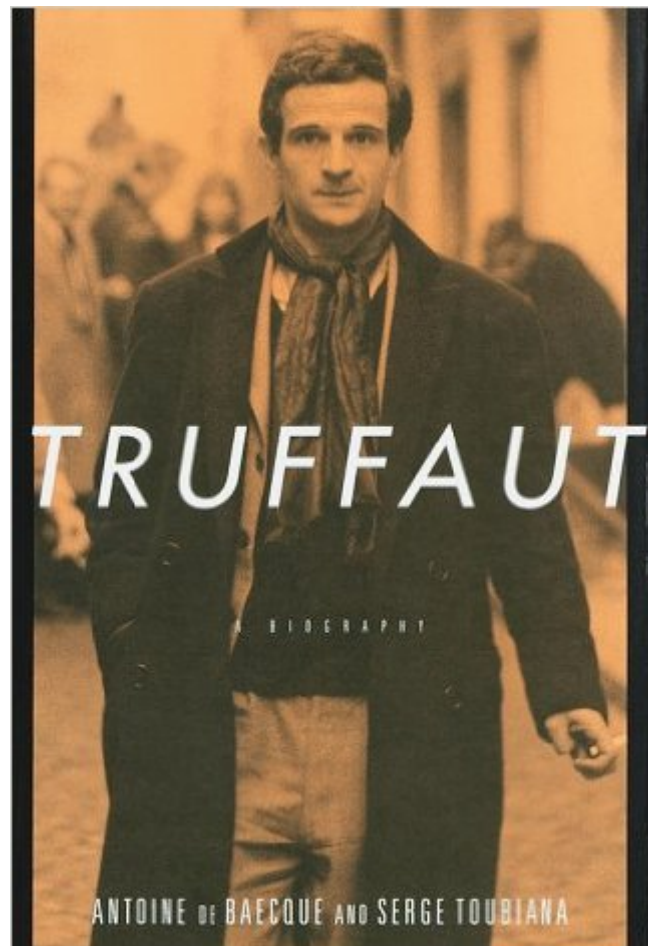


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Truffaut: A Biography



Synopsis

One of the most celebrated filmmakers of all time, Francois Truffaut was an intensely private individual who cultivated the public image of a man completely consumed by his craft. But his personal story--from which he drew extensively to create the characters and plots of his films--is itself an extraordinary human drama. Now, with captivating immediacy, Antoine de Baecque and Serge Toubiana give us the definitive story of this beloved artist. They begin with the unwanted, mischievous child who learned to love movies and books as an escape from sadness and confusion: as a boy, Francois came to identify with screen characters and to worship actresses. Following his early adult years as a journalist, during which he gained fame as France's most iconoclastic film critic, the obsessive prodigy began to make films of his own, and before he was thirty, notched the two masterpieces *The 400 Blows* and *Jules and Jim*. As Truffaut's dazzling body of work evolves, in the shadow of the politics of his day, including the student uprisings of 1968, we watch him learning the lessons of his masters Fellini and Hitchcock. And we witness the progress of his often tempestuous personal relationships, including his violent falling-out with Jean-Luc Godard (who owed Truffaut the idea for *Breathless*) and his rapturous love affairs with the many glamorous actresses he directed, among them Jacqueline Bisset and Jeanne Moreau. With Fanny Ardant, Truffaut had a child only thirteen months before dying of a brain tumor at the age of fifty-two. Here is a life of astonishing emotional range, from the anguish of severe depression to the exaltation of Oscar victory. Based on unprecedented access to Truffaut's papers, including notes toward an unwritten autobiography, de Baecque and Toubiana's richly detailed work is an incomparably authoritative revelation of a singular genius.

