

Shakespeare and Company: A Parisian Literary Landmark [B1]

Luogo di incontro per gli amanti della letteratura, questa piccola libreria indipendente di Parigi è diventata un importante attore culturale nel panorama anglosassone.

In 1951 George Whitman, an American [expat](#) in Paris, founded an English bookshop on the left [bank](#) of the River [Seine](#). He had arrived in the French capital in 1946, and his hotel room was [jam-packed](#) with books. His first attempt to sell them was from a boat, but they got [damp](#). With a \$500 inheritance, he bought a former [grocery store](#) on 37 rue de la Bûcherie. He called his bookshop Le Mistral.

SYLVIA BEACH

In 1962, Le Mistral hosted a reading by the English novelist Lawrence Durrell. It was attended by a local icon, Sylvia Beach. Born in Baltimore in the US, Beach had come to Paris during World War One as a volunteer with the American Red Cross. In 1919, she opened her own English bookshop on 12 rue de l'Odéon in the Saint-Germain-des-Prés quarter of Paris. She called it Shakespeare and Company.

LITERARY HUB

Shakespeare and Company worked as a [lending library](#) too, and specialised in books published in Britain and the US. In the 1920s, there was a large American [expat](#) community living in Paris. Among them were many artists, musicians and writers who were [despondent](#) about America, and had relocated to Paris to live a bohemian lifestyle. With the growing interest in American literature among French readers, the bookshop was soon a literary [hub](#). Among those who frequented it were American writers Gertrude Stein, Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald.

TWISTS OF HISTORY

In 1922, Beach published James Joyce's *Ulysses*. The book had been rejected by several established publishers, who considered it obscene. Beach helped the Irish author complete it, and the thousand-copy first printing was sold exclusively at Shakespeare and Company. In 1940 the Nazis occupied Paris, and the bookshop shut down. Beach survived the war and published a memoir, entitled *Shakespeare and Company*, in 1959. By then, she was a regular visitor to Whitman's *Le Mistral*. In 1962, she declared it to be a "spiritual successor" to her own shop, and Whitman, deeply flattered, announced he would rename *Le Mistral* in her honour.

A SECOND LIFE

The new Shakespeare and Company was already a centre for anglophone literary life in Paris. Writers James Baldwin, William Burroughs, Anaïs Nin and Allen Ginsberg were all early visitors. Whitman often invited travellers, usually aspiring writers or poets, to sleep in the shop in exchange for helping out, agreeing to read a book a day, and writing a one-page autobiography for the shop's archives.

Glossary

- **hub** = centro
- **rejected** = rifiutare
- **first printing** = prima stampa
- **Seine** = Senna
- **damp** = umido
- **grocery store** = negozio di alimentari
- **lending library** = biblioteca
- **despondent** = sconfortati
- **expat** = espatriato (abbreviazione di 'expatriate')
- **bank** = riva
- **jam-packed** = pieno zeppo
- **flattered** = lusingato