



FRANÇOIS TRUFFAUT: FOR THE LOVE OF FILMS

# Stolen Kisses + Antoine et Colette

**SPOILER WARNING** The following notes give away some of the plot.

Those who don't care for Truffaut's films usually complain that there are no really horrible people in them. It's possible that Truffaut has an abnormal capacity to forgive, and that he is not much interested in blame, and this may be what they mean. He is certainly more concerned with what is than with what should be. To be anything else, in his films, is self-indulgent and a waste of time.

There's a neat example of that near the beginning of *Baisers volés*. Antoine Doinel (Jean-Pierre Léaud), the boy hero of *Les quatre cents coups*, now a young man, has just been discharged from the army. He jumps off a bus and runs headlong across a busy square and down a side street. Home, at last, to mother? To his girlfriend? By no means. The rush is to get to a brothel. The first girl he goes up with won't be kissed on the mouth ('*pas avec les clients*'), won't let him muss her lacquered hair, and won't undress. He pays and leaves silently without touching her. He's not in that much of a hurry. There's no hint of recrimination, it's just that she's very bad at her job. At the foot of the stairs he meets a redhead who seems a better deal. He turns round and comes back up to her cheery invitation – 'you'll be my first soldier today'.

By a typical irony of course he is in fact a soldier no longer. But the mistakes people make in weighing each other up are just as much a part of the subject. As always with Truffaut the real enemy is the Institution, which formalises and distorts human relationships. The most vicious remark comes from Doinel's commanding officer: 'I hope we never meet again,' he tells the boy. He could have said nothing worse, for Truffaut's films celebrate the beauty of chance and coincidence. At the end of the film Antoine crashes his TV-repair van incompetently into a car driven by the father of his estranged girlfriend. The young couple meet again and this time they meet for good (although you can never be sure, as the film's last scene reminds us). The reason why the army – or any other institution like it – is the enemy, is that it allows no possibility for the wayward or the exceptional in human affairs, and basic to it is the proposition that all men are the same, or must be made so. But *Baisers volés* proposes that all men are unique and exceptional and that our differences shouldn't be a cause of fear and mistrust but rather of pleasure.

The differences and the similarities – what unites us and what separates us. It sounds like a pretty good invitation to slush. But though Truffaut may present life, for some tastes, as optimistically fruitful, he has taken nothing for granted on the way. There is no sleight of hand and nothing missing.

Antoine visits the home of his former girlfriend Christine. Her parents welcome him and fix him up with a job. It's a banal enough meeting but it's crammed with detail. Antoine is warm but reserved, disappointed not to see Christine,

who's out, embarrassed by their kindness. They are equally warm, but reticent too, since they know that Christine is avoiding him. Though he has clearly had an unhappy time, they are anxious to preserve his independence, aware of his need to tell them about the army and equally of his need to keep silent. Not being perfect they don't manage this balancing act with total success, but in the way in which they pertly, covertly or self-indulgently impose the restraints of delicacy on each other we can read, in a few moments, an account of their marriage. It is an open question whether Antoine's marriage will be like this one or like his own parents', of whom we hear nothing.

This wholeness, or integrity, can be established or destroyed by the smallest details. Out of gullibility Antoine loses the job they get him as a hotel night clerk, allowing a canny old private eye to bluff his way into an adulterous bedroom. But it is the investigator, M. Henri, who, by way of compensation, takes Antoine on and teaches him the detective business. In a taxi speeding across Paris M. Henri points out of the window. 'Over there you can get very good salt pork and lentils.' The comic detail – this is one of Truffaut's funniest films – is serviceable, for it calls not only on the idea of apprenticeship, but also of tradition and affection and the place they play in it. We may remember the old man in the hut by the water's edge in *Fahrenheit 451*, lying on his deathbed, teaching a boy to take on the life of *Weir of Hermiston*. By dozens of such tiny clues the larger theme emerges: the circle of life involves death, just as the night's tragedy can turn into farce by the morning.

M. Henri and Antoine pursue their inquiries to a fluttering of closing doors. With each new door that closes in his face Antoine learns a little more of his trade. But at the end of the sequence comes the door that's nearest his heart-Christine's. As her mother opens the front door to let Antoine in, the side door opens too, to let Christine out.

At the best moments these contradictory elements flow together in unforced concentration. M. Henri is on the Agency phone impersonating someone inquiring about the private life of a young woman teacher. To his right the door of the washroom lies open. The entire staff seems to be going in and out of it. Antoine's other male colleague is being rejected again by the senior woman investigator, while she, with little tact, tries on a new wig in the mirror, admired by the cool, efficient and possibly lesbian junior. Antoine sweeps in, desperate and elated, having just been seduced by the beautiful wife of the client whose lugubrious suspicions of betrayal he has been hired to investigate. There is the sense of a world in chaos, in helpless pursuit of passion. Without warning the receiver drops from the old man's hands and he falls dead at their feet. After the funeral we can guess what Antoine's first duty will be. He picks up a street girl and climbs upstairs, mindful of the advice of his office pal. 'To make love is a way of compensating for death ... it's a way of proving you exist.'

Such things need affirming. Chance is so chancy. Who would have believed that the old man who lost you your job would get you another? Who would believe that you could track a man down to a post office and while your eyes never left the doorway a lorry could draw across it and your man slip away?

Life and its objects interfere with your plans for them. Only when Antoine sends the wife, Fabienne, a *pneumatique* which brings her to his room in the morning are objects on his side. We watch fascinated as underground pipes whisk the message across Paris, and Fabienne and Antoine, so unimaginably separated, are united. Who would have believed that?

