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Schwarzbach, F.S. *Dickens and the City*. London: Athlone Press, 1979. Pp. xii, 258. Illustrations. Bibliography. $22.50

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Explore this journal

haps inadvertently, he has avoided many areas of controversy by producing a straightforward and affectionate but bland narrative which, unfortunately, glosses over major controversies or avoids analytical judgements.

Examples of this approach abound. The history of radicalism at Brooklyn and its long-lasting effects on the school's reputation as a "little red schoolhouse" are understated, owing to the fact that in actual numbers the radicals were few. True, but then why were they seemingly so influential beyond their strength? While dubious about the success and effects of the controversial Open Admissions Policy, Professor Horowitz ends with an "either/or" assessment that fails to make a final judgement. Only in his assessment of the stormy administration of President John Kneller (1969-79) does Horowitz come close to some sort of analytical conclusion, although even here he tries to soften the blow.

Several other important issues remain insufficiently explored: What, if any, were the effects of a wholly "commuter" student population? What were the factors which went into the selection of Harry D. Gideonse as President? Here was a crucial decision, as Gideonse, more than any other individual, moulded Brooklyn College into a first-class school during his long tenure as President (1939-66). The bitter ethnic clashes of the 1970s (Jews versus Blacks and Puerto Ricans) are only briefly noted. Surely these offer interesting insights into competition between ethnic groups which have achieved a certain degree of success and status and those eager to follow in their footsteps in the same urban institutions. Finally, the takeover of CUNY by New York State is noted briefly, belying the long political controversy over a parallel city and state system, and the intense rivalry between the two groups.

One must also note that this book is marred by some typographical errors (including a missing line on p. 138), which have become the bane of all American publishing.

The City University of New York has been a unique urban institution, and Brooklyn College has long been one of its most noted components. Professor Horowitz has not wholly captured the factors which made the college special: to students who fervently desired higher education but could not afford to go elsewhere, and to the larger community which saw an obligation to assist these students and benefit in doing so. Professor Horowitz has produced a pleasant narrative of Brooklyn College, one which will certainly appeal to alumni. Unfortunately, he has shied away from major controversies and incisive analytical judgements.

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Schwarzbach, F.S. *Dickens and the City*. London: Athlone Press, 1979. Pp.xii, 258. Illustrations. Bibliography. $22.50

The London seen by Pope as the "dear, damned, distracting town," and by Dr. Johnson as the constantly stimulating environment of which no reasonable person would ever tire, became in Wordsworth's words, the "monstrous ant-hill on the plain," "a huge fermenting mass of humankind." This view of the rapidly growing and changing metropolis repelled many writers, and caused them to flee either literally or metaphorically and to breathe new life into the myth of an idyllic rural life. The response of Charles Dickens to the nineteenth-century urban environment (for the most part for Dickens the urban world was London) was dramatically different: the city was the prism through which most of his literary vision was refracted. Moved by what, in a favourite phrase, he called "the attraction of repulsion," Dickens throughout his career was drawn to that which was most confusing, disturbing and ugly in the urban milieu. Indeed, with the exception of Mrs. Gaskell, whose work centred on Manchester, Dickens was perhaps the only English writer of stature to deal extensively with the city in the first two-thirds of the nineteenth century.

By working together a chronological literary analysis with solidly grounded reading in urban and social history and psychologically-informed biographical information, Professor Schwarzbach has produced a persuasively argued and most readable study of this central focus of the novelist's life and work. One student of English literature has written that the literary imagination has amongst its tasks that of domesticating our apprehension of the terrifying or the unknown.[1] This, Professor Schwarzbach argues, is what Dickens did for the Victorian city: "his great accomplishment was to have penetrated utterly the inner urban jungle, and make it known to the entire nation." Dickens became part of the ordinary Englishman's cultural heritage; sales of his novels ran into the millions and countless thousands heard his writings read aloud. Dickens, like Engels at about the same time, plumbed the depths of urban alienation and described compellingly the emptiness and isolation that were so widely experienced in the midst of a teeming city. One of the reasons for the persuasiveness of Dickens' vision of the city was that his own experience and reactions, so often transposed directly into his fiction, parallelled those of so many of his fellow citizens. England, which by the 1850s was the first nation to have a majority of its citizens residing in urban areas, arrived at this state by massive rural-urban migration. Dickens' move as a child from Chatham to London, the trauma, fear, and frustration brought about by this profoundly disorienting dislocation, and his subsequent creation of a personal myth of a present urban hell opposed to an ideal pastoral past, must have articulated the incoherent

feelings of many urban migrants.

