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Author(s)	P. Michael Campbell P. Michael Campbell
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# A comedy of manners

By P. MICHAEL CAMPBELL

**E**ric Rohmer's films stand out in sharp contrast to today's standard cinematic fare. The French director's low-budget works are typically short on action and long on talk. Unlike most other modern filmmakers, Rohmer feels no compulsion to keep things moving. Not much happens in his movies — except talk and more talk. Characters converse about what they've done and why they did it, what they'd like to do and why it appeals to them, and so on.

*Pauline at the Beach* (*Pauline à la Plage*), Rohmer's latest, bears an especially appropriate epigraph from a 12th-century poet to the effect that "a wagging tongue bites itself." Well, there are wagging tongues aplenty in this tale of infidelity and romantic intrigue set in a small vacation beach town on the northern coast of France. With nothing better to do, the five or six principal characters spend their time talking, and playing a rather convoluted game of musical beds.

Fifteen-year-old Pauline (Amanda Langlet) and her older cousin Marion (Arielle Dombasle) have come to the beach in search of a little fun under the sun in the wan-

ing days of summer. Right away, they run into one of Marion's old flames, a good-looking but overly sincere wind surfer named Pierre (Pascal Greggory), and his middle-aged "friend," a liberated divorcee named Henri (Feodore Atkine).

The first third of the film is devoted to these four characters' abstract musings on the nature of love and what constitutes the "ideal" relationship.

The stunningly beautiful Marion has just broken off an unsatisfying marriage to a hopelessly devoted husband, because, as she puts it, "That wasn't love; it was fidelity." Now, she's looking to fall for someone new. "I want to burn with love," she says.

For awhile, at least, she finds that scorching passion in Henri. For his part, however, Henri wants to continue to enjoy his nomadic freedom, his life "without luggage, physical or moral."

Meanwhile, Pierre pines for Marion. He is "waiting for a deep and lasting love" and can neither understand nor accept Marion's passionate relationship with the older, unfaithful Henri.

As it turns out, the only one of the four with a lick of sense is the adolescent Pauline. She strikes an



appealing balance between Marion's romantic passion, Henri's easygoingness and Pierre's intensity.

For a talk-oriented film like this to appeal to most moviegoers, the

characters need to be captivating and likeable (as in the popular *My Dinner with Andre*, for example.) Unfortunately, *Pauline at the Beach* is populated with selfish characters who are not likely to endear them-

selves to most audiences. Only Langlet and two supporting cast members (Simon de la Brosse as Pauline's summer boyfriend, Sylvain, and Rosette as the beach's

SEE PAGE 16