



The 400 Blows Les Quatre cents coups

Director: François Truffaut

©/Production Company: Les Films du Carrosse

Production Company: SEDIF

Production Manager: Georges Charlot

Unit Manager: Jean Lavie

Assistant Unit Manager: Robert Lachenay

Administration: Roland Nonin

Secretary: Luce Deuss

1st Assistant Director: Philippe de Broca

2nd Assistant Directors: Alain Jeannel,

Francis Cognany, Robert Bober

Script Supervisor: Jacqueline Parey

Screenplay: François Truffaut

Adaptation: M. Moussy, F. Truffaut

Dialogue: Marcel Moussy

Director of Photography: Henri Decaë

Camera Operator: Jean Rabier

Camera Assistant: Alain Levent

Stills Photography: André Dino

Editor: Marie-Josèphe Yoyotte

Assistant Editors: Cécile Decugis,

Michèle de Possel

Art Director: Bernard Evein

Properties: Raymond Le Moigne

Laboratory: GTC

Processed by: C.M.C. (Paris)

Music: Jean Constantin

Sound: Jean-Claude Marchetti

Assistant Sound: Jean Labussière

Sound Studio: S.I.M.O.

Thanks: Claude Vermorel, Claire Mafféi,

Suzanne Lipinska, Alex Joffé, Fernand Deligny,

Claude Vêga, Jacques Josse, Annette Wademant,

École Technique de Photographie et de

Cinématographie, Jean-Claude Brialy,

Mademoiselle Jeanne Moreau

Dedicated to the Memory of: André Bazin

Cast:

Jean-Pierre Léaud (*Antoine Doinel*)

Claire Maurier (*Antoine's mother*)

Albert Rémy (*Antoine's father*)

Guy Decomble (*teacher*)

Georges Flamant (*M Bigey, René's father*)

Patrick Auffay (*René Bigey*)

the children

Daniel Couturier, François Nocher

Richard Kanayan (*Abbou*)

Renaud Fontanarosa, Michel Girard, Henry Moati,

Jean-François Bergouignan, Michel Lesignor

with

Luc Andrieux

Robert Beauvais (*schoolmaster*)

Bouchon

Christian Brocard

Yvonne Claudie (*Mme Bigey*)

Marius Laurey

Claude Mansard (*examiner*)

Jacques Monod

Pierre Repp (*English teacher*)

Henri Virlogeux (*nightwatchman*)

Jeanne Moreau (*woman with dog*)*

Jean Douchet (*lover*)*

Bernard Abbou (*child*)*

Jacques Demy (*policeman*)*

Philippe de Broca, François Truffaut (*men at funfair*)*

Jean-Claude Brialy *

France 1959©

99 mins

Digital * Uncredited

Ensemble: The Filmmakers from Richard Linklater's *Nouvelle Vague*

The 400 Blows

Les Quatre cents coups

Linklater on Truffaut

I don't know if Godard means the most to me. I think it's Truffaut and Rohmer – long term, it's probably Truffaut. I like Chabrol's early films, but he became more of a genre guy.

Everybody goes their own way, don't they? Rivette carried the torch for truly experimental – he and Godard pushed themselves and stayed on that track. All of them were really true to themselves – the ones we talk about. I don't love *Fahrenheit 451* [1966] and *The Bride Wore Black* [1968] so much. Truffaut's genre work... it's OK. They're not my favourites. Other than that, I'm with him – film in, film out. *The Green Room* [1978], some of his lesser-known films: I like *Mississippi Mermaid* [1969]. The first Truffaut film I ever saw was *The Woman Next Door* [1981]; I had never seen *The 400 Blows*. Once I finally started catching up with him, he quickly became my favourite.

Richard Linklater interviewed by Jonathan Romney, *Sight and Sound*, Winter 2025-26

A contemporary review

That there's a Chaplinesque pathos about François Truffaut's *Les Quatre Cents Coups* isn't surprising; for like Chaplin's tramp, Antoine Doinel, the protagonist of this film, tries to live a way of life that quickly brings him into conflict with society. Antoine presents positives similar to Chaplin: he's a bit of a dandy, full of tricks and affection, with a lovely appreciation of life, and yet a sense of its absurdity also. But for him, the conflict with society is more than a matter of pathos; for Antoine is only 12-and-a-half years old, and his history presents in an extreme form that most tragic experience of adolescence, the loss of spontaneity. In a series of incidents of ever-increasing significance, Antoine is shown as the victim of such irresponsible people as his parents, the masters at his school, and various social workers who have to deal with him. The more he tries to evade their tyranny, the stronger is their hold over him. The prison of his home and of his school leads to a cage at the police station, and eventually to the barred windows of an Institute for Juvenile Delinquents.

This is a deeply ironical film. For instance, Antoine's downfall is precipitated by his admiration for Balzac, one of the most eminent critics of society, and confirmed when he tries to return a stolen typewriter; and this irony takes on an increasing resonance because Antoine doesn't realise the ambiguity of social morality. At one moment, a morality picked up from films lets him down in life; at another, his parents punish him viciously for what is really a trivial offence, though they in turn are amused by the way in which a friend has fiddled his tax returns. The irony that envelops the film is truly Balzacian, involving a whole society; so that Antoine's schoolmasters and parents, especially his mother who could easily have been portrayed as a villain, are seen as victims of misunderstandings and misfortunes similar to his. And it is for this reason that Paris, which plays such a great part in this film from the credit titles onwards, is more than a stage setting. This grey Paris of dawn lights or drenched with rain (so beautifully photographed by Henri Decaë) is essential to the action; and it is significant that the most moving moment in the film comes when Antoine is driven away from it in a police van. This city, which has condemned and almost destroyed him, is the place he most loves.

