Jean de Florette and Manon des Sources
based on the novel by Marcel Pagnol

The two part movie Jean de Florette and Manon des Sources is based on the novels Jean de Florette and Manon des Sources by Marcel Pagnol, a Southern French author whose novels portrait simple people of Southern France. The movie tells the seemingly simple and straightforward story of Jean Cadoret who inherits a farm and some land in Provence, in the South of France. He is the son of “Florette” a former inhabitant of the village close to the farm, and is known there as “Jean de Florette”. He is a well educated tax collector who has given up his tax collecting position in the city to make a living on the farm. He is hard working, determined, open minded and a “good” man to the point of being naïf. Jean de Florette is also a hunchback. He is accompanied by his wife Aimee who is a retired opera singer and his 10-year old daughter, Manon. Jean de Florette wants to make a living on the farm by growing his own produce and raising rabbits. He has read books on how to do so. A major obstacle to Jean’s plans, however, is a shortage of water.

The main characters in the village are Cesar Soubeyran and his nephew, Ugolin. Cesar is rich and unmarried. He has no children and considers Ugolin his heir. Ugolin participated in the war in Africa and has returned back to France with the idea of growing flowers. Ugolin and Cesar hope to purchase Jean de Florette’s farm for their flower project. Cesar and Ugolin know that there is a source of water on Jean’s property. They block off the water in the hope that Jean will give up farming because of lack of water and that he will sell them his property at what they call a
reasonable price. Throughout the movie we see Jean de Florette labor to get enough water for his plants and rabbits, see him in despair, pick himself up again and in the end he gets killed through a tragic accident. His widow sells the farm to Cesar and Ugolin, but Jean’s daughter Manon finds out the truth about the blocked off water well when she observes Cesar and Ugolin unblock the well.

In the second part of the movie, Manon des Sources, Manon does get her revenge. Ugolin falls in love with Manon who is repulsed by him. She finds out where the water for the village comes from in the mountains and blocks it off. In a dramatic encounter between the villagers/Ugolin/Cesar and Manon the truth about Cesar’s and Ugolin’s ugly scheme to ruin Manon’s father, Jean, is uncovered. Later, we also find out that in a twist of fate Cesar and Florette (Jean’s mother) had an affair and, unbeknown to Cesar, Jean was his son.

Superficially, the story is about the traditional and narrow minded village people versus the educated city person, Jean de Florette and his family who are open to new ideas and are willing to try something new, e.g., farming. The village people all knew that there was a source of water on Jean de Florette’s property but it is against their tradition to mingle in somebody else’s affair and so they let Cesar and Ugolin get away with murder (of Jean de Florette). Jean de Florette gives everybody and everything the benefit of doubt. When his daughter Manon states that she doesn’t like Ugolin because he is ugly, doesn’t trust him, Jean corrects her and tells her that just because somebody is ugly doesn’t mean he is not a good person. Jean de Florette tells Ugolin how he will make money, raising rabbits and plants. Ugolin
then tells Cesar about those plans and they make fun of Jean stressing that city folks don’t really know anything about farming and that only their methods of farming which are based on tradition are successful. It is interesting to see that both Cesar/Ugolin and Jean de Florette have basically the same dream that they are trying to achieve. Cesar/Ugolin want to raise flowers, Jean de Florette wants to raise rabbits and plants for produce. Despite their similar dreams, they go about realizing it in totally different ways. Cesar/Ugolin by treachery and deceit, Jean de Florette through honesty and hard work. Neither one accomplishes their dream in the long run as the movie shows.

The movie is set in a small village in the South of France. It is cast where it takes place, in the mountains of Southern France. The scenery in the movie is breathtaking. You can almost smell the “Herbes de Provence”, feel the simmering heat. The movie is very successful in capturing a certain “Frenchness”. The use of the Southern French accent with its rolled “r” adds charm and authenticity to the story. Even without speaking French this Southern (French) accent has a sing-song quality. It adds lightness to the movie which is contrasted by the deceit and evil acts of Cesar and Ugolin. This contrast creates a tension that carries through Jean de Florette. You see Jean labor hard when he carries water back to his farm, even the donkey that Jean is using to haul water is overworked. His family has been very supportive but at this point you see doubt in their eyes, his wife still will give anything she has to help her husband, her precious diamond necklace, but it is clear that she has lost faith or is about to loose faith in the cause, you can see it in her
eyes. Yet, she still sells her precious necklace. After all this hard labor and suffering, you expect, you want Jean to succeed! And after each failure to obtain a steady source of water, after all the sacrifices, you are sure he will, he must come up with a plan and eventually succeed. The tension builds up. When Jean de Florette gets ready to blow up the well in order to get to water deep down in the rocky ground you are hopeful that he will succeed and that this is IT. And you are incredulous when he dies. Cesar and Ugolin seem to win and get away with their scheme to acquire the farm.

The lack of any significant music, other than the “Jean de Florette” theme music, adds to the drama of the movie. Natural sounds are used to enhance the flair of the movie. The movie successfully brings across the simmering heat that demands water for the plants, the back breaking labor of Jean de Florette as he hauls water across the mountains to keep his farm going. One of the most impressive scenes in the movie is when Jean de Florette hopes for water. A thunderstorm is approaching, you see the fast moving clouds in the night sky, hear the thunder, see the wind, and then see the rain falling on the wrong side of the mountains. Jean stands outside with his family behind him, screaming at God, appealing to God for rain, hopeful. But destiny has it that the rain falls on the other side of the mountain and Jean’s farm stays dry again. Now Jean’s hope turns into frustration when he realizes that the rain won’t fall on his property, anger, almost madness.

The second part of the movie, *Manon des Sources*, is about Jean’s daughter Manon’s revenge on the village and Cesar/Ugolin. She is successful. Cesar and Ugolin
have to admit what they did to ruin and in the end cause Jean’s death. It is also clear that all the villagers were passive participants in the scheme by knowing but not preventing it from happening. In this part, Cesar finds out that Jean was his son. Cesar and Jean’s mother Florette had an affair shortly before Cesar left to fight in the war. Florette’s letters were lost and never reached Cesar. She married another man to escape the shame that comes with a pregnancy out of marriage at this time in history. Florette assumed that Cesar rejected her because he never answered her letters. After Cesar learns the truth he looses his spirit and dies later on. Ugolin, rejected by Manon, commits suicide.

*Manon des Sources* is less dramatic than *Jean de Florette*. It is predictable. Manon ends up marrying the village teacher who is a city-educated intellectual and Cesar makes her his heir before his death. *Manon des Sources* lacks the poignant scenes of the first part and focuses more on what role fate played in the events. Although the second part is not as poignant as the first part it still adds closure to the events.