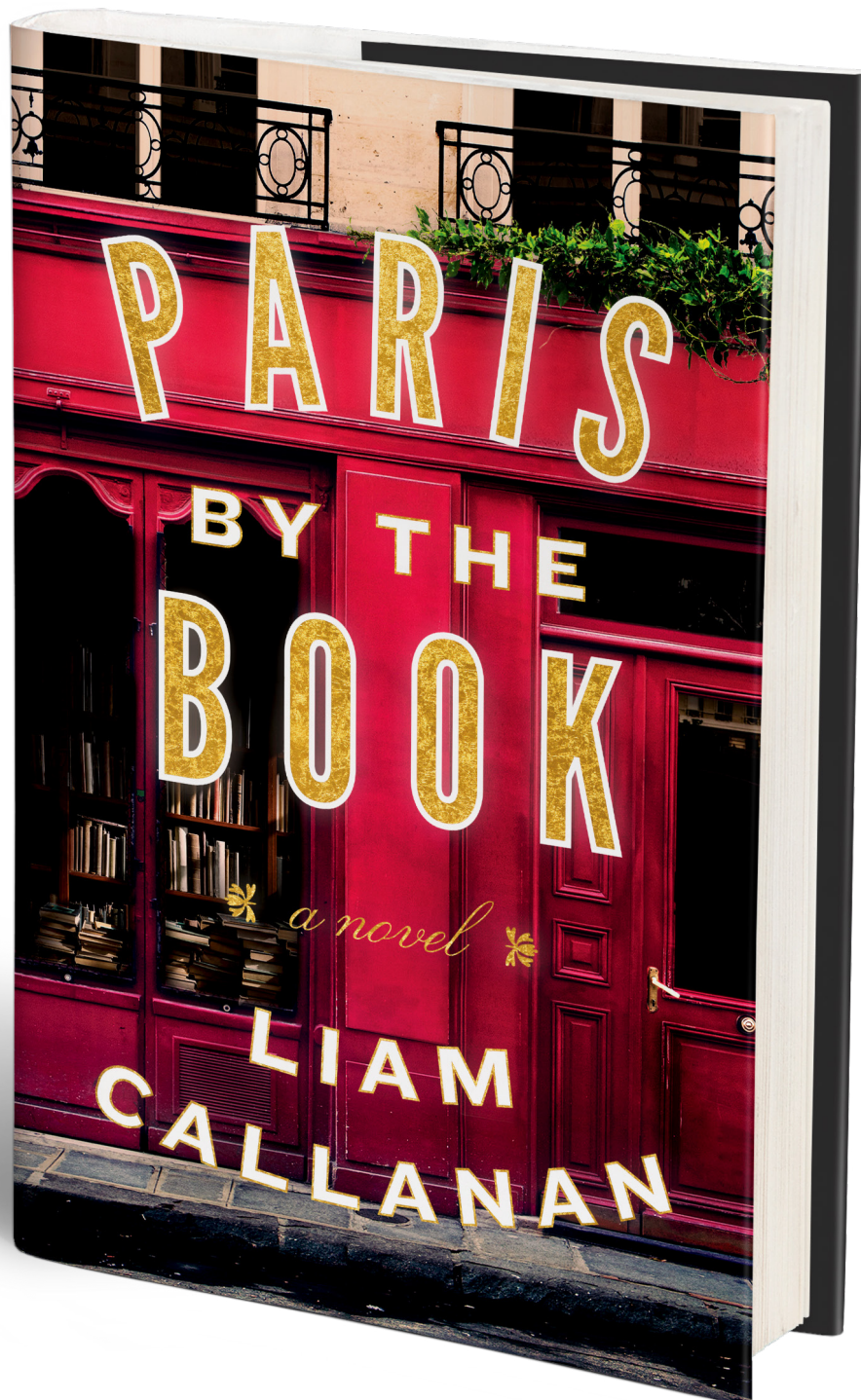


# PARIS BY THE BOOK

— BOOK CLUB KIT —



# A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR



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A few years back, my wife and I embarked on a long-held dream: a trip to Paris. And not just any Paris, but the Paris of my then-young daughters, the Paris of children's books and movies, in particular Ludwig Bemelmans's *Madeline* series and Albert Lamorisse's haunting short film (and book), *The Red Balloon*. As our plane drifted down over a gray Paris skyline, I wondered: would the Paris below live up to the Paris of their dreams?

My novel is about dreams. Paris dreams, life dreams, family dreams, and what happens when those dreams conflict with reality. The novel's narrator, Leah, has long dreamed of visiting Paris, but it's not until her husband disappears that she finds herself in France, thanks to an odd clue he left behind. With her two daughters in tow, they scour the city in search of him.

