

Shakespeare and Company and Subculture in Twentieth Century America



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The Making of a Subculture

A subculture is “an identifiably separate social group within a larger culture, especially one regarded as existing outside mainstream society (“Subculture”). A subculture rejects some part of a dominant culture, but at the same time cannot exist without it. The Lost Generation writers of the 1920s and the Beat Generation poets of the 1950s and 1960s were members of two subcultures, and they inspired their respective movements through their literature and lifestyles. Members of each group rejected materialism and the pressure to conform to a growing homogenous consumer culture after World War I and World War II. Their wish to escape the suppressions of mainstream American culture resulted in many of these writers leaving the country altogether. These writers became expatriates, several of them drawn to Paris, France, a cosmopolitan (or culturally diverse) city, whose residents did not pressure visiting foreigners (as opposed to immigrants) to assimilate to any set cultural standard.

Emerging at the same time that the first wave of expatriate writers arrived in Paris in the 1920s was a small English language bookstore called Shakespeare and Company. Soon after its opening, expatriate writers, many of whom would later compose the Lost Generation, began flocking to the shop in order to converse with and borrow books from its owner, a kind woman with a passion for literature and writers named Sylvia Beach. News of the eclectic lending library traveled quickly, and it was not long before its visitors transformed the bookstore into a sanctuary for expatriate writers from the United States as well as England and Ireland and Sylvia Beach was helping to publish what would become some of the most famous works of twentieth century western literature.

Although Beach’s bookstore would close during World War II, in 1951, a second English language bookstore opened in Paris, known as Le Mistral. Its owner, an

American expatriate named George Whitman, would run his bookstore in the spirit of Sylvia Beach's bookshop, encouraging writers to develop their creativity while lending books free of charge. Le Mistral was home to a second wave of American expatriates, poets who were part of a subculture known as the Beat Generation. The Beat poets flocked to Le Mistral to consult books, converse with Whitman, and participate in poetry readings. Whitman viewed his bookshop as a "socialist utopia," where aspiring writers in Paris who were low on funds could sleep, in exchange for helping out around the store. Whitman's bookshop, today known as Shakespeare and Company (he changed the name after Beach's death, in her honor), is still in business, and has become somewhat of an institution.

With the help of Beach and Whitman, who harbored and aided members of the subculture groups that visited their respective bookshops, the Lost Generation and Beat Generation writers went on to gain much popularity and success. Shakespeare and Company thus influenced the development of subculture in twentieth century America through its impact on the Lost Generation and Beat Generation writers.

Sylvia Beach and Shakespeare and Company

Around the corner and one block from the metro at the Boulevard Saint-Michel, past street vendors and touristy cafés, resides the historic bookstore Shakespeare and Company. Directly across the street from Notre Dame Cathedral, and located only yards from the center of Paris, this revolutionary bookshop served throughout the latter half of the twentieth century as a haven for expatriate writers to gather and share ideas. However, the history of Shakespeare and Company goes back much further than 1951, when an

American World War Two veteran named George Whitman opened the doors to the famous bookshop originally called “Le Mistral.” In fact, the roots of Shakespeare and Company lie several streets away at 12 rue de l’Odeon, and a generation before, in the year 1919, when a young American woman, Sylvia Beach, decided to open a small bookshop in Paris that quickly became a sanctuary for expatriate writers from all over the world. Sylvia Beach and her bookstore, Shakespeare and Company, would serve as publisher and financial supporter to expatriate writers living in Paris after World War I. Beach herself introduced writers to one another, serving as a social networker and a vital link between writers who made up the Lost Generation.

Sylvia Beach

The second of three children born to Presbyterian minister Sylvester Beach and Eleanor Orbison, Nancy Beach, who would change her name to Sylvia as a teenager, had an insatiable interest in books from an early age. The nature of her father’s profession as a pastor required the Beach family to move around frequently, and when Sylvia was fourteen, they moved to Paris.

From Paris, the Beach family moved to Princeton, New Jersey, where Reverend Beach became the minister of the town’s First Presbyterian Church. Among the congregation were several prominent members of society, including future president Woodrow Wilson and his family, as well as “the Grover Clevelands and James Garfields” (Beach, 7). As Noelle Riley Fitch explains in *Sylvia Beach and the Lost Generation*, “Like the college professor, the minister often

shares the education and culture of the upper class, without having its economic advantages" (23). Thus, although the Beaches associated with wealthy people, they had to rely on "the goodwill and generosity of others" in order to survive financially. As Fitch explains, Sylvia learned how to rely on others for economic support, and she used this skill later in life when opening her own bookstore.

