

RAPTURE is a 1965 20th Century Fox drama featuring Patricia Gozzi, Dean Stockwell, Ingrid Thulin, and Melvyn Douglas. Below is Kino Ken's review of the Zeus dvd release of that film.

15 of a possible 20 points = **** = outstanding film

Key: *indicates outstanding technical achievement or performance
(j) designates a juvenile performer

France 1965 black-and-white 104 minutes live action English-language
feature drama Panoramic Productions Distributed by 20th Century Fox.
Producer: Christian Ferry an FXM release

Points:

- 2 Direction: John Guillermin*
 - 1 Editing: Max Benedict and Françoise Diot
 - 2 Cinematography: Marcel Grignon*
 - 2 Lighting
 - 1 Screenplay: Ennio Flaiano, Stanley Mann based on the novel
Rags in My Riches by Phyllis Hastings
 - 2 Music: Georges Delerue*
 - 1 Art Direction: Jean André
Costume Design: Jacques Fonteray
Makeup: Janine Jarreau, Janine Lanksheaf, and Ben Nye
 - 1 Sound
Sound Editing: Peter Thornton
Sound Recording: Joseph de Bretagne and Gordon McCallum
Sound Mixing: Otto Snel
 - 2 Acting
 - 1 Creativity
- 15 total points

Cast: Melvyn Douglas (Frederick Larbaud), Patricia Gozzi (j)* (Agnes Larbaud), Dean Stockwell (Joseph), Gunnel Lindblom (Karen), Murray Evans (young gendarme), Sylvia Kay (Genevieve), Ellen Pollock (landlady), Peter Sallis (Armand), Leslie Sands (first gendarme), René Aranda (wedding guest), Jean-Claude Bercq (mechanic in Karen's room), Albert Daumergue

(barman on the boat), Marius Gaidon (wedding guest), Pierre Gualdi (café's owner), Gaston Meunier, Georgette Peyron and Robert Secq (wedding guests)

One of the "lost" treasures of world cinema, John Guillermin's 1965 drama *Rapture* has for unknown reasons not surfaced on any North American official dvd release. The version being reviewed here is a pristine quality print from FXM Retro, released by Zeus DVD.

Based on a bestselling novel titled *Rapture in My Rags* by Phyllis Hastings, the Guillermin film was shot on location along the Brittany coast of France. That wild and constantly altering background ideally parallels the psychological tangle enveloping three characters locked in struggle against society, nature, and each other.

Central to this conflict is teenage Agnes Larbaud, someone who today would probably be readily identified as autistic. She's imaginative, partially feral, solipsistic. Having been removed from public schooling by a frigidly unbending father intent on keeping the child to himself, Agnes has little social interaction outside her home. There seems no bond whatsoever between herself and an older sister whose marriage opens the film. Since the girl's mother is dead, yet another source of love is denied her. The one real female companion for Agnes is a hired housekeeper of extremely low moral character, hardly an exemplary role model. Karen is affordable, however, making her an attractive employee in the eyes of miserly ex-judge Frederick.

Eventually viewers learn Monsieur Larbaud's isolation is the result of an adulterous affair involving Agnes's mother and a family friend. Prodded to a murderous rage after discovering spousal treachery, Frederick retires from a Parisian judiciary job, taking his deteriorating family with him to a cliffside manor house in Brittany. There his wife dies soon afterwards, leaving him alone to raise two daughters.

His elder girl, seen only near the beginning and end of the picture, is conventional, bluntly logical, a female version of the judge's own personality. She desires papa's relocation to a less dreary and out-of-the-way residence where a pair of newlyweds can provide for his needs much better than dreamy, unpredictable Agnes. Her solution to the problem of little sister's strangeness is getting the oddball reassigned to a nearby sanitarium.

Something equally repugnant to Frederick and his younger child. Indeed, such a prospect terrifies Agnes, who's agonizingly aware of losing self-control

whenever stress disrupts her life. Unable to cope with novelty, whether it arrives in the form of strangers, noises, or irregularities of schedule, the shyest Larbaud additionally must deal with demands made by her changing adolescent body. She's being forced into a quagmire of loneliness by restrictions imposed upon her by geography and family. Only by abandoning herself completely to the rapture of nature can she discover some semblance of happiness.

Agnes's great wish is for something to possess which is entirely her own. A self-created scarecrow should serve that purpose. Since Frederick won't permit playing with dolls and Karen the housekeeper is too obsessed with male company to be either satisfactory partner or mentor, the garden by default becomes the girl's domain and the man of straw its protector.

Until one day a paddy wagon driver's assaulted on the curving shore road below the Larbaud property. His vehicle overturns, liberating several sailors charged with disorderly conduct. Two are soon recaptured. But not before one gendarme who had been accompanying them is severely wounded. The third, a handsome youth named Joseph, eludes searchers. He makes his way on a stormy night to the Larbaud farm, borrowing Frederick's old suit which Agnes used to humanize her malkin.

At this point a realistic plot starts to leach into fantasy. Two females present join forces to bring the intruder to a comfortable farmhouse bed, sneaking him past an unobservant homeowner.

