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# SWISS FILMS REVIEW

Another Swiss film was shown in London last September. After enjoying Alain Tanner's *La Salamandre*, the London public had a chance to appreciate *Retour d'Afrique* by the same director.

Like Tanner's other films and those of his two other French-Swiss colleagues, Sutter and Goretta, *Retour d'Afrique* deals with problems arising from the boredom experienced by some in the capitalist and bourgeois context of Swiss life.

It is the story of an *escape* from the realities of an insipid life, an escape which never materialises.

The heroes of the film, Vincent and Françoise, who live in a garrett in the old town of Geneva, plan to start a new life in Algeria. They rely for this venture on the help of a friend, Max, who has lived over there for many years.

The day they set out to leave, having sold all their belongings, bid farewell to their friends and definitely closed the door on Geneva, they receive a short telegram from Max telling that, owing to unforeseen difficulties, he is not in a position to welcome them. He asks them to remain for a while in Geneva and promises more explanations in a letter to come.

The second part of the film bears a considerable resemblance to *Waiting for Godot*.

It takes part entirely in the couple's empty flat as they wait for the fateful letter. That letter is expected on a Monday – Vincent has checked the time of arrivals of regular flights from Algiers. But it doesn't. There is no letter on the following day, and the day after. They wait for a whole week, not daring to go outside for fear of meeting someone they know.

They struggle to preserve the illusion that they have already gone. On no account must their decision to turn a new leaf be thwarted by this unexpected contretemps.

Twice every day, Vincent opens the letter-box only to find postal advertisements which he tears up in a rage. The remainder of the day is spent in the flat where the two make love or muse about life and the dread of the hopeless future which they must escape at all costs.

But finally, their belief in their journey begins to wane and one day, the fateful letter from Max arrives, slipped beneath the door by the postman. It explains that the trip to Africa is no longer possible.

Max plans to return to Switzerland. He asks his friends to wait for him another 10 days. He will then give them the useful tips they will need.

This letter spells the *Retour*

*d'Afrique*. Vincent and Françoise will not go to Africa, and Tanner portrays them nine months later in their flat in a new estate on the outskirts of Geneva. The scream of jets taking off serves as the background to the new, staid domestic life into which they have settled.

But they still ask themselves the same old questions: shall we have a child? To throw him into this sick world of ours? To take him for Sunday outings in the family car with other bourgeois families in Sunday dress? To take him to the parks in a pram? The idea – which sounded so ludicrous nine months ago – appears dangerously close to reality.

One day, Vincent and Françoise decide that they *will* have a child. "A child that will be rebellious, a drop-out, someone that will say the system stinks, throw it overboard," says Vincent. Unable to break free from their environment, too undetermined to make the journey to Africa without help from outside, they decide to fall into the fold. They will have a child like every other family, but a child that will do what they were afraid to do and that will symbolise their unrealised dreams.

The film ends with Vincent and Françoise discussing, with some anxiety, the realities of having a child. They realise that one of them will have to stop work for a while, he as a gardener and she as a postal employee. They argue that there is no particular reason why the woman should give up her job. Since it is immaterial who stays at home to look

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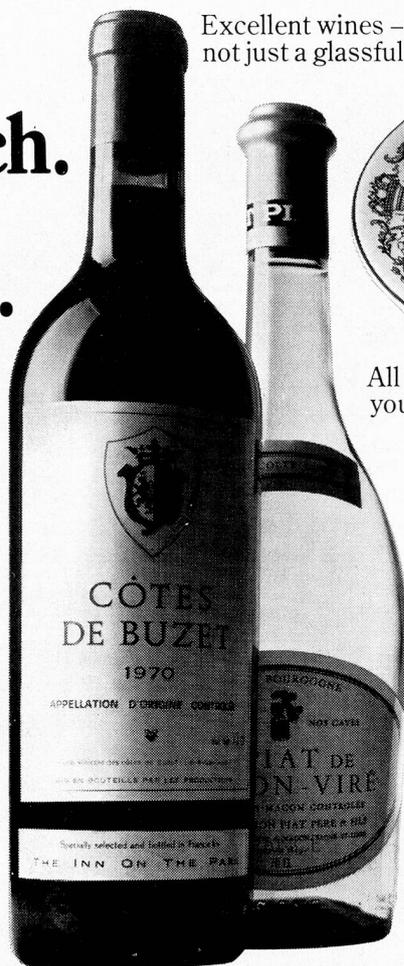
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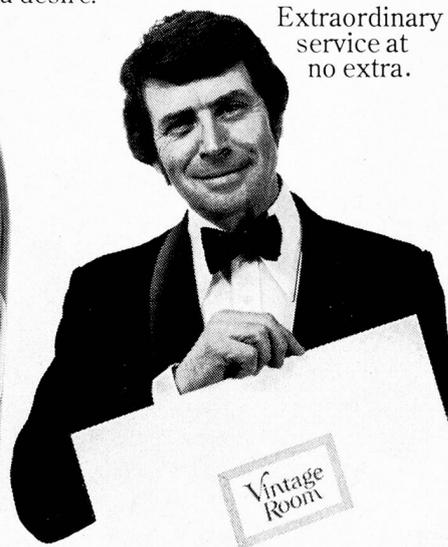
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after the baby, they decide to settle the issue by tossing a five-franc coin. Françoise says that if Wilhelm Tell's face shows up, she will stay at work. The coin is tossed. Vincent lifts his hand from his wrist and makes a broad smile. The film ends on this scene without revealing which of the two will have to look after the baby.

