



The Main Feature

Season 39 - Issue 11 screening 28.2.19

France 1959 99 mins Certificate PG

Director François Truffaut
Screenplay François Truffaut and Marcel Moussy
Cinematography Henri Decaë

Cast

Antoine Doinel Jean-Pierre L  aud
Mother Claire Maurier
Stepfather Albert R  my
Teacher Guy Decomble



In April 1951, the first edition of the magazine Cahiers du Cin  ma was published. Founded by Andr   Bazin and others, it included amongst its writers Jacques Rivette, Jean-Luc Godard, Claude Chabrol, and Fran  ois Truffaut (the so-called Young Turks). In the early days, the magazine was dominated by Bazin, but the tastes of the Young Turks moved away as they began to write critical appreciations of more commercial American filmmakers such as Alfred Hitchcock and Howard Hawks rather than the canonized French and Italian filmmakers that interested Bazin. The Young Turks broke completely with Bazin by 1954, when an article by Truffaut attacked what he called la qualit   fran  aise ('the tradition of quality'), denouncing many critically popular French films of the time as being unimaginative, oversimplified, and even immoral adaptations of literary works.

By the end of the 1950s many of the Young Turks were becoming dissatisfied with just writing criticism and began making films themselves, creating what became known as the New Wave. They wanted to get away from the studio system, so their films were generally made on tight budgets, from their own scripts, using natural light and authentic settings.

The term New Wave was first used in an article in the weekly magazine L'Express in November 1957 with the title 'La Nouvelle Vague arrive!' though the subject was more to do with youth culture than with cinema. It used as an example the highly successful film 'And God Created Woman' (1956) by Roger Vadim and starring his then wife Brigitte Bardot as an amoral young woman who was carefree, sun-bathed in the nude, danced the cha-cha-cha, was proud of her sexual freedom, and used slang.

But the first stirrings of the New Wave were much further back, in an attempt to put cinema firmly alongside other art forms. In 1948 the director Alexandre Astruc wrote an article 'Le Cam  ra-Style' (The Camera-Pen) that came to be treated as a manifesto: 'The cinema ... becomes bit by bit a language ... the form through which an artist can express his thoughts or translate his obsessions, just as in an essay or a novel.' As a later critic put it: 'Without the cinema, Truffaut, Rohmer and Rivette would have been novelists, and Godard a poet and essayist'.

The New Wave – which covers roughly 1958 to 1968 - did not displace existing popular cinema. There were still musicals and costume dramas, Jean Gabin continued to star, Jacques Tati made his almost silent comedies, and Louis de F  nes was still a policeman in St Tropez. But the quintessential New Wave films

include (and apologies if I miss out your favourite) Alain Resnais' *Hiroshima Mon Amour* (1959), Jean-Luc Godard's *À Bout de Souffle* (*Breathless*, 1960), Agnès Varda's *Cléo de 5 à 7* (1961), Truffaut's *Jules et Jim* (1962), and Robert Bresson's *Au hazard, Balthazar* (1966).



Les quatre cents coups (*Four Hundred Blows*, 1959) was Fran  ois Truffaut's first feature-length film, made after his brutal and unforgiving reviews caused him not to be invited to the Cannes film festival the previous year. It is an early example of how the director can create as personally as a novelist's pen. It has been called one of the supreme examples of 'cinema in the first person singular' and it won Truffaut the best director award at Cannes in 1959.

Truffaut was born out of wedlock when his mother was seventeen; at eighteen, she met Roland Truffaut, whom she married in 1933, and he recognized the boy as his own. But

Truffaut spent his first years with a wet nurse and then his grandmother, as his parents had little to do with him. When his grandmother died, he returned home at the age of eight. An only child whose mother insisted that he make himself silent and invisible, he took refuge in reading and later in the cinema. Truffaut had an uneasy relationship with his adoptive father. After young Fran  ois committed minor thefts, Truffaut senior turned him over to the police.

All this is reflected in the circumstances of the lead character of the film, Antoine Doinel (Jean-Pierre L  aud), as we see his misadventures at school against the background of his unwelcoming home life, and a gradual separation from the norms of society. Like Antoine, Truffaut found a second home in the cinema (even when he could not afford a ticket); Truffaut also ran away from home at the age of eleven, after inventing an outrageous excuse for playing truant.

Truffaut was fortunate in finding L  aud to play the pivotal role of Antoine with such aplomb. He advertised the part in the newspaper. Out of sixty boys who responded to the advertisement, Truffaut chose the 14-year-old L  aud because 'he deeply wanted that role . . . an anti-social loner on the brink of rebellion.' He encouraged the boy to use his own words rather than sticking to the script. The result fulfilled Truffaut's aim, 'not to depict adolescence from the usual viewpoint of sentimental nostalgia, but . . . to show it as the painful experience that it is.'



Finally, a word about the title. The literal translation of *Les quatre cents coups* is *Four Hundred Blows*, but there is a French idiom 'faire les quatre cents coups' which can be rendered as 'to live a wild life'.

Michael Hipkins

Members may have followed the recent media storm surrounding Liam Neeson following an interview to promote his latest film in which he admitted he once set out to kill an innocent black man.

