

# The Modern Portrait in Nineteenth-Century France

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## Courbet and Baudelaire

### Portraiture against the Grain of Photography

The portrait, that type of painting which appears so modest, calls for an immense intelligence. No doubt the artist's submissiveness must be great, but his power of divination must be equally so. Whenever I see a good portrait, I can guess at all the artist's efforts, who must not only have seen at once all that lay on the surface but must also have guessed at what lay hidden. I compared him just now to the historian, and I might also compare him to the actor. . . . If you care to examine the matter closely, nothing in a portrait is a matter of indifference. Gesture, grimace, clothing, even decor – all must serve to realize a character.

– Baudelaire, “Salon of 1859”<sup>1</sup>

Although much has been written about the genesis and sources of Gustave Courbet's realism, little attention has been devoted to his portraits, with the exception of the early self-portraits dating from the 1840s.<sup>2</sup> This is somewhat surprising in light of the key position portraiture occupied in Courbet's artistic production, especially during the early years when he was formulating a distinctive, individual attitude toward art making. In Courbet's case, his persona as radical realist and *homme engagé* has tended to overshadow his less glamorous supporting role as maker of portraits. Yet he painted numerous portraits, both commissioned and uncommissioned, throughout his lifetime; indeed, several of his most important artistic manifestoes, such as *Burial at Ornans* (1849–50) and *The Studio* (1854–55), are monumental group portraits. In the statement accompanying his 1855 realist exhibition, Courbet insisted that the artist's task was to translate the customs, ideas, and appearance of his epoch.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, as I shall argue, the double insistence upon physical resemblance and inner truth in portraiture,



together with the antithetical traditions of viewing the human face either as natural purveyor of emotions or as visual convention and semiotic field, made the portrait a crucial testing ground for the expressive capacities of realism.<sup>4</sup>

Courbet, who arrived in Paris in 1839, sold almost nothing for a decade. He subsisted on the allowance he received from his father, copied the old masters in the Louvre, and by the late 1840s had formulated his own version of realism.<sup>5</sup> It was portraits (and self-portraits) which first brought him official recognition at the Salon during these years. In 1849 he made his mark with *After Dinner at Ornans*, a monumental group portrait that was purchased by the state. Although Courbet mentions individual portraits with some frequency in his correspondence – especially during the 1840s – it is difficult to assess his attitude toward portraiture. In two letters written to his family in 1845 he complained about financial pettiness, the degradation of bourgeois taste (sounding like Baudelaire), and the compromising demands of portrait painting.<sup>6</sup> Yet Courbet's later correspondence with Bruyas and others provides conflicting testimony.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, the numerous portraits he painted throughout his career attest to his continued interest – both aesthetic and financial – in the making of portraits.

Although money was the primary incentive for most artists who produced portraits, Courbet painted numerous uncommissioned, informal portraits of friends (such as that of Baudelaire) that were not economically motivated. Moreover, his portraits (including those of Baudelaire and Trapadoux) are considered seminal examples of his realist style.<sup>8</sup> For a realist who eschewed allegory and insisted upon direct observation of the visible world, portrait painting would appear to have been a rather straightforward operation. In Courbet's case, however, this is far from self-evident. A surprising number of the portraits and self-portraits from the 1840s and beyond are infused with subjectivity and seek to represent inner states, such as reverie.<sup>9</sup> In more programmatic canvases, such as *Burial at Ornans*, Courbet enlisted the portrait in the realist enterprise of translating the ideas and appearance of his epoch and invested portraiture with the ambitious scale and cultural authority of history painting. Far more than an epiphenomenon at the periphery of Courbet's art, portraiture played a crucial role in the development of his realist style in the late 1840s.

Despite its long history and unabated popularity in the nineteenth century, portraiture tended to be considered primarily as an end product rather than as an artistic process. Like still-life painting, it was equated primarily with objective observation and accurate transcription, in other words, with replication of a prototype (in this case the model). The validity (and value) of portraiture was therefore based on the amorphous and highly dubious concept of resemblance. Photography, with its seemingly miraculous capacity to record the human face with an unprecedented degree of exactitude, introduced a superior form of mechanical reproduction and a new realist paradigm. Inevitably, the

painted portrait was forced to realign (and redefine) itself in relation to the new medium, either as analogous to or, more important, in reaction against photography.

The 1840s, Courbet's formative years, coincided with the coming of age of photography, which developed rapidly and by mid-century posed a serious threat to artists, in particular professional portrait painters.<sup>10</sup> With the advent of photography, the portrait was effectively democratized, and portrait photography became a flourishing industry. By the late 1850s inexpensive photographic portraits had become widely available in the form of *cartes de visite*.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, photography purportedly introduced a new, objective form of vision that was able to record the visible world with an unprecedented degree of detail. Indeed, hostile critics routinely faulted realist artists and writers for following nature too closely and for creating works that resembled daguerreotypes.<sup>12</sup> It is this uneasy convergence of portraiture, photography, and the realist aesthetic at mid-century that I now wish to examine more closely, by focusing on Courbet's enigmatic *Portrait of Baudelaire* (c. 1848–49; Fig. 4).<sup>13</sup> Rather than presenting a convincing likeness in the conventional sense, this indeterminate, private depiction of the *poète maudit* should be read against the grain of photography. Moreover, it illustrates the dangers of attempting to circumscribe too narrowly Courbet's polyvalent, realist style and foreshadows Baudelaire's antiphotographic diatribe in his "Salon of 1859."<sup>14</sup>

### **Courbet and Baudelaire: Art, Amitié, and Bohemianism**

Yes, dear friend, even in our so civilized society, I must lead the life of a savage. I must break free even from governments. The people have my sympathy. I must turn to them directly. I must get my knowledge from them, and they must provide me with a living. Therefore I have just embarked on the great wandering and independent life of the bohemian.