Truffaut has said of his film that it should be judged not by its technical perfections but by its sincerity; but of course a man's sincerity can only be

Ensemble: The Filmmakers from Richard Linklater's *Nouvelle Vague*

The 400 Blows Les Quatre cents coups

Thu 1 Jan 12:30; Fri 30 Jan 18:00

Journey to Italy Viaggio in Italia

Thu 1 Jan 15:00; Sun 18 Jan 15:10;

Wed 28 Jan 20:45

Orphée

Sat 3 Jan 20:50; Thu 15 Jan 21:00;

Sun 25 Jan 15:20

Léon Morin, prêtre Léon Morin, Priest

Sun 4 Jan 12:20; Tue 27 Jan 18:10 (+ intro by

season curator Diana Cipriano)

Paris nous appartient Paris Belongs to Us

Sun 4 Jan 18:00; Fri 16 Jan 20:20

Slacker

Mon 5 Jan 20:45 (+ intro by season programme

assistant Sean Atkinson); Thu 29 Jan 18:00

Last Year at Marienbad L'année dernière à

Marienbad

Tue 6 Jan 18:10 (+ intro by film critic Phuong Le);

Tue 13 Jan 20:45

Le Bonheur Happiness

Wed 7 Jan 20:40 (+ intro by film critic

Christina Newland); Sat 17 Jan 12:00

Les Cousins The Cousins

Thu 8 Jan 18:10 (+ intro by season curator

Diana Cipriano); Sat 31 Jan 20:30

Pickpocket

Thu 8 Jan 20:45; Wed 28 Jan 18:15 (+ intro by

Muriel Zagha, writer and broadcaster on film, and

co-host of cross-cultural podcast Garlic & Pearls)

My Night with Maud Ma nuit chez Maud

Fri 9 Jan 20:40; Wed 14 Jan 18:00;

Thu 22 Jan 20:30

Out 1: Noli me tangere

Sat 10 Jan 11:40 (Episodes 1-4);

Sun 11 Jan 12:10 (Episodes 5-8)

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judged by his technique. It is in fact through the success of his technique that Truffaut catches so much of life's richness. How can one define it? Best, I think, by comparing it with the technique used by Alain Resnais in *Hiroshima mon amour*; for Resnais, in his brilliant film, uses an approach which is the most complete antithesis of Truffaut's, and in doing so brings up the most serious issue in film aesthetics. With Resnais one is always aware of art. Experiences, through subtle montage, are always wrought into aesthetic patterns so that (especially in his treatment of the bombing of Hiroshima as an allegory) one admires his wit but suspects his morality. With Truffaut, however, art conceals art; sequences are neither broken down and manipulated into aesthetic effect, nor is their moral complexity tampered with. The control of the film lies rather in the playing of complete sequences one against the other, like tesserae in a mosaic. For instance, before the tense scene in which Antoine is caught returning the typewriter, we are shown actuality shots of children absorbed in a Punch and Judy show, their faces gleaming with excitement. The point is clear – Antoine is a child like them – yet it doesn't hinder our involvement in the action. Here, as in life, we only realise the complexity of an event after we have lived through it. It follows then with complete rightness that the closing shot of this film should be ambiguous.

The camerawork shows this admirable tact also. The camera trails after Antoine as he empties his garbage can, for instance, or drinks a bottle of milk, never forcing us into an immediate judgment. The most audacious of these shots is one that already has become classical, a one-and-a-half minute travelling shot at the close of the film as Antoine runs away from the Institute across the countryside and down to the sea. It is clear that Truffaut has learnt much from the theories of André Bazin, to whose memory the film is dedicated.

Bazin's belief that the film should try to capture the ambiguity and multiple levels of meaning one finds in the best novels is amply carried out here; but always in terms of the immediate, of the subtle, significant detail. With the most delicate of touches Truffaut builds up a picture of Antoine's home, of its disorder and his neglect; or, more amusingly, the bizarre home of René, Antoine's friend, with its stuffed horse and its multitude of fat, purring cats. Relationships are caught in a simple, startling action; Antoine's affection for his mother is shown briefly in the fond way he handles the perfume and brushes on her dressing-table. But Truffaut's most impressive accomplishment is to catch the improvised quality of life; and this, one suspects, is why he is so much at home with children. The scenes in the classroom are both tender and funny; without knowing it, one boy systematically messes up an entire exercise book, whilst another one only finds inspiration for his essay as the master tells the boys to stop writing.

It is because of this talent for improvisation that Truffaut manages to bring out such a magnificent performance from his Antoine (Jean-Pierre Léaud), of whom Truffaut has said: 'I encouraged him to play by ear. He performed freely, reacting in his own manner and responding in his own words.' The success of this method is most apparent in the weakest part of the excellent script (by Truffaut and Marcel Moussy), when Antoine is questioned by the analyst at the Institute. In fact the boy's naturalness and charm, and Truffaut's lightness of direction, make this scene wholly successful; and it is finally, indeed, through Truffaut's lightness of touch and zest for life, and through Léaud's realisation of Antoine's stoicism and almost cockney resilience, that this film never becomes portentous or depressing. It is, truly, a film that speaks up for life.

Eric Rhode, *Sight and Sound*, Spring 1960