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| **Truffaut, François (1932-1984)** |
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| François Truffaut was a French film director, actor and film critic, best known for being one of the founders of the French New Wave - a movement he helped usher in with his film Les Quatre Cents Coups (The 400 Blows, 1959) - a realistic, compassionate tale of youthful alienation and rebellion.  Truffaut’s troubled childhood and teenage years were marked by an uneasy family life, truancy and petty crime, but also by voracious reading and film going. Like many of the French New Wave members, he frequented Henri Langlois’ influential Cinemathèque Française. He would later reflect on this period in The 400 Hundred Blows, whose defiant yet vulnerable protagonist, Antoine Doinel, is an alter ego of sorts. |
| François Truffaut was a French film director, actor and film critic, best known for being one of the founders of the French New Wave - a movement he helped usher in with his film Les Quatre Cents Coups (The 400 Blows, 1959) - a realistic, compassionate tale of youthful alienation and rebellion.  Truffaut’s troubled childhood and teenage years were marked by an uneasy family life, truancy and petty crime, but also by voracious reading and film going. Like many of the French New Wave members, he frequented Henri Langlois’ influential Cinemathèque Française. He would later reflect on this period in The 400 Hundred Blows, whose defiant yet vulnerable protagonist, Antoine Doinel, is an alter ego of sorts.  In 1948 Truffaut met the film critic André Bazin who would act as both mentor and personal support. Bazin got him work at Cahiers du Cinéma (which he had recently founded). Truffaut’s tenure at the magazine is marked by critical intransigence and an astute spirit of observation; his 1954 article ‘A Certain Tendency in French Cinema’ attacks the staid academism of the French filmmaking of the 1950s. His acerbic output would earn him a ban from the Cannes Film Festival in 1958. However, one year later, Truffaut would return to collect the Best Director award for The 400 Blows.  Like Bazin, Truffaut was strongly influenced by auteurism, in particular by Alexandre Astruc’s concept of the ‘camera-pen’ (‘caméra-stylo’) as the primary expressive tool of any director. Compared to other New Wave directors like Jean-Luc Goddard, Alain Resnais or Chris Marker, Truffaut’s style is less formally radical, but his commitment to the primarily visual aspect of cinema was just as strong. His most experimental film is probably Tirez sur le pianist [Shoot the Piano Player] (1960)- a gangster story featuring jagged editing and confusing voiceovers. His interest lay mainly in genre exploration, and like many French filmmakers of the period, he had a great admiration for Hitchcock, about whom he wrote an influential volume in 1967. Over his 25 years long career, he directed thrillers such as La Mariée était en noir (The Bride Wore Black, 1968) and science fiction films like Fahrenheit 451 (1966), an adaptation of Ray Bradbury’s novel. In Jules et Jim (Jules and Jim, 1962), another New Wave landmark, he explored the amorous idealism and eventual tragic dissolution of a romantic triangle; with La Peau douce (The Soft Skin, 1964), he created a domestic drama, and a story of marital infidelity. Truffaut also continued Antoine Doinel’s adventures over four more films: the short Antoine et Colette (1962), Baisers voles (Stolen Kisses, 1968), Domicile conjugal (Bed and Board, 1970), and L'Amour en fuite (Love on the Run, 1979).  Two of his later films, L'Enfant sauvage (The Wild Child, 1970) and La Nuit américaine (Day for Night, 1972), merit special mention. The Wild Child (based on true historical incidents) is the story of Jean Itard (played by Truffaut himself), an 18th-century physician who attempts to ‘recivilize’ a seemingly wild boy found in the neighboring woods. The delicate, sympathetic drama uses some relatively anachronistic techniques like iris shots as an audience distancing mechanism and explores the fluid boundary between nature and culture, civilization and wilderness. Day for Night is a heavily metatextual film, exploring, like Fellini’s 8 1/2 the personal toll of filmmaking.  Truffaut is also notable for playing one of the main roles in Steven Spielberg’s Close Encounters of the Third Kind (1977). Selected Filmography Les Quatre Cents Coups (*T*he 400 Blows, 1959)  Tirez sur le pianist (Shoot the Piano Player, 1960)  Jules et Jim (*Jules and Jim* 1960)  Antoine et Colette (1962)  La Peau douce (The Soft Skin,1964)  Fahrenheit 451 (1966)  La Mariée était en noir (The Bride Wore Black, 1968)  Baisers voles (Stolen Kisses, 1968)  L'Enfant sauvage (The Wild Child, 1970)  Domicile conjugal (Bed and Board, 1970)  La Nuit américaine (Day for Night, 1972)  L'Amour en fuite (Love on the Run, 1979)  Le Dernier metro (The Last Metro, 1980) |
| Further reading:  (Baecque and Toubiana)  (Braudy)  (Truffaut) |