

THE ASKING PRICE by *Helen Hull*
(COWARD-MCCANN. \$2.50)

HELEN HULL has finally and undeniably demonstrated her skill in the craft of fiction in *The Asking Price*. This story of a frustrated poet, set against the background of a provincial college town, is grimly and dramatically effective.

The evolution of Oliver Gilbert is principally directed by his wife, Audrey—a pretty, narrow-minded, rather hard young woman, with no particular imagination, and with an unbounded respect for social propriety and for economic success. Beneath her unintermittent prodding, the idealistic, aspiring, poetic college instructor becomes a successful professor, full of years and scholarly honors, head of his department and assistant dean of the college. Oliver is bound securely to the treadmill of his barren and successful days, first by his wife's charm, and by her inflexible notions of good and evil, later by his love for his daughter Olive, to whom he passes the burden of his dreams.

The book is well and graphically written, crowded with fine characterizations, with excellently contrived and effective incidents. Yet it is not wholly rounded or convincing. A glint of humor, which it lacks, or a tinge of irony, or even the admission of another side to the unbalanced equation of Oliver Gilbert's life, might have imparted to it a quality of enduring satisfaction.

MARGARET WALLACE

FLIGHT WITHOUT END by *Joseph Roth*
(DOUBLEDAY, DORAN. \$2.50)

ONE more spiritual autobiography, one more novel dictated by the disillusionment of post-war Europe is *Flight Without End*. The hero Tunda, we cannot help feeling, is Roth

the man regarded with the extended vision of Roth the writer; and his restless flight across Europe in search of his war-time fiancée represents the search for lost romance in a world of stale disenchantments. That the quest fails doubly shows us just how completely the Tundas of Europe are victims of their generation: for not only does the girl fail to recognize Tunda when he finds her, but Tunda himself is beyond caring or doing anything about it.

The familiar note struck in this book, the spectacle it presents of one more *âme égarée*, makes us pause for artistic no less than human reasons. For in the case of men who, like Roth, have real talents, these contemplations of the Waste Land—the only land they know or seem fated ever to know—indicate that the talents will never reach their full flowering. Roth has written eight books, and how many people have heard of him? Yet he has both natural gifts and acquired polish and skill; his little pictures of a city or a milieu, his snapshots of a personality or the summary of an existence are delightfully keen and witty. Reading them, one thinks of Bruno Frank or Jean Giraudoux. But all these merits are doomed to remain on the level of dilettantism so long as Roth's soul is sick and his only reaction to life one of impotence and futility. In an age whose literature is surcharged with purposelessness and negation he, as one more messenger who bears the same tidings, must represent, not only a human but also an artistic tragedy. This is not to discount nor pass over his sufferings, nor to deny that they have bred ironic sensibilities which are culturally valuable; it is only to insist because one must that such writing has small moral or emotional leverage, small contact with the life that still continues, though Roth's be ten years ended.

LOUIS KRONENBERGER

BIOGRAPHY

BAUDELAIRE by *Lewis Piaget Shanks*
(LITTLE, BROWN. \$3.50)

IN his recent *Variété II*, Paul Valéry says: "Baudelaire has reached the height of glory. . . . If among our poets there are any greater and more richly gifted than Baudelaire, there is none more *important*". And one might add that among the numerous studies in French and English which have contributed to the posthumous fame of this long-misunderstood poet, none is more important or more satisfying than that by Mr. Shanks, who had already given us his excellent translation of *Les Fleurs du mal*. For unhampered by the vague enthusiasm of Arthur Symonds or the scientific thesis of certain French writers, he presents the man and his work in a manner at once sympathetic and critical.

In this very living biography we can forget for the moment the satanic genius who, in Victor Hugo's words of faint praise, "created a new shudder", and follow rather the pitiful sufferings of the man. In 1842, at twenty, Charles Baudelaire was an extraordinarily idealistic youth, full of promise and confidence; in 1866, pursued by creditors and ravaged by disease, abandoned by his friends and constantly scolded by his adored mother, after having been fined for immoral writings and seen his masterpieces ignored by a hostile world, he could escape suicide only through recourse to laudanum. Yet, somehow, he never abandoned his ideal, though he often mocked it; in his love affairs as in his financial relations, in his experiments with drugs as in his literary projects, he never lost the need of creating a dream-world about him. In this respect, as Mr. Shanks indicates, his poems "moulded him no less than he mould-

ed them" until the poet became "the victim of a youthful mask, which grew into his flesh and became a part of it".

This picture of the poet does justice also to the critic; for as Baudelaire himself said, "It is impossible for a poet not to contain a critic". And besides that self-criticism which is inseparable from artistic creation, he exercised his taste on his contemporaries by writing the first intelligent judgments of Delacroix, Daumier, Constantin Guys and Wagner. But the greatest of his non-poetic works is undoubtedly his interpretation of Edgar Allan Poe, to the rewriting of whose stories—for the translation far surpasses the original—he devoted seventeen years, with the result that Poe now enjoys a European reputation such as he has never had at home.

Swinburne perhaps best epitomized Baudelaire's threefold claim to fame when he called him "the illustrious poet, the faultless critic, the fearless artist". Unfortunately Mr. Shanks does not give much consideration to the literary innovations which establish Baudelaire's place in the tradition of French poetry—a singularly significant position between two great movements, where, through his insistence upon a more solid substance and purer form, he stands out as the turning point in the evolution from the romanticism of Hugo to the symbolism of Verlaine and Mallarmé.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN

SIR HARRY JOHNSTON, HIS LIFE
AND LETTERS by *Alex Johnston* (CAPE &
SMITH. \$3.50)

THE LATE Sir Harry Johnston, whom most American readers will remember as the author of *The Gay-Donkeys* and of *Mrs. War-*