– Courbet, letter to Francis Wey<sup>15</sup>

To glorify vagabondage and what one might call Bohemianism, the cult of multiplied sensation, expressing itself through music.

– Baudelaire<sup>16</sup>

What is art? Prostitution.

– Baudelaire<sup>17</sup>

Nothing is known of the circumstances that incited Courbet to paint Baudelaire's portrait. We do not even know exactly when Courbet and Baudelaire met, although they almost certainly knew each other by 1847.<sup>18</sup> Both were part of the radical bohemian coterie who frequented the Brasserie Andler in the late 1840s, and they shared an interest in popular art forms, such as caricature and pantomime, and the working-class ballads of Pierre Dupont, as



4. Gustave Courbet, *Charles Baudelaire*, c. 1848–49. Montpellier, Musée Fabre. Photo Frédéric Jaulmes.

well as progressive politics.<sup>19</sup> The bohemia inhabited by Courbet and Baudelaire in the late 1840s was artistic, intellectual, and political. Passageway to success, laboratory for the avant-garde, and repository for radicalism, it provided a fluid space for individual experimentation and the forging of an artistic identity in opposition to bourgeois society.<sup>20</sup> Boisterous bon vivant, braggart, and *blagueur*, Courbet was a lifelong bohemian, who unabashedly manifested his sociopolitical convictions and his disdain for bourgeois conventions despite his artistic success. Conversely, Baudelaire was a bohemian by necessity rather than inclination. Constantly on the move to escape his creditors and forced to live as a vagabond, Baudelaire nevertheless espoused dandyism as the last flicker of heroism in a decadent age.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, what Baudelaire sought (and found) in bohemia was the cult of multiple sensations and escape through intoxication, which provided the catalyst for his creativity. Moreover, bohemia represented the opposite pole of dandyism, a necessary counterpoise in the dualistic system he envisaged, in which the self was both vaporized and central-



ized.<sup>22</sup> For Courbet, bohemia provided a more complex sort of artistic and mental liberation – both an identity and a disguise – and the means for simultaneously approaching and distancing himself from the Parisian intellectual milieu.<sup>23</sup>

The evidence substantiating the friendship between Courbet and Baudelaire is sketchy and inconclusive at best.<sup>24</sup> Even the stories about Baudelaire taking refuge in Courbet's studio (most likely in 1849) are maddeningly imprecise. Gros-Kost recounts the picaresque tale of Courbet, looming over the unconscious poet, waiting to record his opium-induced visions.<sup>25</sup> In 1851 Baudelaire published *Du vin et du haschisch*, which was subsequently incorporated into *Les paradis artificiels*.<sup>26</sup> Although it is tempting to link the portrait to Baudelaire's stay in Courbet's studio, there is no documentation, and the *Portrait of Baudelaire* cannot be dated precisely. First exhibited in Courbet's realist pavilion in 1855, the picture was purchased by the publisher Auguste Poulet-Malassis in 1859.<sup>27</sup> In the catalogue for his 1855 exhibition, Courbet dated the portrait 1850; however, most scholars have placed it earlier.<sup>28</sup> The etching Félix Bracquemond made after Courbet's portrait bears the legend "peint en 1848."<sup>29</sup> Moreover, external evidence indicates a date no earlier than 1847 and no later than 1849.<sup>30</sup> These are the years when Courbet and Baudelaire were most closely associated; furthermore, before 1847 Baudelaire wore his hair long and sported a beard (see Fig. 8).

In retrospect, 1849 marks the apogee of Courbet and Baudelaire's personal and professional relationship. In 1849 Baudelaire assisted Courbet by proposing his works for state purchase and by preparing notices for the works Courbet sent to the Salon that year.<sup>31</sup> And it was most likely in 1849 that Baudelaire took refuge in Courbet's studio. That year Courbet embarked on his ambitious series of canvases recording rural life and customs, which established him as the leading proponent of realist art and brought him widespread notoriety. But it was Champfleury, not Baudelaire, who zealously championed Courbet's contested canvases. After 1849 Baudelaire's artistic and intellectual interests began to diverge from those of Courbet and the realist *cénacle*, although he wrote a laudatory preface for Pierre Dupont's *Chants et chansons* in 1851 and published ground-breaking articles on caricature in the 1850s.<sup>32</sup>