This rather domestic scene is a fitting end to a very straightforward story. At least one thing can be said for Tanner: he makes his points very clear indeed. There is no useless pseudo-philosophical verbiage. Quite to the contrary, dialogues appear rather simple and unimaginative, in keeping with the boredom of modern life which Tanner is managing to convey with some success. The film is in black and white. This, and an appropriate choice of music, adds to the nihilistic atmosphere of the film.

The story is set in Geneva, just as *La Salamandre*, but, while that film had constant shots of Geneva in the rain, *Retour d'Afrique* emphasises the constant rumble of traffic upon which the camera returns constantly to picture the world as it is outside the garret where the drama unfolds.

The cast is new and Tanner has been very fortunate in his choice of Françoise Mathouret at Vincent and of Josée Destoop as Françoise. To conclude the film is on the whole good, but a little slow-paced.

Another film (of a *totally* different vein) set in Switzerland was also showing in London cinemas during September. This was the *Eiger Sanction* where the action actually climaxes on the north face of the Eiger. The hero, played by Clint Eastwood (of *Dirty Harry* and *One Dollar More* fame), has to carry out an execution on the forbidding mountain. Two-thirds of the film is taken up by the build-up to the climb and the actual ascent where Clint Eastwood has to "sanction" a "baddie".

Although the plot is weak and the violence not as dramatic as it is in other Clint Eastwood films, the film might please those interested in mountaineering scenes and not likely to be too impressed by people hurtling down the Eiger's north wall. The opening shots are filmed in

Zurich, where a murder is carried out in the Niederdorf.

A scene indicating that the receptionist at the Little Scheidegg Hotel is open to bribery is rather unfair to Swiss hotel traditions. But I do not think there is a case for libel!

PMB

## SWISS EVENTS

### SWISS NATIONAL HYMN TO REMAIN UNCHANGED

Switzerland's current National Anthem, the moving "Morgenrot", written by A. Zwyssig and L. Widmer, is to retain its status for the time being in the Army and at Switzerland's diplomatic missions abroad. The Federal Council, which took this decision, has also invited the Cantons to preserve this hymn as the Swiss National Anthem in a letter to cantonal governments.

This hymn replaced the previous National Anthem, whose tune resembled that of the British one, in 1961. It was supposed to be a temporary solution.

A contest was held to find an apparently more adequate and lasting National Anthem. But no other hymn has won comparable support during the past 14 years and the government has therefore decided to prolong our current anthem's "temporary" life indefinitely.

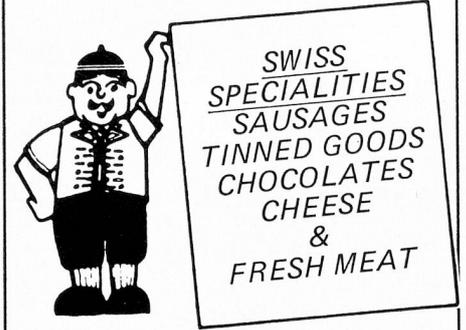
### A CENTURY OF MILK CHOCOLATE

This year, it is a 100 years since the Swiss Daniel Peter succeeded, after many attempts, in perfecting the process for the manufacture of milk chocolate that has made the name and fame of the Swiss chocolate industry.

Peter's first export successes were in England, where the chemist of a small town ordered 100 lb of chocolate from him ... since then, sales of chocolate abroad have increased considerably to reach the figure of 15,900 tonnes last year, ie about 17 per cent of the country's total output.

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This big figure is nevertheless considerably below that achieved in previous years, the Swiss chocolate industry having been unable, above all for financial reasons, to maintain its position in the face of free foreign competition.

Although Switzerland is the biggest per capita consumer of chocolate in the world (9.5 kg per head of the population per year), sales on the home market also dropped in 1974 to 55,000 tonnes, 10 per cent of which consisted of imported products (as opposed to only one per cent in 1960).

### NEW DOLL MUSEUM ON SWISS SHORE OF LAKE CONSTANCE

A rather special museum has been opened in the Lake of Constance village of Güttingen, on the Romanshorn-Kreuzlingen railway line. Two private collections of 250 dolls and toys from the 19th and early 20th centuries have been combined to make a permanent exhibition in the converted assembly rooms of the restaurant Adler.

The items include a number of particularly valuable and rare automatic and semi-automatic exhibits. The collection is open to the public on Wednesdays, Saturdays and Sundays from 14.00 hours onwards.



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