In that sense, my novel's a mystery: where did he go? But it asks other questions, too, that you may find prompt discussion: what role do dreams play in a marriage? What if they change? And what if someone—a spouse—or somewhere—a city—you thought you knew well turns out to be utterly different? Would Paris be Paris without all those who dream it into reality each day?

Other pressing questions: what's the difference between a kir and a kir royale and how are they best prepared? Where's the grandest library in Paris? What's the best place to ride a triceratops in the City of Light? All that's inside, but for now I'll leave you with one final question, which I was asked the last day of that first fateful trip to Paris.

Our girls, exhausted, insisted on going into a tiny English-language bookshop that had magically appeared before us. Inside, all was in disarray, but the harried proprietor smiled when she saw my girls flop down in the children's section and pursue their favorite activity (apart from soccer, softball and volleyball): reading. The proprietor explained the store was going out of business. Then she sized us up. "I am wondering something," she said. "Would you like to buy the store?"

My wife and I exchanged a long look. The answer's in the book.



A MAP OF PARIS, INSPIRED BY

# PARIS BY THE BOOK



## SHAKESPEARE & COMPANY

Shakespeare & Company, one of Paris's most famous English language bookstores, is a great place to browse, or even stay, if you want to join the ranks of the hundreds of writers who have bunked down here over the years.



## BEMELMANS'S OLD BAR

Children's book author...and barkeep? Ludwig Bemelmans, author of *Madeline*, actually had a long history in restaurants and hotels. Though it's changed hands many times since, it's still possible to get a drink here (and Leah does).



**MÉNILMONTANT (RUE PIAT)** The famous film (and book) *The Red Balloon*, Leah's obsession, was made here. Though events overtake her and she doesn't get a chance to take in the view, it's secretly the best in Paris.

**PALAIS ROYAL** At the outset of the book, Leah follows a man out of the Louvre and later into the stately gardens of the Palais Royale. (Fans of the Audrey Hepburn film *Charade*, particularly the chase in its final minutes, will recognize this columned court.)



**THE RED WHEELBARROW** Liam writes: "The Red Wheelbarrow was on the cusp of closing when I visited in 2012. The bookstore I have in my own novel is entirely fictional (as are many of the adjoining businesses I cite), but when I was looking over my fictional Paris for a place to put it, this is the neighborhood, in the 'lower' Marais, that I thought of. I renamed the street rue Saint-Lucie la Vierge, after Saint Lucy, the patron saint of writers. Paris purists will note that there is a real rue Saint-Lucie way over in the 15th Arrondissement. My rue is definitely not that."



**CINÉMATHEQUE FRANÇAISE** Off the beaten track, this massive edifice is worth a visit if you're serious about cinema (as Leah is, or once wanted to be).



**PONT NEUF** The name means "new bridge" but it's actually the oldest in Paris, finished in 1607. Ludwig Bemelmans's heroine Madeline likely fell from this bridge (the artwork is unclear).

**THE MARAIS** Leah and her daughters live in the Marais, a trendy Paris neighborhood. Once marshland, its twisty, narrow streets are one of the few parts of Paris left relatively untouched by Baron Haussmann's vast 19th-century reconfiguring of the city.



**PLACE DES VOSGES** Late in the book, Declan and Leah meet here to talk things out. Once home to Victor Hugo, it's a beautiful spot, but it can be difficult to tell, once you're in the middle of it, how to get out, which may have contributed to the claustrophobia they experience.



**CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL (HÔPITAL NECKAR ENFANTS MALADES)** This hospital has (at least) three claims to fame. A scene from the novel takes place here. The stethoscope was invented here. And while Bemelmans does not specify where Madeline has her famous appendectomy, it's likely here; the bus her classmates take—which, of course, reads 'Madeleine', the church by the same name being a destination in central Paris—goes right by here.



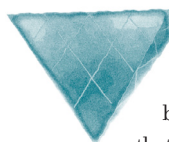
**PICARD** Several times in the book, Leah and her daughters feast on a "fête de Picard," or a Picard party. Picard is a frozen food chain, and surprisingly popular among Parisians (though they might not admit that).



**EIFFEL TOWER** For the longest time, Leah resists visiting the Eiffel Tower—and she's not alone in that. Critics have grouched ever since. But it's hard for a visitor to see it for the first time and not smile.

## BIBLIOTHÈQUE NATIONALE RICHELIEU

Leah strides past the French national library early in the novel. With over 40 million catalogued items, it's one of the largest in the world and arguably the grandest: don't miss the Labrousse reading room.



