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# Antoine Doinel's *Spleen*: Truffaut Misreads Baudelaire

Achinoam Ester Berger



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**Abstract:**<sup>1</sup> This essay examines the intertextual dialogue between François Truffaut's cycle of autobiographical films, known as the Doinel cycle, and Charles Baudelaire's collection of poems *The Flowers of Evil* (*Les Fleurs du mal*), and collection of prose poems *The Spleen of Paris* (*Le Spleen de Paris: Petits poèmes en prose*). The focal point is the fourth Doinel film, *Bed and Board* (*Domicile Conjugal*, 1970), and the poem "Spleen IV" in *The Flowers of Evil*. By applying Aner Preminger's (Preminger: 2006) cinematic adaptation of Harold Bloom's "anxiety of influence" theory (Bloom: 1973) and "misreading" concept (Bloom: 1975), I argue that the explicit and implicit references to Baudelaire are not a homage, i.e. a mere expression of admiration, but a complex and multilayered misreading, which encompasses the dual movement of admiration, as well as rebellion, towards the forefather. The wrestle with Baudelaire is a significant milestone in Truffaut's journey towards finding his own voice on the one hand, and towards establishing his position as an important (re)former of modernist cinema on the other. Furthermore, along with a considerable contribution to thematic interpretation of Truffaut's film(s), the misreading of Baudelaire is distinctly important as it reveals that Truffaut's cinema is rooted in poetry, as, and perhaps even more than, it is rooted in prose fiction. On a larger scale, this suggests that the cinematic medium corresponds to the hybrid genre of prose poetry.

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"C'est l'Ennui ! — l'œil chargé d'un pleure involontaire,  
Il rêve d'échafauds en fumant son houka  
Tu le connais, lecteur, ce monstre délicat,  
— Hypocrite lecteur, — mon semblable, — mon frère!"

Baudelaire, "Au lecteur".<sup>2</sup>

"He is Ennui! — His eye filled with an unwished-for  
tear,  
He dreams of scaffolds while puffing at his hookah.  
You know him, reader, this exquisite monster,  
— Hypocrite reader, — my likeness, — my brother!"

Baudelaire, "To the Reader" (translation: Eli Siegel).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Baudelaire 1975, pp. 5-6.

<sup>3</sup> Eli Siegel, *Hail, American Development* (New York: Definition Press, 1968); Charles Baudelaire's *Fleurs du Mal*/Flowers of Evil (WEB 09.02.14), <http://fleursdumal.org/poem/099>.

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## Introduction

The purpose of this essay is to explore the intertextual relationship between Francois Truffaut's Doinel cycle (1959-1979),<sup>4</sup> comprised of five autobiographical films which follow the protagonist, Antoine Doinel, during a time span of twenty years, and Charles Baudelaire's collection of poems *The Flowers of Evil* (*Les Fleurs du mal*, 1857/61/68)<sup>5</sup> and collection of prose poems *The Spleen of Paris: Short Poems in Prose* (*Le Spleen de Paris, petits poèmes en prose*, 1869). It focuses principally on the film *Bed and Board* (*Domicile Conjugal*, 1970) and the poem "Spleen IV".

I argue that the allusions to Baudelaire in Truffaut's *Bed and Board* are not merely homage, i.e. a manifestation of admiration, but what Fishelov<sup>6</sup> identifies as a genuine dialogue: "Cases where the author, after reading attentively a literary work, responds to it in a dialectical way".<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, I intend to demonstrate that Baudelaire is an important forefather of Truffaut, in Harold Bloom's<sup>8</sup> terminology, and that the intertextual relationship corresponds to Bloom's definition of "misreading", a complex dialogue in which the son appropriates the father on the one hand, and misinterprets him on the other.<sup>9</sup>

My interpretive approach is largely based on Preminger's<sup>10</sup> cinematic adaptation of Bloom's "anxiety of influence" theory<sup>11</sup> and "misreading" concept.<sup>12</sup> Preminger<sup>13</sup> argues and demonstrates that the multiplicity of allusions in Truffaut's films are in fact a complex weave of intertexts, and that intertextual interpretation is crucial for any comprehensive understanding of Truffaut's films. Truffaut's cinema, Preminger emphasizes, is based on a constant wrestle, of which he is partially aware, with influential forefathers.

Berger and Preminger<sup>14</sup> explain the benefits deriving from adopting and adapting Bloom's misreading to the discourse on the subject of Truffaut:

"'Poetic strength comes only from a triumphant wrestling with the greatest of the dead' (Bloom, 1975: p. 9), in this assertion Bloom formulates a standard for measuring the quality of a poem and for canon formation. Poems

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<sup>4</sup> See details hereinafter.

<sup>5</sup> *Les Fleurs du mal* appeared in three editions; the last is posthumous.

<sup>6</sup> Fishelov 2008, pp. 423-445.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 427.

<sup>8</sup> Bloom 1973, 1975.

<sup>9</sup> Bloom 1975.

<sup>10</sup> Preminger 2006.

<sup>11</sup> Bloom 1973.

<sup>12</sup> Bloom 1975.

<sup>13</sup> Preminger 2006.

<sup>14</sup> Berger and Preminger 2011.

in the Bloomian discourse ‘are neither about “subjects” nor about “themselves.” They are necessarily about other poems’ (Bloom: p. 18). Bloom characterizes the artistic creation as a dialogue with tradition. Because of the constant wrestle with the past, the poet misinterprets and re-writes his precursor or, in Bloom’s words, he misreads his father. [...] For our discussion, the most important component in Bloom’s theory is his ‘misreading’ concept. This concept augments the intertextual discourse significantly more than the overused term ‘homage’. Unlike homage, ‘misreading’ encompasses the conflict between reading and disruption, between admiration towards the precursor, to which ‘homage’ aims as well, and rebellion against him, indicated by the term ‘misprision’. The duality, which is implied in Bloom’s theory, is highly relevant to the dialogue that Truffaut creates with cultural intertexts”.<sup>15</sup>

Truffaut’s films are influenced by a considerable number of artists from different media, among whom a few can be regarded as his most influential forefathers. Insdorf<sup>16</sup> classifies Truffaut’s films into those influenced by Alfred Hitchcock and those influenced by Jean Renoir,<sup>17</sup> which include the Doinel films and *Bed and Board* in particular.

Preminger<sup>18</sup> also cites Hitchcock and Renoir as Truffaut’s most influential film directors,<sup>19</sup> yet unlike Insdorf, he argues that each of Truffaut’s films bears the strong influences of both.

Two strong literary forefathers are indicated especially regarding the Doinel cycle, namely Proust and Balzac. Gillain considers the cycle Proustian; she regards the films as fragments of memory which comprise a photograph of the past twenty years, while the imagination fills in the missing parts in order to capture the lost time:

“Sa force ne tient pas seulement aux transformations physiques de Jean Pierre Léaud<sup>20</sup> d’un fragment à l’autre, mais à ces pans entiers de vie antérieure que l’image fait adhérer à son corps. Truffaut récupère ainsi au compte de l’émotion de vieillissement des rues de Paris, des modes féminines, des voitures, vieillissement même de l’image dont le grain et la lumière varient de séquence en séquence. Film proustien, *L’Amour en fuite* ne se contente pas de filmer ‘La mort en travail’, il instaure avec elle une relation ludique”.<sup>21</sup>

[“Its power stems not only from the physical transformation of Jean-Pierre Léaud from one fragment to another, but from those entire portions of earlier life that the image causes to adhere to his body. Truffaut thus retrieves, on

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid. [translation is mine].

<sup>16</sup> Insdorf 1994.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Preminger 2006.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 277.

<sup>20</sup> The actor who plays Antoine Doinel in all five films [my note].

<sup>21</sup> Gillain 1980, p. 5.



the emotional level too, the aging of the streets of Paris, of women's fashion, of the vehicles, the aging even of the image itself in which the grain and the lighting vary from sequence to sequence. A Proustian film, *Love on the Run* does not content itself with filming 'Death at Work'; it establishes a ludic relationship with it."<sup>22</sup>

For Preminger,<sup>23</sup> who views the Doinel cycle as a misreading of Balzac's *Human Comedy* (*La Comédie humaine*), the uniqueness of this cycle lies in the encompassing of reality and fiction into a single artwork:

"Troyat's description of Balzac's innovative literary project entailing 'the return of the characters from one book to another' aptly characterizes what Truffaut does in the Antoine Doinel films. [...] Truffaut chooses to make a 'Balzacian' experiment, [...] to connect all the Antoine Doinel films into a single complete unit [...] A connection is created between the various films and a containing of the space and the time that exist outside the film – the number of years that have passed between the various films – within the space and the time of the film itself [...] the 20 years during which the series was made are compressed into a single cinematic unit. Truffaut extended the boundaries of film to beyond the screen and created a connection between film and life itself in a new way".<sup>24</sup>

In this essay I will argue and demonstrate that Baudelaire, too, is an important member of this respected group of forefathers and that the different literary influences are not mutually exclusive. On the contrary, they complement each other in a similar way to the different cinematic influences.

