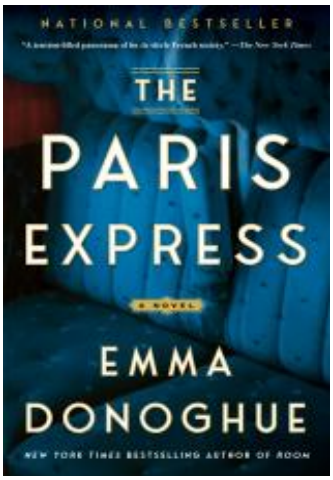
The Paris Express

by Emma Donoghue



About the Book

Emma Donoghue, the ?soul-stirring? (*Oprah Daily*) nationally bestselling author of ROOM, returns with a sweeping historical novel about an infamous 1895 disaster at the Paris Montparnasse train station.

Based on an 1895 disaster that went down in history when it was captured in a series of surreal, extraordinary photographs, THE PARIS EXPRESS is a propulsive novel set on a train packed with a fascinating cast of characters who hail from as close as Brittany and as far as Russia, Ireland, Algeria, Pennsylvania and Cambodia. Members of parliament hurry back to Paris to vote; a medical student suspects a girl may be dying; a secretary tries to convince her boss of the potential of moving pictures; two of the train?s crew build a life away from their wives; a young anarchist makes a terrifying plan, and much more.

From an author whose ?writing is superb alchemy? (Audrey Niffenegger, *New York Times* bestselling author), THE PARIS EXPRESS is an evocative masterpiece that effortlessly captures the politics, glamour, chaos and speed that marked the end of the 19th century.

Discussion Guide

1. The epigraph reads: ?The occasional disaster, what does it matter? Let?s take necessary evils in our stride --- every great invention costs a few lives!? How does this set up the novel and what is to come for the passengers? After reading the novel, do you think lives lost to great inventions are worth the cost?

2. This book was inspired by an iconic photograph. If you were to write a historical fiction novel, what photograph would you base it on and why?

3. How many of you were aware of the Montparnasse Train Crash before reading the book? How did that knowledge of

the book?s ending affect your reading experience? For those who did not know about the train crash, were you able to predict at any point how the story would end?

4. One of the most interesting aspects of this book is the wide range of characters whose lives we get a peek into. Which of these characters did you love or resonate with the most, and why?

5. What are some of the moral dilemmas that occur throughout the book? How do the characters handle these dilemmas, and do you approve of their choices?

6. In ROOM, THE PULL OF THE STARS and THE WONDER, Emma Donoghue captures audiences in an enclosed space --- a hospital room or a vigil in a small village --- and takes readers on an unexpected journey. What do you think the enclosed setting adds to (or removes from) the story?

7. Mado deliberates on her decision throughout much of the story. What do you think tipped her over the edge and influenced the choice she made?

8. The train ends up being one of the most fascinating characters in the book. What did you think about her (and her desire to be famous)?

9. Henry Ossawa Tanner, one of the first African American artists to gain international acclaim, is part of Paris Express?s grand cast. Henry, in real life and as depicted in the novel, is one of many African American artists who immigrated to Paris to escape American racism --- see Josephine Baker, James Baldwin, Nina Simone, etc. France was at the peak of its colonial exploits during this time --- another point depicted in the novel. What do you think made France a safe haven for some marginalized people and not others?

10. Emma is known for being brilliant at historical research. What did you learn reading this book that surprised or amazed you?

Author Bio

Born in Dublin in 1969, Emma Donoghue is an Irish emigrant twice over: she spent eight years in Cambridge doing a PhD in 18th-century literature before moving to London, Ontario, where she lives with her partner and their two children. She migrates between genres, writing for screen and stage, but she is best known for her novels, which range from the historical (THE WONDER, FROG MUSIC, SLAMMERKIN, LIFE MASK, THE SEALED LETTER) to the contemporary (AKIN, STIR-FRY, HOOD, LANDING). Her international bestseller ROOM was a *New York Times* Best Book of the Year and a finalist for the Man Booker, Commonwealth, and Orange Prizes. Donoghue also wrote the screenplays for ROOM and THE WONDER. Her most recent film (adapted with Philippa Lowthorpe from Helen Macdonald?s memoir) is H IS FOR HAWK.

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