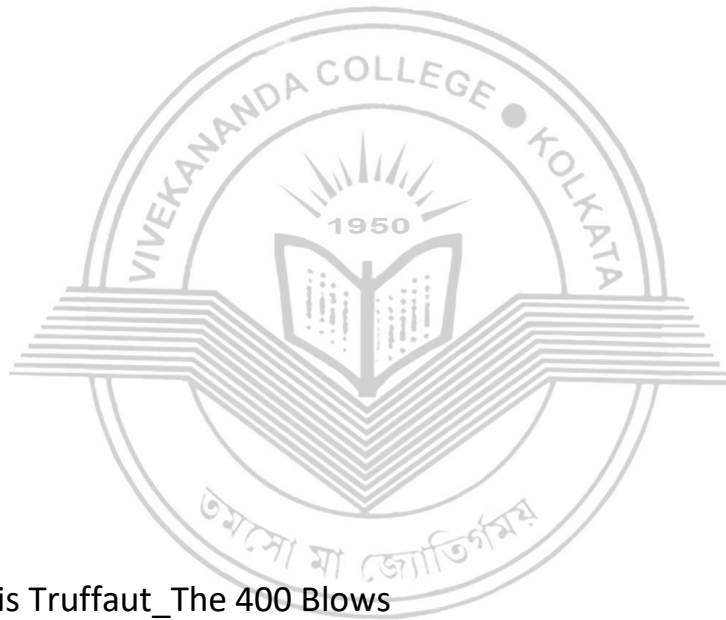


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NAAC ACCREDITED 'A' GRADE



Topic: François Truffaut\_The 400 Blows

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Name of the Teacher: Bandana Basu Bhowmick

Name of the Department: Film Studies

## François Truffaut

Truffaut was born in Paris on 6 February 1932. His mother was Janine de Montferrand. His mother's future husband, Roland Truffaut, accepted him as an adopted son and gave him his surname.

He lived with his grandmother until her death when Truffaut was ten years old. It was only after his grandmother's death that he lived with his parents for the first time. Truffaut would often stay with friends and try to be out of the house as much as possible.

In a film career lasting over a quarter of a century, he remains an icon of the French Film industry, having worked on over 25 films. The 400 Blows came to be a defining film of the New Wave genre. Shoot The Piano Player, Stolen Kisses, Jules and Jim, The Bride Wore Black, Day for Night and Bed and Board are a few of his most famous movies.

His best friend throughout his youth and until his death was Robert Lachney, who was the inspiration for the character René Bigey in The 400 Blows. The 400 Blows was widely acclaimed, winning numerous awards. His work in 400 Blows was simple but beautiful. The way the movie starts gives you a fair bit of idea about how beautiful the movie is.

The film concludes with a freeze-frame of Antoine, and then the camera zooms in on his face, looking into the camera.

He is known for his brilliant camera work. Also, his sense of pacing a movie is brilliant. His every single work completely makes you believe that he is indeed the master of this art. The way he narrates his story as a director increases your interest.

Another movie, Stolen Kisses was a huge success. There are many continuations from The 400 Blows. Although the story is complicated but nothing is overdone. In this movie, the director has perfectly used the locations.

## Truffaut's "The 400 Blows"

This 1959 semi-autobiographical French film illustrates the journey of Antoine, a young boy who always seems to get himself into trouble.

Director François Truffaut relives his childhood in the form of Antoine in *The 400 Blows* a film which showcases the spatial and personal limitations of youth set up by a social structure made for adults.

Childhood in *The 400 Blows* becomes a stifling world of overcorrection and surveillance for young Antoine, where spaces meant for youth only serve to illustrate the ways adolescents must sneak under the judgemental and demanding eyes of teachers, parents, and other authority figures. Antoine is one of these children that discounts the authority of adults and is therefore marked as a bad child. Despite his delinquent social status, it is evident that Antoine is no worse behaved than other boys his age and that it is his environment that works against him. In all, Truffaut utilizes New Wave cinematography to visually illustrate to the audience the social restrictions and prejudices against youth as well as communicate modern youth's own view of the world and how they live in it.

