it was my turn to act, I went out there, I did a few takes and then I returned to the directing. It was as if I had no time to lose with myself!

This was the first time I had taken so little interest in myself. All of a sudden, I discovered the pleasure of directing others, of conjuring up shots and images, of arousing laughter and emotions that did not depend solely on me. I also discovered the fascination of filming faces and certain landscapes that resemble faces... I did not think it was possible to find such pleasure simply in filming a face...

That doesn't prevent your well-digger from having an intensity, a truth, a power of emotion and a mixture of restraint and abandon that makes him one of your finest characters... It's as if we were discovering something about you that we had never seen before...

Perhaps it's because, even though I've played fathers before, this is the first time paternity is at the heart of a film... Perhaps also because this role signifies a change in status, a passage from one age to another... I was so immersed in the story that everything happened almost unconsciously. In fact, that's more or less the way I always work... Except that here there was a much longer gestation period. In fact, time is what you need with important roles like this.

The funny thing is that on the shooting schedule, we had given me a week directing in order to adapt before I had my first scenes as an actor. But the weather decided otherwise. We were obliged to begin with an interior scene in which I acted. In the end, that was better. From the very first take on the very first day, I jumped in at the deep end, performing and directing at the same time. That way, at least, I was immediately into it.

Was there one particular scene that you apprehended as an actor or for the other actors?

I apprehended them all... because I was directing them! What I can say now is that nothing was simple but everything was easy... No, something was a little more complicated, but only where directing was concerned: the scenes by the river. We were supposed to start with them... but ended up filming them last of all! Because the river was in flood and because, in devising the shots, despite all my scouting, I never took into account the fact that water is not a solid element! Once again, I wanted to be as close as possible to the actors and have tracking shots on the water. It was THE BRIDGE ON THE RIVER KWAI!

Did you ever sense the influence during filming of certain directors with whom you have worked in the past?

Basically, there was no influence on a directing level because, with them, I was an actor first and foremost. However, where friendship is concerned, I of course thought during shooting of Claude Sautet, Claude Berri, Francis Girod... I felt I would have liked them to see my film...

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What did you tell Alexandre Desplat who composed the score?

That I didn't want the music to simply accompany the images but to be something the audience would listen to. For me, music is not background noise, it's an actor in its own right. And it was a magical experience to go to his studio to listen to his compositions that back up the film's emotions so well.

In the end, what surprised you most as a director?

The power of the obsession. For two years, I can say I thought of nothing else. I slept four hours a night, I would wake at two in the morning and work on the script breakdown again. It was as if it had released something within me. I didn't know I could be so stubborn, so determined. But, oddly, perhaps because everything found an echo within me, was all so familiar and took me back to such personal things, to people I've known, to feelings I've experienced, to relationships I'm familiar with, to landscapes I love, I rarely thought throughout this whole adventure that it was a first film. I always felt that it followed on from those I had made as an actor, that it was part of a logical sequence, that it was the consequence of them...

Interview with Astrid Bergès-Frisbey

When did you hear about the work "THE WELL-DIGGER'S DAUGHTER" for the first time?

Five or six years ago. I was enrolled in an acting class and one of the first texts I had to work on... was a scene from "The Well-Digger's Daughter"! Life can be so funny: the first time I went on stage in my acting class was for "The Well-Digger's Daughter." Then I read about Daniel's project and I remember being intrigued because, being so fond of Pagnol, I was curious to see how it would turn out. And then they called me for a screen test! I had two scenes to work on. The first scene in the film, the meeting with the character of Jacques and the crossing of the stream. And then the confession scene, when Patricia tells her father she is pregnant.

What state of mind were you in for this audition?

As always at such moments, I was a little nervous but, at the same time, I felt driven by a kind of exciting energy. I rarely wear a dress in everyday life but it amused me to put a dress on and wear a pair of boots... The casting director had explained that if I got through the first round, the next stage would probably be a meeting or a screen test with Daniel.

Three weeks later, my agent called to say that I had an appointment with Daniel Auteuil. I was very excited going there. Daniel held his arms out to me and said, "Welcome." Then as we talked - his son had been born shortly before - he said, referring to him, "He could be your child." I did not really understand what he meant or, at any rate, I didn't dare believe it. And then he said, "You've no idea how difficult it is to choose the actress to play your daughter, but I'm glad it's you." He told me like that! I could hardly believe it. It was beautiful to find out that way, straight from him. I was extremely touched by the trust that he immediately placed in me. Daniel thought that young people today aren't really familiar with Pagnol. So I told him about my acting class and above all how much I loved Pagnol.

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What do you like about Pagnol?

I saw some of his films at first but, above all, once I started working on texts to become an actress, I read a lot of his work. I love his writing. It's writing that speaks to me, touches me and moves me deeply. He says serious things with apparently simple words that come from the heart. He uses a very special kind of language. In fact, it is very difficult to translate Pagnol. His language is full of sunshine and humanity, serious and light at the same time, funny and deep. I like his approach to people, true, ordinary people that he makes into extraordinary characters. And most of his stories are completely timeless.