This case study is particularly significant since, to my knowledge, nearly all the research regarding intertextuality, or any other form of dialogue in Truffaut's films, refers either to cinematic or to prose literature (fiction or historical) intertexts;<sup>25</sup> very few, however, concern poetry. In an essay which surveys Baudelaire's influence on different artists, Schlossman<sup>26</sup> notes a resemblance between Truffaut's *Jules and Jim*<sup>27</sup> and Baudelaire's poems and prose poems;<sup>28</sup> she emphasizes especially that the principal female character, Catherine, "recalls many of Baudelaire's poems and prose poems",<sup>29</sup> as well as a similitude in tone and in the

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<sup>22</sup> Translation by Richard Flantz, see: Preminger 2004, p. 183.

<sup>23</sup> Preminger 2004.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., pp. 181-183.

<sup>25</sup> See: Berger and Preminger 2011; Preminger 2007, 2006, 2004; Stam 2006; Auzel and Beaufils-Fievez 2004; Gillain 1991; Insdorf 1994; Klein 1992; Hedges 1991; among others.

<sup>26</sup> Schlossman 2005.

<sup>27</sup> *Jules et Jim*, 1962.

<sup>28</sup> Schlossman 2005, pp. 179-180.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 179.

theme of “the vocation of art and love”.<sup>30</sup> Unfortunately, she does not elaborate this fascinating hypothesis any further on the one hand, and does not expand it beyond this particular film on the other.

DalMolin<sup>31</sup> conducted a comparative research on the image of the woman’s fragmented body as reflected in the work of Baudelaire, Truffaut, and Freud, with Petrarch’s poetry as a point of departure. This is another indication of Baudelaire’s influence on Truffaut; however, her analysis focuses on psychoanalysis and gender studies and corresponds to these disciplines. Moreover, her approach is not intertextual as she regards each text as a closed sign-system.

In the sections below I explore the intertextual dialogue between Baudelaire and Truffaut – its existence, significance, and contribution to the interpretation of the films, as well as to Truffaut’s self-positioning as a (re)former of modernist cinema.<sup>32</sup> Firstly, I verify that Baudelaire is an important forefather of Truffaut (part I). Secondly, I consider the dual movement of appropriation and rebellion, which is manifested in the flowers leitmotif, of which *The Flowers of Evil* is part (part II). I then focus on the specific poem implied, “Spleen IV”, and examine in detail the multifaceted misreading and its contribution to the interpretation of the film (part III). In the last section I turn to Baudelaire’s prose-poem collection *The Spleen of Paris* (part IV); I first discuss the term spleen, and how Truffaut adopts and adapts Baudelaire’s idea of the interrelations between spleen and modernity. I then deal with modernist forms: on the one hand, the interrelations between cinema, prose literature, and poetry in general; on the other, the evolution and revolution of Truffaut’s narrative vis-à-vis Baudelaire’s evolution from *The Flowers of Evil* to *The Spleen of Paris*.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> DalMolin 2000.

<sup>32</sup> For more on Truffaut and modernist cinema, see: Stam 2006; Preminger 2006.

## Prologue: Baudelaire and the Doinel Cycle

*Bed and Board* (*Domicile Conjugal*, 1970) is the fourth film in Truffaut's autobiographical Doinel cycle. These five films follow the protagonist, Antoine Doinel, in different moments of his life through a period of twenty years.

Although each of the films is a "stand alone" feature film, the cycle as a whole is an artwork which is greater than the sum of its components. As Gillain<sup>33</sup> and Preminger<sup>34</sup> note, it captures not only the specific periods portrayed in each film but also the time spans between them.

### The Adventures of Antoine Doinel

In the first Doinel film, *The 400 Blows* (*Les 400 coups*, 1959), which is also Truffaut's first feature film, Antoine is a twelve-year-old boy. For his parents he is a burden, for his teacher – a troublemaker. Neither the former nor the latter understand that Antoine is merely a child longing for love; most of all he is deprived of maternal warmth and care. Hence he absorbs himself in books and films, blurring the line between fiction and reality.

The second film, *Antoine and Colette* (*Antoine et Colette*, 1962)<sup>35</sup> is about first, unrequited juvenile love. Antoine's relationship is not only with Colette, but also with her parents who welcome him warmly.

In the third film, *Stolen Kisses* (*Baisers volés*, 1968), Antoine is a young man undergoing the stage of self-formation. The film is structured as a "disguised"<sup>36</sup> detective movie, in which Antoine pursues his own self-identity vis-à-vis the world, women, art, and love. He begins a relationship with Christine Darbon, who will become Madame Doinel in the next film; again the relationship includes the parents. Unlike Colette, Christine wants Antoine – who, for his part, is uncertain. At the same time, Antoine passionately desires a significantly older, married woman, Fabienne Tabard.

"Non, pas Mademoiselle, Madame!" is the opening statement of *Bed and Board*. It is repeated by Christine, thus emphasizing that this film centers on conjugal life; and indeed the film captures day-to-day episodes from the conjugal life of Antoine and Christine.

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<sup>33</sup> Gillain 1980.

<sup>34</sup> Preminger 2004.

<sup>35</sup> A short film (29 minutes).

<sup>36</sup> This concept is Preminger's evaluation of Truffaut's statement that *Johnny Guitar* is a disguised Western. See: Preminger 2006, p. 218.

In *Bed and Board* Antoine begins to write an autobiographical novel, which will have been completed in the next film, *Love on the Run* (*L'Amour en fuite*, 1979). Thus, in addition to a retrospective glance, which encompasses the twenty years that have passed, this last film presents Antoine at an extremely important moment of his life at which he becomes a professional novelist.

The Doinel films are autobiographical, and Antoine is considered Truffaut's alter-ego.<sup>37</sup> Therefore, the accomplishment of Antoine's first novel represents, to a large extent, the accomplishment of Truffaut's first film, *The 400 Blows*. At the same time, Antoine's autobiographical novel encompasses the previous twenty years of the fictional hero's life, just as *Love on the Run* does.

## **Bed and Board**

*Bed and Board* takes place in contemporary Paris. A significant part of the film is situated in the apartment building where Antoine and Christine live. The neighbors frequently meet each other on the staircase and in the inner courtyard.

During the first half of the film, Antoine's job is to dye flowers. Yet this is not just a day job, but a vocation; he is passionately obsessed with finding the chemical formula for the "absolute red" ("Le rouge absolu"). Antoine constantly fails, however, until he ends up burning the flowers; then, frustrated, he seeks a new job.

Thanks to a sequence of misunderstandings, Antoine is hired by an American firm. There he encounters Kyoko, a Japanese woman, with whom he has a love affair; when Christine finds out about this affair they quarrel, and ultimately Antoine leaves the conjugal domicile. Then, little by little, Antoine's fascination with exotic Kyoko turns into annoyance at the same gestures he admired at first. Gradually Antoine finds his way back to Christine and their home.

## **Baudelaire in Bed and Board**

An entire scene in *Bed and Board* is devoted to a conversation about Baudelaire; it is situated at the beginning of Antoine's love affair with Kyoko, after their first meeting. Kyoko entices Antoine to visit her at home after working hours, and there, before he leaves, she kisses him passionately; Antoine looks surprised, yet not at all dissatisfied.

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<sup>37</sup> See: Preminger 2006, 2004; Guigue 2002; Insdorf 1994; Gillain 1991; among others.

On his way home, Antoine encounters his neighbor Césarín, the owner of the bistro on the street level, and they chat in the courtyard. Antoine mentions that he is writing an autobiographical novel, and Césarín responds, “Ah, so you are a novelist like Baudelaire” (*Bed and Board*, 00:56:14). This is the departure point for a lively conversation about Baudelaire and about Antoine’s novel (*Bed and Board*, 00:56:08 – 00:57:20):

Antoine : ...je suis en train d’écrire un roman...

Césarín : Oui, Oui... Alors vous êtes un romancier comme Baudelaire ? Vous savez qu’il a commencé dans les fleurs ?

Antoine : Ah oui, non, mais Baudelaire il écrivait pas des romans.

Césarín : Ah, ben, tiens... Et « Les Fleurs du Mal » alors, qu’est-ce que c’est, dites ?

Antoine : « Les Fleurs du Mal » c’est un recueil de poèmes.