He said he walked the streets with a weapon for a week years ago, hoping to take out his anger after someone close to him was raped by a black man.

The Hollywood star said he was ashamed of his actions, but his remarks have sparked widespread outrage.

He said: "God forbid you've ever had a member of your family hurt under criminal conditions. I'll tell you a story. This is true."

Neeson said the alleged rape took place a long time ago and he found out about it when he came back from a trip abroad. The actor went on to use racially offensive language about the attacker.

He said: "She handled the situation of the rape in the most extraordinary way.

"But my immediate reaction was... I asked, did she know who it was? No. What colour were they? She said it was a black person.

"I went up and down areas with a cosh, hoping I'd be approached by somebody - I'm ashamed to say that - and I did it for maybe a week, hoping some [uses air quotes with fingers] 'black bastard' would come out of a pub and have a go at me about something, you know? So that I could kill him."

Well, I think someone at our local Odeon cinema has a sense of humour as the poster for his new film was displayed close to another recently:



Comments and reactions to: **Florence Foster Jenkins**

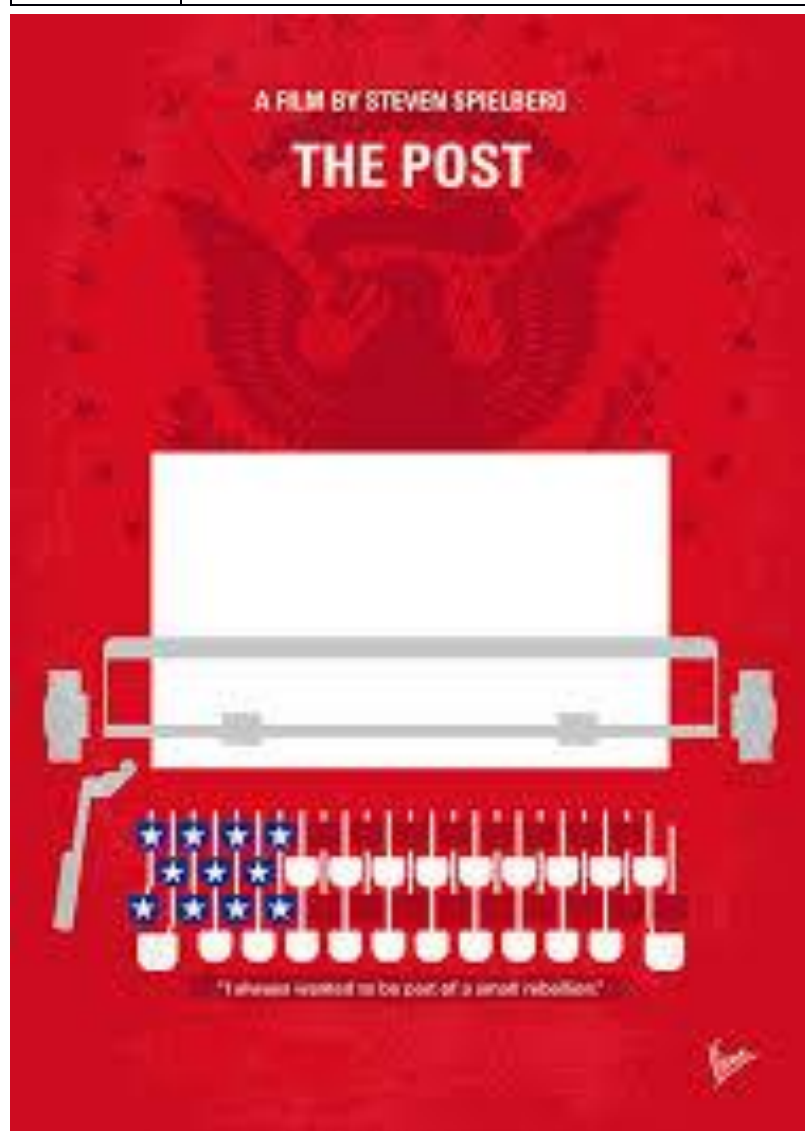
Score **0** **1** **2** **3** **4** **5** **6** **7** **8** **9** **10**
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No of reaction slips received = 32

Average Score = 7.47

Apologies but I've not got the reactions with me, so I'll have to do a double issue next time!

Position	Film	Average Score
1 st	Darkest Hour	8.08
2 nd	Guildford in the Great War	7.56
3 rd	Florence Foster Jenkins	7.47
4 th	Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri	7.4
5 th	The Violin Teacher	7.2
6 th	L'homme du train	6.71
=7 th	Piccadilly	6.41
=7 th	Bar Bahar (In Between)	6.26
9 th	Death of Stalin	6.26
10 th	The Levelling	5.6
11 th	Phantom Thread	5.16



**Next on 14
March:**

“Spielberg has assembled the best cast that gives us a spectacular film that reminds us to fight for the rights we've been given, particularly the freedom of the press.”

“Hanks is fantastic, Streep is stupendous, and Spielberg's direction is masterful.”

“Steven Spielberg's tense, terrific new drama, with Streep and Hanks at their finest, celebrates the passionate bond between a free press and every thinking human being, however diminished the species in Trump's America.”