Beach Moves to Paris

In 1917, Beach moved to Paris with her sister Cyprian, an aspiring actress. In her memoir, *Shakespeare and Company*, Beach describes the excitement and danger of living in World War One Paris, amidst "nightly air raids" and "Big Bertha, the Germans' pet gun, which raked the streets during the day" (11).

While living in Paris as a young adult, Beach's love of literature and books engrained within her the aspiration to open a bookshop in the future. While visiting the Bibliothèque Nationale (the national library of France) one day, Beach learned of a French bookstore, called La Maison des Amis des Livres, which she decided to visit. There, she met the shop's owner, Adrienne Monnier, who became Beach's friend and inspiration, and later, lover and lifelong companion. Monnier, who "believed that the world of books is a world of writers and readers linked together by ineffable, almost mystical, bonds" (Wineapple, v), served as a role model for Beach, who would use Monnier's philosophy in creating a bookshop that served as a sanctuary for visiting writers. At Monnier's bookstore, Beach networked with French patrons and authors, who later helped her with opening her own bookshop.

As World War I loomed over France, however, Beach longed to be able to help in some way, and her plans for opening a bookshop were set aside for the

duration of the war. For a summer, she lived out in the French countryside helping families to pick grapes and harvest wheat, as most able-bodied men were off at war on the Western Front, and their farming chores fell upon the women and children at home. Beach then joined the American Red Cross for several months, and at the end of the war, returned to Paris, ready to put her plans into action.

After befriending Adrienne Monnier, the two had entertained the idea of Beach returning to the United States to open a French bookstore in New York, to offer Americans the opportunity to become acquainted with contemporary French authors and gain an appreciation for French literature. When Beach had returned from working for the Red Cross, however, she found the enterprise to be too costly for her funds, and the bookstore instead “turned into an American one in Paris” (21), where the cost of living was much cheaper. Beach found a small vacant shop at 8 rue Dupuytren, and in November of 1919, her small bookstore, which she named “Shakespeare and Company,” was open for business. Beach was surprised to find that from the moment the store opened its doors, “for twenty years,” her customers “never gave [her] time to meditate” (21). She was not surprised to find, however, that because of the high cost of English books, “lending books... was much easier in Paris than selling them” (21).

Friends and Patrons

News about Beach’s bookstore spread to America, and it was not long before writers from the United States who had come to Paris to escape post-war

“suppressions” in American society that barred them from freedom of expression were flocking to Shakespeare and Company.

Some of Beach’s earliest American customers were George Antheil, a composer from New Jersey, Robert McAlmon, a poet from the Midwest, and Ezra Pound, who Beach recounts in her memoirs talked more about his furniture making skills than about literature. Other early visitors were American expatriate Gertrude Stein and her partner, Alice B. Toklas. Stein, upon visiting Shakespeare and Company “complained that there were no amusing books in it” (28), as Beach stocked only a few of Stein’s works in her library. Beach nevertheless befriended Stein and Toklas, and Stein’s fans began going to Beach with requests to meet the writer.

Shakespeare and Company, from its earliest days, served as a common place for writers and artists to correspond and share ideas with one another, with Beach as the go between that kept these relationships intact. However popular the small bookshop became in its early years in Paris for American writers, it was nothing compared to what it would become after Sylvia Beach’s first meeting with Irish expatriate James Joyce.

The Lost Generation Writers

Many of the most notable figures who frequented Beach’s Shakespeare and Company were writers who sought to escape the censorship of artistic freedom and the suppression of dissent prevalent in post World War I American society. Today, these authors are members of a specific literary period, known as the Lost Generation. Expatriate writer Gertrude Stein coined the term, telling her friend and protégé Ernest Hemingway, “You have no respect for anything. You