Césarín : Oh, hé, écoutez, vous savez j’en connais un peu plus que vous sur Baudelaire, hein, parce que justement je viens de lire un article... Vous saviez qu’il était le fils d’un prêtre ?

Antoine : Baudelaire ?

Césarín : Et parfaitement, son père a été ordonné prêtre et ensuite il a travaillé heu... chez les Choiseul-Praslin, oui. C’était le percepteur des enfants... Qu’est-ce que ça va raconter votre roman ?

Antoine : Oh vous savez... je parlerai de la vie en général, de ma jeunesse...

Césarín : Oui ?

Antoine : Je pense sans cesse passer du particulier au général.

[...]

Césarín : Et comment qu’ça s’appellera ?

Antoine : Ah ben, j’ai pas justement encore trouvé le titre.

Césarín : Ah oui ! Ah ben, ça c’est pas difficile ça, trouver un titre. Est-ce qu’y a des trompettes dans votre roman ?

Antoine : Ah non !

Césarín : Est-ce qu’y a des tambours dans votre roman ?

Antoine : Non. (Il rit).

Césarín : Ah ben alors, vous avez qu’à appeler ça Sans tambours ni trompettes".<sup>38</sup>

“Antoine: I am writing a novel [...]

Césarín: So you’re a novelist. Like Baudelaire! He started with flowers too.

Antoine: Yes, but Baudelaire didn’t write novels.

Césarín: Is that so? How about *Flowers of Evil*?

Antoine: That’s poetry.

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<sup>38</sup> Truffaut 1970, pp. 344-345.

Césarín: I know more about him than you do.... I just read an article on Baudelaire. Did you know his father was a priest?

Antoine: Baudelaire?

Césarín: Absolutely. His father was an ordained priest; then he worked for a family...the Choiseul-Praslins...as a tutor for the children [...].

What is your novel about?

Antoine: You know...about life in general...my youth...

Césarín: I see.

Antoine: I go from the particular to the general.

[...]

Césarín: What's the title?

Antoine: I haven't got one yet.

Césarín: It shouldn't be hard to find. Are there any trumpets in your novel?

Antoine: No.

Césarín: Any drums?

Antoine: No.

Césarín: Then you call it *With No Trumpets and No Drums!*"<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Truffaut 1971, pp. 285-286.

## Part I: Baudelaire as Forefather

This conversation between Antoine and his neighbor draws attention to the “quest for the father” theme, which is treated comprehensively in the research on Truffaut’s oeuvre.<sup>40</sup> Nevertheless, this theme takes a unique direction here because it is a crucial moment in Antoine’s life: the beginning of autobiographical writing, which is the first step in his journey towards becoming a professional writer in the next film. An intertextual interpretation reveals the significance of Baudelaire in this process.

When Césarín tells Antoine about the article he read, he tells him, in fact, very little about Baudelaire, yet provides very detailed information about Baudelaire’s father. Unlike Césarín’s misconception about Baudelaire as novelist, the information he gives about Baudelaire’s father is accurate;<sup>41</sup> however, one important detail is omitted: the given name of the Duke of Choiseul-Praslin was Antoine-César.<sup>42</sup> Nevertheless, this name does not totally disappear; it is metamorphosed into the names of the two interlocutors, Antoine and Césarín.

A metamorphosis of a person’s name into an intertextual signifier echoes the famous Madeleine scene<sup>43</sup> in Proust’s<sup>44</sup> *In Search of Lost Time (A La Recherche du temps perdu)*. As Kristeva<sup>45</sup> demonstrates, in that scene the woman’s name, Madeleine Blanchet, undergoes a metamorphosis and turns into a Madeleine pastry. The taste of this Madeleine pastry soaked in tea, which sets off the autobiographical fictional protagonist’s involuntary memory, is the fundamental experience that initiates his journey towards becoming a professional writer.<sup>46</sup>

This dual intertextual movement, to Proust’s famous scene and to Baudelaire, highlights Baudelaire as a significant forefather of Truffaut in the crucial moments of beginning the journey towards finding his own unique artistic identity.<sup>47</sup>

### Where Is the Father?

Truffaut’s wrestle with Baudelaire had already started in the first scene of *The 400 Blows*, along with the linkage between cinema and poetry. Antoine, then a twelve-year-old boy, wrote a

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<sup>40</sup> See: Preminger 2006; De Baecque and Toubiana 2001; Gillain 1991; among others.

<sup>41</sup> See: Pichois (ed.) 1975, p. xxv.

<sup>42</sup> “Joseph-François Badelaire, père du poète, [...] ordonné prêtre à la fin de 1783 ou en 1784. [...] il sera précepteur des fils du duc Antoine-César”; *ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> Proust 1987, pp. 43-44.

<sup>44</sup> Proust 1987.

<sup>45</sup> Kristeva 1994.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 13-36.

<sup>47</sup> It is also a signifier for intertextual dialogue with Proust, a topic that is beyond the scope of this essay.

poem on the classroom wall which described an injustice he was subjected to by the teacher; the latter, however, mocked Antoine's poem for its deficiency of classical stylistics:

“Bravo ! Nous avons un nouveau Juvenal dans la class! Mais il est encore incapable de distinguer un alexandrine d'un décasyllabe... Primo: Doinel, vous allez me conjuguer...pour demain...[...] notez la phrase... A tous les temps de l'indicatif, du conditionnel... et du subjonctif... [...] ‘Je dégrade les mures de la classe ... et je malmène la prosodie française’”.<sup>48</sup>

[“Marvelous, we have a new Juvenal in the class! Only he can't tell the difference between alexandrine and blank verse. Firstly: Doinel you will conjugate for tomorrow... [...] in all the tenses of the indicative, the conditional, and the subjunctive... [...] ‘I deface the classroom walls and I mistreat the French prosody’”].<sup>49</sup>

Preminger interprets this scene as an auto-reflexive statement of Truffaut, who wishes to differentiate his cinema from classical French cinema:

“Truffaut is using the teacher to wrestle with the classic French cinema and with psychological realism, represented by Delannoy and his conservative cinematic language. His misreadings define a new language and abuse the strict conventional classic codes; contrary to every cinematic convention, Truffaut uses hand-held cameras, sharp camera motions, freeze frames, editing codes that ignore the shot-counter-shot pattern and even works with non-professional actors”.<sup>50</sup>

In addition to Preminger's important observation about modern versus classical cinema, it is important to stress that Truffaut, already in the first scene of his first film, uses poetry to portray (modern) cinema. Yet why does he choose Juvenal to be the emblem of classical poetry?

The answer may be found in Walter Benjamin's notes for his unfinished book about Baudelaire,<sup>51</sup> in which he compares Baudelaire to Juvenal:

“Baudelaire and Juvenal. The decisive difference is that when Baudelaire describes degeneracy and vice, **he always includes himself**. The gestus of the satirist is foreign to him. Admittedly, this applies only to *Les Fleurs du mal*, which differs entirely in this regard from the prose pieces”.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Truffaut 2004, pp. 38-39.

<sup>49</sup> Truffaut 1969, pp. 17-18.

<sup>50</sup> Preminger 2006, p. 95. (In Hebrew, English publication in print, translation: Mindy Ivry).

<sup>51</sup> Benjamin planned to write a three-chapter book about Baudelaire. However, he accomplished in his lifetime only the second chapter, “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire” (see: Benjamin 2003, pp. 313-355). After Benjamin's death in 1940, his notes for the other two chapters were assembled under the title “Central Park”, see: Benjamin 2003 [1938-40], pp. 61-199.

<sup>52</sup> Benjamin 2003, pp. 189-190 [highlight is mine].



Benjamin notes that, on the one hand, Baudelaire acts within a tradition; on the other, he changes this tradition significantly. This idea is clearer in an earlier note, referring to the Roman satirists in general:

“The structure of *Les Fleurs du mal* is not based on any ingenious arrangement of the individual poems, still less on some secret key. It results from the relentless exclusion of any lyric theme that does not bear **the stamp of Baudelaire’s own profoundly sorrowful experience**. And precisely because Baudelaire was aware that his form of suffering – spleen, the *taedium vitae* – is a very ancient one, he was able to make the signature of his own experience stand out in bold relief against it. One suspects that few things could have given him a greater sense of his own originality than a reading of the Roman satirists”.<sup>53</sup>

According to Benjamin, Baudelaire’s revolution does not reflect a rejection of Juvenal and the classical tradition but rather an alteration of the classical literary tradition from within, by relating to his individual experiences in lyrical terms.

Via Antoine’s poem and the teacher’s reaction to it, Truffaut reenacts Baudelaire. Antoine’s poem is an opening statement to Truffaut’s cinematic oeuvre introducing and manifesting a constant dialogue with the tradition, while extensively drawing upon personal experiences throughout.