Baudelaire never wrote about any of Courbet's paintings, and there is no extant correspondence between poet and painter.<sup>33</sup> Baudelaire had, however, intended to write an essay on Courbet and the realist movement, which was never completed. In the fragmentary notes for "Puisque réalisme il y a," he unflatteringly characterized Courbet as a "clumsy Machiavelli" intoxicated by Champfleury.<sup>34</sup> There is no way of knowing whether Baudelaire desisted from publishing his realist diatribe out of procrastination or out of amity. In "Peintres et aquafortistes," published in *Le Boulevard* in 1862, there is one final, highly ambivalent statement about Courbet's art. Baudelaire attributed Courbet's immense success to the poverty of ideas and absurdities of French

painting. Yet, paradoxically, he also credited him with helping to reestablish the taste for simplicity, directness, and a disinterested love of painting.<sup>35</sup> It was the obscure illustrator Constantin Guys (not Courbet) whom Baudelaire immortalized as “le peintre de la vie moderne” in 1863.<sup>36</sup> Courbet, for his part, manifested his ambivalent feelings about Baudelaire and the art of poetry in one of his most peculiar pictorial projects, a mock-heroic “epic” satirizing poetic inspiration entitled *Source of Hippocrene*, in which Baudelaire was to be represented, notes in hand.<sup>37</sup>

After 1850, Courbet and Baudelaire drifted apart as they pursued their divergent artistic and literary careers. Courbet based his depiction of Baudelaire in *The Studio* (1854–55) on the earlier *Portrait of Baudelaire* that had remained in his studio.<sup>38</sup> Baudelaire figures prominently at the far right among Courbet’s patrons and shareholders. But the solitary poet is absorbed in his book and seemingly oblivious of the painter. In a letter to Champfleury recounting the work in progress, Courbet described the poet at the extreme right, perched on a table, reading, but cryptically added, “I should have begun with Baudelaire.”<sup>39</sup> What exactly did Courbet mean? A closer examination of Courbet’s puzzling *Portrait of Baudelaire* will elucidate the ambivalent relationship between painter and poet at mid-century and help to delineate the amorphous “field” or “space of possibilities” of the modern portrait in contrast to photography.<sup>40</sup>

At the most basic level, Courbet’s intimate, small-scale portrait represents Baudelaire seated in profile, reading and smoking in an interior. Stacked on the desk are books and a portfolio, presided over by an inkstand and quill pen – the tools of the writer’s profession. The canvas documents the intellectual work of Baudelaire and attests to the personal ties linking Courbet and Baudelaire in the late 1840s. T. J. Clark situates the *Portrait of Baudelaire* in the context of radical politics and bohemianism in the 1840s, yet concedes that it is a highly equivocal (and private) image of a short-lived friendship.<sup>41</sup>

During the 1840s and 1850s Courbet painted a number of his Parisian confreres, including Marc Trapadoux, Francis Wey, Berlioz, and Champfleury, as well as a revealing series of self-portraits in which he adopted different personas, notably that of bohemian radical in *Man with a Pipe* (1848–49; Fig. 5).<sup>42</sup> The *Portrait of Baudelaire* should be included within this corpus of masculine occupational portraits representing intellectuals and artists. Courbet also portrayed the eccentric Fourierist apostle Jean Journet in the guise of the Wandering Jew.<sup>43</sup> In particular, the *Baudelaire* merits comparison with the *Portrait of Marc Trapadoux Examining a Book of Prints* (1849; Fig. 6). Courbet’s *Portrait of Baudelaire* will also be considered in relation to other contemporary depictions of Baudelaire, such as the early romantic icon by Emile Deroy and photographic portraits by Nadar and Carjat.<sup>44</sup>

The work that most closely approximates the *Baudelaire* in mood and significance, however, is the *Portrait of Trapadoux Examining a Book of Prints*



5. Gustave Courbet, *Man with a Pipe*, 1848–49. Montpellier, Musée Fabre. Photo Frédéric Jaulmes.

(1849). Trapadoux – bohemian, philosopher, and mystic – is depicted sprawled next to the stove in Courbet's studio, examining a print album, a pipe clutched absentmindedly in his left hand.<sup>45</sup> Like the *Baudelaire*, this intimate interior scene, which stresses the sitter's absorption, falls midway between portraiture and genre. The sense of distance is countered by the awkwardly foreshortened pose that extends into the viewer's space. Nadar's caricature of 1861 conflates Courbet's distorted perspective with that of a poorly executed snapshot.<sup>46</sup> Although Trapadoux is represented frontally, his head is lowered and his expression inscrutable. The *Portrait of Trapadoux* provides few overt clues about the sitter. Instead, it strikes a subtle balance between composure and disarray, suggesting through visual ambiguity the complexities of the sitter.<sup>47</sup> There is also a densely stumped black crayon study of Trapadoux in a pensive pose, his head supported by one hand (see Fig. 7). In comparing the drawing to the painting, the viewer is struck by Courbet's lack of concern with physical likeness in the painting. As in the *Portrait of Baudelaire*, Courbet is primarily preoccupied with recording the reflective state of mind characteristic of the sitter. In the painting Courbet deemphasizes physical likeness (denotation), relying primarily upon body language and visual ambiguity to connote Trapadoux's philosophical bent, asceticism, and exoticism. In 1850 Courbet wrote to



Champfleury that he thought of Trapadoux as “the medicine man associated with some savage tribe.”<sup>48</sup>

The portraits of Trapadoux and Baudelaire are also related to Courbet’s contemporary self-portraits, in particular *Man with a Pipe* (1848–49). Here Courbet poses aggressively and self-consciously as a radical bohemian, but the veiled gaze and indeterminate expression make the picture a complex, ambiguous image of the artist as utopian dreamer and *révolté*. Courbet later described it to his patron Bruyas as “the portrait of a fanatic, an ascetic.”<sup>49</sup> As this letter makes clear, Courbet envisaged his self-portraits as an autobiographical record and an expressive outlet for exploring and displaying the diverse facets of his personality. He exploited visual ambiguity even more effectively in the masterly conté crayon self-portrait, *Man with a Pipe* (c. 1846–48; Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford) by playing off directness and strategic role-playing against psychological distance and self-reflexivity, creating a subtle image that registers his attempt to fuse exterior and interior phenomena, realist corporeality and romantic mystery.<sup>50</sup> The portraits of his bohemian friends from the late 1840s are likewise unconventional exercises in the rendering of individual identity.