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Customer Reviews

The book starts from before day one, describing Truffaut's conception into the world as accidental and unwanted. We see parents who were much harsher and less loving in the bio than we do in *The 400 Blows*. We are presented with a boy genius turned truant, turned self-hating autodidact who by the grace of some magical force is redeemed. That magical force, of course, is the beauty and wonder of film. Amid this telling, we are given a lesson in French film history. Great names like Max Ophuls, Jean Renoir, Alain Resnais, Goddard, and Cocteau. We see this young boy rise from a state of debilitating poverty to the ranks of polemical, ingenious film criticism. We are excited when this precocious film journalist rails against a heavily commercialized, stagnant film establishment, and we hold our breaths when this same critic turns director, and releases his first full length feature, *The 400 Blows* and wins the Cannes' Grand Jury Prize. In this biography, the wonderful and important films that made Truffaut famous take a back seat. Instead, we see how his formative years inform his adult years in his search for love from actress, to actress, to actress. We see Truffaut's friendships and fall outs with brilliant filmmakers, and we see what goes on behind the scenes on the sets of his films. We realize, quite easily, that Truffaut the man is very special. At the end of the book, we come away with at least a glimpse of the true essence of Truffaut--a singular genius, searching for love in life and through films; a humble creator who makes films to please no one but himself; a charming friend who prefers humor over sentimentality; and most of all, an intensely private individual who used film to articulate his deepest yearnings. Yes, Truffaut was a great film maker, but as this biography so convincingly shows, he was an even greater person.

There was considerable autobiographical content to the movies of Truffaut, but they expose only a public side, frequently with a focus on male/female relations. Truffaut's childhood is exposed as sadder, but possibly less harsh than his image (and *The 400 Blows*) suggest. The rest of his life was lived to its fullest with many life-long friends, close working relationships and a touching continuity to his relations with the women in his life, even after the time of passion had passed. There are many references to French intellectuals and film-makers that will not be familiar to American readers and occasionally slow the book down. The description of the genesis of many of the famous movies and the time and troubles to be overcome to bring a movie to the viewer is as the best I have read. All-in-all, this is an entertaining and extremely well-written biography. The translation is seamless.

While I share the other reviewer's enthusiasm for this excellent biography, there were some problems with the book that suggest to me that there is more to be said about Mr. Truffaut. The jumps in time throughout the book were ominous, as if the authors either didn't have enough information or didn't want to write about a particular moment in Truffaut's life. The organization of the book into short chapters with titles like "Friends First" and "The Diminished Life" some only 3 or 4 paragraphs long interrupted the flow of the narrative for me and made it hard to keep names and events clearly in my mind's eye. The biography was strongest on the early and late periods in the director's life. The long middle section felt repetitive and I found myself wandering a bit. As other reviewers have pointed out: you won't find any exhaustive information on the making of various films in this book. I am looking forward to reading the Insdorf book for film coverage. There is an exhaustive listing of Truffaut's written works at the end of the book, but a curiously short list of books and articles on Truffaut (24 listings primarily in French). I suspect that the publishers trimmed this list considerably, so you will have to look elsewhere for a comprehensive bibliography. Despite my criticisms I enjoyed this book a great deal and it has led me back to the films which are now enhanced from reading this biography.

When you saw all of TRUFFAUT's films, this book has the edge over all other books about him. It is a complete biography about a man who had a passion for making movies. It is also about a man who loved actresses and had love affairs with many of them. FRANCOIS is all over the book with his strengths and his weaknesses. Many of his movies have autobiographical contents; STOLEN KISSES for instance show his obsession with women; The character of AZNAVOUR in SHOOT THE PIANO PLAYER is almost a portrait of himself; JULES AND JIM was a love triangle, and in his private life FRANCOIS had several mistresses at the same time. His sensitive approach has also ruined a few movies like THE SOFT SKIN and THE MISSISSIPPI MERMAID. As a critic he could be very rude at times, but he was a convincing debator. Finally, I would say that movies were really his escape from the monotony of life; it was his own ticket for adventure. A worthy biography, because I learn things about him beyond gossip.

Beautiful book, I am very happy with it. Truffaut is one of the best directors ever existed. It has some great pics.

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