However, Antoine takes Baudelaire’s innovations in *The Flowers of Evil* further by going beyond its poetic boundaries. While *The Flowers of Evil* comprises rhymed and metrically versed poems, Truffaut’s alter-ego writes a free verse poem. Thus, In Bloom’s terminology, Truffaut uses Juvenal to deny the influence of Baudelaire.

Although it seems that Truffaut was not aware of the strong influence of Baudelaire at the time of making *The 400 Blows*, he gained a belated awareness and manifested it in *Bed and Board*. This process resembles that of the name Doinel, which Truffaut had considered his own creation and only years later discovered to be the surname of the secretary of Jean Renoir,<sup>54</sup> one of his most influential forefathers.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 162 [highlights are mine].

<sup>54</sup> Truffaut 1970, p. 10.

<sup>55</sup> For comprehensive discussion of the influence of Renoir, see: Preminger 2006; Insdorf 1994; Gillain 1991; among others.

## Part II: The Flowers of Evil: Appropriation and Rebellion

Flowers are the leitmotif in *Bed and Board*, in which *The Flowers of Evil* plays an important role. Apart from Antoine's painted flowers, which dominate the first part of the film, flowers are responsible for the dramatic climax in its second part, which is the revelation of Antoine's love affair to his wife.

Kyoko, Antoine's Japanese lover, hides little love notes in a bouquet of tulips and sends the flowers to Antoine at his workplace. Due, however, to a sequence of misunderstandings, the bouquet gets to Christine, and when the buds open, the love notes fall on the kitchen table of the stunned wife.<sup>56</sup>

Neither Antoine's flowers nor Kyoko's tulips are mimetic of the "real world", the former in content and the latter in cinematic language – a slow motion of the opening buds; nonetheless, both are part of the film's reality. In that sense Truffaut adopts Baudelaire's notion of "art for art's sake" (*l'art pour l'art*); poetry must not inspire either to a moral goal or to a mimetic goal, but must only be faithful to its own poetic truth, as Baudelaire articulates in *New Notes on Edgar Allen Poe*:<sup>57</sup>

“Je ne veux pas dire que la poésie n'ennoblisse pas les mœurs, - qu'on me comprenne bien, - que son résultat final ne soit pas d'élever l'homme au-dessus du niveau des intérêts vulgaire; ce serait évidemment une absurdité. Je dis que si le poète a poursuivi un but moral, il a diminué sa force poétique ; et il n'est pas imprudent de parier que son œuvre sera mauvais. **La poésie** ne peut pas, sous peine de mort ou de défaillance, s'assimiler à la science ou à la morale; elle **n'a pas la Vérité pour objet, elle n'a qu'Elle-même**. Les modes de démonstration de vérité sont autres et sont ailleurs. La vérité n'a rien à faire avec les chansons. Tout ce qui fait le charme, la grâce, l'irrésistible d'une chanson enlèverait la vérité son autorité et son pouvoir. Froide, calme, impassible, **l'humeur démonstrative repousse les diamants et les fleurs de la muse**; elle est donc absolument l'inverse de l'humeur poétique”.<sup>58</sup>

[“I do not mean that poetry does not ennoble manners – let there be no mistake about it – that its final result is not to raise man above the level of vulgar interests; that would obviously be an absurdity. I say that, if the poet has pursued a moral aim, he has diminished his poetic force; and it is not rash to wager that his work will be bad. **Poetry** cannot, under penalty of death or failure, be assimilated to science or morality; it **does not have Truth as its object, it has only itself**. The means for demonstrating truth are others and elsewhere. Truth has nothing to do with songs. All that constitutes the grace,

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<sup>56</sup> *Bed and Board*, 01:02:49-01:06:45.

<sup>57</sup> “Notes Nouvelles sur Edgar Poe”: Baudelaire 1976, pp. 319-337.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 333 [highlights are mine].

the charm, the irresistible attraction of a song, would take from Truth its authority and its power. Cold, calm, impassive, **the demonstrative mood rejects the diamonds and flowers of the Muse**; it is then absolutely the inverse of the poetic mood”].<sup>59</sup>

Truffaut<sup>60</sup> expresses the same idea, in very similar words:

“Puisque l’art n’est pas scientifique. [...] Le critique doit méditer cette affirmation de Jean Renoir : « Tout grand art est abstrait », il doit prendre conscience de la *forme* et comprendre que certains artistes, par exemple Dreyer ou Von Sternberg, ne cherchent pas à faire ressemblant”.<sup>61</sup>

[“Art is not scientific [...]. Every critic should take to heart Jean Renoir’s remark, ‘All great art is abstract.’ He should learn to be aware of form, and to understand that certain artists, for example Dreyer or Von Sternberg, never sought to make a picture that resembled reality”].<sup>62</sup>

Yet there is one more humble appearance of flowers in the film, or more precisely of their absence. Christine has just given birth to the couple’s first child, and Antoine is rushing to visit her. At the clinic’s doorstep he encounters Christine’s parents, and the three converse briefly; then, instead of following Antoine into the clinic, the camera stays a while with the parents, and we can hear Madame Darbon saying, “Il aurait tout de même lui apporter des fleurs” [He still could have brought her flowers]”.<sup>63</sup>

The absent/present dialectic opens and closes the neighbors’ conversation. Césarín, like a Shakespearean fool, discloses the essence of Truffaut’s rebellion against Baudelaire: whereas in Baudelaire’s oeuvre the title corresponds to what **exists** in the artwork – a book titled *The Flowers of Evil* is about flowers – in Antoine’s/Truffaut’s, the title corresponds to what **does not exist** – Without Drums or Trumpets.

Following Césarín’s guidelines and applying Bloom’s terminology, the presence of flowers in the film indicates Truffaut’s appropriation of Baudelaire, whereas their absence points to his wrestle with Baudelaire. Truffaut appropriates Baudelaire’s idea of “art for art sake’s” (*L’Art pour l’art*) on the one hand, and wrestles against Baudelaire, claiming that the essence of an artwork is the absent more than the present, on the other.

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<sup>59</sup> Baudelaire (translation: Lois Boe Hyslop and Francis E. Hyslop, Jr.) 1964, pp. 131-132 [highlights are mine].

<sup>60</sup> Truffaut 2007.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>62</sup> Truffaut 1978, p. 12.

<sup>63</sup> Truffaut 1970, p. 325 [translation is mine].

### Part III: “Spleen IV”: A Multifaceted Misreading

Though represented as Césarin’s original idea, the title, he suggests for Antoine’s novel, “ Sans tambours ni trompettes”, is, in fact, a French proverb, which means:

“Furtivement, discrètement, sans éveiller l’attention. D’origine militaire : se disait d’une troupe qui partait, un peu honteusement, sans jouer du tambour et sans sonner de la trompette”.<sup>64</sup>

[“Furtively, discreetly, without attracting attention. The origin is military: it is said about a troop departing somewhat shamefully, without drumming and without blowing a trumpet”].<sup>65</sup>

In Riffaterre’s terminology, this proverb is the “connective”,<sup>66</sup> which is the key to the intertextual interpretation:

“These signposts are words and phrases indicating, on the one hand, a difficulty – an obscure or incomplete utterance in the text – that only an intertext can remedy; and, on the other hand, pointing the way to where the solution must be sought. Such features, lexical or phrasal, are distinguished from their context by their dual nature. They are both the problem, when seen from the text, and the solution to that problem when their other, intertextual side is revealed”.<sup>67</sup>

Preminger<sup>68</sup> argues that this connective is a signpost to Hitchcock’s *Rear Window*:<sup>69</sup>

“This dialogue, which may be interpreted as relating to Hitchcock’s dramatic poetics, especially in light of the fact that the film opens with music that alludes to the music with which *Rear Window* opens, with the obvious omission of the drums and the trumpets, reveals Truffaut’s rebellion against Hitchcock and his aspiration to define an alternative cinema. Truffaut is interested in the banality of life, without the drums and trumpets”.<sup>70</sup>

At the same time, in the context of the neighbor’s conversation about Baudelaire, it is beyond doubt that the same proverb also points to Baudelaire’s poem “Spleen IV”:<sup>71</sup>

"LXXVIII Spleen

Quand le ciel bas et lourd pèse comme un couvercle

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<sup>64</sup> Lafleur 1979, p. 579.

<sup>65</sup> Translation is mine.

<sup>66</sup> Riffaterre 1990.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 58.

<sup>68</sup> Preminger 2006, pp. 138-142.

<sup>69</sup> Hitchcock 1954.

<sup>70</sup> Preminger 2006, p. 140. (In Hebrew, English publication in print, translation: Mindy Ivry).

<sup>71</sup> See: Pichois 1975, p. 980.

