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Author(s)	Hy Hollinger
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## Sans Toit Ni Loi

(Vagabond)  
(FRENCH-COLOR)

*Variety 9.4.85*  
Venice, Aug. 30.

A Cine-Tamaris and Films A 2 coproduction. Paris, in collaboration with the French Ministry of Culture and Channel Four, London. Written and directed by Agnès Varda. Features Sandrine Bonnaire. Camera (color), Patrick Blossier; sound, Jean-Paul Mugel; editor, Varda, Patricia Mazuy; music, Joanna Druzdowicz. Reviewed at Venice Film Fest (competition), Aug. 29, 1985. Running time: 105 MINS.

With: Sandrine Bonnaire (Mona, the vagabond), Macha Meril (Madame Landier, the plantologist), Stephane Freiss (Jean-Pierre, the agronomist), Laurence Cortadellas (Eliane, his wife), Marthe Jarnias (Aunt Lydie, the old woman), Yolande Moreau (Yolande, the maid), Joel Fosse (Paulo, the conman), Patrick Lepczynski (David, the Jew), Yahiaoui Assouna (Assoun, the vineyard worker).

The first highlight in the competition at Venice and an inside favorite to win one of fest's top prizes, Agnès Varda's "Vagabond" (title translates: "Without A Roof And Beyond The Law") should easily do well on the arthouse circuit with proper handling and a boost from other key fests on the circuit. It numbers among Varda's best films.

"Vagabond" begins with a worker in the southern vineyards discovering the body of a young girl frozen to death in a ditch. When the police arrive, they inspect the corpse under suspicion of possible foul play. Then the entire story is told in a kind of seamless flashback, the case-history bridges offered when a succession of characters "testify" before the camera on what they know about the girl. It is gradually revealed that the girl has no one to blame but herself for dying as she did.

Mona is one of those all-too-common contemporary teenagers who aimlessly drifts. She carries her tent on her back, swims (in the opening shot) in the Mediterranean in the warmer weather to bathe herself from time to time, sleeps during the particularly cold spells in railroad stations or abandoned villas, and makes acquaintances or has relations with whomever she wishes as she goes along. She never stays in any one place very long, yet an impression of her visit is always left behind due to her rather amoral attitude to sex, stealing-to-eat, and her practice of sleeping where she pleases.

In fact, it's the people she meets that provide the moral and narrative context to the story. She is equally at home with Arab workers (a Moroccan, a Tunisian), garage attendants (when broke, she sleeps with one or other of them arbitrarily), and middle-class inhabitants of the district (a woman who pursues the medicinal value of plants and herbs, a rich old woman in a villa).

Mona covets her freedom most of all. So, too, do a couple raising goats and making cheese to sell for a living. The girl lives with them for a while, then one day steals a few bars of cheese for her knapsack to be on her way — which she then exchanges for a few francs with a prostitute on a highway soliciting

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customers ~~among~~ passing cars. From time to time, she teams with other vagabonds of her own age, sleeping together in villas they've broken into.

Varda's style is reminiscent of Robert Bresson's in exposing the evil in the world without judging the motives of the protagonist herself. There's also a scene toward the end that hints of the impending doom, as though Mona is a victim of fate or a moral code more alien and cold-hearted than her own. Now ill from a lung infection and without tent or blankets (burned in her last abode; an unheated shack for the Arab workers and riff-raff), she ventures into a village — only to be surprised and mishandled by youths in a season vineyard ritual, an annual Halloween-style celebration during which passers-by are rather maliciously sprayed with the purple of the grape.

Sick, drenched and humiliated, she flees into the countryside, falls into a ditch — and freezes to death.

Credits are all top-grade. Outstanding are the performance by Bonnaire, the sparse musical soundtrack, and Varda's risky refusal to dramatize the story any more than necessary. — *Holl*.