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decidedly fits the crime: Nicholas is condemned to watch a pornographic film starring Lily Montgomery and, still strapped to a rack, to observe her in a real act of copulation. But even this is far from the end of his trials, or ours. The reader whose curiosity equals that of the hero (and he must surely be a masochist) follows Nicholas through further ordeals, all directed at his rehabilitation. When the novel ends, as it was bound to do, in a whopping anticlimax, it is hard to say whether relief or resentment predominates.

If the case against Nicholas as a man was clear-cut, the case against Fowles as novelist is less so. Despite the preposterous assumptions of his story, he does induce avid suspension of disbelief for long stretches of lucid prose. Both his narrative skill and his intellectual pretensions are exceptional; the former deserves and the latter demand serious consideration.

As a technician Fowles commands respect even though, or rather because, his mode is conventional. His effort, here and in the morbidly ingenious *Collector*, to stretch the limits of realism by use of fantastic subject matter merits applause. Facile at invention and style, Fowles easily fulfills the external requirements of fiction, and by so doing provokes us all the more with his internal failures. Like a vaudeville magician himself, he seems hopeful that quickness of the hand will deceive the mind.

His pretension to something more than entertainer is, however, registered in an introductory quotation. This claims that the popular definition of "magus" as "mountebank in the world of vulgar trickery . . . has the same correspondence with the real symbolical meaning that the use of the Tarot in fortune-telling has . . . to the secret science of symbolism."

If we take this hint seriously and seek religious allegory in the godlike actions of the magus, we must call Fowles's novel irreverent, for his magician is at best a second-rate miracle worker who, although wealthy enough to play what he calls "the godgame," resorts to fake Modiglianis when he wants to im-

press his victims. On the other hand, if we pursue another of the novel's erudite suggestions, we may consider it a philosophical metaphor and Fowles "a sort of Empson of the event." In that case, too, we must blame the novel, for as a metaphor is it not only overextended but hopelessly mixed, a jumble of vast platitudes neither systematized nor disguised by their elaborate staging.

If, in last resort, we simply judge the novel at face value as a story of sin and redemption, we can grant it originality and yet find that it lacks the dimension implied by its massive paraphernalia. At this level the novel fails in elementary human terms, for Nicholas never justifies the care lavished on him by heroine, magician, or author. From first to last, he is mean, petty, commonplace, a bore. With Nicholas as target for miracles, it must finally be said that the godgame is not worth the candle.

The Poet As Critic

ALFRED WERNER

THE PAINTER OF MODERN LIFE, AND OTHER ESSAYS, by Charles Baudelaire. \$6.95.

ART IN PARIS 1845-1862, by Charles Baudelaire, \$7.95. Phaidon Publishers; distributed by the New York Graphic Society.

Art criticism got off to a start only in 1759, when Denis Diderot, the brilliant man of letters, began to review the mammoth exhibitions called Salons. His reviews, also called Salons, are still readableone wonders how many of today's reviews will be two centuries hence! The actual father of modern art criticism, however, was the Symbolist poet Charles Baudelaire, whose lengthy but never boring surveys of art in Paris under Louis Philippe and then under Napoleon III are now at last available to us, superbly translated and edited by Jonathan Mayne, in two well-designed and well-illustrated volumes.

Picasso once argued that it would be better if all critics were poets, and wrote poetry instead of pedantry. Baudelaire, however, felt that every

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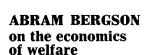
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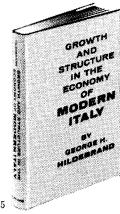
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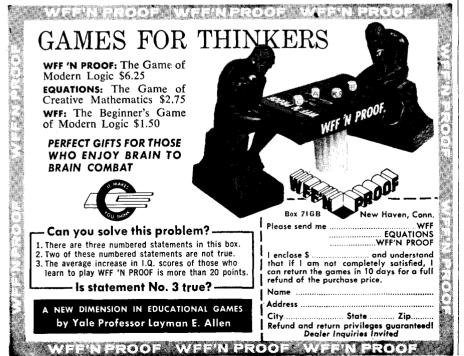
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true poet had also within him a good critic, and indeed, some of the most lucid utterances on the visual arts come from him, and from Gautier, Valéry, Apollinaire, and Eluard, as well as from Heine and Wilde. Except for two essays on Poe and one on Wagner, these volumes deal with painters, mostly contemporaries, though there are also notes on Hogarth, Goya, and Brueghel. It is hardly surprising that Delacroix gets top rank-he is mentioned in every one of the five reviews of group shows, including the one from which he was pointedly excluded. Even before they had met, the young man wrote in what was his first important published work, the Salon of 1845: "M. Delacroix is decidedly the most original painter of ancient or of modern times." The great romantic painter helped the young poet to crystallize his ideas, and the latter often transcribed the profound thoughts of the artist who had a philosophical bent. One of the major essays here is the twenty-eightpage eulogy written a few weeks after Delacroix' death in August,