drink yourselves to death... You are all a lost generation" (Hemingway, 29). The writers who expatriated to Paris after World War I were known as the "Lost Generation" because their "inherited values were no longer relevant in the postwar world" ("Lost Generation"), where people turned to materialism as they attempted to return to a state of "normalcy." One member of the Lost Generation, James Joyce, who had gained moderate popularity on the success of his first novel, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, was in the midst of a battle with publishers because of his up and coming book *Ulysses* when he first met Sylvia Beach. Publishers in both England and America would not touch his newest work, as they knew government authorities would consider the work obscene because of its graphic language and its stream of consciousness style, which violated literary standards of the time. Consequently, no publishing company in any English speaking country was willing to risk its business by printing the book. Beach, who had met Joyce at a party, saw him as a sincere and compassionate person, fueling her desire to help him in his struggle with *Ulysses*, and soon after their first encounter, she asked Joyce for the honor of having Shakespeare and Company publish the work. Beach hoped that by publishing *Ulysses* in France, the same obstacles would not emerge, and Joyce's acceptance of her offer marked the first step in Shakespeare and Company's ascendance into an entity that was more than just a bookstore-the small shop was quickly gaining mass popularity. Beach, with the help of Adrienne Monnier, who had much experience in working with publishers, found one by the name of Maurice Darantiere, who Beach explains, "was much interested in what [she] told him about the banning of *Ulysses* in the English-speaking countries" (48), and thereby agreed to produce the work. Darantiere was "an established printer in Dijon,"

who “worked with contemporary French writers and so was used to dealing with experimental works of fiction” (“Letter” 30).

While *Ulysses* was in process of publication, Beach and her network of friends and patrons worked hard to sell copies of the book in advance, while at the same time moving Shakespeare and Company to a bigger shop, at 12 rue de l’Odeon. In the midst of these endeavors, Beach also arranged a meeting between Joyce and Valery Larbaud, “one of the most admired writers in France” (Beach, 54). Not only did she serve as publisher for Joyce however, Beach also assisted him financially, at the expense of her bookshop, so that he could support his family before the income from *Ulysses* came in.

Thus, Beach’s risky efforts to publish Joyce, to help him establish connections with prominent writers in France, like Larbaud, and to assist him financially, almost single-handedly led to his notoriety after the printing and distribution of *Ulysses*. The assistance of Shakespeare and Company led to the emergence of a literary icon, though neither Beach nor the bookstore ever gained much credit for Joyce’s success. Sadly, financial difficulties later forced Beach to sell some of her original Joycean manuscripts in order to keep Shakespeare and Company afloat.

Though fond of him, Beach did not consider Joyce her “best customer.” That title fell upon Ernest Hemingway, who Beach considered a great friend. In her memoir, she describes Hemingway as a writer characterized by “his originality, his very personal style, his skillful workmanship, his tidiness, his storyteller’s gift and a sense of the dramatic, his power to create” (81). Ernest Hemingway frequented Shakespeare and Company, and was one of Beach’s first paying customers. Hemingway held Shakespeare and Company in high esteem,

and in his memoir *A Moveable Feast*, describes the bookstore as “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” (35). Hemingway spoke highly of the bookstore's owner as well, and attested to her character that “no one that I ever knew was nicer to me” (35).

Another expatriate writer and friend of Beach who frequently visited Shakespeare and Company was F. Scott Fitzgerald, who lived frivolously with his wife Zelda through his enormous fortune that he accumulated from his books, including *The Great Gatsby*. Beach however, in her memoir, speaks of him with the highest respect, venerating “his blue eyes and good looks, his concern for others, that wild recklessness of his, and his fallen-angel fascination” (116). Beach and Monnier arranged a meeting over dinner between Fitzgerald and Joyce, whose work Fitzgerald admired, and once again, Shakespeare and Company served as the link that attached two literary icons of the Lost Generation.

The End of an Era

The end of Beach’s bookshop came during the Nazi occupation and the imposition of the Vichy France government during World War Two, when a Nazi official threatened to shut the store down because Beach refused to hand over to him her personal copy of Joyce’s *Finnegan’s Wake*, the successor to *Ulysses*. It was then that Beach, along with her friends and patrons, emptied the shelves, loaded books into storage for protection, and closed the doors to Shakespeare and Company.

After the store closed, Sylvia Beach began working against the Vichy France government, and was eventually arrested and sent to an internment

camp. At the end of the war, after Beach's release and her return home to live with Monnier, it was none other than Ernest Hemingway who "liberated" Shakespeare and Company, fighting off armed guards to rid the rue de l'Odéon of Nazi occupation. However, once the war ended, Beach never reopened her bookstore.