Sur l'esprit gémissant en proie aux longs ennuis,  
Et que de l'horizon embrassant tout le cercle  
Il nous verse un jour noir plus triste que les nuits ;

Quand la terre est changée en un cachot humide,  
Où l'Espérance, comme une chauve-souris,  
S'en va battant les murs de son aile timide  
Et se cognant la tête à des plafonds pourris ;

Quand la pluie étalant ses immenses traînées  
D'une vaste prison imite les barreaux,  
Et qu'un peuple muet d'infâmes araignées  
Vient tendre ses filets au fond de nos cerveaux,

Des cloches tout à coup sautent avec furie  
Et lancent vers le ciel un affreux hurlement,  
Ainsi que des esprits errants et sans patrie  
Qui se mettent à geindre opiniâtrement.

-Et de longs corbillards, **sans tambours ni musique**,  
Défilent lentement dans mon âme ; l'Espoir,  
Vaincu, pleure, et l'Angoisse atroce, despotique,  
Sur mon crâne incliné plante son drapeau noir".<sup>72</sup>

[“Spleen IV

When low and heavy sky weighs like a lid  
Upon the spirit moaning in ennui,  
And when, spanning the circle of the world,  
It pours a black day sadder than our nights;

When earth is changed into a sweaty cell,  
In which Hope, captured like a frantic bat,  
Batters the walls with her enfeebled wing,  
Striking her head against the rotting beams;

When steady rain trailing its giant train  
Descends on us like heavy prison bars,  
And when a silent multitude of spiders  
Spins its disgusting threads deep in our brains,

Bells all at once jump out with all their force,  
And hurl about a mad cacophony  
As if they were those lost and homeless souls  
Who send a dogged whining to the skies.

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<sup>72</sup> Baudelaire 1975, pp. 74-75 [highlight is mine].

- And long cortèges **minus drum or tone**  
Deploy morosely through my being: Hope  
The conquered, moans, and tyrant Anguish gloats –  
In my bowed skull he fixed his black flag”.]<sup>73</sup>

In addition, Zimmerman<sup>74</sup> shows that Baudelaire wrote “Spleen IV” as a reaction to *Petites Misères de la vie conjugale*<sup>75</sup> [*Little Miseries of Conjugal Life*],<sup>76</sup> a text written by Balzac and illustrated by Bertall, which describes scenes from the life of a married couple.<sup>77</sup> Truffaut’s *Domicile Conjugal* echoes the title of this work as well as its structure and content. Therefore, a complex weave of intertexts is indicated by this single connective. In Bloom’s terminology, Truffaut uses Baudelaire to deny the influence of Hitchcock and Balzac.

### A Misreading of Misreading: The Son Corrects the Father

Whereas Baudelaire misreads the original proverb, Truffaut chooses to restore it. This is a unique example of a son who not only disrupts his father but literally corrects him. The dual movement of misreading draws special attention to the word **trumpets** and to the word **music**.

In French, the word *trompette* [trumpet] refers to an epic style.<sup>78</sup> However, when Truffaut reestablishes the original proverb, he actually restores the **absence** of trumpets, hence calls attention to their existence in Baudelaire’s poem. Eliminating the trumpets, Truffaut expresses his reservations towards Baudelaire’s floweriness of form and tone, and presents his own creation – a casual and colloquial film.

### Music

The only music in “Spleen IV” comes from the church bells at the fourth strophe.<sup>79</sup> The church bells are a symbol of the religion, and, as Richter emphasizes, their role is to gather the masses:<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Baudelaire (translation: James McGowan) 1993, pp. 148-150 [highlight is mine].

<sup>74</sup> Zimmerman 1980.

<sup>75</sup> Balzac and Bertall 1956.

<sup>76</sup> Translation is mine.

<sup>77</sup> Zimmerman 1980, p. 5.

<sup>78</sup> The French proverb “Emboucher le trompette” [to mouth the trumpet] means: “Prendre un ton, un style solennel, poétique, emphatique, pour dire quelque chose. [...] Enfin, la trompette est le symbole du style épique” [to say something with a solemn, poetic, rotund tone or style. [...] In short, the trumpet is the symbol of the epic style]. See: Lafleur 1979, p. 611 [translation is mine].

<sup>79</sup> For detailed exploration and explanation of the poem, see: Richter 2001, pp. 767-779.

<sup>80</sup> Richter 2001.

“Les cloches, comme nous le savons, sont l’expression sonore la plus importante de la religion. Comme elles sont consacrées, elles sonnent pour rassembler le peuple de Dieu, pour lui rappeler les temps des actes liturgiques. Mais elles sonnent aussi dans le moments de danger – un orage ou un ouragan, par exemple –, exprimant une prière, une invocation collective, une conjuration”.<sup>81</sup>

[“The bell tower, as we all know, is the most important sonorous expression of the religion. Being consecrated, they strike in order to gather the people of God, to remind them of the times for the liturgical work. Yet they strike also in times of danger – a storm or a thunder storm, for example –, to express a prayer, a communal invocation, a conjuration”.]<sup>82</sup>

Yet, in Baudelaire’s poem, the sound of church bells turns into a cacophony of terrifying screams, and then, in the fifth strophe – into a deathly silence. The tension between intolerable loud music and its sudden absence expresses the gap between signifier and signified; although the mighty edifice of the church is still standing and calling the mass, its spiritual power is lost. The church can no longer provide the consolation of a mass united in a mutual faith. The container has not changed, but it is empty of its content. Rituals replace genuine passion; the sign has become empty. The music and its absence express the emptiness of the symbol as well as the emptiness of the soul.

In the Doinel films, and particularly in *Bed and Board*, as Guigue<sup>83</sup> points out, Antoine’s “marital typecast” is associated with music. In *Antoine and Colette* Antoine’s encounters with Colette revolve around concerts for youngsters;<sup>84</sup> in *Stolen Kisses* Christine studies in the conservatory and in *Bed and Board*, once married, she gives violin lessons; lastly, Sabine in *Love on the Run* works in a music shop.<sup>85</sup> However, Guigue’s conclusion that: “Surtout l’élément musical est associé, dans l’esprit d’Antoine, à une forme de sentimentalité” [Above all, in Antoine’s mind, the musical element is associated with sentimentality],<sup>86</sup> does not yield the full interpretive potential of his important observation.

*Bed and Board* opens with the image of Christine’s legs, her palm, adorned by a wedding ring, and her violin case, progressing in perfect harmony; at the same time, on the sound track we hear Christine’s voice twice correcting vendors, who mistakenly approach her as an unmarried woman: “Non, pas Mademoiselle, Madame!”<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., pp. 772-773.

<sup>82</sup> Translation is mine.

<sup>83</sup> Guigue 2002, pp. 177-182.

<sup>84</sup> La Jeunesse musicale de France.

<sup>85</sup> Guigue 2002, p. 179.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid. [translation is mine].

<sup>87</sup> *Bed and Board*, 0:00:55-0:01:55.

Preminger refers to the harmony between Christine's legs, marital status, and violin case:

*"Bed and Board* opens with Christine, a woman struggling to maintain a relationship with her partner, and a demonstration of her mobility, which is also the source of her charm; the feminine leg is presented as the enchantment that undermines male equilibrium in most of Truffaut's films. Beside her leg, which is gracefully and lightly walking along, we are presented with the harmonious motion of Christine's violin case".<sup>88</sup>

Gillain, however, articulates the conflict involved in this harmony:

"La première scène pose d'emblée le problème. Les jambes de Christine parcourent l'écran et on l'entend par deux fois corriger en voix off des commerçants qui l'appellent mademoiselle: 'Non, pas mademoiselle, madame.' [...] les jambes du désir sont devenues celles de la loi [...] Le mariage brouille les codes, altère le langage du désir, [...] le rituel remplace le désir".<sup>89</sup>

["The first scene immediately raises the problem. Christine's legs roam the screen, and we hear her twice in voiceover, correcting the retailers who call her Mademoiselle: 'No, not mademoiselle – madame!' [...] The legs of desire became those of the law [...] marriage confuses the codes; alters the language of desire, [...] ritual replaces desire"].<sup>90</sup>

Following these two interpretations one could argue that the image of Christine in the opening scene signifies the tension between erotic passion and day-to-day conjugal routine, embraced by the law. This tension leads Antoine later to have the love affair with Kyoko; however, when the affair becomes a daily-basis relationship, Antoine suffers even more from the routine.

Truffaut then, appropriates Baudelaire's idea of spleen as caused by the tension between passion and rituals. Yet Truffaut wrestles with Baudelaire by transferring the scene from the realm of the metaphysical and the liturgical to ordinary day-to-day life. The sublime passion becomes a down-to-earth desire between man and woman. Truffaut also complicates the situation; instead of a "black and white" dichotomy – music versus deathly silence – he presents a variety of tones, like life itself.