True, he hails as the "Painter of Modern Life" a mediocrity named Constantin Guys, whose sketches of nineteenth-century Parisian life might be forgotten were it not for the poet's enthusiasm, extending over forty pages. But notwithstanding his strange partisanship for "Monsieur G" (as he is called throughout the essay), Baudelaire was as much opposed to naturalism and even realism as was his mentor Delacroix, and therefore unable to appreciate fully Courbet or Manet. To a twentieth-century man who ardently espouses Kandinsky's plea for the "spiritual in art," Baudelaire appears to embody all that is expected from a writer on art. For he was against a sterile imitation of nature. He defined art, instead, as "the creation of an evocative magic." He glorified individualism, personality, fantasy, and imagination, asserting that it was the artist's task to decompose the world and to create new worlds. The real genius was the artist who had the power to arouse, through a painting, the poetry that lav buried in the viewer's soul.

In a sense, Baudelaire anticipated

Surrealism and even the nonfigurative art that emerged about half a century after his death. He modestly gave credit to those before him who had voiced their preference for vision over the drudgery of reproducing natural occurrences. He approvingly quotes the expatriate Heine, who wrote, "The artist cannot find all his forms in nature . . . the most remarkable are revealed to him in his soul," and he freely transforms a dictum of Delacroix' by comparing nature to a "vast dictionary whose leaves he [the artist] turns and consults with a sure and searching eye." Of course Kandinsky's completely nonobjective compositions were still in the womb of the future; the artist, looking at the visible world, still had to make use of it in order to express himself. But he could use images that were common to all in order to communicate ideas that were his own exclusively, that is to say, to express visually "the invisible . . . the intangible." Just as the poet, for his own special purposes, uses words that belong to all, so the painter, Baudelaire tells us, considers the universe a vast storehouse of signs, from which he selects a few to transform and combine them at will. Not only Kandinsky comes to mind here but also Klee (who counted Baudelaire among his favorite authors), for the stress is on creative imagination, on the "soul" (one of the poet's key words); in short, on the metaphysical.

The essays assembled here are declarations of emancipation from nature (which in itself is crude and lacks design) and pleas for the greatest formal freedom for the artist, who must be allowed to set his own imprint on his transformations of reality. The modern artists—cosmopolitan, autonomous, sensitive, and intelligent—must leave the narrowly positive world in which only photographers reproduce what they see, and must instead follow their inner law.

It is not important that Baudelaire at times overestimated artists whose names can now be found nowhere except in his essays, and failed to perceive the excellence of some of his important contemporaries. The critic may make mistakes. He may not write without having his

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own point of view. Baudelaire did have an aesthetic; in fact, he formulated Romanticism in the visual arts when he demanded "intimacy, spirituality, color, aspiration towards the infinite, expressed by every means available to the art." (Again anticipating Kandinsky and Klee, he also talked of the "melodiousness" of certain paintings.)

Do I seem to imply that these four hundred-odd pages contain nothing but distilled theory? Nothing could be further from the fact. Baudelaire's prose is as elegant, charming, and carefully wrought as his poetry. He also knew that nobody wanted to read the cold, unfeeling reviews that were common in his time (and are still more common today). He tried, instead, to write pieces that would be not only "passionate" but also "amusing and poetic." He always begins with the shock of pleasure (or its opposite) received from the contemplation of a work of art. He then proceeds to examine why he reacts as he does, thus transforming volupté into connaissance. By knowledge he does not, of course, mean the dry information that can be culled from reference books, but rather that intuition which is in itself a spontaneous creation.

IHROUGHOUT the two volumes we might be walking through the exhibition halls in the company of a serious and sensitive man, a splendid talker who at the same time has something of the schoolmaster about him. The writing of these essays, for Baudelaire, was neither a mere job (as it might be for a journalist) nor solely an instrument for self-expression (as it is for "critics" who seem to care not at all whether they communicate). Baudelaire was an educator who wanted to reform the artist's worst enemy, the bourgeois.

Indeed, the Salon of 1846 is specifically dedicated to the gentlemen of the bourgeoisie. "You can live three days without bread—without poetry, never . . . you need art." With missionary zeal he explains: "Art is an infinitely precious good, a draught both refreshing and cheering which restores the stomach and the mind to the natural equilibrium of the ideal."

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