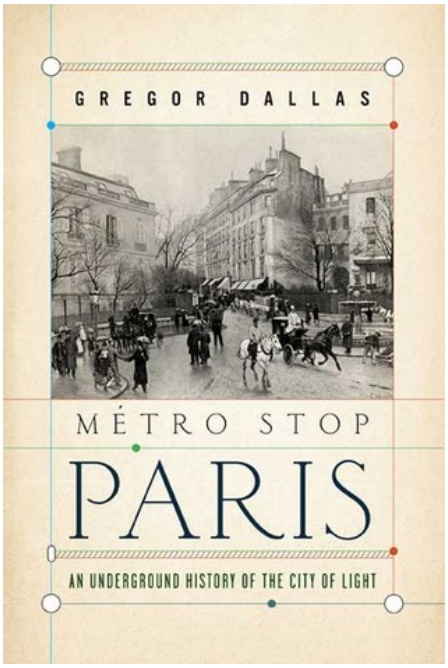

Metro Stop Paris: An Underground History of the City of Light

Gregor Dallas

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Metro Stop Paris: An Underground History of the City of Light Gregor Dallas
A history of Paris in twelve metro stops.

Metro Stop Paris recounts the extraordinary and colorful history of the City of Light, by way of twelve Metro stops--a voyage across both space and time. At each stop a Parisian building, or street, or tomb or landmark sparks a story that holds particular significance for that area of the city.

Dallas takes us to the jazz cellars and literary cafes of Montparnasse and Saint-Germain-des-Pres; the catacombs at Hell's Gate; and the Opera during the days of Claude Debussy. A darker side of Paris emerges at the Trocadero stop and a charitable side at the Gare du Nord, which highlights the work of Saint Vincent de Paul. Finally, our journey ends at Pere-Lachaise cemetery with the little-known story of Oscar Wilde's curious involvement in the Dreyfus affair, one of France's greatest legal scandals. From Hell (the Denfert-Rochereau stop on the south side of the city) to Heaven (the Gare du Nord at the north end of Paris), *Metro Stop Paris* carries readers on a journey of the heart and mind.

Metro Stop Paris is a thinker's guide to Paris made up of "slices of life," little vignettes drawn from Paris's two thousand years of history. Taken separately, these are charming historic tales about a city known and loved by many, but read as a whole *Metro Stop Paris* goes straight to the heart of what is quintessentially Parisian.

Metro Stop Paris: An Underground History of the City of Light Details

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From Reader Review Metro Stop Paris: An Underground History of the City of Light for online ebook

Lynne says

If you're the type of person who explores cities via public transportation, this is a great book to take a look at. Some sections were a bit slow for me, but that was just due to my lack of interest in those areas.

Ashley says

This was fascinating. I loved reading about the history of Paris that doesn't show up in text books. The first chapter had my imagination going to such an extent that I had nightmares after reading it. Overall, its a fantastic historical book.

Debbie says

Fascinating historical information about Paris from an unusual viewpoint.

Carol says

Wonderful book! At first, one might think that this book would be about the metro, but it uses the metro stops as a point of departure to learn the history of given areas of Paris. For example, the chapter on Pere Lachaise mostly deals with Oscar Wilde, who is buried there, contrasting his trials (literally) with his contemporary, Dreyfus. It is just packed with historical information about figures from St. Vincent dePaul to Marie deMedici.

Ellie says

I don't think this book delivered much on the premise of history behind the names of the metro stops in Paris. More a rambling history on unconnected aspects of literary history.

Casey Black says

Walking through my local library recently, I happened upon a book that rang out with familiarity, immediately transporting me back to my one summer in Paris three years ago in which I stood outside the Shakespeare and Co. bookstore near Notre Dame and listed to a memorable little Englishman read his work to attentive bibliophiles, and passersby.

That author, Gregor Dallas, opens his book with an appeal for his meandering approach to French history, writing, "The more history I wrote, the more I realized that history is travelling: if you don't see the places where the major events of the past occurred, you get lost in the abstractions, system-building and theories that have so distorted our view of the past over the last few decades...some historians write history as if the event they describe could have occurred anywhere on the globe."