Courbet’s idiosyncratic *Portrait of Baudelaire*, which apparently satisfied neither artist nor sitter, poses an aesthetic and an art-historical dilemma.<sup>51</sup> In particular, the glowing color and lack of precision contrast vividly with Courbet’s more straightforward portraits of the 1840s, such as that of H. J. van Wisselingh (1846; Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth, Tex.). Even the hypothesis that the *Baudelaire* is merely an *ébauche poussée* fails to explain its stylistic anomalies and fundamental ambivalence.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, in considering Courbet’s portraits, artistic strategies cannot be divorced from the problem of representing character. In his “Salon of 1859” Baudelaire asserted that nothing is indifferent in a portrait, that gesture, clothing, even decor, all play a role in delineating character; but at the same time he insisted that the portraitist must delve below the surface to divine what is hidden.<sup>53</sup> Finally, what exactly did Courbet mean when he complained that he was unable to “realize” Baudelaire’s portrait? More than merely a *boutade*, his remark speaks to the central challenge faced by the portrait painter and provides the key to deciphering the *Portrait of Baudelaire*.

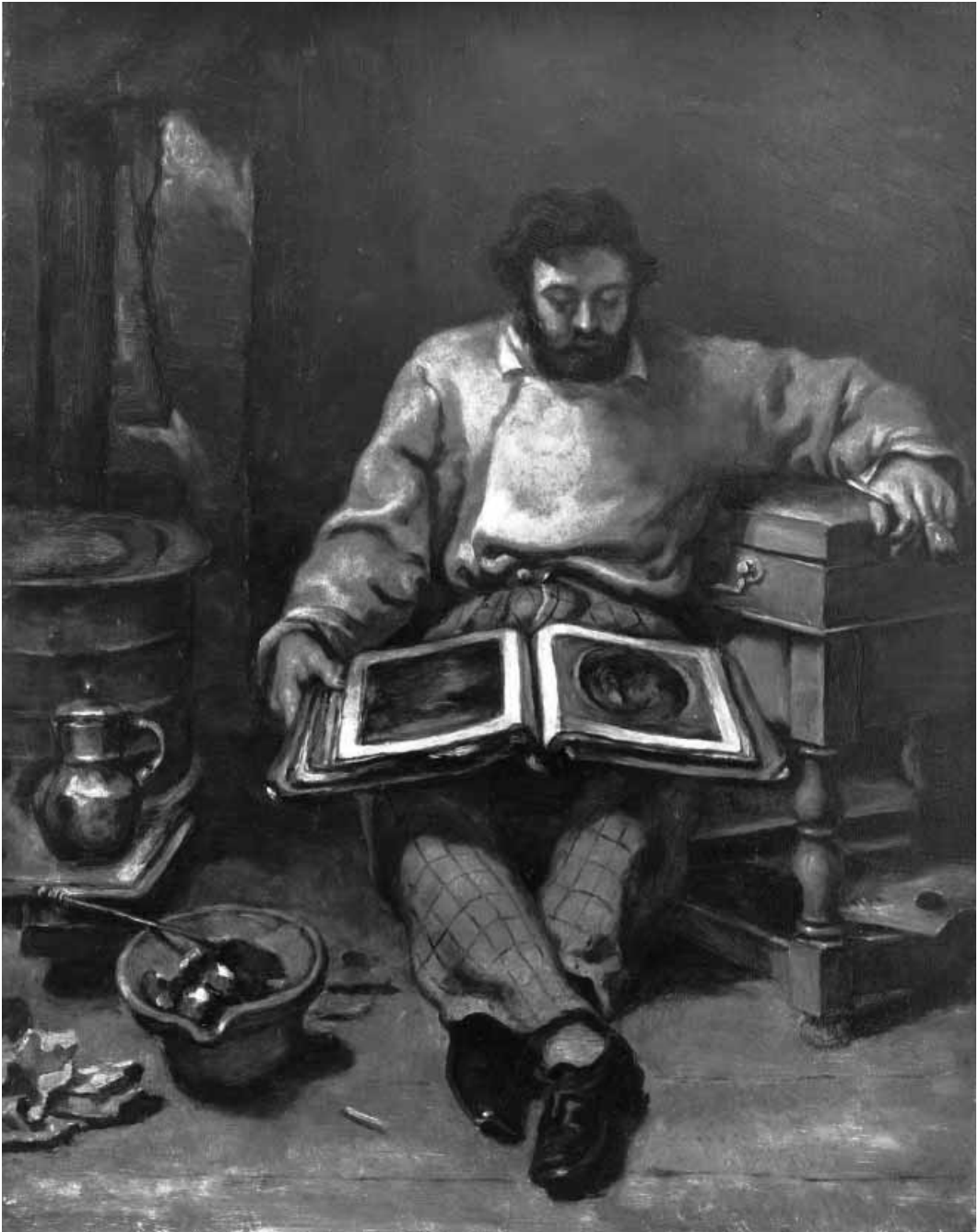
### “Baudelaire intime”: Picturing a Modern Lyric Poet

I don’t know how to *finish* (*aboutir*) Baudelaire’s portrait; every day his face changes.

