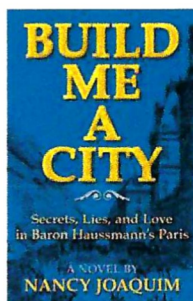
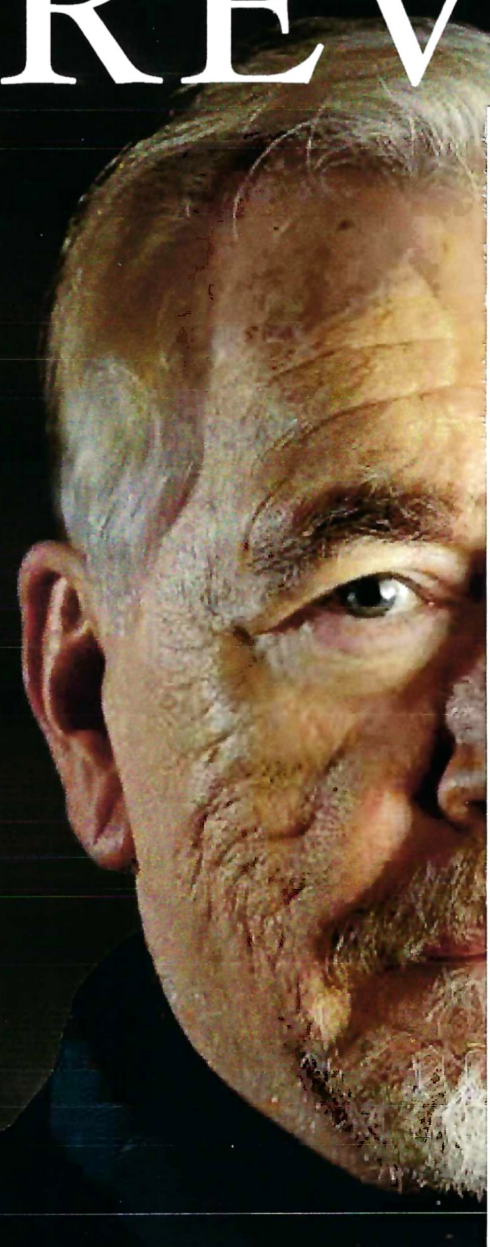


KIRKUS

VOL. XC, NO. 2 | 15 JANUARY 2022

REVIEWS



BUILD ME A CITY
Secrets, Lies, and Love in
Baron Haussmann's Paris

Joaquim, Nancy
Montrose Hall (321 pp.)
Jan. 22, 2022
978-1-7377559-0-6

A novel chronicles one man's fictional journey through the tumultuous second half of the 19th century in Paris.

Charles Fabron of Rouen has a thriving architectural practice and a beautiful young wife, Louisa, pregnant with twins. But it all comes crashing down when Louisa dies in childbirth along with the twin boys. Devastated, Charles reluctantly accepts a position in Paris with the dynamic Baron Haussmann, the emperor's right-hand man overseeing a complete tearing down and rebuilding of the City of Light. Charles is angry to be named supervisor of demolition, but Haussmann's legendary charm wins him over, and he throws himself into the work, which he finds that he enjoys and which helps him heal. One day, Daniel Lazare, a young boy, shows up, recommended as a runner, a messenger among all the projects. He proves himself almost indispensable and well liked. But suddenly, he is accused, falsely, of theft, and no matter how personable he is, it is well known in Paris that orphans and runaways like Daniel are robbers and liars. He takes off. The rest of the book is a hunt for him on Charles' part and also the revelation that the architect has really been a puppet in his own life. Joaquim, a graceful writer, makes the most of an exciting period in French history—first the Second Empire, then the Prussian siege of Paris, and finally the Commune. Haussmann is toppled, becomes hated, and the Communards try to destroy his magnificent work. But the real story is the relationship between Charles and this mysterious boy who has disappeared. Readers follow Charles into old age, into what Milton called “calm of mind, all passion spent.” As Charles reflects, “A garden is like life. It never turns out quite the way you want it to.” But in the author's poetic treatment, readers get a wonderful Dickensian denouement that glosses over some of the dicey coincidences. Readers will forgive Joaquim those improbable twists because they will want to believe in the characters and have love reaffirmed.

**An intricately plotted tale
that draws readers in and makes French history come alive.**

Diana Ejalta, Laura Gao

s on
moir,
lat