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<sup>88</sup> Preminger 2006, p. 140, (In Hebrew, English publication in print, translation: Mindy Ivy).

<sup>89</sup> Gillain 1991, p. 204.

<sup>90</sup> Translation is mine; quotation within translation: Truffaut 1971, p. 230.



## Part IV: The Spleen of Paris: Short Poems in Prose

“Spleen IV”<sup>91</sup> expresses a process of ennui, an inner feeling of nothingness and of vanity, which is taking over the poet’s body, mind, and soul. It is the last poem in a cycle of four poems titled “Spleen”;<sup>92</sup> this cycle forms part of the largest section of *The Flowers of Evil*, “Spleen and Ideal” [“Spleen et idéale”].<sup>93</sup> Sorrell<sup>94</sup> explains that this section bears a relation to Baudelaire’s late work *The Spleen of Paris: Short Poems in Prose*<sup>95</sup> [*Le Spleen de Paris: Petites Poèmes en Prose*]:<sup>96</sup>

“Paris *Spleen* is the prose pendant to the verse of the *Flowers of Evil*. Indeed, a number of the former are reworkings of poems from the *Flowers*. The choice of the noun *spleen* establishes a clear link between the two, calling to mind as it does the heading of the *Flowers of Evil*’s longest section, *Spleen and the Ideal*”.<sup>97</sup>

### Baudelaire’s Spleen

The term spleen, which corresponds to the French word *ennui*, is an extremely important concept in Baudelaire’s oeuvre. It became identified with him, and is rooted, as McGowan<sup>98</sup> explains, in medieval psychology:

“‘Spleen’ in medieval psychology was one of the four ‘humours’ thought to control human behavior. It became associated in the eighteenth century, especially in England, with deep, suicidal depression, which seems to have led to Baudelaire’s associating it with the soul-deadening spiritual condition he calls ‘ennui’”.<sup>99</sup>

Baudelaire’s “ennui”, McGowan clarifies, is different from the ordinary use of the word in day-to-day French, and the equivalent in English could ostensibly be “boredom”:

“Ennui: frequently translated into English as ‘boredom’, but ‘boredom’ seems not forceful enough for what Baudelaire intends. ‘Ennui’ in Baudelaire is a soul-deadening, pathological condition, the worst of the many vices of mankind, which leads us into the abyss of non-being”.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Baudelaire 1975, pp. 74-75.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., pp. 72-75.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., pp. 3-81.

<sup>94</sup> Sorrell 2010.

<sup>95</sup> Baudelaire 2010.

<sup>96</sup> Baudelaire 1975 [1869], pp. 273-374.

<sup>97</sup> Sorrell 2010, p. v.

<sup>98</sup> McGowan 1993 (see: Baudelaire 1993, “Explanatory Notes”).

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., pp. 351-352.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., p. 351.

Rosenthal<sup>101</sup> elucidates that ennui is a profound sense of never-ending nothingness, which is worse than pain:

“The ennui of [...] Baudelaire was of course not just boredom, but something much more profound. It was a deeply-rooted paralyzing affliction permeated with the sentiment of vanity of existence. Baudelaire gave this condition the name of *spleen*”.<sup>102</sup>

Even-Zohar adds that Baudelaire’s ennui is not only emotional but intellectual as well:<sup>103</sup>

“[T]he ennui is not only of the ‘soul’ but also of the ‘spirit’, ‘head and heart’ as one. The sense of tediousness and depression is not only emotional but also intellectual; it is the melancholy of the indulged cultured man; that is to say: a concrete form of bad humor, not just a vague sadness of the soul”.<sup>104</sup>

The intertext then, reveals Antoine Doinel’s mental state just before he succumbs to Kyoko’s seduction, along with the undercurrents that course beneath the seemingly serene “*domicile conjugal*”. An intertextual interpretation shows that Antoine’s adultery is not a mere childish caprice, involving attraction to a beautiful stranger and then, very quickly, boredom with his new “toy”, but rather the consequence of a long-lasting and possibly intrinsic mental state.

## Spleen and Modernity

Along with describing a private experience, “Spleen IV” articulates the mental condition of Everyman in modernity. It is “un vraie allégorie de la condition humaine”<sup>105</sup> [a true allegory of the human condition],<sup>106</sup> argues Bromberg. In addition, Rosenthal<sup>107</sup> notes that Baudelaire regarded spleen as “the particular malady of the modern age in general”,<sup>108</sup> and as an inevitable result of rapid progress:

“Baudelaire [...] thought that, concurrent with the rise of Christianity, the burgeoning spirit of scientific progress in the modern age contributed to the destruction of man’s happiness and to the emergence of ennui. The experience gained by dint of human intellectual curiosity destroyed the illusions which made happiness possible”.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Rosenthal 1976.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., p. 347.

<sup>103</sup> Even-Zohar 1975.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., p. 35 [in Hebrew, translation is mine].

<sup>105</sup> Bromberg 1975, pp. 146-147.

<sup>106</sup> Translation is mine.

<sup>107</sup> Rosenthal 1976.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., p. 342.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., p. 344.

Illouz<sup>110</sup> elucidates the correlation between the modern age and the (im)possibility of happiness, beginning in the second half of the nineteenth century:

“Karl Marx, Max Weber, Emile Durkheim, Georg Simmel, have all tried to understand the meaning of the transition from the ‘old’ world to the ‘new’. The ‘old’ was religion, community, order and stability. The ‘new’ was breath-taking change, secularity, dissolution of community ties, increasing claims to equality, and a nagging uncertainty about identity. [...] Modernity, most sociologists agreed, offered exhilarating possibilities, but also ominous risks to our ability to live meaningful lives. Even sociologists who conceded that modernity meant progress over ignorance, chronic poverty, and pervasive subjection still viewed it as an impoverishment of our capacities to tell beautiful stories and to live in richly textured cultures. Modernity sobered people up from the powerful but sweet delusions and illusions that had made the misery of their lives bearable”.<sup>111</sup>

As Rosenthal notes, in his planned preface for the 1861 edition of *The Flowers of Evil*, as well as in his unfinished work *Fusée*, Baudelaire directly articulates his point of view regarding the destructive impact of the rapid technological progress of Modernity on art.<sup>112</sup>

“Materialism, utilitarianism, and ‘progress’, are found to be particularly detrimental to art. [...] Baudelaire echoes this sentiment in his plans for a preface to the 1861 edition of *Les Fleurs du Mal*. [...] Baudelaire [...] foresaw that progress, in robbing mankind of spiritual substance, would **render existence mechanical**. [...] In *Fusées* Baudelaire predicted that [...] there would be no vital energy in man [...] instead, there would exist a society of robots: ‘**La mécanique nous aurais tellement américanisés**, le progrès aurais si bien atrophié en nous toute la partie spirituelle, que rien parmi les rêveries sanguinaires, sacrilèges, ou antinaturelles des utopistes ne pourra être comparé à ses résultat positifs’ (Œuvres, pp. 1262-3) [“**So far will machinery have Americanized us**, so far will have atrophied in us all that is spiritual, that no dream of the Utopians, however bloody, sacrilegious or unnatural, will be comparable to the result”]<sup>113</sup> [...] The ultimate conclusion of [...] Baudelaire was that the idea of progress and perfectibility is absurd. It is in reality a phenomenon inspired by man’s vanity, and it is the source of his misery”.<sup>114</sup>

Similar ideas are aptly depicted throughout *Bed and Board*. The gap between Antoine’s two working environments is a good example. At first, Antoine dyes flowers and fails time and

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<sup>110</sup> Illouz 2012.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., pp. 7-8.

<sup>112</sup> Rosenthal 1976.

<sup>113</sup> Translation within text: Baudelaire (translation: Christopher Isherwood) 1949, pp. 20-21.

