

Document Citation

Title	Swiss 'color film in black and white'
Author(s)	Louise B. Sweeney
Source	<i>Christian Science Monitor</i>
Date	1972 Aug 14
Type	review
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	1
Subjects	
Film Subjects	La salamandre (The salamander), Tanner, Alain, 1971

'Swiss 'color film in black and white'

By Louise Sweeney

"La Salamandre" is an intriguing Swiss film about a girl who is something of a salamander — that mythical creature who is able to live in fire without harm.

The salamander in this case is a girl whom her discoverers call Rosemonde, a blonde who made the headlines a few years earlier when her uncle was shot with his own rifle. The uncle claimed it was Rosemonde in a fit of anger; Rosemonde claimed the uncle was just cleaning his gun and it went off accidentally.

Rosemonde's discoverers are two writers who accept money to collaborate on a play about her: Pierre, a journalist fresh from Brazil, and Paul, who supports his family as a plasterer. Pierre and Paul both set off to write about Rosemonde and why she did or did not commit the crime, Pierre bloodhounding his way along with interviews, Paul working from his intuition as a writer.

At first they come to the conclusions from different approaches. Then, as the real Rosemonde insinuates her way into their lives, they begin to tear up scripts and wring their hands over ever being able to get her on paper.

This 1970 film by Alain Tanner, who directed and wrote the script (with John Berger), is introduced in the credits as "a color film in black and white." So it is. The color is in the characterization, dialogue, and acting, all of which are vivid, bright. Mrs. Tanner's theme is that of the feminine mystery — what is the Mona Lisa smiling about, who was "Laura"? And the plot is really just an excuse to explore that mystery rather than the gunshot, because the film is certainly not a thriller in any other sense, any more than it's a full-feathered tragedy or comedy although there are aspects of both.

Bulle Ogier is riveting as Rosemonde, the pretty, amoral, hip, and rebellious daughter of a large farm family who has gone to the city for kicks and found she doesn't like selling shoes any more than stuffing sausage in a factory. Miss Ogier has a mobile, expressive face and Mr. Tanner's cameramen follow it around like a faithful dog. Jean-Luc Bideau is delightfully wry, gruff, and curious as reporter Pierre. Jacques Denis is droll as the writer-plasterer.

"La Salamandre" smacks of other directors at times — especially of Francois Truffaut's "Jules and Jim" in its approach to the triangular relationship, and it reminds me too of early Jean-Luc Godard. Mr. Tanner focuses on Miss Ogier as intently as Godard did on Anna Karina in "A Woman Is a Woman" or Marina Vlady in "Two or Three Things I Know About Her." There is also a Godardian undercurrent of antiestablishment, revolutionary bitterness in the script which drags out the film, particularly toward the end. It needs cutting.