Truffaut's attention to the point of view of the children reveals a perhaps more honest interpretation of the world as well as the failures of the adults. *The 400 Blows* is known to resemble the director's own childhood, and the film is heavily influenced by an adolescent's point of view. One instance of this is in the classroom, where the camera stares up at the teacher in front of the blackboard as if the film audience was a part of the class itself. There are many moments where the camera also peers just past the vision of these authority figures that reveals the perspective of children and their secret lives. One instance of this is when Robert's father bursts in just as Antoine is hiding behind a bed. While Robert's father does not see Antoine, we as the audience can. This use of the camera illustrates the children's contempt for and distrust of authority figures. This distrust, from the audience's perspective - and therefore the children's perspective - is not unjustified as we see adults either unable to discipline, tend to over discipline, or neglect children altogether. Not a single adult character in the film ever quite commands the audience's or Antoine's respect. According to Masculine Singular New Wave films were

popular and critically acclaimed “because they were made by young people for young people with small budgets and young...actors to convey a feeling of authenticity,” (Geneviève Sellier). The 400 Blows thrives on authenticity whether through its use of an actor of the same age as his character or its film style that lacks in heavy theatrics. These styles appeal to the young audience of the time as a change from the melodramatic period pieces of their parents’ era. Additionally, this film simultaneously exists as both a timeless illustration of the youthful experience but also a time-specific depiction, even criticism, of mid-century France. This criticism is filtered through the eyes of an adolescent, that both grants authority to Antoine’s eyes while also illustrating his misfortunate dramatized by his stoic resilience in the face of it all. This style both appeals to youth while also acting nostalgic for an adult audience, in this way Truffaut succeeds in making a relatable, natural film.

This interest in a natural film is of deep importance to this movie to make Antoine as realistic as possible, rather than just another dramatic film hero. The director’s status in New Wave cinema is evident in his long attentive shots that follow every move by Antoine and also his use of **caméra -stylo**, an intimate connection between director and film. Antoine is meant to differ from the traditional hero because he never actually wins or triumphs. The longshots previously mentioned aid in encouraging the audience to engage with his perspective. Unlike older films that cut up a scene as mundane as walking to shorten it or make it more exciting, we as an audience follow Antoine from the bedroom all the way across to the kitchen and watch him set the dining room table. The physical movements are shared between Antoine and the audience. Despite the slow pace, these moments bring life to the film and its characters as they live lives similar to our own. Additionally, the large amount of wide outdoor shots allows the audience both spatial perspective and breathing room for a more natural shared experience with Antoine. In fact, Truffaut is so dedicated to the natural effect of the film that much of Antoine’s dialogue is improvised [Cannes]. This interest in a natural depiction of the human experience is also evident in the film’s unique progression of events. Rather than a traditional plot arc with a climax and resolution, Antoine’s story consists of an accumulation of bad luck. The film begins with Antoine getting in trouble for passing around a pin-up in class, despite others participating as well, initializing the audience with the idea that trouble seems to be awaiting Antoine at every turn. As his environment continues to hinder him, his troubles only grow exponentially until he is sent to a juvenile delinquent detention

centre. The film also concludes with Antoine running away to the beach, yet again about to get in trouble, but without any clear indication of what is to come for him. This ending particularly made Truffaut famous as it is so vague as to the fate of the hero and provides no resolution. Perhaps Truffaut wants to leave the ending indefinite as Antoine is not just a character, but a real child who will make his own decision, rather than have his fate decided by the director.

As previously mentioned, the cinematography connects the audience's perspective to that of Antoine's, creating a single shared experience. This film style is evident visually and audibly, such as how there is rarely background music except for when Antoine is happy, moments that are few and far between. These auditory cues inform the audience of when and where Antoine experiences happiness. Spaces he does not experience happiness are ironically spaces meant for children, such as school and home: "...one of the major spaces of childhood: the classroom. School brings in a new system of order, bringing in a sense of politics into childhood," (Pinkston). These spaces both figuratively and literally reject Antoine as he is socially belittled or physically removed from them. These spaces also appear visually the most confined and small - a physical manifestation of the anxiety Antoine feels internally. Once outside, he appears more energetic and engaged, rather than distracted, as he is free from the social tensions that stifle and neglect him. This is evident in the final scene at the beach. Antoine does not appear interested in attempting to run to town or back home, rather he seeks out the beach, a space both physically and socially open. Despite this, as the audience has witnessed throughout the film, Antoine recognizes that his social boundaries, his inability to escape the society that suppresses him, follows him even to this final space. It may actually be inferred that Antoine's lack of a conclusive ending only illustrates the inescapable nature of youth.