Each has a personal interest in the outlaw. Karen sees him as a more adventurous alternative to her usual boyfriend. For Agnes, he's nothing less than her scarecrow come magically to life. Even though she knows better than that in her more lucid moments, a fairy-tale interpretation of events holds compelling fascination. She had eagerly assembled the raggedy crow-discourager to keep her company. Now that creation has reciprocated her enthusiasm for life by metamorphosing into a real human being. One capable of returning her affection.

Joseph, however, is more strongly drawn to Frederick's money and domestic helper.

Before long, the dangerous secret of conspirators Karen and Agnes is revealed to Frederick. He cleans and bandages Joseph's wound, gives him painkiller tablets, and decides to hide the outlaw from police. The lad might be just what he's seeking, a fellow advocate for social justice and sounding-board for ideas about judicial reform.

Or he might be a thieving rake. Which turns out to be the case, in spades.

Finding Karen ensconced in a corner of the family tool shed with an amorous Joseph, Agnes turns into a fair copy of Avenging Angel, first locking Joseph outside, then attacking her rival with whatever was handy. It happens to be a shovel, wielded with furious strength. Joseph meanwhile breaks down part of the door to rescue his flirtatious companion.

Karen, though, has experienced quite enough terror from the local Fury. She determines to pack up and leave. Frederick has no idea why she's departing. No one cares to supply detailed explanations.

With competition gone, Agnes allows herself to be seduced by Joseph, something audiences are likely to find stomach-churning. After all, the girl is still just a naïve country maiden while the seducer's an experienced adult who doesn't seem particularly picky about paramours.

Soon Frederick's deprived of both cash and virgin daughter. Two lovers obviously not meant for each other, an awkward pair of social misfits, go on the lam together. Shades of Caril Fugate and Charles Starkweather hang heavy over their subsequent misadventures. Kitchen sink makeshifts and feeble attempts at temporary employment and domestic economy prove catastrophic for the French duo. Making matters still worse are news reports the gendarme Joseph shot has died. So now he's a killer as well as robber. While the young man might attempt a self-defense plea in court, odds against a jury's believing that story appear overwhelming.

Unable to handle money securely or cook capably, a defeated Agnes returns home, having lost everything "borrowed" from her surviving parent. With no place else safely to shelter, Joseph follows his feckless companion to the Larbaud homestead, only to find two patrolmen present.

Warned to flee by screams of father and daughter, the fugitive takes to his heels with the law following hot on his trail.

Will he escape?

Can Frederick provide Agnes with more than just material security?

Check out this tense drama on YouTube to find the answers.

Anchored by what may be the greatest juvenile acting performance in cinema history, *Rapture* is an emotionally immersive, harrowing achievement unjustly neglected by a Hollywood obsessed with amusing supernatural trifles. It features elegant black-and-white compositions, a multitude of memorable close-ups, panoramic tracking shots, oblique camera angles reminiscent of silent German expressionist drama, and lyrical shoreline scenes that may

trigger memories of Scandinavian pastoral footage from films of Ingmar Bergman and Bo Widerberg.

Sound recording skillfully intersperses bird cries, waves breaking on rocks, and roaring winds with man-made sonic aggravations such as pneumatic drills. Occasionally at the expense of clearly audible diction.

Georges Delerue's score, frequently composed of off-kilter lullaby passages, conveys admirably the fragile, unsteady mental states of three main characters, all to varying degrees attempting to hide from themselves in a hopeless quest.

Besides fifteen-year-old Patricia Gozzi's landmark depiction of a semi-hysterical socially backward outcast, Melvyn Douglas's guilt-ridden patriarch and Dean Stockwell's fatalistic, courteously treacherous interloper supply plenty of riveting fireworks. Gunnel Lindblom, on loan from Svensk Filmindustri in a probable attempt to expand her audience base beyond Scandinavia, is less definitive, her household trollop character skimming all-too-close to uninspired stereotype.

Adaptation by Ennio Flaiano and Stanley Mann of an acclaimed psychological novel by Englishwoman Phyllis Hastings is only partially successful. It removes a climactic Freudian murder, resets action from its original English background, and replaces a "happily ever after" ending with one steeped in bittersweet uncertainty.

These changes were likely sops to mainstream filmgoers. They boomeranged, mass audiences giving the motion picture a wide berth in the face of some negative reviews implying Guillermin's opus depended heavily on *nouvelle vague* copycat edits, generous dollops of child abuse, Dean Stockwell's resemblance to James Dean, and exaggerated muggings by young Gozzi. None of these criticisms are valid. However, once published they were received as astute observations by adults stunned by radical European film imports preceding *Rapture*. Inept marketing by Twentieth-Century Fox, which apparently had no idea how to promote it, further damaged the movie's chances of commercial success.

Luminous lighting throughout and fully capable direction of supporting performers and extras are additional strengths of this film.

Modestly budgeted art direction yielded modest, though adequate, returns.

Very much an adult movie for exclusively adult spectators, *Rapture* thoroughly deserves a heavily-promoted Criterion Collection dvd / blu-ray combo release. It's a stupefying mystery why this title is, or was, available in

Britain on Eureka's Masters of Cinema label but somehow failed to show up on this side of the Atlantic. For shame!

Don't miss any opportunity coming your way to see it and be amazed.