– Courbet<sup>54</sup>

Assuredly the strange in all things remains the dominant characteristic of Baudelaire, and with so many others still obstinate in scrutinizing this brain, in digging up this complex and contradictory soul, it remains for us *to decipher the indecipherable*.

– Nadar<sup>55</sup>



6. Gustave Courbet, *Marc Trapadoux Examining a Book of Prints*, 1849. Troyes, Musée d'art moderne, Donation Pierre Lévy. © Photo RMN.

From Théodore de Banville to Jules Vallès, Baudelaire's contemporaries have left striking but fragmentary portraits of his various personas: dandy, poet, *flâneur*, and *révolté*. But the figure behind the masks remains stubbornly incognito.<sup>56</sup> Although both Baudelaire and Courbet conceived of the artist as a





7. Gustave Courbet, *Marc Trapadoux*, c. 1847. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Art Museums, Courtesy of the Fogg Art Museum, Bequest of Meta and Paul J. Sachs.

modern hero, for Baudelaire it was a tragically alienated heroism etched in suffering and cloaked in solitude. Baudelaire envisioned the artist/writer in metaphorical terms (with metaphysical overtones) as whore, ragpicker, fencer, and even conspirator.<sup>57</sup> Art itself figured as a form of prostitution in the commodified cultural marketplace characterized by the reign of the *feuilleton*.<sup>58</sup> Walter Benjamin tellingly links the crisis in artistic production and reproduction in the mid-nineteenth century to a general crisis in perception and the ability to return the gaze.<sup>59</sup> Not coincidentally, portraiture experienced a profound identity crisis during these years. By undermining the aura of the masterpiece, photography played a significant role in the “remise en question” of the painted portrait.<sup>60</sup> Despite photography’s indexical character, the portrait photograph often proved indeterminate and enigmatic, as the diverse photographs of Baudelaire discussed below demonstrate.

Baudelaire’s acquaintances were invariably struck by his changeability – his chameleon-like capacity to assume different roles – as Vallès indicated by comparing him to a ham actor (*cabotin*).<sup>61</sup> Champfleury, too, mentioned Baudelaire’s uncanny ability to transform himself completely from one day to the next.<sup>62</sup> And it was Baudelaire’s constantly changing physiognomy that frustrated Courbet. (Is that perhaps why he painted him in profile rather than

full face? The profile view has been associated with detachment from the viewer and the body in action, like the third person in speech.)<sup>63</sup> (Not coincidentally, it was Baudelaire's fleeting profile that Manet represented in the early 1860s in *Concert in the Tuileries* [1862] and a related etching.) In *Charles Baudelaire intime*, Nadar dramatically contrasted the godlike dandy of the 1840s with the aging, silver-haired specter of the 1860s, with his bitter mouth and unforgettable gaze.<sup>64</sup> Modern biographers (notably Jean-Paul Sartre) have continued to probe Baudelaire's psyche for clues to his otherness, dualism, masochistic behavior, and underlying melancholy.<sup>65</sup> Yet the image of Baudelaire that emerges remains blurred and indistinct, like a faded daguerreotype whose mirrorlike surface has reabsorbed the sitter's image.

During the 1840s Baudelaire, whose originality and eccentric dress were becoming legendary, resided in an elegantly appointed flat in the Hôtel Pimodan on the Île Saint-Louis and composed many of the poems for *Les fleurs du mal*.<sup>66</sup> He met Balzac, Banville, Sainte-Beuve, Alexandre Privat d'Anglemont, and Nadar, and formed a close friendship with the artist Emile Deroy (1820–46), who painted Baudelaire's portrait in 1844.<sup>67</sup> The poet and "his painter" became inseparable. They frequented the Louvre and the café Tabourey and were fixtures at Banville's intimate literary soirées, along with Pierre Dupont (whose portrait Deroy also painted). Moreover, Deroy appears to have influenced Baudelaire's aesthetic ideas, in particular his notions about the expressive properties of color.<sup>68</sup>

Deroy's murky, introspective *Portrait of Baudelaire* (1844; Fig. 8), which was rejected by the jury of the 1846 Salon, is the earliest extant painted portrait.<sup>69</sup> Baudelaire's pale, subtly illuminated face (here bearded) emerges from a shadowy ground. Deroy painted the young poet as a Van Dyckian dandy exuding grace, elegance, and seduction – the very qualities that Banville singled out in his evocation of Baudelaire.<sup>70</sup> But it is Van Dyck with a decidedly romantic twist; in particular, the elegant, nervous hands are tensely curled and the pose is self-consciously staged rather than effortless. According to Nadar, Deroy painted the portrait by lamplight in Baudelaire's apartment in four sittings attended by the painters Antoine-Jean-Marie Arondel and Léon Fauré, together with Lucius-Nestor Sonjeon and Nadar himself.<sup>71</sup>

