

Daniel Auteuil and Gerard Depardieu in lyric French film.

Film

Florette typical farm drama

Jean de Florette
Princess Theatre
March 11-21

review by Jae Laplante

The French epic *Jean de Florette* (at \$17 million, the most ambitious in that country's history) arrives at the Princess this weekend, basking in the glow of a successful six-month run in New York and Los Angeles, thanks mostly in part to reverential treatment from some critics who hailed it "a masterpiece."

Based on the famed Marcel Pagnol novel *L'Eau des Collines*, Jean represents the first part of the mammoth cinematic translation by director Claude Berri. (It is to be followed by *Manon of the Spring*, immediately following Jean's run.) And while it is richly done, with fine performances and beautiful camera work, make no mistake: *Jean de Florette* is considerably less than "a masterpiece."

Now, there is certainly nothing very wrong with it. But this classically-styled, self-consciously lyric film suffers from a substance problem: it's a nice movie, but where is the punch? For a film modelled as a modern version of a Greek tragedy, *Jean de Florette* is sorely lacking the dramatic tension and overwhelming sense of inevitability that provides the basis for greatness. What remains is simply a well-crafted, old-fashioned, painfully wholesome movie.

The title character of the film, played by Gerard Depardieu (quick-name three French films you've seen that he hasn't starred in), is a hunchback who inherits a rich piece of farmland in Provence, a rural province of southeast France, in the mid-1920's. He moves there with his wife (played by his real-

life wife Elizabeth Depardieu) and small daughter Manon, all of them wholesome-as-hack, with major dreams about "living off the land" and getting back in tune with Mother Nature. After spending most of their lives in the cities.

But that's not all, mon ami. There's big bad, mega-unwholesome villains waiting in the wings just itching to vaporize the Florette clan's eagle-high hopes into rat-sized disappointments. The proud Cesar Soubeyran (Yves Montand) and his dim-witted nephew Ugolin (Daniel Auteuil, who nearly steals the show) hope to force Jean-The-Pure off the land by plugging up the spring that supports the farm with cement, so that when Jean can't make a go of it, they can conveniently step in and snatch up the land at a low price, unplug the spring and reap in the benefits.

Berri and his co-scriptwriter, Gerard Brach (Tess), play the material completely straightforward and simply, neither attempting to shape the material into great cinematic art nor investing it with anything beyond sensitive melodrama. The movie simply becomes *A Man and His Farm*. Everything unfolds with utter predictability to anyone who has ever seen any rural farm drama in this country, and that is not a compliment. "Nice" movies don't do anything, don't say anything—what is the point?

That's also not quite the bottom line. To be fair, Berri has made *Jean de Florette* technically beautiful, with glorious panoramic shots of the French countryside, a wonderful score, and a sumptuous rhythm. Gerard Depardieu, Yves Montand and (especially!) Daniel Auteuil are magnificent performers; there's considerable pleasure in just watching them act. But I'd rather see *Barfly*, it's much more fun.

Books

A writer from the West

interview by James Blake

Jack Hodgins, established Canadian author, certainly believes that environment affects one's perceptions. "As an Islander growing up on the edge, you see yourself differently than someone raised in the city," he says.

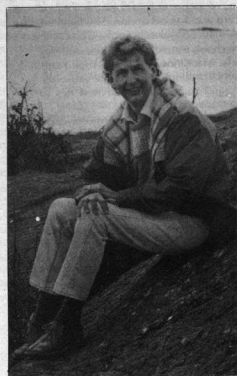
Growing up on Vancouver Island, Hodgins feels that the ideas for his novels spring from his experience as "a fringe dweller looking out at the ocean where your patch of earth is the whole world" as opposed to the "feeling of being tall on the prairies and dwarfed in the mountain malleys." Hodgins thinks of himself as a "Westerner, West Coaster, and Islander."

However, some of the material used in Hodgins' latest work, *The Honorary Patron*, was gathered on a recent trip to Vienna where Hodgins attended "The Conference on Canadian Literature," where he and his writing were "on exhibit." "I was surprised to find that my books are being taught in European universities," said Hodgins.

Also, Hodgins toured the museums of Vienna and learnt something about art. "I fell in love with the painting, 'Die Familie' by Egon Schiele and wanted it for myself, but of course I couldn't, so I tried writing about it, although I've never written about art before." Similarly, he "got the idea for the novel in a rooftop cafe in Vienna."

"I'm aiming at literary excellence; I want to make something good because I'm a lover of literature. I want each novel to be better than the last one. I'm always aiming a little higher. I'm never satisfied." This hardworking attitude of Hodgins has helped him become the recipient of the "Colson Literary Award," the "Canada Australia Literature Prize," and the prestigious "Governor General's Award." "Awards are encouraging. They're a kind of a report card, an ego booster and a measure of the sense of worth of my work," says Hodgins.

Hodgins' job as professor of creative writing at the University of Victoria, brings him into contact with many aspiring writers.



Jack Hodgins, writer.

to whom he gives advice. "A writer must work hard, hard, hard. He must work like a dog and care so passionately that nothing can stop him. You must be disciplined, take advice, and read, read, read. It is a combination of talent and passion", says Hodgins.

Also, Hodgins is "insulted" when people tell him that they could write a book if only they had time. Hodgins finds writing "very rewarding," but doesn't "fool" himself about the amount of money that can be made from it. "It is very hard in Canada to make a living by royalties, although I receive a steady trickle of royalties."

"I want to be filthy rich, but I wouldn't be happy to give up teaching," claims Hodgins. "I take my ideas from wherever I can find them."

Undergraduate Science Society Annual Elections

All science students are hereby notified of the annual elections of, and opening of nominations for, the following positions:

U.S.S. Executive:

President, VP Academic, VP Communications, VP Activities, VP Finance

Students' Union Student's Council:

5 Councilors

General Faculties Council:

8 Councilors

Faculty of Science Council:

12 Student Representatives

Nominations are now open and will close at 12:00 noon on March 17th, 1988. Campaigning is to occur from the close of nominations until March 24th. **Voting will take place from 10:00 a.m. until 3:00 p.m. on Friday, March 25th, 1988** on the main floor of the Microbiology wing of the Biological Sciences building. **All Science students are urged to vote in this election.** For more information contact the Chief Returning Officer, James Jensen, (BSM-142) at 432-2099.

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