



FRANÇOIS TRUFFAUT: FOR THE LOVE OF FILMS

For the Love of People... The Films of François Truffaut

Good evening. First, thank you for coming to this talk on the films of François Truffaut. I hope you will find it interesting. I am no expert on Truffaut, but I greatly enjoyed revisiting his work in order to research the BFI's retrospective; I hope to share that enjoyment with you this evening, particularly through the clips I have selected, but also in passing on some thoughts I had after watching the films. For those of you who haven't been to any of my previous talks, I should explain that my concern is with the films themselves, rather than with the biographical details of the man who made them, which I consider pertinent only insofar as they shaped his work. Moreover, what I have to say is certainly not offered up as any kind of definitive reading of some aspect or another of Truffaut's creative achievements. Rather, the talk is simply my personal response to his body of work, and an expansion of the notes I wrote about the films for the January and February editions of the BFI Southbank Guide.

In structuring the retrospective, I would happily have screened the films in the order they were made, but because colleagues suggested a thematic approach, I decided, as you have probably seen, to separate the films into four sections: those centred on the character of Antoine Doinel, those in which the influence of Jean Renoir might be discerned, those in which the influence of Alfred Hitchcock and American genre cinema might be discerned, and those films particularly notable as literary adaptations. We'll be discussing those different aspects of Truffaut's work this evening, but I should stress that the categories – and the way I divided up the films – are somewhat arbitrary. The films I chose to exemplify 'The Hitchcock Truffaut', for example, are mostly adapted from books, so could have been filed under 'The Literary Truffaut' – except that the process of adaptation is not foregrounded as much in those films as it is in the titles I selected for 'The Literary Truffaut'. In other words, the categories overlap; with the obvious exception of the Doinel films, where the films ended up being placed was a matter of nuance or emphasis.

One thing I learned from working my way through his films was that categorising Truffaut is never straightforward. For marketing purposes, a subtitle was provided for the retrospective – 'For the Love of Films' – to evoke not only Truffaut's cinephilia but the centrality of film to his life and sense of identity; famously, he was a critic before becoming a filmmaker, and he himself felt that it was his passion for cinema – a passion he was encouraged to put to professional use by his friend and mentor André Bazin – that had saved him from becoming a delinquent. But I decided to use 'For the Love of People...' for the title of this evening's talk because, notwithstanding his devotion to cinema, the films Truffaut made are not inspired by movies but about human individuals in all their messy complexity. Not only was Truffaut no Tarantino; he wasn't even a Godard. It's interesting to compare *Breathless* with *Shoot the Pianist*, *Bande à Part* with *Silken Skin*, *Made in USA* with

The Bride Wore Black. I offer those particular pairings, partly because of their approach to genre, partly because in each case the films were made in the same year – but how different they feel, not least in terms of characterisation and compassion.

Indeed, for all that Truffaut was probably the most audience-friendly of the five big names of the *nouvelle vague*, he remains, perhaps, the hardest to pigeon-hole. Godard was for the most part concerned with interrogating cinematic conventions and the politics of cinematic representation. Rohmer established his own personal genre as a means of exploring the gaps between what is felt and thought, what is said and done. Chabrol used his own variations on Hitchcock's tropes and themes to mount an ongoing critique of the French bourgeoisie, while Rivette created his own highly idiosyncratic, frequently fantastic and extended narrative experiments to ponder mysteries of community and creation. Truffaut, in comparison, is almost impossible to pin down. Restlessly ranging through different genres while seldom adhering to generic conventions, he nevertheless made films which feel unusually personal. That said, what would one expect from the man responsible for '*la politique des auteurs*'?

At a time when so much writing about movies involves hyperbolic five-star raves and dismissive put-downs, we surely need to take a nuanced approach to Truffaut's work. Undoubtedly his body of work was uneven. Even individual films can be uneven. Some start weakly but end up considerably more satisfying than one initially expected. Though quite a few of his films are flawed to some degree, none of them is worthless or without interest. (Besides, perfection is impossible.) In revisiting Truffaut's work, I found that many of the films surprised and stirred me with magically cinematic moments of subtle insight. I hope that you too will discover a few such moments this evening.

