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Man's search for Identity in the Modern
World: Baudelaire as Poet, Prophet and Moralist.

A thesis presented in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in French at
Massey University.

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1977

ABSTRACT

The search for identity by modern man is caused by the frustration he encounters in the face of rapid industrial and material advance which is not counterbalanced by spiritual progress.

This is the problem which Baudelaire examines. When satisfaction and gratification of physical desires prove ephemeral, man rebels against the standards he has been brought up to believe in. Wine and drugs fail to expand his personality sufficiently for him to achieve fulfilment, and he comes to realise that he must use his own creative ability in order to gain any sense of achievement or satisfaction.

But his experiences give him some insight into his own failings, and some idea of his capabilities.

Chapter I sets Baudelaire against the background of nineteenth-century change, drawing out the reasons for man's disorientation. In Chapter II various ideas are examined which Baudelaire shared with the Romantic writers and which he developed further as he studied man's search for identity.

Much of man's anguish is centred on ennui and frustration, which are examined in Chapter III.

Failure to reach harmony leads man to investigate the inner being, hoping through wine and drugs to expand this aspect of his personality, as is shown in Chapter IV.

Frustration then leads to revolt and reorientation, dealt with in Chapter V, which closes with man's contemplation of the meaning of death.

Chapter VI is concerned with Baudelaire's interpretation of true progress, a topic which is essential to his concepts of harmony and identity, for these latter concepts deal with the whole man, the achievement of balanced spiritual and physical harmony.

Throughout, Baudelaire is shown as being not only a poet, but also a moralist and prophet.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

		Page
Chapter I	Introduction	1
Chapter II	Baudelaire and the Romantics	17
Chapter III	Ennui and frustration in the poet's search for identity in the material world.	30
Chapter IV	Baudelaire's self-search: Wine and drugs.	47
Chapter V	Revolt and reorientation.	63
Chapter VI	Baudelaire's interpretation of progress.	78
Chapter VII	Conclusion.	88
	Bibliography.	93