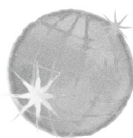
**CARROUSEL DU LOUVRE** At the outset of the book, Leah finds herself at the Louvre—or more specifically, at the high-end shopping mall beneath the Louvre. From here, she starts a chase that heads up and out of the Louvre complex, across the Rue de Rivoli and then into the gardens of the Palais Royal.



**SAINT PAUL** This is Leah's home Métro stop, where many of their journeys begin and end. The butcher with the rotisserie chickens that mother and daughters obsess over? It's just a few meters from the staircase.

## JARDIN DES PLANTES

Paris has dozens of carousels, including many unusual ones. Here in Jardin des Plantes—a famous Paris zoo—is a carousel devoted to endangered and extinct species, including a triceratops.



**OBERKAMPF** The dance club Declan and Leah visit is (sadly) wholly fictional, though the author did plenty of dancing to research what it would be like. While there's no actual address, in his imagination it's located in this district, which has a busy nightlife.



**10 PLACE D'ITALIE** Liam writes: "This address doesn't appear in the novel, but it was my first 'home' in Paris in the sense that this is where the Thibauts, the fictional family of my high school textbook, were said to live."



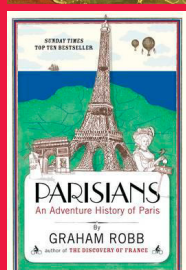
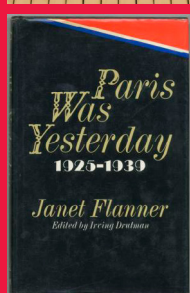
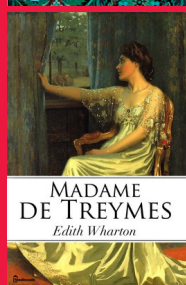
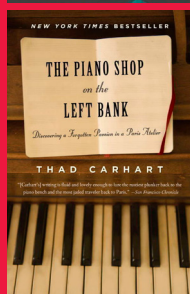
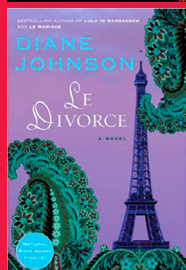
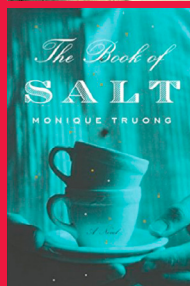
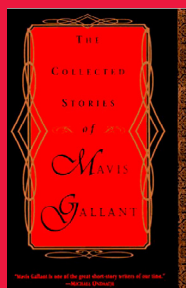
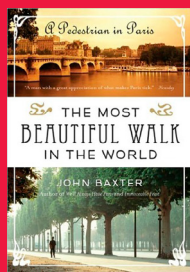
ALERTE: SPOILER!

# READERS' GROUP GUIDE

- 1 The author has said that much of his fiction is about belief—not necessarily religious belief, but what it means to believe in people, things, places—like Paris—that are surrounded in myth. How are myths created? What sustains them? What is gained, and lost, when myths crack?
- 2 Despite traditionally being children's books, *Madeline* and *The Red Balloon* greatly affect the decisions, emotions, and overall relationship of Leah and Robert, from their first meeting all the way through the Eady women's explorations of Paris. What books have stuck with you since childhood? Do you have a book that has affected you in a similar way to how these affected Leah and Robert?
- 3 Though he is physically absent for most of the plot, the story revolves around Robert's decision to leave his family. Is Robert the antagonist of the story? What did you ultimately feel Robert's motives were?
- 4 Robert's manuscript starts with the line "They loved their lives and where they lived, but still they wondered, what happens next?" How do you think each member of the Eady family would interpret that line?
- 5 Books set in Paris lay out both literal and figurative paths for Leah and her daughters after they arrive. Robert's unfinished manuscript in particular acts as a point-by-point guide. Have you ever read a book that mirrors your own life path? That told your future?
- 6 "Paris...is a challenge, an invitation, a city that doesn't distinguish between the two." Leah here is talking about Paris, France, but it is not hard to draw parallels between her ideal, adoptive city and the Paris in Wisconsin where she became engaged. How does this sentence apply to both Paris's in Leah's life?
- 7 After finding Robert's new novel, Leah reflects on the genre of "self-fiction," which she believes illuminates the way that humans are always constantly editing our own lives until "we find a narrative that suits us, completes us". Besides Robert, do you feel any of the characters did this during the story? Which ones? Why do you think they also felt the need to?
- 8 "I was protective of my passion, my Paris. So much so, I'd long put off going... I had a cynical certainty that the Paris I'd find would disappoint." What ultimately drives Leah to Paris is not her passion for the city, but her desire to keep her family together. Have you ever been afraid to pursue something or someone you love because you were afraid it wouldn't live up to your expectations? Did you ever pursue it? Did you have a choice?
- 9 On page 49, Eleanor gives advice to Leah: "Guilt, the greediest emotion, wants everything... Grief just wants time." Does this line resonate for you, in your own life? How do the Eady women process their grief?
- 10 Throughout the story, we watch through Leah's eyes as her daughters grow up and mature into their own. How does Leah change? Does she?
- 11 Leah and her daughters organize their bookstore in a most unusual way—mingling nonfiction and fiction, grouping titles geographically, sometimes by the thinnest of threads. If you were going to invent a new way to organize a bookstore, how would you do it? How do you organize your own books?