Sylvia Beach's Impact on the Lost Generation

Through her commitment to publishing writers, and her efforts to introduce writers to one another, Sylvia Beach served as the bond that united members of the Lost Generation. From Joyce to Hemingway to Fitzgerald, the Lost Generation authors set a precedent for literature of the twentieth century. These bohemian expatriates laid the groundwork for literary movements that stressed the evils of artistic suppression and censorship, as well as conformity and materialism. Had it not been for Sylvia Beach's little bookshop, in a postwar Paris filled with expatriate writers all aspiring to have freedom of expression in their work, many of the most famous English language writers of the 1920s may never have had their greatest works published. As Joyce made evident by his distress about the publication of *Ulysses*, Sylvia Beach was his last hope. Without Beach's assistance, *Ulysses* may never have existed in publication. The writers of the Lost Generation may never have become so interconnected, had it not been for Beach's efforts to introduce fellow writers to one another, in the hopes that they would learn from and inspire each other. James Joyce may never have known Valéry Larbaud, F. Scott Fitzgerald would never have known James Joyce, and Ernest Hemingway may have never met Ezra Pound. The web woven

by Beach connecting the post war expatriate writers together is unmistakable, as shown by their constant desire to have Beach introduce them to one another.

Beach's ability to conjure intellectual conversation allowed her to act as a muse to the Lost Generation authors, especially to her good friend Ernest Hemingway. She "served the arts with missionary zeal, nurtured artistic talent, and maintained her own identity in a crowd of strong personalities" (Fitch). Her dedication to the writers she wanted to succeed and her ability to maintain a sense of self while managing a business explains much of the success that Shakespeare and Company encountered.

George Whitman and the Mistral

"So it is no longer Sylvia Beach's Shakespeare and Company visited by André Gide...James Joyce and Henry Miller. It is The Mistral, visited by James Jones, Styron, Ginsberg, and Burroughs, the beatniks, and the new bohemians."

Anaïs Nin

The Diary of Anais Nin, Vol. 5

George Whitman

In August of 1951, almost a decade after Sylvia Beach closed her bookshop, a young American war veteran by the name of George Whitman decided to open a small English bookshop and lending library that he called "Le Mistral." "The Mistral," as its earliest English-speaking patrons knew the store,

quickly gained notoriety as a hangout for American writers and poets who sought the company of fellow English speaking bohemians.

George Whitman was born in 1913 in New Jersey, coincidentally in the same state where Sylvia Beach grew up. His father, Walter Whitman, was a writer and later, a science professor at Salem Teacher's College, and his mother, Grace Whitman, a devout Christian, who, to the vexation of George, "insisted her children embrace the church" (Mercer, 24).

George Whitman had excelled in reading as a child, possessing a love of literature from an early age. After graduating from Boston University in 1935, with a dual degree in journalism and science, instead of taking a job, he decided to travel, in order to "explore the world and mix with the people" (26). Whitman became a hobo of sorts, and he went west, "hopping trains...living off the kindness of strangers, seeing America from the bottom up" (26). After awhile, Whitman came up with a plan to "walk around the world, and 113,000-mile journey, with 30,000 of them on foot" (26). When he grew exhausted from his venture, Whitman moved to Panama to get a job working on the Panama Canal. He then returned to America for a time, taking classes in Russian at Harvard at one point, as he labeled himself as "a communist, completely and unequivocally" (27), a political leaning that he had embraced as an undergraduate at Boston University. When the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor in December of 1941, Whitman enlisted in the military and his superiors stationed him in Greenland. After the war, Whitman returned to the United States for a while, but had a strong urge to resume his travels.

Whitman moved to Paris in the 1940s, where he took a class at the Sorbonne, during which time he operated a small library out of his hotel room.

After living in Paris for a few years, Whitman began to formulate plans for opening a bookshop, where he could practice his socialist ideals, lending books free and offering whatever he could to strangers. It was in 1951 that his plans came full circle, and “Le Mistral,” both named for “his girlfriend at the time, and the name of the famously fierce wind that blows through the south of France” (30), opened its doors.

Anaïs Nin and Le Mistral

Le Mistral’s earliest wave of patrons included French diarist Anaïs Nin, American writer Henry Miller, as well as a surge of expatriate writers and travelers who had heard rumors of a bookstore founded in the spirit of Sylvia Beach’s Shakespeare and Company, but whose radical owner allowed patrons to sleep in beds among the bookshelves at no charge. In Volume Five of her diaries in Paris, Nin writes about Le Mistral and its quirky owner, who she describes as “undernourished, bearded, a saint among his books, lending them, housing penniless friends upstairs, not eager to sell, in the back of the store, in a small overcrowded room, with a desk, a small gas stove” (202).

