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ANGELE

Written and Directed by Marcel Pagnol
1934

Based on Jean Giono's novel, "Un de Baumugnes." Produced by Films Marcel Pagnol. Executive producer: René Pagnol. Photography: Willy, Roger Ledru, Gricha. Music: Vincent Scotto. Editing: Suzanne de Troeye, André Robert. Set Designer: Marius Brouquier. Sound: Jean Lecocq, Bardisbanian. In French; English subtitles. 150 mins.

With: Orane Demazis (Angèle), Fernandel (Saturnin), Annie Toinon (Philomène), Henri Poupon (Clarius), Blanche Poupon (Florence), Edouard Delmont (Amédée), Andrex (Louis), Jean Servais (Albin), Charles Blavette (Tonin), Fernand Flament (Le Tatoué), Darcelys.

The most memorable of Marcel Pagnol's films were derived from two sources of inspiration: his own plays and original stories (the *Fanny* trilogy, *La Fille du Puisatier*, *Manon des Sources*) and the novels of his Provençal compatriot, Jean Giono. Both writers imbued their work with the particular sounds and texture of that region of France which nurtured them, while investing the characters inhabiting it with primal, universal traits which transcended their specific context. What largely differentiated their respective prose landscapes of the Midi was that Giono lyrically evoked the terrain itself, while Pagnol, primarily a man of the theater, celebrated the nuances of voice and behavior of the human figures within this milieu.

Angèle was Pagnol's second screen adaptation of a Giono work, following upon *Jofroi* (1933), and his third directorial effort. (The first two entries in the Marseille trilogy, *Marius* and *Fanny*, were respectively helmed by Alexander Korda and Marc Allégret, under Pagnol's supervision.) Giono's emphasis on the physical world proved a new challenge for Pagnol, liberating him from the sound-stage confinement of his reconstructed waterfront cafés and boudoirs. Like Renoir's *Toni*, made in the same year as this film, *Angèle* makes the harsh, sun-bleached landscapes a palpable force of both comfort and disruption in the lives of its characters; simply by capturing the incessant buzz of the cicadas on the soundtrack, Pagnol grounds the rather melodramatic impetus of the story in the naturalistic roots of Provençal peasant life. In return, the director grants a sense of verbal and emotional amplitude to Giono's collection of rustic icons - homely saints (Albin) and fools (Saturnin), the worldly tempter (Louis) and a redeemed tarnished angel. For their original American releases in the thirties, such Pagnol films as this one and *Regain* were heavily sheared to more conventional lengths; both lost about an hour's worth of footage, reducing them to their plot essentials. This treatment sabotaged the essence of Pagnol's approach to his subjects. The richness of a film like *Angèle* comes from what at first glance seems to be its structural redundancy - Pagnol's tendency to show the heroine's succession of personal crises, and at each turn pausing to record the reactions to these events of those woebegone relatives and suitors observing it all from the periphery. The human ramifications rather than the situations themselves are what concern Pagnol most; he's drawn to the way time and experience temper and transform the relationships between these people, expressed through the vivid rustic imagery of their speech. The languid rhythms of this film in its complete form give the persuasive impression that Pagnol himself is observing these lives along with his audience, allowing the story to follow its natural contours without any intrusion. Pagnol's evident affection for his characters is evenly matched by his confidence in the patience of his movie public.

Pagnol's is also triumphantly an actors' cinema. For all his popularity in unrestrained farce, Fernandel's greatest glory came from the comic pathos of his carefully delineated work for this director. The gauche tenderness and nervous self-effacement of his farmhand in *Angèle* is a theatrical tour-de-force inflected with genuine poignance (if not subtlety). Orane Demazis, Pagnol's then-wife and the

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interpreter of most of his stage and film heroines through the mid-thirties, might seem physically an unlikely sort to have stirred up all the trouble she inadvertently wreaks in *Angèle*; yet as in the *Fanny* trilogy, the clarity and directness of her acting demolishes such considerations. Amidst the loving panoramas of the rocky Provençal landscapes, the most arresting image from this film remains the sight of Demazis in close-up, her eyes glistening with ardor, fear and flattery at the blandishments whispered by her seducer in the shadows.

--Stephen Harvey