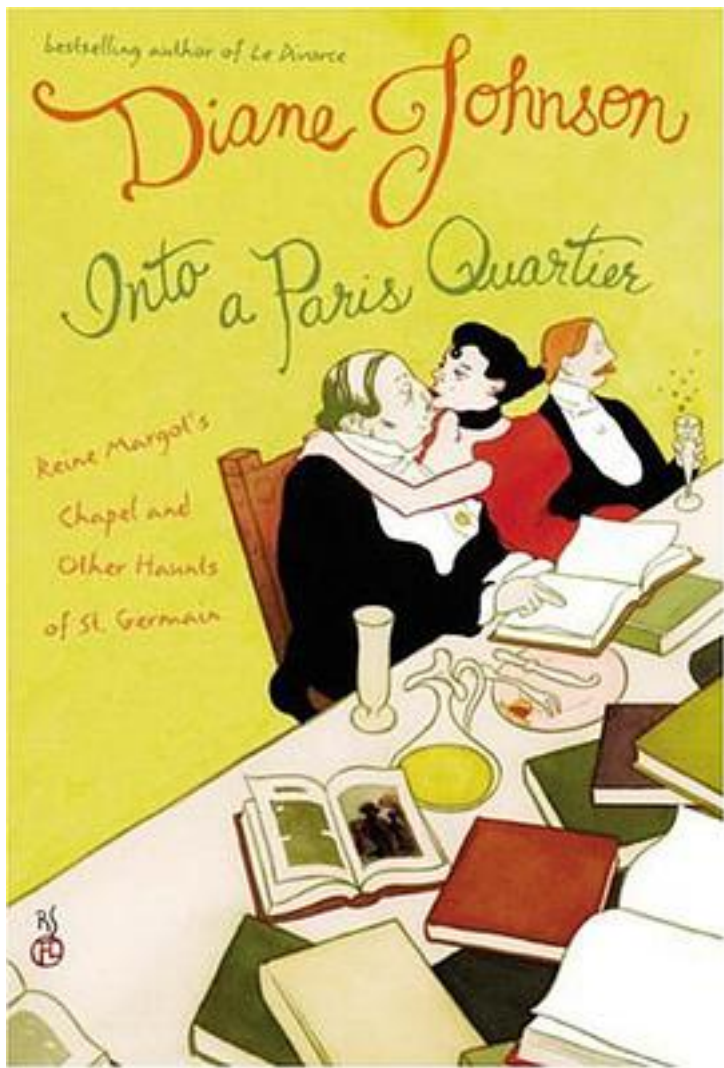


Into A Paris Quartier



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As a child, Diane Johnson was in love with the books of Alexander Dumas, especially *The Three Musketeers*, 17th-century residents of St. Germain-des-Pres, an area of Paris that sprang up in the 9th century around a famous Benedictine abbey. Today Johnson herself lives in the richly historic quartier and has discovered the musketeers' haunts and those of its many other famous denizens. "Thomas Jefferson lived on rue Bonaparte, just a few doors away on the street where I am now living more than two hundred years later," Johnson writes, "and Franklin was just around the corner on the rue Jacob. The novelist Henry Miller stayed up the street at the Hotel St. Germain, where Janet Flanner, the venerable New Yorker correspondent also lived." Though modern St. Germain is lively and prosperous, and the recent past-the heyday from the 40s through the 60s, famous for jazz and existentialism-best known, "the seventeenth century is still strangely present, and I find that to understand the now, it is necessary to see it back then." From her kitchen window, Johnson looks out on the slate-covered dome of a chapel begun by the fascinating and licentious Reine Margot, wife of Henri IV. "Since I have come to live on the rue Bonaparte," Johnson writes, "I find that beside the shades of Jean-Paul Sartre and Edith Piaf, there is another crowd of resident ghosts that urge themselves forward for recognition-ghosts of four centuries ago, of the three Musketeers D'Artagnan, Athos, and Porthos; of four queens-Catherine de Medicis, Marguerite de Valois, Anne of Austria, and Marie Antoinette; of the sinister Cardinals Mazarin and Richelieu; Kings Louis XIII to XVI and Henrys; and numberless other misty figures in plumed hats whose fortunes and passions were enacted among the beautiful, imposing buildings still making up this neighborhood." More recent centuries are also represented within a few minutes walk of Johnson's apartment. Empress Josephine resided on her street and Napoleon's mother nearby. The painters Delacroix, Corot, Ingres, David, and Manet lived in the neighborhood. Composer Richard Wagner spent a year here and Oscar Wilde died here. The list goes on and on. With her delicious imagination and wry and opinionated voice, Diane Johnson's stories and ruminations about her fascinating neighborhood will be a true feast for anyone enticed by the City of Light.

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