



Paris Noir: The Secret History of A City

Jacques Yonnet

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In Paris Noir Yonnet tells us about some of the darker quarters of Paris on the left bank of the Seine, centred on the place Mauberge and the rue Mouffetard, as seen from his own experience. It is mainly written during the 1940s, under the Occupation and in the immediate post-war period; there is a certain amount dealing with the resistance, but the main thrust of the book is a Paris that existed between the wars - and is well known from the film noir -but has since disappeared. It concentrates on the people, rather than places, a mixture of ordinary workers, tradesmen, artists, con-men and criminals. It invests the area with a sense of mystery including occasional supernatural events; it is extremely well written, often using the language of the inhabitants of the area. Raymond Queneau considered it the greatest book ever written about Paris. For Dedalus it is the perfect counterfoil for J.K.Huysmans' Parisian Sketches which Dedalus published in 2004 which showed the darker side of Paris pre Haussman's big boulevards. 'Among the books you must read before you die is Paris Noir by Jacques Yonnet.' Raphael Sorin "Concentrating on the seedy area around Rue Mouffetard, which becomes "La Mouffe" in a typically Parisian abbreviation, Yonnet reveals the dark side of the City of Light in the 1940s in this "secret history of a city". The street life of the Left Bank ticks on much as normal during the Occupation, though Leopoldie the tart stops turning tricks because "the green German uniform does not suit her complexion". Keep- on-Dancin', the killer with a fondness for history, rules the roost. Though describing himself as "sceptical, disillusioned, cynical", Yonnet casually dispatches a traitor in the Resistance. This is film noir in book form." Christopher Hirst in The Independent

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