"The Well-Digger's Daughter" is the best example of this. Of course, if it were written now, the setting would be different, the characters too probably, but the feelings and emotions it provokes would be the same. It's all this, in my opinion, that makes him a great author. And to have the opportunity to work on a Pagnol adaptation with someone like Daniel who feels such strong and obvious love for him, well, that was amazing...

Have you seen Marcel Pagnol's film?

I hadn't seen that one and I did not see it prior to shooting. But I'll no doubt watch it after our film is released... Talking with Daniel, listening to him, watching him work, I quickly understood how this text, this world and these characters have a very personal resonance for him. He had no trouble at all in making this story his own. It's fascinating to sense this blend of respect, loyalty and liberty in him.

How did you work with Daniel Auteuil?

We talked a great deal. Daniel places a great deal of trust in the people he chooses. He shared all his joys and all his questions with me throughout preparation. He called me to tell me, "That's it, I've found your sister!" He was so excited about meeting Emilie Cazenave. It was the same when he found the house. He was so eager to make the film that he communicated his passion and energy to everyone. I don't have much experience but I have never seen a crew so fully behind its director. You could tell that he was very touched by it...

One day, before shooting began, almost out of the blue, he decided that he needed to do a read-through with all the actors. So we all met up, except for Jean-Pierre [Darroussin] who could not be there. It was wonderful to see Daniel so elated, as if, by bringing us all together, he was diving into the heart of the living matter of his film. For us, it was very stimulating because, during the reading, we suddenly had a view of the film as a whole, we understood what he was expecting of us, what he wanted...

How would you define Patricia?

Patricia is a young woman who, early on, has been forced to play the role of a mother. She is a strong and complex young woman. She was raised both in the city with a rich lady, and in the country when she returns to help her father to raise her sisters.

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She is not a prisoner of her social environment, but she is forced to "submit" to things, to "submit" to the burden that being an unmarried mother represents at the time, being from a poor family and having a child with the son of a rich family... I love the way in which she accepts the situation. She knows that this child didn't happen along by chance. In a way, she has chosen Jacques. She is not some naive girl who has let herself be fooled. She is a very responsible person who accepts the consequences of her deeds.

What, for you, is the most touching thing about her?

Her loyalty to her father and her strength. She accepts her father's decision that she must leave the family home and, at the same time, she lays down her conditions at the end for a marriage that she wants to be sure is taking place for the right reasons and not only to save appearances, something that she couldn't care less about. I like that kind of integrity.

Moreover, she's someone who, even if she is hurt, is able to forgive. I like the way she deals with what happens to her, I like the way in which we see her become a woman over the course of the story and I like the liberty that she displays, in the end, despite the constraints of her condition and the period.

In what way is she close to you? Or distant from you?

I think I have a lot in common with her. Firstly, because I'm the oldest of three sisters that I took a lot of care of. But it's not just that... I think that, like her, I can be very determined, I'm honest with what I think is fair. I have that faculty to both forgive and not to lose sight of what really counts for me. The main difference is probably that I would never have waited for my father to throw me out, I'd have left before that! But perhaps it's just a question of the period...

In any case, Patricia is a character that I found fairly easily. I have to say that all the work done ahead of shooting helped me a great deal. Notably the work on the costumes with Pierre-Yves [Gayraud]... For me, a lot of things happen at the moment of the character's "physical" creation. It's a stage in which I always invest myself a great deal. The more precise the costumes are, the more precise you are in your performance. I loved working on that with Pierre-Yves, the assistant designer and the hairdresser...

Actually, on an artistic level, I think that everyone - the set designer, the costume designer, the hair and make-up artists - has done a wonderful job, guided by Daniel who fully accepted the period film aspect but for whom nothing should be frozen in time. And the result is so right, so alive...

Were there any scenes that you particularly apprehended?

One, but I wasn't really apprehending it, it's just that we were obliged to shoot it first. And, because of that, it worried me a lot to start with that particular scene. It's a "post-baby" scene when I go to visit the Mazels and my father gets worried and angry.

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In fact, he's afraid that they'll steal his "baby"! Initially, we had planned to shoot more or less in sequence, or at least begin with the scene by the river, but because of the bad weather, the whole schedule was altered. I was already dreading playing Patricia as a mother before playing Patricia as a girl. But, above all, it's a scene in which, in this father-daughter couple, I'm in control, I'm the one who decides and who puts my father in his place.

Starting with that scene with Daniel, with everything that it represented, was pretty stressful! A few days later, we even had to shoot the end of the film! For everyone, it was fairly strange to find ourselves shooting the final scene at the very start of the shoot. At the same time, it was a real joy. For Daniel first and foremost. It's as if the fact of having to manage everyone at the same time from the very beginning, of having to dive into the fray right away, had freed something within him. It was as if, all of a sudden, it had liberated him both as an actor and a director.

So, for you, were the acting partner and the director one and the same person?