Geoff Andrew

Geoff Andrew is Programmer-at-large for BFI Southbank. He has written and lectured extensively on the cinema; his books include studies of Nicholas Ray and the American 'indie' filmmakers of the 1980s and '90s, and BFI Classics on Kieslowski's *Three Colours Trilogy* and Kiarostami's *10*. More recently he edited, for *Sight & Sound's* 'Auteurs Series', anthologies devoted to Jean-Luc Godard, Martin Scorsese and Spike Lee. He writes on film, music and the other arts at geoffandrew.com

FRANÇOIS TRUFFAUT: FOR THE LOVE OF FILMS

For the Love of People... The Films of François Truffaut

Mon 10 Jan 18:20

François Truffaut's Cinematic and Literary Influences

Sat 29 Jan 12:00-16:30

Jules et Jim (Jules and Jim)

From Fri 4 Feb

Philosophical Screens: Jules et Jim

Thu 10 Feb 20:20

The Representation of Women in Truffaut's Films

Fri 18 Feb 18:20

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 conjugal)

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)

From Fri 7 Jan

THE RENOIR TRUFFAUT

Une belle fille comme moi (A Gorgeous Kid like Me)

Sat 1 Jan 20:40, Tue 4 Jan 20:40, Sat 22 Jan 18:10

Day for Night (La Nuit américaine)

Sun 2 Jan 18:30, Fri 7 Jan 18:10, Sat 15 Jan 20:45, Tue 25 Jan 20:45

L'Enfant sauvage (The Wild Child) + Une histoire d'eau

Mon 3 Jan 18:10, Mon 10 Jan 20:40, Mon 24 Jan 18:10

The Last Metro (Le Dernier metro)

Sat 8 Jan 17:10, Fri 21 Jan 17:50, Sat 22 Jan 20:30, Wed 26 Jan 20:30

Pocket Money (L'Argent de poche)

Sat 8 Jan 20:55, Sat 29 Jan 18:00

The Man Who Loved Women (L'Homme qui aimait les femmes)

Sun 9 Jan 18:20, Mon 24 Jan 20:40

BFI Course: François Truffaut

Every Tue from 18 Jan-22 Feb 18:30-20:30

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THE LITERARY TRUFFAUT

Anne and Muriel (Les Deux Anglaises et le continent)

Sat 5 Feb 12:20; Thu 17 Feb 17:50 (+ intro by actor Kika Markham);

Tue 22 Feb 20:25

Fahrenheit 451

Sat 5 Feb 20:45; Sun 13 Feb 12:40; Sun 27 Feb 18:40

The Story of Adèle H (L'Histoire d'Adèle H)

Wed 9 Feb 20:55; Sat 12 Feb 20:45; Sat 19 Feb 18:20

The Green Room (La Chambre verte)

Thu 10 Feb 18:20; Tue 15 Feb 20:40; Wed 23 Feb 20:40

THE HITCHCOCK TRUFFAUT

Shoot the Pianist (Tirez sur le pianiste)

Tue 1 Feb 20:50; Fri 11 Feb 18:30; Sat 26 Feb 13:20

The Bride Wore Black (La Mariée était en noir)

Fri 4 Feb 20:45; Sun 13 Feb 18:00; Sun 27 Feb 12:00

Finally Sunday! (Vivement dimanche!)

Sat 5 Feb 17:15; Sat 12 Feb 12:30; Sun 27 Feb 15:30

Mississippi Mermaid (La Sirène du Mississippi)

Sun 6 Feb 12:40; Fri 18 Feb 20:35; Wed 23 Feb 20:40; Fri 25 Feb 18:00

La Peau douce (Silken Skin)

Sun 6 Feb 18:20; Sat 12 Feb 17:20; Sat 26 Feb 15:30

The Woman Next Door (La Femme d'à côté)

Tue 8 Feb 20:30; Mon 21 Feb 18:10; Thu 24 Feb 20:30

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A selection of 10 Truffaut films will be available on BFI Player Subscription from January, and a selection of Truffaut films will screen around the UK

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