Unfortunately, while the process of writing the book may have invoked a travelers romanticism for its author, Dallas does not likewise fully immerse and gratify his readers' senses--his descriptions of physical place are superficial at best, and the use of the Paris metro stops is never illustrative and well justified. Often, Dallas begins with a brief description of space couched in an argument for its philosophical importance—lost in beautiful abstractions about creativity and life and death—and then he too quickly deviates into historical accounts, no longer orienting readers around street corners let alone near the metro stop names that serve as each chapter title.

Still, consider this a mere packaging problem. It does not hurt the book once one lays aside the expectation for a sensorial ride through underground Paris. What shines in the book is the way it lays together many Parisian stories (depicting everyone from Oscar Wilde to Catherine de Medici and Sartre to Debussy), allowing them to play a part in a larger epic narrative. Where Dallas misses opportunities to unite a sense of place, he more than compensates with his insight into character. One begins to imagine time layered on top of itself, and its major players read like the Gods of Greek mythology.

So, while the book is not a complete success (and perhaps ends too abruptly), it does manage to make lives jump from the page, and serves as a meeting place for those who have been there and can remember the sights and smells enough to indulge in their own memories, and feel like part of a story greater than their own.

Judith Rich says

I found this rather disappointing and full of sweeping generalisations. Apparently all Marxists have "no time for Emile Zola". Actually, I rather liked Therese Raquin. So there.

Mr Dallas really doesn't like left wing politics. I mean REALLY doesn't like them. He rants quite a lot about Communism and in particular how wrong it was of Sartre to support/join, with no attempt to explain why he may have done so. But I felt he seems to gloss over those who were more attracted to the far right, or offers explanations for them (like why Oscar Wilde chose to side with anti-Semites during the Dreyfus affair).

And in what way is Petain an "anti-hero"? Isn't the opposite of a hero a villain? Isn't an anti-hero the fictional guy you ought not to root for but do, like, say, JR Ewing in "Dallas" (OK, not the best or most literary example, but thinking on my feet here). Not someone who was a bona fide Nazi collaborator. In real life.

There are some interesting facts in here, but overall I didn't really enjoy it.

Tyas says

I really like this book! In an engaging way, Gregor Dallas takes us to several historically, esthetically important places in Paris on the Metro (albeit imaginary, in the case of our readers). Dallas tells us so many things about the places that tie Paris from the past to the present, from the times of the Romans to the French Revolution to Oscar Wilde, Anais Nin, Andre Gide... The book is, in short, entertaining while enlightening at the same time.

I have some notes, though:

1) This book lacks pictures. For someone who's never been to Paris like me, this is a major drawback, especially when he talks about something as if every reader has seen it.

2) The ending is abrupt; the book ends just like... *that*. I'd expect some closing lines or last chapter that would give us the feeling 'Aaaah, how great Paris is!', not just a sentence of how Oscar Wilde pathetically closed his face with his hands.

Kera says

I picked this book up at Shakespeare & Co in Paris back in 2008. It was a delightful read that provided anecdotal histories around the different metro stops that most people frequent while traversing the city. It made the city come to life, and gave me starting points for weekend sojourns and sightseeing expeditions. It's a unique framework for a brief history lesson, and kept me interested from beginning to end. It's by no means an in-depth or hyper-detailed piece, but it was precisely what I was looking for: a book that provides a sense of place for different neighborhoods around Paris.

Paul says

A history philosophy travel guide of Paris told through the Metro stops beginning the the catacombs where the many of the church graves of all the city were moved. The stone from these underground quarries provided the building material for the buildings of Paris.
Religion and revolution are also covered as we travel to the various stops.
An enjoyable read.

Warwick says

Looking through my notebooks, the chapter that stuck with me most out of this interesting book of Paris anecdotes was the one dedicated to Anaïs Nin. The story in here is mainly about her affair with Otto Rank, and fascinating it is too. But in the middle of it, a name appeared which I did not expect:

> Anaïs spent much of her energy trying to get Henry's first novel, *The Tropic of Cancer*, published; her chief link here was Rebecca West who kept a posh place in London and cultivated relations with the grand London literary agent, A. D. Peters. But nobody seemed to appreciate Henry's efforts; Rebecca told Anaïs that she wrote better, and that is what Anaïs thought, too.