Deroy's romantic icon, which does not closely resemble any of the other known likenesses of Baudelaire, emphasizes sensitivity and psychological intensity – standard romantic signs of artistic genius. Jean Ziegler suggests that it is in some sense a collaborative portrait (and a *rapinade*), in which Baudelaire copped an affected pose from a portrait of Laurence Sterne.<sup>72</sup> This youthful effigy demonstrates Baudelaire's capacity for transforming his physiognomy as well as his propensity for the dramatic. It is more a portrait of a mental state and a romantic type (the poet) than a convincing physical likeness. In fact, Asselineau identified it with the fictional portrait of Samuel Cramer in *La Fanfarlo*.<sup>73</sup> Like Delacroix's virtuoso portrayal of Paganini in the act of perform-



8. Emile Deroy, *Charles Baudelaire*, 1844. Versailles, Musée du Château de Versailles.  
© Photo RMN.

ing, it pushes the conception of portraiture away from objective representation toward subjective evocation and visual ambiguity.<sup>74</sup> Banville, who described the portrait as “tormented and tragic,” noted the clenched, quivering hand and apostrophized the canvas as if it were a living being.<sup>75</sup> Deroy’s seductive *Portrait of Baudelaire* is suspended between warring principles: intensity and detachment, radiant light and impenetrable darkness, fact and fiction (to borrow Baudelaire’s terms from his “Salon of 1846.”)<sup>76</sup>



Forced to economize and thus relegated to bohemia, Baudelaire vacated the Hôtel Pimodan in 1845 and abandoned his extravagant style of dress.<sup>77</sup> He adopted severe black suits, shaved his beard, and cut his hair short. Courbet's portrait, most likely painted in 1848 or 1849 when Baudelaire was struggling to establish his literary reputation, records this new public persona. Although Courbet depicted Baudelaire as a writer with the tools of his profession, it is a highly unconventional, indeterminate image that resists categorization.



Courbet has bequeathed us a sketchy, out-of-focus, and decidedly enigmatic likeness that registers the impossibility of capturing the poet's mercurial personality and constantly changing physiognomy on canvas. In particular, the *Baudelaire* lacks the directness and specificity that characterize the majority of Courbet's portraits and self-portraits from the 1840s. Instead, like Chardin's celebrated representations of children playing, such as *Boy with a Top*, Courbet's composition falls somewhere between portraiture and genre painting.<sup>78</sup> Moreover, the *Portrait of Baudelaire* is in many ways a subversive and strangely impersonal image (despite its intimate scale) that undercuts the traditional premises of portraiture as well as the conventions of pictorial composition. Particularly striking are the lack of a centralized focus and spatial incongruities, such as the awkwardly rendered table, together with the oddly uniform treatment of figure and setting.<sup>79</sup> Was Courbet attempting to make some sort of egalitarian and/or anti-academic statement by subverting pictorial conventions? Or should the stylistic anomalies be attributed primarily to his preoccupation with picturing Baudelaire in all his complexity? Before attempting to answer these questions, it is necessary to consider two other components of the realist enterprise at mid-century that have a direct bearing on the *Portrait of Baudelaire*, namely, photography and caricature.

At mid-century, photography was both a transformative technology and a multifaceted sociocultural discourse embodying the contradictions of modernity.<sup>80</sup> Associated with scientific and technological progress by its proponents, it was denounced by its enemies as a mechanical form of reproduction whose excessive verisimilitude threatened to corrupt public taste. Photography's perceived truth to optical reality allied it, for better or worse, with positivism and the naturalist school in painting and literature.<sup>81</sup> Although its educational value and technological applications were widely acknowledged from the outset, it was perceived by hostile critics, such as Baudelaire, as a sort of anti-art that threatened to destroy the artistic imagination. However, the photographic portrait did not lead to the demise of portrait painting or its material enslavement, as critics had initially feared; rather, it incited artists to explore painterly, "antiphotographic" directions, even realist painters like Courbet.<sup>82</sup> Moreover, portrait photographers faced many of the same challenges as portrait painters in attempting to record the character and social status of the sit-

ter in a single, condensed image. Although Baudelaire was critical of photography and denounced its artistic pretensions in his “Salon of 1859,” he was friends with two of its leading practitioners, Nadar and Carjat, and posed repeatedly for the camera in the 1850s and early 1860s.<sup>83</sup> Not surprisingly, the photographs of Baudelaire, which document his public persona as dandy and poseur, emphasize outward appearance. But their striking variations in mood and expression, like Courbet’s painted portrait, attest to the difficulty of recording Baudelaire’s fleeting physiognomy. In fact, they could be characterized as “opaque disclosures” in which the sitter remains unknowable despite the pretext of an interactive regard.<sup>84</sup>

Nadar’s earliest photographs of Baudelaire date from around 1854–55.<sup>85</sup> There is a sober, half-length portrait of him with his hands thrust inside his coat – a modern, deflationary adaptation of the famous Napoleonic gesture (see Fig. 9). Represented in three-quarter view, he gazes warily past the viewer. There is another masklike depiction (supposedly taken the same year) that bears little resemblance to the first. Here a world-weary, disabused Baudelaire stares out impassively through slitlike eyes, his features seemingly cast in bronze.<sup>86</sup> A slightly out-of-focus photographic impression of Baudelaire standing in three-quarter view, recently attributed to Nadar, also dates from the mid-1850s.<sup>87</sup> This unique proof, which belonged to Baudelaire, literally registers the mobility of his features that struck his contemporaries and endows him with a surprisingly youthful aura.<sup>88</sup> Its fuzziness and lack of definition make it the photographic equivalent of a rapid, unfinished sketch, subverting the denotative properties of the photographic medium that Baudelaire so deplored and insisting instead on the unknowability of the subject.

