



## Baudelaire

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The publication in 1857 of *LES FLEURS DU MAL* (*FLOWERS OF EVIL*) established Charles Baudelaire as the preeminent poet of his generation. Their prosecution as an immoral work established him as a victim of bourgeois incomprehension. In *BAUDELAIRE* Joanna Richardson pursues the details of the private life of this difficult man.

Richardson posits the poet's bonds with his parents as keys to his life. His father, a former priest who died when Charles was six, loved art and literature. His mother, Caroline Dufays was preoccupied with security. His stepfather, Jacques Aupick, loved the talented child but became estranged from the poet. As an adult, the son continued to struggle for proofs of affection from his mother while rejecting the social structures and discipline the Aupicks held dear. This conflict underlies Baudelaire's poems and love affairs, in which women are seen as "Madonna" or "Whore." Richardson considers the intrinsic merits of Baudelaire's body of prose work, translations of Edgar Allan Poe, and criticism of art, literature, and music, as well as his verse and prose poetry. The final tragic years, when mother and friends nursed Baudelaire, robbed of speech by syphilis, are a poignant illustration of the love and respect which he inspired, in spite of his failure in worldly terms.

Richardson quotes copiously from Baudelaire's literary texts and from personal papers of the poet and his circle. With verse quoted only in the original language, the book presupposes a knowledge of French and broad acquaintance with nineteenth century France. The text is accompanied by endnotes, a bibliography of works in French and English, and an index. Illustrations include portraits of the artist as well as family members, colleagues, and friends.

## Sources for Further Study

*London Review of Books*. XVI, March 24, 1994, p. 7.

*Los Angeles Times Book Review*. LXII, January 15, 1995, p. 4.

*The Observer*. April 3, 1994, p. 19.

*The Spectator*. CCLXXII, March 26, 1994, p. 31.

*The Times Literary Supplement*. March 25, 1994, p. 10.

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