<sup>114</sup> Rosenthal 1976, pp. 346-347 [highlights are mine].

time again to fulfill his scientific ambition; but he is surrounded by people all day long in the lively courtyard. The second working-place, the American firm, is highly technological and Antoine maneuvers little boats in an artificial basin with the help of a remote-control device. However, the firm's modernity emphatically juxtaposed with Antoine's estrangement, loneliness, and the absurd impossibility of communication.<sup>115</sup>

## The Telephone

Difficulties of communication are one of the film's major themes.<sup>116</sup> The telephone is a leitmotif, which express throughout the film the effect of technology on communication. It first appears at the beginning of the film, when Christine is trying in vain to overcome the brouhaha in the courtyard while she talks with her mother on the telephone of the ground-floor bistro; consequently, thanks to Christine's father's connections at the upper echelon, a telephone is promptly installed in the young couple's apartment. Throughout the film, the telephone appears again in key situations, as Insdorf notes:<sup>117</sup>

“Each of these characters, to one degree or another, points to two fundamentally Truffautesque perception: how much they need others and how difficult it is to reach them. [...] Truffaut's symbol for these sentiments is the telephone, whose presence helps to structure the film [...] It is, therefore, appropriate that at the two points when Antoine is most distressed, his only recourse is the telephone. When he cannot find anyone to share in his excitement over becoming a father he ends up in a phone booth. And when he is utterly ‘bored’ with Kyoko, he calls Christine from a restaurant phone – three times. Antoine, like the others, needs the telephone, needs to make the connection”<sup>118</sup>

Although Insdorf's sharp observation discerns the significance of the telephone, her interpretation does not grasp that the telephone is not a symbol of comforting interpersonal communication, but of its deficiency. In all but perhaps the last appearance of the telephone in the restaurant, the communication is very difficult or fails completely: Christine and her mother barely hear each other; when Antoine is checking the newly installed telephone he dials the number of the speaking clock [*l'horloge parlent*] but reaches the Hospital Cochin; and when

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<sup>115</sup> The difficulties of communication, social alienation, and loneliness of the individual in the modern hyper-technological world are also manifested through a complex intertextual dialogue with the film *PlayTime* (Tati 1967), a theme that requires a separate discussion.

<sup>116</sup> See: Insdorf 1994, pp. 77-84; Preminger 2006, pp. 135-144; Gillain 1991, pp. 201-207; among others.

<sup>117</sup> Insdorf 1994, pp. 83-84.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., p. 84.

he indeed calls his friend to announce the birth of his son, as Insdorf mentions, this friend is not at home. As Gillain asserts: “l'exemple le plus fort des complexités de la communication est celui du telephone” [the telephone is the best example of the complexities of communication”].<sup>119</sup>

Moreover, this modern apparatus of communication is the cause of a serious quarrel between Christine and Antoine.<sup>120</sup> Whereas Christine is thrilled about the new telephone, stressing its modernity,<sup>121</sup> Antoine does not share her enthusiasm; he is reluctant and even hostile towards the new appliance and insists that he does not need it: “I don’t give a damn about the phone!”<sup>122</sup> [“Le téléphone, je m’en fous”]<sup>123</sup> he replies to Christine’s reproaches; and when Christine claims that the telephone would “when we’re bored [...] get us in touch with friends”<sup>124</sup> [“quand on s’ennuie”]<sup>125</sup> Antoine’s response includes the word *ennui*<sup>126</sup> no less than seven times, all just in order to say that he has never experienced it.<sup>127</sup>

However, the obsessive hyperbolic negation raises the suspicion that the truth is the opposite, and the intertextual interpretation confirms this. Moreover, in the context of Baudelaire’s intertext, Antoine’s *ennui* entails a much graver meaning than the English translation “boredom”; it is the mental condition of “spleen”.

## Prose Poems

In addition to the content of *The Spleen of Paris*, the reference to Baudelaire in *Bed and Board* pertains also to the form of *Short Poems in Prose*. The conversation between Antoine and Césarín raises some serious reflections about the position of cinema with regard to prose literature on the one hand and to poetry on the other, and about its interrelation with them. The seemingly comic and even foolish wrangling compels a reflexive inquiry about the nature of poetry, prose literature, and cinema; what are the strengths and the limits of each medium? In what do they resemble each other? What is unique to each medium? Where do they intersect? What makes *The Flowers of Evil* poetry? Does Truffaut’s autobiographical film cycle resemble

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<sup>119</sup> Gillain 1991, p. 205 [translation is mine].

<sup>120</sup> Truffaut 1970, pp. 305-307 [English: Truffaut 1971, pp. 254-255].

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., p. 305.

<sup>122</sup> Truffaut 1971, p. 255.

<sup>123</sup> Truffaut 1970, p. 307.

<sup>124</sup> Truffaut 1971, p. 255.

<sup>125</sup> Truffaut 1970, p. 307 [highlight is mine].

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

prose literature or does it have more in common with lyrical poetry? Or is it in fact in between, like Baudelaire's prose poems?

### **Cinema: Prose, Poetry, and In Between**

In Truffaut's films, Gillain argues,<sup>128</sup> side by side with the narrative layer there is a system of non-narrative mechanisms which construct another layer of meanings:

"Au cours de leur déroulement, l'esprit du spectateur est sollicité sur deux modes différentes et complémentaire : tandis que son attention est mobilisé par le réseau complexe d'un récit [...] une lecture inconsciente, suscitée par une série de **rimes, répétitions, retours, parallélismes**, lui permet de brûler les lentes étapes du rationnel pour organiser les données de l'image en une vision cohérente et harmonieuse".<sup>129</sup>

["During the film, the spectator's mind follows two different and complementary paths: while his attention is occupied by the complex network of the storyline [...] an unconscious reading, prompted by a series of **rhymes, repetitions, reversions, and parallelisms**, enables him to burn the slow stages of the rational in order to organize the images' visual information into a coherent and harmonious vision"].<sup>130</sup>

Although Gillain refers to techniques Truffaut uses to capture the spectator's subconscious mind, she in fact describes a series of means to create meaning in poetry, and borrows poetical terms.

The same approach is manifested by Truffaut himself:<sup>131</sup>

"Mon plaisir commençait souvent où s'arrêtait celui de mes confrères : aux changements de ton de Renoir, aux excès d'Orson Welles, aux négligences de Pagnol ou Guitry, aux anachronismes de Cocteau, à la nudité de Bresson. [...], j'approuvais la phrase d'Audiberti : '*Le Poème le plus obscure s'adresse au monde entier*'".<sup>132</sup>

["My enjoyment often began where that of others left off: Renoir's changes of tone, Orson Welles's excesses, Pagnol's or Guitry's carelessness, Bresson's nakedness. [...] I always agreed with Audiberti: 'The most obscure poem is addressed to everybody'"].<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Gillain 1991.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., p. 23 [highlights are mine].

<sup>130</sup> Translation is mine.

<sup>131</sup> Truffaut 2007 [1975], pp. 13-34.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>133</sup> Truffaut (translation: Leonard Mayhew) 1978, p. 5.

In addition to using poetical terminology as a metaphor for cinematic language, the critical writing about Truffaut, as well as Truffaut's own critical writing, suggests that producing meaning in cinema involves combining form and content, with the former more significant than the latter.

Sandbank expresses the same idea with regard to poetry:

“Differentiation between form and content in poetry is always temporary [...] the form is destined to cooperate with the content, to be a part of it and even to be assimilated into it. Form and content work hand in hand to deliver the poem's meanings”.<sup>134</sup>

In *Bed and Board* itself, Truffaut's fictional alter-ego, Antoine Doinel, shows a clear inclination to poetry. When interviewed by his future American employer, Antoine is required to answer a few questions in English, a language he barely understands. The scene becomes a comic dialogue-of-the-deaf; Antoine, when asked if he reads American newspapers, replies, “I prefer poetry to prose”.<sup>135</sup> Despite the comic tone, this is an important statement; once again, as Insdorf observes regarding Truffaut's films, “the profundity is inseparable from the playfulness”.<sup>136</sup>

### **The Doinel Cycle: From *The Flowers of Evil* to *The Spleen of Paris***

Although in *The Flowers of Evil* Baudelaire made significant innovations in poetic language,<sup>137</sup> these mostly remained within the rigorous frames of classical prosody, i.e. metrical rhythm and rhymed verse. Only in *The Spleen of Paris* did Baudelaire fulfill his ambition to create a totally innovative poetic form: poetry with neither rhythm nor rhyme, which captures the tempo of daily life in the modern metropolis. As he put it in a letter in 1862 to Arsène Houssaye, which prefaces the posthumous prose-poetry collection:

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<sup>134</sup> Sandbank 2002, p. 13 (in Hebrew, translation is mine).

<sup>135</sup> Truffaut 1970, p. 312.

<sup>136</sup> Insdorf 1994, p. 70.

<sup>137</sup> For detailed explication of Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du mal* poetics, see: Baudelaire [Notice et Variants par Pichois] 1975, pp. 787-1118.