Over the years there were, however, some significant changes in Dickens' literary vision. Through the chronological examination of the novels, Schwarzbach traces the shift in Dickens' perception to a view of the city as a new metropolitan environment which, while it harboured evil, allowed for the possibility of good. For instance, in the most substantive chapter of the book, the author shows how Dickens' changed view of London in *Bleak House* is the result of his maturing appreciation of social questions. His new concerns were reflected in several practical projects, such as a home for fallen women, a venture supported by his wealthy friend Angela Burdett Coutts, and in his new magazine *Household Words*. Here the interweaving of Dickens' social and imaginative writings might have been highlighted a little more precisely. For example, both the message and description of some of the novel's 'bleak houses' had their origins in specific articles in *Household Words*, a connection which could have been pursued fruitfully. Finally, Professor Schwarzbach shows Dickens' movement in his later works from predominantly social to more personal concerns, a change which involved a painful dispelling of his personal myth of a rural Golden Age and a new interest in passages of sustained streams of consciousness (especially in *Our Mutual Friend*), which, he argues, look forward to Henry James and James Joyce. In these and other ways the author documents the interaction between the novelist and his subject and demonstrates how Dickens' work came to terms with the obscurities and threats of the urban environment. This is a fine book which deserves to be read by historians and English specialists alike.

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Krautheimer, Richard. *Rome: Profile of a City, 312-1308.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980. Pp.xvi, 389. Illustrations. $50.00 (U.S.) cloth, $16.50 (U.S.) paper.

Morris, A.E.J. *History of Urban Form Before the Industrial Revolutions.* 2nd ed. New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1979. Pp.x, 317. Figures. $41.95 (U.S.)

Two books on the city, or one particular city, in history, but books of a very different sort. Krautheimer is a professor Emeritus of New York University, now living in Rome. He writes with obvious passion for the city. "I have tried," he writes in the preface, "to sketch a profile of

Rome as a living organism from the time of Constantine in the early fourth century to the removal of the papacy to Avignon, a thousand years later.... I have striven to outline a history of Rome during a thousand years *through*, rather than *of*, her monuments." Before the enormity of the task, he is humble, but he concludes, "It was fun to find out so much I did not know after a lifetime and to sum it up."

This is, then, a very personal book. It carries its learning lightly; the enthusiasm is contagious. Again and again, I found myself thinking, "I never knew that, I've never noticed that, I can't wait to get to Rome again and have a look." One might single out for mention the vivid description of Constantinian Rome in the opening chapter, with the reminder that the distinction between areas *entro* and *fuori le mura* then had little importance, and the care taken to relate topographic detail to broader social and economic conditions. Or take the account of the *abitato* as it developed through the eleventh to thirteenth centuries (Chapter 12), where the crowded street was "an extension of the house rather than a self-contained entity," and the paragraphs on the transformations of the Capitol combine splendid lucidity with a conversational tone, as if the author were showing you around in person ("one keeps forgetting that in Roman times the principal buildings of the Capitol faced east overlooking the forum").

There are of course points of detail which might be challenged. Occasionally one feels that what is happening at Rome might have been brought into relation with conditions elsewhere. It might, for instance, be pointed out that the physical deterioration of the city from the fifth century on is part of the general decline of urban standards in the west. The economy did not permit the investment of the vast sums that were needed to maintain the services and monuments which an ampler age had provided. Carthage, second largest city of the Western Empire, was in the same state as Rome. One is reminded that in Britain today the cities face a massive investment programme to replace Victorian sewers, and on the weekend that this review was written, British Rail announced plans to close or curtail seriously services on two lines because it could not afford to repair two century-old bridges now, in the phrase of the Roman monuments, *vetustate conlapsa*, "collapsed through age."

This is then a necessary book for all students of the urban history of Rome and for all lovers of the city. It is beautifully produced. Photographs are outstandingly good and well chosen to illustrate the text. They are the fruit of many hours of archival research, and include a number of unusual and interesting views. The same is true of the drawings and watercolours which are reproduced. The author's own maps (e.g. figures 28, 1193a, 193b) are most useful. My biggest complaint is that the index is not detailed enough for a book of this density.

1. G. Robert Strange, "The Victorian City and the Frightened Poets," *Victorian Studies*, Vol. XI (Summer 1968), p.631.