The frequently reproduced photographs from the early 1860s by Nadar and Carjat document Baudelaire’s altered physical appearance.<sup>89</sup> The most arresting image is Carjat’s photograph “aux gravures” (c. 1863; Fig. 10), which depicts Baudelaire posed against a backdrop of caricatures, thus transcribing and celebrating his “cult of images.” This is the only photographic image that refers explicitly to Baudelaire’s artistic and literary preoccupations. Like Deroy’s early portrait, Carjat’s photograph exudes a catlike tension; the body twists in space and the left hand curls around a walking stick. In 1863 Baudelaire wrote to Carjat expressing his satisfaction with this photograph and requesting additional proofs.<sup>90</sup> As the photographic portraits demonstrate, even the unblinking, purportedly “objective” eye of the camera offers conflicting pictorial testimony about Baudelaire’s elusive physiognomy and opaque personality.<sup>91</sup>

Despite his aesthetic reservations about photography, Baudelaire clearly recognized its unique characteristics and inherent power (as well as its defects) in the domain of portraiture. Writing to request a photograph of his mother in 1865, he explained that he desired “an accurate portrait, but one possessing the fuzziness (*flou*) of a drawing.”<sup>92</sup> Moreover, Baudelaire attacked the pro-





9. Nadar (Gaspard-Félix Tournachon), *Charles Baudelaire*, c. 1855. Photo Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

pensity of photographers to record (and exaggerate) all the surface defects of a face, reiterating his criticisms of the photographic medium from his “Salon of 1859.” That year Baudelaire discussed portraiture at some length, insisting that the introduction of the imagination and the poetic in no way precluded resemblance.<sup>93</sup> In his “Salon of 1846” he proclaimed that there were two ways of understanding portraiture: either as history or as fiction.<sup>94</sup> He also insisted that, just as a novel may be more “truthful” than history, so a painterly, imaginative portrait may more clearly explain its model than a meticulous drawing. Courbet’s *Portrait of Baudelaire*, with its “anticomposition,” blurred, painterly surfaces, and strangely disembodied subject, falls on the side of fiction and embodies what could be characterized as an antiphotographic concept of portraiture. Rather than attempting to represent observed “reality” through additive detail, it operates reductively by simplifying and conceptualizing the sitter. And, consciously or unconsciously, it reiterates in visual terms the dichotomies of mind and body, artist and model.

Another form of art associated with the realist enterprise at mid-century in which Baudelaire was particularly interested was caricature. The satirical

prints of Gavarni, Daumier, and their less well-known colleagues chronicled daily life and social mores and relentlessly ridiculed human pretensions and foibles. Caricatures, which appeared in journals such as *Le Charivari*, provided a shorthand visual language of communication for the urban public and challenged traditional artistic hierarchies. Baudelaire was among the first critics to analyze caricature as a serious art form possessing philosophical as well as aesthetic significance.<sup>95</sup> In light of this, it is appropriate that caricature appears to have provided the visual model or prototype for Courbet's reductivist depiction of Baudelaire.

Baudelaire, a gifted draftsman in his own right, admired the art of caricature, in particular the incisive, politically and morally freighted drawings of Honoré Daumier. Daumier (who owned one of Baudelaire's self-portraits) maintained that Baudelaire could have been a great draftsman.<sup>96</sup> Poulet-Malassis, an avid collector of Baudelaire's drawings, lauded his friend's ability to sum up a physiognomy with a few decisive strokes.<sup>97</sup> Although primarily known as a photographer, Nadar began his career as a caricaturist. For his celebrated *Panthéon Nadar* published in 1854, he designed a *portrait charge* of Baudelaire (see Fig. 11).<sup>98</sup> Nadar, like Courbet, depicted Baudelaire with a tuftlike forelock and emphasized the irregularity of his nose and his intense, almost diabolical expression. Although obviously exaggerated and caricatural in intent, Nadar's depiction reiterates the features found in Baudelaire's own self-portrait sketches and caricatures from the 1840s. In fact, the 1854 *portrait charge* appears to be based on a self-portrait drawing by Baudelaire dating from c. 1846–48 that belonged to Nadar (see Fig. 12).<sup>99</sup> Baudelaire's own caricatural self-portraits thus served as the visual template for both Nadar and Courbet.

Although more subtle and painterly, Courbet's portrait reproduces the same trenchant features found in Baudelaire's caricatural self-portraits. Moreover, Courbet's *Portrait of Baudelaire* operates very much like a caricature by reducing the subject's face to its essential, most salient traits (without eliminating resemblance) and by engaging the viewer to "complete" the image mentally. During the 1840s Courbet looked to popular prints for artistic inspiration and painted Trapadoux examining an album of prints. The *Portrait of Baudelaire*



10. Etienne Carjat, *Charles Baudelaire "aux gravures,"* c. 1863. Photo Bibliothèque Nationale de France.



11. Nadar (Gaspard-Félix Tournachon), *Charles Baudelaire*, preparatory study for the *Panthéon Nadar*, n.d. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France. Photo Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

is a peculiar hybrid of the caricatural or conceptual and the painterly – a synthesis also essayed by Daumier during the 1840s, although his paintings remained virtually unknown during his lifetime.