"Quel est celui de nous qui n'a pas, dans ses jours d'ambition, rêvé le miracle d'une prose poétique, musical sans rythme et sans rime, assez souple et assez heurtée pour s'adapter aux mouvements lyriques de l'âme, aux ondulations de la rêverie, aux soubresauts de la conscience ? C'est surtout de la fréquentation des villes énorme, c'est du croisement de leurs innombrables rapports que naît cet idéal obsédant. Vous-même, mon cher ami, n'avez-vous pas tenté de traduire en une *chanson* le cri strident du *Vitrier*, et d'exprimer dans une prose lyrique toutes les désolantes suggestions que ce cri envoie jusqu'aux mansardes, à travers les plus hautes brumes de la rue?"<sup>138</sup>

["Who has not, in bouts of ambition, dreamt this miracle, a poetic prose, musical without rhythm or rhyme, supple and choppy enough to accommodate the lyrical movement of the soul, the undulations of the reverie, the bump and lurch of consciousness? It is above all in the habit of huge cities, the endless meeting of their ways that this obsessive ideal originates. You have yourself wished to put into *song* the *glazier's* grating cry, and render in lyrical prose its heartbreaking resonances, carried up to attic rooms higher than the mist of the streets"].<sup>139</sup>

An equivalent narrative development is discernible in the course of the Doinel cycle, running from the fairly classical narrative of *The 400 Blows* to *Love on the Run's* totally new narrative form. Though introducing new and innovative cinematic forms, which significantly developed the cinematic language, Truffaut's first feature film is still classical in narrative terms, as Preminger explains:<sup>140</sup>

"*The 400 Blows* introduced new cinematic forms within a classical, conventional narrative framework. Despite the formal innovations [...], its narrative structure corresponds to the criteria formulated by Stam in his definition of a classical-realistic narrative. Antoine [...] struggled to solve a definite problem [...]. This desire is anchored in distinct psychological plausibility [...] which he tries to overcome throughout the film. The narrative retains unity of place, time and action, even when individual scenes shatter the Aristotelian unities, as a result of breaks in the sequential, smooth cinematography or deviations from conventional editing norms. [...] the film's ending, though innovative in formal terms with its freeze-frame, constitutes what Stam would call a classic resolution: Antoine's wish is realized [...]. These formal innovations, which characterize the cinematic style Truffaut fashioned in *The 400 Blows*, have no direct influence on the film's narrative structure – the innovations belong to the category Stam mentions in his explanation regarding the relation between realism and classic texts. As he states, 'these terms denote a set of formal parameters involving practices of editing, camerawork, and sound which promote the appearance of spatial and temporal continuity. This continuity was achieved,

<sup>138</sup> Baudelaire 1975, pp. 275-276.

<sup>139</sup> Baudelaire (translation: Martin Sorrell) 2010, pp. 3-4.

<sup>140</sup> Preminger 2006, pp. 187-190. (In Hebrew, English publication in print, translation: Mindy Ivry).



in the classical Hollywood film, by etiquette for introducing new scenes (a choreographed progression from establishing shot to medium shot to close shot); conventional devices for evoking the passage of time (dissolves, iris effects); editing techniques to smooth over the transition from shot to shot (the 30 degree rule, position matches, direction matches, movement matches, inserts to cover up unavoidable discontinuities); and devices for implying subjectivity (interior monologue, subjective shots, eyeline matches, empathic music)'. (Stam, 2000, p. 143) [...] Truffaut broke many of these rules in *The 400 Blows*. In certain instances, Truffaut's new cinematic language has been found to have had local implications regarding the narrative structure [...]. These scenes defy the narrative principle that Stam describes as the natural choice in classical narration".<sup>141</sup>

Truffaut departed further and further from the classical narrative, and as Gillain clarifies,<sup>142</sup> these disruptions of the classical reach their peak in *Love on the Run*:

"*L'Amour en fuite* se présente d'abord comme une expérience cinématographique entièrement nouvelle. Réunissant des bribes de films antérieurs pour les intégrer à un récit contemporain, le film tisse une évocation du passé unique au cinéma".<sup>143</sup>

["*Love on the Run* introduces itself first of all as an entirely new cinematic experience. By assembling snippets from preceding films, in order to integrate them into a contemporary narrative, the film weaves an evocation of the past, which is unique in cinema"].<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Gillain 1980.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>144</sup> Translation is mine.

## Epilogue: A Film Is Born

Truffaut's trajectory from a classical to a totally innovative narrative runs parallel to Antoine's liberation from emotional constraints throughout the Doinel films. In the last film of the Doinel cycle Antoine's autobiographical novel is finally born, and is baptized *The Salads of Love* (Les Salades de l'amour). Preminger<sup>145</sup> offers an interesting interpretation of this strange name, stressing the complex interrelations between an artwork and the reality of which it is a mimesis, and suggests that "salads" is a new form of narration:

"The discussion of autobiography's obligation to reality, which Truffaut provokes by means of Antoine, justifies the title 'Salad of Love' that Antoine finally decides to give to his autobiographical book. In the film *Bed and Board* he is in a dilemma about what title to give his book, and a neighbor suggests the title: 'Neither Trumpets nor Drums' (*Bed and Board*, 1970, 0:56:51-0:56:53 min). The name Antoine chooses, which we hear about for the first time here, alludes to the 'salad' that Antoine makes of all the events of his life, while the book, in the end, is different from the multiplicity of its components. Actually 'salad' also constitutes an image of the cinematic project that Truffaut carries out here with his earlier films that are components in the present cinematic product, *Love on the Run*".<sup>146</sup>

Nevertheless, the book's title also refers to the mental process Antoine undergoes throughout the five films. Antoine Doinel's life is marked by the sign of prison, which is rooted in a fundamental adolescent trauma that occurs in *The 400 Blows*. After stealing a typewriter from his father's office, his father turns him in to the police. Antoine finds himself watching the streets of Paris through the bars at the rear of a police van; this "joyride" ends in a night in police custody, and then imprisonment in a juvenile detention center.<sup>147</sup>

Preminger explains the symbolic meaning of Antoine's non-conventional theft:

"This is not a random act of theft; it's a typewriter, a machine through which people express themselves linguistically. The machine was stolen from his father's office, not from an unknown location, which lessens the criminal meaning of the act and suggests a Bloomian interpretation of the oedipal symbolism involved: the son steals a machine that produces words from his father; in other words, he needs to do this in order to formulate his own voice, and his father reacts aggressively".<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Preminger 2004.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., p. 188.

<sup>147</sup> After this first experience, prison recurs in the Doinel cycle through content and cinematic language, as in the opening scene of *Stolen Kisses* which finds Antoine in a military prison.

<sup>148</sup> Preminger 2006, p. 107. (In Hebrew, English publication in print, translation: Mindy Ivry).

The completion of the book is the moment in which Antoine has finally formulated his own voice vis-à-vis his forefathers, among whom Baudelaire is an important one. In French, the police van for transporting detainees is known as “un panier à salad”<sup>149</sup> [literally: a salad basket]. In Baudelaire’s “Spleen IV,” different kinds of prisons are used as metaphors, and the sense of imprisonment grows as the poem progresses.<sup>150</sup> The intertextual dialogue in *Bed and Board* is the penultimate link in the chain, which anticipates the next film; the ultimate title of Antoine’s book, *Les Salades de l’amour*, corresponds to the fundamental adolescent experience, and the Doinel cycle comes full circle.

“The film of tomorrow will be an act of love”<sup>151</sup> writes Truffaut when he describes the novelty of the *Nouvelle Vague* cinema, and associates the act of making films with the act of making love. After being conceived for twenty years, Antoine Doinel’s book can finally be born and so can Truffaut’s film.

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<sup>149</sup> See: Rey-Debove 2004, p. 1206.

<sup>150</sup> For detailed explanation, see: Richter 2001, pp. 767-779.

<sup>151</sup> Truffaut 1978, p. 19.

## Conclusion

This essay validates Preminger's hypothesis that Truffaut's intertextual interpretation is crucial to any profound understanding of Truffaut's films, and expands it beyond cinematic and prose-literature intertexts. We can well establish the hypothesis that Baudelaire is an important forefather of Truffaut, along with Hitchcock, Renoir, Balzac, and Proust. Moreover, a single line is a signifier to Hitchcock, Baudelaire, and Balzac at the same time, indicating that the different influences are not mutually exclusive but complementary. The importance of Baudelaire's influence is enhanced by its appearance at the beginning of Antoine's journey towards becoming a professional writer; at the same time, it sends us back to the fundamental experience that initiated his drive to write.

The dialogue with Baudelaire helps Truffaut articulate the complex relationship of cinema with the literary medium. Truffaut's films, and his cinematic *Weltanschauung*, are rooted in poetry at least as much as they are rooted in prose literature; but most of all, they correspond to the hybrid genre of prose poetry. At the same time, the dual act of appropriation of Baudelaire, as well as wrestling with him, contributes to establishing Truffaut's position as a (re)former of modernist cinema; consciously or not, being Baudelaire's cinematic double entitles Truffaut to be "the film director of modern life" and the Doinel cycle to be *The Spleen of Paris* of its time.

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