



# Baudelaire and Caricature: From the Comic to an Art of Modernity

*Michèle Hannoosh*

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## **Baudelaire and Caricature: From the Comic to an Art of Modernity** Michèle Hannoosh

Baudelaire's essays on caricature offered the first sustained defense of the value of caricature as a serious art, worthy of study in its own right. This book argues for the crucial importance of the essays for his conception of modernity, so fundamental to the subsequent history of modernism. From the theory of the comic formulated in *De l'essence du rire* to his discussions of Daumier, Goya, Hogarth, Cruikshank, Bruegel, Grandville, Gavarni, Charlet, and many others, Baudelaire develops not only an aesthetic of caricature but also a caricatural aesthetic--- dual and contradictory, grotesque, ironic, violent, farcical, fantastic, and fleeting--- that defines an art of modern life. In particular, Baudelaire's insistence on the dualism and ambiguity of laughter has radical implications for such emblems of modernity as the city and the flaneur who roams the streets. The modern city is the space of the comic, a kind of caricature, presenting the flaneur with an image of dualism, one's position as subject and object, implicated in the same urban experiences one seems to control. The theory of the comic invests the idea of modernity with reciprocity, one's status as laughter and object of laughter, thus preventing the subjective construction and appropriation of the world that has so often been linked with the project of modernism. Comic art reflects what Walter Benjamin later defined as Baudelairean allegory, at once representing and revealing the alienation of modern experience. But Baudelaire also transforms the dualism of the comic into a peculiarly modern unity--- the doubling of the comic artist enacted for the benefit of the audience, the self-generating and self-reflexive experience of the flaneur in a "communion" with the crowd. This study examines his views in the context of the history of comic theory and contemporary accounts of the individual artists. Complete with illustrations of the many works discussed, it illuminates the history and theory of caricature, the comic, and the grotesque, and adds to our understanding of modernism in literature and the visual arts.

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