Rebecca West! In connection with Anaïs Nin of all people…I was delighted and amazed. I pulled down my copy of Deirdre Bair's not-especially-well-liked biography of Anaïs Nin, which I read years ago and which apparently I had forgotten. It was interesting to see that West's admiration of Nin's writing was not reciprocal: apparently Anaïs thought West wrote ‘like a man and I don't like it’. No surprise there – Rebecca West thought that whether you were male or female should be a trivial concern in life, and no concern at all in literature; whereas Anaïs Nin thought women should dedicate their lives to creative male geniuses and write accordingly. Thinking about it, it's amazing they didn't explode in an antimatter singularity when they came together.

The story of how they met is a wonderful demonstration of both their characters: West concisely brilliant, Anaïs totally bonkers. This is how Bair tells it:

> [Anaïs Nin] first wrote to the English critic and novelist Rebecca West in the autumn of 1932, after West had written brief praise for her book on Lawrence. Anaïs read West's most recent novel, *Harriet Hume*, and sent a letter of appreciation, thanking West in return for hers. West did not reply. Nin waited a month, then wrote again, saying she rarely sought out strangers, but having read *Harriet Hume*, seeking to know its author was a ‘logical outcome’. Once more, West did not reply.
>
> In March 1934, Anaïs wrote yet again, asking West if she would read Henry [Miller]'s Lawrence book and recommend it to a British publisher. This time West replied with a two-word cable: ‘Why? How?’ Incredibly, it was all the encouragement Anaïs needed to go to London. She persuaded Hugo [her husband] to give her enough money for a week's stay and went at once.

Their accounts of the meeting differ somewhat. The way West remembers it:

> Despite West's best efforts not to receive it, Anaïs succeeded in presenting her with Henry's Lawrence manuscript. She read a few pages and decided it was ‘a farrago of nonsense’, but she liked Anaïs, and feeling sorry for her, all alone in London, gave an impromptu dinner party, took her to the theater to see Charles Laughton's Othello, and invited her to a family lunch. ‘We gave her a full and happy four days,’ West recalled, ‘and as she was a total stranger I don't think I did badly for her.’
>
> Anaïs's account consumes many pages in her unpublished diary, starting with [...] her initial impression of West as ‘Pola Negri without beauty and English teeth…. She is deeply uneasy. She's intimidated by me.’ Anaïs said that at luncheon, she was ‘more and more disillusioned by [West's] sexlessness, her domesticity and by her last book on St. Augustine…Naturally she admired Henry's book on Lawrence and passed over *Black Spring* in silence.’

It was Rebecca West who seemed to make Anaïs first realise that she could write better than most of the men she was sleeping with on a semi-regular basis.

> Rebecca supposedly said, ‘[...] you're a so much better writer than [Henry Miller] is, so much more mature.’ ‘I was mute with surprise [Anaïs says in her diary]....It stunned me. No, she must be prejudiced. NO, NO. She's wrong.’ Later, she added, ‘Henry will never forgive me for this – if he knew. I realized suddenly that Henry would not want me greater.’

The two of them became quite good, if unlikely, friends. West took Anaïs to a dinner party in her (West's) honour in New York, but Anaïs ended up pulling Norman Bel Geddes over cocktails and launching a brief affair, which didn't go down too well. Still, West ended up visiting her in France the next year, and they had a little holiday together which is frankly rather difficult to imagine:

> She read Anaïs's burgeoning manuscript and made thoughtful comments; Anaïs instructed her in the art of applying false eyelashes and mascara. The two women painted each other's nails and compared their analyses, their husbands, and their lovers.

Rebecca West and Anaïs Nin painting each other's nails? Unlikely Scenes From Literary History #54887.

In the end, as she did with most people, Anaïs pushed Rebecca away. When she came to publish her famous diaries, West asked for all references to her to be removed on threat of legal proceedings. In the proofs, which West sent to her lawyer, there was a long section in which West supposedly confessed to being sexually abused by her own father. West recognised this as being Anaïs's own ‘latent, highly disguised, sexual fantasy’ (Nin apparently really did seduce her own father, or at least found the notion extremely compelling, and she replays the scenario endlessly in her work and her diaries).