Yes. Daniel was everywhere at once. In the frame and not in the frame. It was fascinating to see him direct a big scene and, a second later, step in front of the camera for a close-up with a lot of lines, shoot one or two takes, which astounded us so much because he was amazing, then step back behind the camera to prepare the next take. Of course, he has plenty of experience but even so... What mattered to him was giving everyone time, being there for each one of us. He is incredibly generous. In fact, he had prepared his film so well with his director of photography, his cameraman and his first assistant - playing all the scenes himself on the sets well before shooting (sometimes he would call me and say, "I'm tired of acting everything, I can't wait for you to get here!") - he was so steeped in this story and his character, that his well-digger heart was the driving force for the film. He wasn't just an actor directing other actors, he was a real director. He is involved in everything, he discusses everything, he chooses everything, everything goes at his pace...

Again, although I have very little experience, I have never seen a crew behind someone 300% like that. He was able to handle difficult situations such as locations with an incredibly high wind that was knocking down the lights, a scene that was supposed to be shot over three days but one day it rained, the next was sunny and the third day the sky was full of clouds! Yet he handled it all, showing that he was the captain of the ship, while performing lengthy monologues!

How does he impress you as an actor?

Through his precision, his power and his intensity... I have very strong memories of the scene where he leaves me on the road... All of a sudden, I had the feeling of being carried off by an avalanche. I had never known anything like it. Such restraint and yet such power... Moreover, the wind was so strong and present that you would think he's getting angry at the same time as the wind. It was a true gift - even if it didn't always make life easy - having a wind like that... In that scene, Daniel is exceptional... It was so upsetting, that I had to step away between takes to go and cry in secret, in order to let off all the emotion that he had communicated to me.

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His acting is so amazing and so precise, so close, deep down, to the people of this land whose story he is telling. They don't easily show their emotions but they have tender hearts...He knows exactly what he wants to express and he has absolutely incredible mastery of it. Quite frankly, he astounded me!

Had Nicolas Duvauchelle already been chosen when Daniel Auteuil gave you the role of Patricia? What is his best asset in your opinion?

I think he was one of the first actors chosen by Daniel. He was sure Nicolas was right for Jacques Mazel. Nicolas' best asset is most definitely his intuition and his instinct. He is a very concrete person. His acting comes from the very depths of his personality. Even if it is not necessarily concrete for him in his private life, when he expresses it in front of the camera, it obviously is. He's wonderful.

Was the seduction scene that opens the movie easy to perform?

To perform, yes, it was pure acting... But to shoot it was a lot more complicated. It was very hard for the crew because they had to set up tracking shots on the water, they were all in waders. Except for Nicolas who ended up with bruises all over his feet from carrying me over the stones! But it was a magical spot...

And Kad Merad's best asset?

His energy. He is someone who brings boundless and generous energy to a shoot. And Daniel, who I think has had to suffer sometimes in his career from being a little too reined in, did a magnificent job of both not holding Kad back and at the same time focusing him on the character... Kad does wonderful work in the film. He is both funny and always on the verge of emotion... What energy! Just like Sabine [Azema] in fact. It's fascinating to see an actress like her, with all the experience she has, doing her job with so much passion, freedom and almost innocence, like a five-year-old child taking her mother's dresses and starting to perform for her family, totally into it...

The couple she forms with Jean-Pierre [Darroussin] - who is a calm and very meticulous presence - is magnificent, both funny and heartbreaking. I also like the scenes I have with Marie-Anne [Chazel]. There is a great deal of strength in the character and at the same time we sense the wounds and suffering that have given her this strength. Marie-Anne brings incredible truth to the character...

Did you know Emilie Cazenave?

No. As soon as Daniel told me about her, I really wanted to meet her because it was important for me to know who would be my sister! It's a fairly difficult part to cast: she had to be my younger sister and, at the same time, her love for Kad, well Felipe, had to be plausible... It was really good to work with her. I love the scenes we have together at home. They're so believable! You believe in this reality, in this "everyday" aspect. It's a real victory to succeed in bringing so many people together and, in a trice, turning them into a true family...

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When I saw the film, Emily and Daniel really touched me in the scene where they are alone during Patricia's absence and the father is in a terrible state... Amanda is a beautiful character. Like all the "Pagnolian" characters in this film. These are real people, generous people, living out deeply human stories... Even Mrs Mazel, played by Sabine, who is the most complex character because we could easily hate her, well, Pagnol does not judge her and even makes her touching...

If you could retain just one image of this whole adventure, or just one moment?

There are so many! The first image that perhaps comes to mind is the final scene that I mentioned earlier and that we shot almost at the very start of filming. At the last minute, Daniel decided to do a long shot but we had to hurry because it was the last day we had on the set and the light was going. We virtually improvised the scene and we couldn't have done more than two takes. It was full of energy, movement, spontaneity... life! It was a magical thing to experience such a moment...

And, of course, the moments when I shared a scene with Daniel, those moments when he was there for me... So many things...It's the most incredible human adventure that I have experienced so far.