

***The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds* is a 1972 live action feature drama directed by Paul Newman. It won Joanne Woodward a Best Actress Award at the 1973 Cannes International Film Festival. Below is Kino Ken's review of that Zeus dvd release.**

**10 of a possible 20 points = \*\*1/2 = average movie**

**United States 1972 color 100 minutes live action feature drama  
20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox / Newman Foreman Company  
Producers: John Foreman and Paul Newman**

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

**Points:**

- 2 Direction: Paul Newman\***
- 0 Editing: Evan Lottman**
- 1 Cinematography: Adam Holender**  
**Stills Photography: Muky Munkasci**
- 1 Lighting: Robert Dolan (gaffer)**
- 0 Screenplay: Alvin Sargent, based on the play by Paul Zindel**  
**Script Supervision: Roberta Hodes**
- 1 Music: Maurice Jarre**
- 2 Art Direction: Gene Callahan\***  
**Set Decoration: Richard Merrell\***  
**Scenic Art: Stanley Cappiello**  
**Props: Joseph Caracciolo**  
**Costume Design: Anna Hill Johnstone**  
**Makeup: Fern Buchner**
- 0 Sound**  
**Sound Editing: Al Nahmias and Katherine Wenning**  
**Sound Re-Recording: C. Robert Fine**  
**Sound Mixing: Dennis Maitland**  
**Casting Direction: Shirley Rich, Michael Chinish, and Don Phillips (extras)**
- 2 Acting**
- 1 Creativity**

## 10 total points

**Cast: Joanne Woodward\* (Beatrice, the mom), Nell Potts\* (j) (Matilda, younger daughter of Beatrice), Roberta Wallach\* (j) (Ruth, elder daughter of Beatrice), Judith Lowry\* (Nanny), David Spielberg (Mr. Goodman), Richard Venture\* (Floyd), Carolyn Coates (Mrs. McKay), Will Hare (junk man), Estelle Omens (Caroline), Jess Osuna (Sonny), Ellen Dano\* (Janice Vickery), Lynne Rogers (Miss Hanley), Roger Serbagi (Charlie), John Lehne (apartment manager), Dee Victor (Miss Wyant)**

**One of the best-acted movies of the 1970s, *The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds* has been permitted to fall into obscurity due probably to its status as an independent production. Like *Rapture*, it was distributed by 20<sup>TH</sup> Century Fox. Which for unknown reasons has not bothered to release it on dvd.**

**Based on a Pulitzer-prize winning play of the same title by Paul Zindel, it focuses on a dysfunctional single-parent family. Mother Beatrice heads this all-female unit. Her husband has died, leaving two daughters at the mercy of their working-class, heavy-drinking mom.**

**Older daughter Ruth's an extroverted cheerleader disposed to follow in maternal footsteps. She has an idolizing boyfriend named Chris Burns. Chris is her chief preoccupation. The teenager's also an effective actress with a flair for comic imitation.**

**Younger daughter Matilda's an introverted, mousy dreamer. She's currently pursuing a home experiment involving marigolds, some of which have been exposed to gamma rays from a cobalt isotope. Long-range supervision and guidance come from science teacher Mr. Goodman, who seems to hold undue influence over science fair judges.**

**Living in a rundown section of an aging Connecticut town, the Hunsdorfers survive economically by renting a room and providing board for a succession of geriatric patients, several of which die during their stay at Beatrice's home. This negatively impacts on Ruth, leading her to regard their family as ineffective guardians of the dying. Ruth herself suffers from episodes of grand mal epilepsy, often triggered by shouting matches with Beatrice or nightmares about being chased by an unidentified adult male. She nonetheless finds comfort in the arms**

of Beatrice rather than those of her sister, who seems rather envious of the bond between two older Hunsdorfers.

For solace and love Matilda turns to a pet rabbit gifted her by Mr. Goodman. Unwilling to keep it completely caged, she allows the animal to roam through the house and even takes the creature to bed with her. This elicits opposition from Beatrice, who demands the girl clean up properly messes made by her pet. Progressively frustrated when the little blonde refuses to involve herself in sanitation duty, mama ultimately takes action to solve the problem once and for all. Thus making a permanent rift between parent and child.

Another potential source of income for the family comes through a telephone solicitation scheme of some kind which invariably short-circuits, ending with Beatrice insulting each prospective customer. Inability to generate sincere compliments for others, stemming from overwhelming feelings of personal inadequacy, made her an outcast in high school and earned her the nickname of "Betty the Loon."