‘What do I do about this?’ West wrote to her lawyer. ‘Where should I park a disclaimer of all this nonsense?’

Two fascinating people. I'm pleased they interacted.

(It feels strange to quote Bair's book so often in a putative review of someone else's, but since Dallas's book is inherently anecdotal and tangential anyway, I'm allowing myself the liberty.)

Tony says

There are 300 stations in Paris’ sprawling metro system. Gregor Dallas chose twelve of them. In a map in the front of the book, the twelve stations seem rather evenly spaced circling the city. I thought the *underground history* promised in the title would be contemporary, that Dallas would take us through the spindles, each in turn, and introduce us to the bakers and the buskers, the *plen air* painters that I imagine give each city its color. And the book *looks* like it could deliver that. Twelve chapters begin with our arrival at each selected station; each chapter in turn adorned with a single, grainy black and white photograph or etching. Very Sebald-y in appearance. I thought it might prove a travel guide, but with an artistic flair, such that I could go there, take the train, and have a feel for what the locals see.

But it’s not quite that. Dallas is an expatriated English historian. His books are often entertaining, but typically rife with errors. History, but written in his *sense* of things. Here, at each station, we disembark, look around, and are treated to a mini-biography of some notable who lost a head here, was buried there, or found a bed much more to his or her liking than the one risen from that morning.

He chose characters wisely. There is Sartre in the German occupation and his conversion to communism. We learn how St. Denis lost his head. No, really. There’s a statue of him near *Porte de Clignancourt* holding his head. Zola writing *Le Ventre*. Debussy, writing opera scenes that mirrored his own infidelity. Jim Morrison’s body is no longer in the cemetery at *Pere Lachaise*, but Oscar Wilde’s tomb is, and people can’t stop writing wishes of love in lipstick on the granite.

At one stop, we are introduced to Antoine Bourdelle, the sculptor of *The Dying Centaur*. Bourdelle was asked why the centaur dies. “He dies like all the gods,” Bourdelle replied, “because no one believes in him any more”.

Dallas has an eye for the prurient, but never as much as when he tells of the time Anais Nin knocks on Otto Rank’s door. Doctor, doctor, can you help me?

You can read this in pieces, as I did. There are bald statements – “In the twentieth century, belief became the central issue” – which are facially ridiculous. I would have liked more buskers.

Edith says

Good premise, bad/boring ecriture.

Charles says

An irritating, superficial book, opinionated in the worst way (i.e. without substantiation) and poorly-written, with a faux-familiarity that set my teeth on edge from the first few pages. The only reason I have for giving it more than one star is that it's occasionally redeemed by the odd interesting fact. But how reliable is a writer who confuses Shakespeare with Pope, and Socrates with Freud? Dallas is incensed by so much - communism, Islam, psychoanalysis, immigrants, the Nobel Prize committee - there are times when the book reads more like a Daily Mail editorial than a study of Paris. Even the 'big idea' - basing a history of the city on the underground - is poorly handled. Paris deserves better. A book like Graham Robb's Parisians, for example.Parisians: An Adventure History of Paris

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Emily says

This book was strongest in discussing interesting personalities that have called Paris home. I have learned about so many new and different historic figures including Anaïs Nin, Marquis de Morès, and Gabriel de Montgomery. As well as a few I learned more about - Debussy, Oscar Wilde, Émile Zola, and Louis Phillips Joseph, Duc d’Orleans. All through the lens of the modern Metro stops. It was an interesting view into the modern infrastructure.

What I didn’t like about this book was just a few smaller things. One being that at the beginning of each chapter the author kind of discusses the modern Metro stops and area as if you are there. While that was definitely a stylistic choice, it didn’t work well for me, someone who has only been to Paris a few times and didn’t really know what he was referring to. I think this style would be best if someone was in Paris and had the opportunity to read each Chapter at their respective Metro stops. Additionally, there were a few chapters that were just not as interesting to me... although that may be my own personal preferences.

Overall, I liked how diverse the subjects and time periods discussed in this book were and I loved how it brought past events into present Paris.
