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CINEMA

Antoine's progress

THE good news is that Francois Truffaut has brought back to the screen for the fifth time in *Love on the Run*, at the ACADEMY, his endearing character Antoine, played once again by its perfect exponent, Jean-Pierre Léaud. The bad news is that, as charming as the film is, it lacks a little of the inspiration and even the craftsmanship of the four remarkable movies that have preceded it: equally disturbing, the report that Truffaut has said this will be the final movie in the series and now that the character has passed 30 he will leave his subsequent progress unrecorded on film.

The movie which gave Truffaut his first triumph and the one which introduced us to Antoine was, of course, the classic *Les Quatre Cents Coups* (*The 400 Blows* here), made when Truffaut was 27. Subsequently we were to watch the young delinquent grow up — though hardly to mature — in *Antoine and Colette*, *Stolen Kisses* and *Bed and Board*, with character Antoine and player Léaud ageing in unison, and it is fascinating now, in the series of flashbacks from the previous quartet which punctuate *Love on the Run*, to see this process at work.

At the beginning of *Love on the Run* Antoine, the eternal adolescent even after military service, a (failed) marriage and fatherhood, is still chasing love with unabated, teenage fervour, swearing eternal fidelity to his new love but soon revealing the egotistical selfishness which has lost him wife and mistresses; it is no accident that he always seems to be running, is late and forgetful about anything outside his own interests. But at the end of this fifth Antoine chapter Truffaut hints — and it is surely nothing more — that the character he created in depth in 1959 and originally, though not subsequently, based on his own less than happy early years, may at last be approaching maturity — though knowing Antoine as we do by now, we must be forgiven if we remain dubious, just as we must accept the threat of Antoine's celluloid end with Gallic shrug and cynical smile.

Looking back at the Antoine quintet as an overall work of cinematic art, it is a remarkable — indeed, probably a unique — achievement. All five films have a style, a gentle melancholic humour and an obvious affection for character and background which has distinguished the director's best work. And the idea of actor and role ageing together through the years is something I cannot recall being elsewhere attempted by any moviemaker.

There are, incidentally, constant references to previous Antoine films in the new one, in which we meet again some of the actresses who made their reputations in them — including Marie-France Pisier — though it is again a newcomer. Dorothee, who plays Antoine's new (and last?) love.

If the Antoine saga ends on a slightly less than top note it is still on a pretty high harmonious level and I would imagine that anyone who has followed Truffaut's possible *alter ego* during the last 20 years will not want to miss this nostalgic farewell to him.

IF I had to confine myself to one single illustrative word for the work of the directing-producing-writing team of James Ivory, Ismail Merchant and Ruth Jhabvala it would have to be 'elegance'. No matter how variable their material — and they never repeat themselves — the result has been a remarkable exposition of grace, style and elegance, to be seen again in something near perfection in the Anglo-Indian team's new chamber work, *Hullabaloo Over Georgie and Bonnie's Pictures*, at the EVERYMAN. On the surface a simple, slim tale about a Maharaja, his collection of priceless paintings and the efforts of his sister and some collectors to persuade him to sell them, it is also a subtle — and salutary — commentary on the whole complicated subject of the meaning and worth of art as measured against life. Beautifully acted against glorious backgrounds (of the Palace at Umaid Bhavan, Jodhpur) with Dame Peggy Ashcroft marvellous as Lady Gee.

F. Maurice Speed