What unites us and what separates us. If we can defend Truffaut against the charge of sentimentality it will not be for any revolutionary play with the old humanist themes. On the contrary it must be because of the respect he has for our differences, and for the beauty with which he describes our similarities. When Fabienne decides to contact Antoine she looks up his address and memorises it with silently moving lips and closed eyes. When the director of the Agency tells a homosexual client the new address of the lover who has left him the man makes an identical gesture, leaning back in his chair with relief and gratitude, eyes closed, lips moving to print the letters on his brain.

But even that won't work. The lover has taken a wife. Nothing is permanent but death. At the end Antoine gets his Christine at last, and while they sit in the park making plans a pale and serious stranger approaches. He has followed Christine for months, like a detective, but more like a lover. He makes a declaration of passion. I hate the temporary, he tells her. She must eventually shed such attachments and join him, for ever. He strides away. 'He's absolutely mad,' Christine tells Antoine, but Antoine knows better. 'Oh, oui, surement,' he answers, but without much conviction, for by now he knows that while you can be certain that everything will change, you can only hope that things will always be the same. This beautifully conceived and brilliantly acted film confirms Truffaut's high place in the French humanist tradition. He can stand the comparison with Renoir.

**Gavin Millar, *Sight and Sound*, Summer 1969**

## **Antoine et Colette**

Now 16, Antoine (Leáud) works for a record company and frequents classical concerts, where he first notices Colette (Pisier). A wry, witty, perceptive look at the inexperienced teenager's first clumsy attempts at establishing a relationship with a rather more sophisticated young woman, the film reflects back on *The 400 Blows* and anticipates the development of the (sort-of) adult Antoine in the later films.

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## STOLEN KISSES (BAISERS VOLÉS)

*Director:* François Truffaut  
*©:* Les Films du Carrosse S.A.  
*Production Companies:* Les Films du Carrosse,  
Les Productions Artistes Associés  
*Producer:* Marcel Berbert  
*Production Manager:* Claude Miller  
*Assistant Director:* Jean-José Richer  
*Script Supervisor:* Suzanne Schiffman  
*Scenario:* François Truffaut, Claude de Givray, Bernard Révon  
*Dialogue:* François Truffaut, Claude de Givray, Bernard Révon  
*Director of Photography:* Denys Clerval  
*Camera Operator:* Jean Chiabaut  
*Editor:* Agnès Guillemot  
*Art Director:* Claude Pignot  
*Laboratory:* L.T.C. Franay Saint-Cloud  
*Music:* Antoine Duhamel  
*Song 'Que reste-t-il de nos amours' written and performed by:*  
Charles Trenet  
*Sound:* René Levert  
*Dedicated to the Cinémathèque Française of Henri Langlois*  
*Thanks to the Private Detective Agency:* Dubly

### Cast

Jean-Pierre Léaud (*Antoine Doinel*)  
Delphine Seyrig (*Fabienne Tabard*)  
Claude Jade (*Christine Darbon*)  
Michel Lonsdale (*Monsieur Tabard*)  
Harry Max (*Henri*)  
André Falcon (*Monsieur Blady*)  
Daniel Ceccaldi (*Monsieur Darbon*)  
Claire Duhamel (*Madame Darbon*)  
Serge Rousseau (*the man*)  
Catherine Lutz (*Madame Catherine*)  
Paul Pavel (*Julien*)  
Martine Ferrière (*head shop assistant*)  
François Darbon (*boss aid*)  
Jacques Rispal (*Monsieur Colin*)  
Simono (*Monsieur Albani*)  
Jacques Delord (*magician*)

*uncredited*

Marie-France Pisier (*Colette Tazzi*)  
Karine Jeantet (*shop assistant*)  
Christine Pellé (*agency's secretary*)  
Martine Brochard (*Madame Colin*)  
Pascale Dauman (*Parisian woman being followed*)  
Carole Noë (*big girl*)  
Chantal Banlier (*shop assistant*)  
Madeleine Parard, France Monthell, Liza Bracconier (*prostitutes*)  
Jacques Robiolles (*unemployed man on TV*)  
Robert Cambourakis (*Madame Colin's lover*)  
Marcel Mercier, Joseph Mériaux (*mechanics*)  
Jean-François Adam (*Albert Tazzi*)  
Roger Trapp (*employer*)  
Léon Elkenbaum (*dentist*)  
Marcel Berbert

France 1968©  
92 mins

## ANTOINE ET COLETTE

(episode of *L'Amour à vingt ans*)  
*Director:* François Truffaut  
*Production Company:* Ulysse Productions  
*Scenario:* François Truffaut  
*Director of Photography:* Raoul Coutard  
*Editor:* Claudine Bouché  
*Music:* Georges Delerue  
*Cast:*  
Henri Serre (*narrator*)  
Jean-Pierre Léaud (*Antoine Doinel*)  
Marie-France Pisier (*Colette*)  
Patrick Auffay (*René*)  
Rosy Varte (*Colette's mother*)  
François Darbon (*Colette's stepfather*)  
Jean-François Adam (*Albert Tazzi*)

France 1962  
31 mins

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## THE ANTOINE DOINEL CYCLE

**Antoine et Colette** (from *L'Amour à vingt ans*)  
+ **Stolen Kisses (Baisers volés)**

Sat 1 Jan 17:50, Tue 11 Jan 20:35,  
Sat 15 Jan 12:10, Sun 23 Jan 15:30

**Bed and Board (Domicile conjugale)**

Mon 3 Jan 13:00, Thu 13 Jan 20:45, Wed 19 Jan 14:30

**Love on the Run (L'Amour en fuite)**

Wed 5 Jan 20:40, Sat 15 Jan 15:30, Mon 31 Jan 20:40

**The 400 Blows (Les Quatre cents coups)**

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