

Rosalie [15]

2023 Belgium 115 mins

UK released **7 June 2024**

Director **Stéphanie Di Giusto**

Screenplay **Stéphanie Di Giusto ; Sandrine Le Coustumer ;
Alexandra Echkenazi**

Cinematography **Christos Voudouris**

Music **Hania Rani**

Cast **Nadia Tereszkievicz (Rosalie Deluc); Benoît Magimel
(Abel Deluc); Benjamin Biolay (Barcelin)**

The second film by French writer-director Stéphanie di Giusto carries itself with the noble authority of a historical biopic, though its protagonist is in fact an imagined composite of various female case studies from the 19th century. This allows Di Giusto to bend her narrative to fit a message of feminist empowerment that also doubles as an all-purpose paean to society's marginalised misfits. The result is affecting and attractively mounted, though the filmmaking itself never strays far outside the conventional.

Not that Rosalie sets out to shock or dazzle. It is unassumingly built around a performance of sensitivity and warmth by Nadia Tereszkievicz in the title role, with even co-star Benoît Magimel, a craggy asset as her quietly recessive husband, content to accept a dimmer spotlight.

At first glance, Rosalie, young and porcelain-pretty, doesn't seem like the kind of potential bride who'd require a dowry to secure men's interest. One would think she could set her sights higher than Abel (Magimel), a gruff, shy, middle-aged tavern owner who's mainly in it for said dowry – he has debts to settle with Barcelin (Benjamin Biolay), a local factory owner with a fierce puritan hold on the community. Di Giusto teases the mystery of Rosalie's diminished social stock to a point that slightly undercuts her film's compassion: the eventual reveal of her fuzzy chest on their wedding night, is a little too lurid for comfort. Though Rosalie still carefully shaves her face to avoid others' gawping, she's accepted her body hair as the way she was made; the film's coyness around showing it feels an almost prudish misstep.

But the film relaxes, and so does Rosalie – even as her husband remains wary, and her marriage unconsummated. Business picks up at the tavern, with customers drawn to the new barmaid’s beauty and cheer, and she grows comfortable bantering with them, ultimately betting one that she can grow a full beard in a month. It’s a seemingly rash admission, but her thinking behind it is pragmatic, even self-sacrificing: she doesn’t mind becoming a local freak attraction if it brings in more punters. The twist, in a perhaps optimistic interpretation of the era’s values, is that the bearded Rosalie is widely embraced by the community for her confidence and courage; it’s up to Barcelin, a somewhat one-dimensional villain standing in for an entire culture of Christian patriarchy, to start a backlash.

Di Giusto’s script, co-written with Sandrine Le Coustumer, turns somewhat schematic in its pitting of Rosalie’s free, unorthodox femininity against the censure of Society At Large. Tereskiewicz, who has something of the younger Marion Cotillard’s guarded vulnerability, makes Rosalie more than just a poster girl for living one’s truth. She gives her a perverse, self-serving streak of sensual curiosity that contrasts credibly with her dreams of socially approved womanhood, and motherhood. Rosalie wants to be accepted, but not to become invisible, as wives in this community are supposed to do: she’d rather be looked at than stared at, but either is better than nothing.

Guy Lodge (abridged), *Sight and Sound*, 6 June 2024.

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