

# The best bookshops in Paris

 [blogs.lse.ac.uk/lsereviewofbooks/2014/10/18/the-best-bookshops-in-paris/](https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/lsereviewofbooks/2014/10/18/the-best-bookshops-in-paris/)

2014-10-18

**Ana Polo Alonso** is a political adviser and a regular contributor to *LSE Review of Books*. In this post she gives us a tour of the best bookshops in **Paris**. If there's a bookshop that you think other students and academics should visit when they're undertaking research or visiting a city for a conference, find more information about contributing below.



As a city proud of its intellectual zest, cradle of artistic revolutions, and mecca for novelists and poets, Paris is a sanctuary for bibliophiles – a place where endless treasure troves are found just by walking around, exercising the French art of the *flânerie*.

It is also the city that allured and attracted the most notorious artists and writers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – geniuses whose footsteps can be traced today all around the city, especially at the bookshops they frequented.

Ernest Hemingway, for instance, used to visit a bookshop placed at Rue d'Odéon and managed by American-born Sylvia Beach. "On a cold windswept street, this was a warm, cheerful place with a big stove in winter, tables and shelves of books, new books in the window, and photographs on the wall of famous writers both dead and living", he described it in *A Moveable Feast*. Truly a refuge – both physical and intellectual – [Shakespeare and Co.](#) was the meeting point of English-speaking then-aspiring writers like Ezra Pound, Francis Scott Fitzgerald and James Joyce (actually, Beach was the first to publish Joyce's *Ulysses* in 1922).

Regrettably, the original Shakespeare and Co. disappeared, but the indomitable and certainly idiosyncratic George Whitman managed to keep its ethos alive in a new location. Whitman, who died in 2011, launched a bookshop in 1951 called "La Mistral", at [37 Rue de la Bûcherie](#), facing the Notre Dame Cathedral. In 1964, in tribute to Beach, he renamed it to Shakespeare and Co. and provided an intellectual fortress to many now-acclaimed authors. Upon entering into the two-storey bookshop through that iconic green façade, one can't avoid imagining Lawrence Durrell and Henry Miller browsing books there, or the beatnick poets reading out loud their verses.

The clientele may have changed a little bit, but its catalogue of English books is still one of the best in the city, with the bookshop's ground floor filled with new books focusing on literature, sociology and history, and the upper ground crammed with second-hand books on fiction, biography and art.



Inside Shakespeare and Co. Credit: [Kevin Adams](#) CC BY-NC 2.0

For those looking for an intellectual but less-crowded environment, La Hune, at [16-18 Rue de l'Abbaye](#), in the quintessential Parisian neighborhood of Saint-Germain-des-Prés, is the place. Frequented decades ago by surrealists like André Breton, Tristan Tzara or Francis Picabia, this bookshop once had a bohemian flair, but now presents a more refined, even sophisticated outlook. It focuses on French literature and humanities on the ground floor and houses an outstanding selection of fine arts and cinema books on the upper floor.

Another bookshop with cult-status is the highly intellectual [Tschann](#), at [125 Boulevard du Montparnasse](#). Founded in 1925, it gained a much-deserved place in the French 20th century literature not only because its original owners took an active role in nurturing the literary life of the legendary Montparnasse neighborhood, but especially for the fact that the bookshop was paramount in discovering and promoting Samuel Beckett. Nowadays, its wide array of books focuses on fiction, poetry, history, sociology and art. They are the best proof that Tschann's unfettered passion for quality and excellence remains intact.



Credit: [Juan Ruaud](#) CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

Finally, one of the best chances to mingle with the current exponents of Parisian intellectualism is attending one of the many events that Les Cahiers de Colette, at [23-25 Rue Rambuteau](#), organizes. A small, cozy and friendly bookshop in Le Marais neighborhood, it offers an exquisitely curated selection of French literature and philosophy, coupled with a great assortment of history books and a most than notable offer of foreign literature (most books are translated into French, though).

Obviously, the list could go on and on: [Artazart](#), or the iconic [Ofr.](#), which will entice art lovers; the [Librairie Le Bail Weissert](#), specialized in history, antique maps and atlases... But since we are talking about Paris and books, I cannot end this article without making a reference to the world-known *bouquinistes*.

Since the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Seine River has been flanked by small, bottle-green boxes crammed with plastic-wrapped books, maps, drawings, and even bizarre memorabilia. Truly a paradise for hunting first editions, among other literary, philosophical and artistic gems, it has an unique allure that was perfectly described by poet Rainer Maria Rilke in a letter to his wife:

*“The bouquinistes along the quais open their boxes, and the yellow freshness or weariness of the books, the brown violet of the bindings, the more sovereign green of an album, all harmonize, count, take part in the whole and converge in consummate perfection”*

It's a wonderful tribute, not only to the diligent booksellers, but to a city, Paris, that is in itself the largest bookstore in the world.



Credit: [Henrik Berger Jørgensen](#) CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

---

**Ana Polo Alonso** is a speechwriter and political adviser. She holds a BSc in Political Science from the Pompeu Fabra University (Barcelona), and a MA in Public Administration from Pompeu Fabra-ESADE. She also studied Marketing and Branding at the New York University, Project Management at Stanford, and specialized in Digital Marketing at Instituto de la Empresa (IE) Business School. Ana served as Responsible for Communications at the Women's World Forum, and has collaborated with International Organizations to develop advocacy strategies. She is currently finishing her first book, focused on the history of US Presidential campaigns. [Read more reviews by Ana.](#)

---

**Do you have a favourite bookshop? If there's a bookshop that you think other students and academics should visit when they're undertaking research or visiting a city for a conference, then now's your chance to tell us all about it.**

As part of a new weekly feature on LSE Review of Books, we're asking academics and students to recommend their favourite two or three bookshops in a particular city, with the aim of building an exciting online series for our book-loving community of readers the world over.

Bookshops could be academic, alternative, foreign language, hobby-based, secret or underground institutions, second hand outlets, or connected to a university. We'd like to cover all world regions too.

If something comes to mind, we're looking for around 100 words per bookshop, detailing why this place is a must-see. Our editorial team can then find suitable photos and links to accompany the piece, though you're welcome to supply these too. We only ask that you focus on just one city or region, and two or three bookshops within it.

**Email us now if you'd like to contribute:** [lseviewofbooks@lse.ac.uk](mailto:lseviewofbooks@lse.ac.uk)

- Copyright 2013 LSE Review of Books