Courbet's widely disparaged posthumous *Portrait of Proudhon and His Children* (1865; Fig. 13) provides an illuminating contrast with the *Baudelaire*. This monumental group portrait, with its thickly textured paint, limited gamut of color, and homely details, is prosaic and matter-of-fact in comparison to the evocative, unfocused effigy of Baudelaire. Indeed, it could be considered a demonstration of the expressive limitations of strictly metonymic realist portraiture. Since Proudhon never posed for his portrait, Courbet utilized photographic documentation in painting what he termed a “historical portrait of my very intimate friend.”<sup>100</sup> The portrait depicts Proudhon as Courbet remem-





12. Charles Baudelaire, *Caricatures of Baudelaire and Friends*, annotated by Nadar, c. 1846–48. France, private collection.

bered him, seated meditatively in his garden at 83, rue d'Enfer with his two daughters, and emphasizes the simple joys of family life. The original version, shown at the Salon of 1865, included Proudhon's wife, who was later painted over. This ambitious, genre-like portrait was created both as a public manifesto of Courbet's artistic philosophy and as a personal tribute to his comrade-in-arms. Paradoxically, the resulting canvas is an example of what Albert Boime has dubbed "myopic realism," in which the verisimilitude of the details does not add up to a fully convincing whole.<sup>101</sup>



13. Gustave Courbet, *Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and His Children*, 1865. Paris, Petit Palais, Musée des Beaux-Arts de la Ville de Paris. Giraudon/Art Resource, NY.

Although Courbet's *Portrait of Baudelaire* has frequently been admired for its suggestiveness and subtle characterization, it has also been unfavorably compared to Fantin-Latour's more straightforward, programmatic portrayal of Baudelaire in *Homage to Delacroix* (1864; Musée d'Orsay, Paris).<sup>102</sup> Courbet's *Portrait of Baudelaire*, which is characterized by ambiguity and lack of precision, represents a move away from literal representation toward a more subjective and conceptual interpretation of visual appearances emblematic of the repositioning of the painted portrait in contradistinction to photography. Despite its idiosyncrasies, the pictorial record of this particular encounter between artist and model is indicative of the ontological crisis that portraiture faced at mid-century. At the same time it foreshadows the new directions and expressive potential of the modern portrait – both painted and photographic – which emerged during the second half of the century and are examined in the chapters that follow.

In the 1860s, Manet created two etchings of Baudelaire which, like Courbet's portrait, are more preoccupied with conjuring up his complex personality than with physical exactitude. In an undated letter to Asselineau, Manet offered two etched portraits of Baudelaire as illustrations for the posthumous edition of the poet's complete works, which appeared in 1869.<sup>103</sup> Manet, who met Baudelaire in the late 1850s, painted him (in profile and wearing a top hat) in the guise of a

dandy and *flâneur* in *Concert in the Tuileries* (1862; National Gallery, London). The delicate etching of Baudelaire “en chapeau de profil” (Fig. 14) is derived from *Concert in the Tuileries*.<sup>104</sup> This is a fleeting, indistinct image that, like Courbet’s portrait, seeks to evoke the poet’s evanescent personality through visual ambiguity. Manet, like Courbet, opted to depict Baudelaire (the constant fugitive) in profile. The second etching, which is based on a Nadar photograph (c. 1862), portrays Baudelaire full-face and hatless. Manet reworked the plate extensively, accentuating the tonal variations and sharpening the facial features, which are slightly blurred in the Nadar photograph.<sup>105</sup> In the etching, Nadar’s photographic likeness is transformed into a Manichean combat of light and shadow connoting the metaphysical underpinnings of Baudelaire’s poetic art.

For Baudelaire’s artistic colleagues, notably Courbet and Manet, photography was useful as an aide-mémoire, but it was in no way equivalent to painting. Indeed, Manet was fascinated by the photographic image because of its paradoxical nature – namely, the fact that it combined truth and falsity and both mirrored and distorted human perception in new ways.<sup>106</sup> Delacroix, who utilized photographs as anatomical studies, believed that photographic information was of inestimable advantage to the artist who painted from memory.<sup>107</sup> In *L’art de la photographie* (1862), Disdéri maintained that photography and painting were very different art forms and that photography was more analogous to painting *en camaïeu*, or drawing.<sup>108</sup> In particular, Disdéri differentiated painting from photography on the basis of color and the direct relationship between the photograph and what it represents. Ironically, despite Baudelaire’s reservations about the photographic medium, photographs have become the master images commemorating the elusive poet.<sup>109</sup> As Baudelaire prophetically remarked in 1859, photography would rescue precious things from oblivion and fill the archives of our (collective) memory.<sup>110</sup>

The proliferation of photography, which precipitated an identity crisis for the painted portrait at mid-century, also, paradoxically, freed portrait painters to



14. Edouard Manet, *Charles Baudelaire in Profile*, n.d. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1921.