When Ruth one day overhears a teacher remarking to Mr. Goodman that Beatrice was ridiculed as crazy for her outlandish apparel and obvious need for public attention at all times, she can't resist using this gossipy tidbit as a verbal weapon with which to deflate her mom's arrogant putdowns. She also takes advantage of a dramatics class opportunity to ridicule Beatriz, skewering her in a skit parodying parental speech and gestures while dressed in wig and bathrobe belonging to the woman she was lampooning.

At home later that day, the butt of her performance, having found two favorite articles of clothing missing, grilled their borrower on exactly where they were taken and how they were used. Eventually learning the entire truth, Beatriz is devastated by Ruth's betrayal.

On top of that, she's informed by the girl that Matilda's a finalist in their school's science fair. Parents of all five remaining contenders are to appear onstage the evening of final judging.

That news pushes Beatrice over an emotional cliff. What respectable outfit could she wear to such an event? Would she have to deliver a speech? For mama, it's all about her, not Matilda. Well, it is utterly impossible to leave boarder Nanny alone in the house. Perhaps as punishment for mocking her, Ruth's commanded to stay home that night with Nanny. While "loony" mom goes with Matilda to the fair.

Except Ruth has no intention of obeying. Forcing her antagonist to attempt a daughter dump at the residence of Nanny's child. However, Mrs. McKay is out of town at Atlantic City. And her landlord has no intentions of taking Nanny's care upon himself.

Defeated as usual, Beatrice returns home, wreaks vengeance on Matilda's prize possession, opens a can of beer for consolation, then places a call to her daughters' school. Since its principal is unavailable, serving as master of ceremonies at the science fair, she unloads to a secretary, thanking her for making Beatrice feel like a completely worthless human being.

Not content with long-distance troublemaking, Beatrice then drives drunkenly to the school itself, arriving after Matilda has been awarded the top fair prize for her experiment. Ruth, in awe, has congratulated her sister. As have numerous others. All Beatrice can summon is a brief utterance: "My heart is full."

Afterwards, Beatrice basically ignores Matilda while attempting to regale Ruth with pledges to turn their property into a tea shop / mini-playground with small pool.

Matilda finds Peter, her rabbit, and brings it downstairs and out to the yard, setting it down in mute accusation where her mother must see it.

The movie ends with a monologue from its winner about how she has achieved self-recognition as someone important, a feat never accomplished by her mother.

Commendable for Richard Merrell's justifiable household clutter, the picture also earned Paul Newman a nomination for 1973's Palme d'Or for direction of a cluster of impeccable acting performances. Still, the production is encumbered by a profanity-soaked Alvin Sargent screenplay and occasional lapses into near-inaudible sound recording of dialogue.

Maurice Jarre's music, appropriate enough, lacks memorable themes. Though it certainly sustains a melancholy atmosphere.

Lighting and cinematography are adequate.

Editing is bumpy throughout, with spasmodic linkages between scenes rather than cinematic flow.

Prime assets here are performances.

**Nell Potts, daughter of Paul Newman and Joanne Woodward, gives an ethereal rendering of Matilda: shy, studious, self-absorbed like her screen parent.**

**Roberta Wallach, daughter of actress Anne Jackson and actor Eli Wallach, is totally persuasive as a belligerent, rebellious, popular Ruth. Who's fundamentally crippled with anxiety attacks, epilepsy, and an inhospitable home situation.**

**Young Ellen Dano lingers in memory as sadistic Janice Vickery. She's a glib, socially secure experimentalist of the most despicable sort you wouldn't wish upon your worst enemy.**

**Judith Lowry's mute Nanny, having been perfected on stage, arrives onscreen with all camouflaged intelligence intact. Nanny may not be capable of speech. Her hearing might no longer be especially keen. But eyes and mind appear alert as ever, continuing to efficiently process sights and events.**

**Richard Venture's comic relief as Beatrice's brother-in-law Floyd, a flu-ridden bank official trying to appease someone totally resistant to outside advice, is thoroughly entertaining.**

**Of course, the linchpin here is Joanne Woodward's self-loathing matriarch, unfulfilled herself and determined to suppress contentment and success of offspring. One of this gifted actress's best portrayals, it won recognition both at home and abroad, including the 1973 Best Actress Award from the Kansas City Film Critics Circle and a Best Actress in a Motion Picture – Drama nomination from the 1973 Golden Globes. As well as the Cannes Film Festival Award for Best Actress cited above.**

**In 1972, the National Board of Review included this dramatically potent picture in its Top Ten Film list.**

**Despite an MPAA Rating of PG, this movie is purely adult viewing due to abundant profanity and very mature situations involving Beatrice, an "antiques" dealer, and a seemingly senile Nanny.**

**The Zeus dvd release contains no bonus materials.**

**Truly a hidden dramatic gem, *The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds* certainly deserves a proper and greatly overdue dvd release on a label such as Kino International or Sony Pictures Home Entertainment.**