# PARIS READING LIST

Liam spent a year tweeting a new Paris book recommendation each Tuesday. For that list, search #parisbythebook or visit [liamcallanan.com](http://liamcallanan.com). Here are some highlights:



## THE MOST BEAUTIFUL WALK IN THE WORLD

John Baxter

While this book does sketch out some walks, it's even more fun to read with your feet up in a chair, especially when Baxter gets to talking about French food.

## THE BOOK OF SALT

Monique Truong

A gorgeous, lyric novel of Paris and two of its most famous expat inhabitants, Alice B. Toklas and Gertrude Stein, narrated by the Vietnamese cook who lives in their shadow—but in this book, outshadows them.

## THE PIANO SHOP ON THE LEFT BANK

Thad Carhart

Carhart, one of Apple's early PR employees in Europe, had a simple wish for his apartment: a piano. How he came to acquire it and what he learned about France, and pianos, in the process, makes for a mesmerizing read.

## PARIS WAS YESTERDAY

Janet Flanner

Known to longtime *New Yorker* readers by her nom de plume, Gênet, Indiana-born Janet Flanner faithfully filed her "Letter from Paris" column every fortnight for decades.

## PARIS I LOVE YOU BUT YOU'RE DRAGGING ME DOWN

Rosecrans Baldwin

Charming as the City of Light is from afar, Paris has confounded more than one expat who's attempted to make a living there. But few have done so with as good humor—make that laugh-out-loud humor—as Baldwin details in this memoir.

## COLLECTED STORIES

Mavis Gallant

Master of the short story, Gallant was born in Canada but lived most of her life in Paris. Her carefully wrought stories capture Paris and Parisians in a way few other authors have.

## LE DIVORCE

Diane Johnson

If Wharton (see below) is too old-school for you, *Le Divorce* presents a modern take on the novel of manners. Love, sex, religion—and a mysterious (and incredibly valuable?) painting—fuel the intricate plot.

## MADAME DE TREYMES

Edith Wharton

Though known most now for her New York Gilded Age Novels, Wharton frequently wrote about (and lived in) Paris. This volume distills all of Wharton's most famous elements—class, money, religion, straitlaced society—into a slim but powerful novel.

## THE PARISIANS

Graham Robb

There are many histories of Paris, and many more comprehensive than this one—but few more engrossing, thanks entirely to Robb's literary approach of immersing the reader in the point-of-view of the people he's writing about.

## PARIS WITH CHILDREN

Kim Horton Levesque

This little book from publisher Little Bookroom is the most complete, level-headed and helpful guide available if you're interested in taking your children to Paris. Everything is covered, from the Louvre to lavatories.

DRINK UP!

# BOOK CLUB BEVERAGES

*À votre santé* is how the French toast, and since it means, “to your health,” you really shouldn’t resist serving drinks at your book club. It’s the healthy thing to do.



## THE OBVIOUS CHOICE IS WINE. RED, PLEASE.

Follow your nose or the salesman’s advice; if you need a nudge, author Liam Callanan suggests seeking out a wine from the Haut-Médoc, a lesser-known winemaking region in the Bourdeaux region of southwestern France.

## FOR MORE FUN AND COLOR,

or if you prefer white wine to red, mix up a kir or kir royale. The recipe is simple and the result beautiful (not least because it will match the color of the cover of *Paris by the Book*).

*Kir*: Mix one part crème de cassis, a deep purple blackcurrant liqueur, with four parts white wine.

*Kir royale*: Same as above, except use champagne instead of wine. (Remember that champagne can only truly be called champagne if it comes from the champagne region of France. Americans have many similar sparkling wines; a good, less expensive option is Gruet, from New Mexico, of all places.)

In either case, a fun garnish is to plop a frozen berry—raspberries work very well—in the bottom of the glass.



## IF YOU’RE FEELING VERY BOLD

or want to feel very French, serve pastis (Pernod). Set out the glasses, pour a bit of Pernod in each, and then fill with water. The drink will immediately cloud to a milky white. The mixture will taste strongly of licorice, and, if you’re Parisian, memories of long, languid evenings when you talked of many things, especially books.