



# The well-diggers's daughter

**Director:** Daniel Auteuil  
**Country:** France  
**Date:** 2011

*A review by Jordn Mintzer of **Hollywood Reporter**.*

A perfectly packaged kickoff to actor-turned-director Daniel Auteuil's reboot of four works by Marcel Pagnol, *The Well-Digger's Daughter* (*La Fille du puisatier*) is a polished, finely acted tale of love and class in the south of France. Though its academic style and old-school morals may keep younger audiences away, *Daughter* should find takers among mature art-house moviegoers, with a star-studded cast bringing in solid theatrical and ancillary at home.

It's likely that purists will take issue with Auteuil's remake of the 1940 film, which starred Pagnol regulars Raimu and Fernandel in a lengthy, 170-minute version whose production was prolonged due to the events of World War II. While Auteuil (playing the Raimu role) actually recreates certain scenes almost line for line, he adds a glossy veneer to the raw, neo-realist theatrics of the original, layering it with sun-soaked cinematography by Jean-Francois Robin (*Nelly & Monsieur Arnaud*) and a slick, flowing score from Alexandre Desplat (*The King's Speech*).

If, in being so faithful to the text, Auteuil offers few insights into how Pagnol's oeuvre could seem relevant in contemporary times, he does invite viewers to re-experience the auteur's charming dialogues, attitudes and accents – to enjoy his clever stories of social strife and marital mores as they're lived by provincial folk during the early decades of the 20th century. It will be curious to see how this carries through to his upcoming remake of the "Marseillais Trilogy" of *Marius*, *Fanny* and *César*, due out in 2012.

In *The Well-Digger's Daughter*, the titular character, named Patricia (Astrid Berges-Frisbey), is one of six girls that the cantankerous and witty Pascal Amoretti (Auteuil) is forced to raise on his own after the death of his wife. Educated in Paris and with a svelte, allusive beauty, the 18-year-old Patricia is her daddy's "princess," and definitely ripe for a prince. He soon comes along in the form of Jacques Mazel (Nicolas Duvauchelle), the swarthy son of a local hardware salesman (Jean-Pierre Darroussin) and housewife (Sabine Azema), whose attachment to her only child would be potent fodder for Freud.

After trying to contain herself for some time, Patricia gives in to Jacques' advances, and gets pregnant just as Jacques, who's an accomplished pilot, is sent off to fight in World War I. When she tells her father the news, he confronts the Mazels, but the bourgeois couple has no desire to mix their genes with those of a widowed country bumpkin. The proud and stubborn Amoretti takes it badly, banishing his daughter and her "bastard" child, and it's only through the love for Patricia of his simple-minded assistant, Felipe (Kad Merad), that Amoretti may experience a change of heart.

It's hard to hold a candle to a legend like Raimu, who Orson Welles once called "the greatest actor in the world," but Auteuil (who already tested his chops on Claude Berri's Pagnol adaptations, *Jean de Florette* and *Manon of the Spring*), does a terrific job in channeling Amoretti's mix of straight-talking humor, workers' pride and fatherly love, all rolled up in a Provençal accent that could use some subtitling even for French-speaking viewers. In the role originally played by Fernandel, Merad (*Welcome to the Sticks*) delivers a strong performance, offering comic relief and a sense of compassion that his pigheaded boss couldn't live without.

Directing in a highly classical style, Auteuil shoots mostly in medium and wide angles, giving the actors their space and doing his best to stick close to Pagnol's method. (The scene where Amoretti breaks the news to the Mazels is particularly faithful to the first version.) He also inserts a few welcome moments of lyricism, such as when the camera glides over the lush fields and streams of Provence, accompanied by Enrico Caruso's haunting rendition of "Core n'grato."

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Cast: Daniel Auteuil, Kad Merad, Sabine Azema, Jean-Pierre Darroussin, Nicolas Duvauchelle, Astrid Berges-Frisbey, Emilie Cazenave

Director/screenwriter: Daniel Auteuil  
Producers: Alain Sarde, Jerome Seydoux  
Art director: Bernard Veizat  
Costume designer: Pierre-Yves Gayraud

Based on a film by: Marcel Pagnol  
Director of photography: Jean-Francois Robin  
Music: Alexandre Desplat  
Editor: Joelle Hache

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