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THE SOFT SKIN—(*Cinema V*) *At the Paris. In French; English titles.* There is a body of opinion hailing François Truffaut as one of the top directors (“The 400 Blows” and “Jules and Jim”). His current effort, “The Soft Skin,” is indeed a further demonstration of his extraordinary ability as well as versatility. Hard or soft skin, Truffaut gets under it with a suspenseful, meticulous unraveling of a love affair between a famed lecturer who is married and a pretty airline stewardess.

Nothing new, this adultery. But Truffaut does manage to find something new. The ingredients are tension and suspense, as if he were dealing with a plot to blow up a city. He has an incredible technique of using closeups (the flick of an ignition key, the panel instruments of a pilot) and fast cutting that together keep the story moving at a brisk pace. He sets up situations to taunt his characters and takes them carefully on a path leading to his ultimate explosion. These people are made thoroughly believable by Jean Dessailly as the husband, Francoise Dorleac as the hostess, and Nelly Benedetti as the wife. Probably too believable for comfort to an inevitable percentage of any audience.