

FROM THE INTERNATIONALLY BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF
ROOM, THE WONDER, AND THE PULL OF THE STARS

THE PARIS EXPRESS



EMMA
DONOGHUE

"Captivating! . . . An edge-of-your-seat
historical thriller that I couldn't put down."

—SHELBY VAN PELT, author of *Remarkably Bright Creatures*

About the Book

From Emma Donoghue, author of *Room*, *The Wonder* and *Pull of the Stars* comes a taut and suspenseful historical novel that reimagines an 1895 French railway disaster, an event famously documented in dramatic photographs.

Set over a single day, as the morning train travels from the Normandy coast to Paris, men, women and children take their seats in the passenger cars, which are divided by wealth and status. Among the passengers is an anarchist intent on destruction, a young boy travelling alone, a pregnant woman fleeing her home village for the anonymity of the big city, a medical student who suspects a girl may have a fatal disease, and the railway men, devoted to the train, to the company and to each other.

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 thrilling ride and a literary masterpiece that captures the politics, fears and chaos of the end of the nineteenth century.

Discussion Questions

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?

Discussion Questions

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 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)?

Discussion Questions

9. Henry Ossawa Tanner, one of the first African American artists to gain international acclaim, is part of Paris Express' 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?

About the Author



Photograph © Woodgate Photography 2024

Emma Donoghue is the author of sixteen novels, including the award-winning national bestseller *Room*, the basis for the acclaimed film of the same name. Her latest novel is *The Paris Express*. She has also written the screenplays for *Room* and *The Wonder* and nine stage plays. Her next film (adapted with Philippa Lowthorpe from Helen Macdonald's memoir) is *H Is for Hawk*. Born in Dublin, she lives in Ontario with her family. Find out more at EmmaDonoghue.com.

What People Are Saying

"A tension-filled panorama of fin-de-siècle French society."
—Alida Becker, *The New York Times*

"A nail-biter - and you'll learn some history, too."
—PEOPLE Magazine

"Deliciously tense...a heart-pounding ride."
—Real Simple

"Titanic superfans will fall hard for this historically immersive story of glamour, hubris, chaos, and heartache."
—Oprah Daily, most anticipated books of 2025

"Captivating! Emma Donoghue writes in rich, luxuriant detail, yet the story moves at an exhilarating clip. *THE PARIS EXPRESS* brings big questions about human interconnectedness into an edge-of-your-seat historical thriller that I couldn't put down."
—Shelby Van Pelt, author of *REMARKABLY BRIGHT CREATURES*