Nin, who returned to Paris in the 1950s after living in the United States, had been a patron of Sylvia Beach’s bookshop, and observed through Whitman’s clientele, that the character of the expatriate had changed in the thirty years since the Lost Generation had swept through Paris. In her diary from the 1950s, Nin notes that “where there was a warm, hospitable, friendly, demonstrative, affectionate fraternity between writers and artists” was now “often a sullen silence, a disinterested attitude, and the young bohemian lying on the couch reading a book would not stop reading when another writer came in” (203).

The Beats at Home and Abroad

Nin's characterization of this new generation of expatriate wanderers referred to the Beat poets- post World War II bohemians who rejected the conformity and materialism to which a growing homogenous culture in America clung. The beat poets got their name from the leader and most famous member of the movement himself, Jack Kerouac, who, reflecting on the preceding Lost Generation writers, stated to a friend that "this is nothing but a beat generation," in an attempt "not meaning to name the generation, but to unname it" (Waldman).

According to Barry Miles in *The Beat Hotel*, the beats "were primarily from white middle class college educated backgrounds" (4), and they wanted to escape a "Puritanism" that America had embraced after the war, aimed at cleansing the nation of political and cultural dissent. The white middle class Protestant majority in America embraced this conformity in part out of government- imposed fear of the spread of communism. Strengthening this social force was a postwar prosperity enjoyed by many Americans and their need to return to a state of normalcy after years of wartime turmoil and a decade long bought of severe economic depression.

The Beat poets were members of a subculture who felt alienated by these growing social pressures in America. The beat poets rejected the practice of censorship in literature, which came alongside the homogenization of American culture. The beats were notorious for writing pieces that pushed the envelope of the time- literature with content about homosexuality, drugs and criticisms of

society that the dominant culture in America deemed threatening. Censorship of literature became so extreme, that government authorities held obscenity trials in the effort to ban beat literature from importation and publication. Ironically, as well as understandably, these trials only led to the popularization of beat literature, as the best way to spark the interest of the American public regarding a book is to ban it. As stated by Robert Holton in his book *Reconstructing the Beats*, This repression only kindled the imaginations of countless young people, of course, whose desire for a space outside caused them to be drawn irresistibly to this siren song of alienation” (19).

Accompanying these censorship trials were “police raids on Beat cafés and bars in San Francisco, Los Angeles, and New York City” (1). In light of these events, many beat poets decided to leave the country in search of places where they could physically escape the suppression that dominated culture in America.

While Kerouac himself mostly stayed in America when the Beat movement swept across the western world, many of the beat generation poets sought freedom of expression and escape of the suppression of American culture by leaving the country altogether. These expatriates traveled Europe, many of them settling in Paris for a while, in the spirit of their Lost Generation predecessors.

As many of the beat poets were homosexual, they could enjoy “a freer life in France” (Miles, 4). Paris was a place more open to alternative lifestyles as “the Napoleonic code had effectively decriminalized homosexuality in the 19th century. Consequently, gay artists and writers felt more at ease here than in London or New York” (Watson, 1), where no such revolution had occurred. Young and poor, these bohemians, like the preceding Lost Generation writers,

“found an affordable central district” on the Left Bank “where writers and artists met to talk and drink, where accommodation was cheap and the working-class locals tolerant of the bohemians and students in their midst” (1).

According to Barry Miles in *The Beat Hotel*, most of the beat generation poets “were using illegal drugs” (4). Many times, these poets wrote in states of drug-induced euphoria, which they believed aided them in achieving freedom of mind and truth. As Nin states in her diary of this new wave of expatriates, “the visitors were different” from their pre-war literary predecessors (203).

Waves of beat poets who traveled to Paris gravitated to George Whitman’s bookshop throughout the later half of the 1950s, into the 1960s, in order to meet other writers, browse dusty bookshelves, and attend poetry readings on the patio in front of the store or in the tearoom. The first and most famous of the Beats in Paris who frequented the shop were Allen Ginsberg, William Seward Burroughs, and Gregory Corso. Later waves of beats continued to flock to Le Mistral throughout the late fifties and early sixties.

While in Paris, Ginsberg, Burroughs and Corso stayed at the “Beat Hotel,” at 9 rue Git-le-Coeur, a dingy, “class thirteen” hotel, made complete with Turkish toilets, “grimy landing windows” and “corridors that sloped at strange angles and the floors creaked and groaned” (Miles, 13). At the hotel, Ginsberg and his friends led promiscuous lifestyles with both men and women in their quest for sexual freedom, and they used drugs such as mushrooms, morphine, and heroin, among others.

The Beats at Le Mistral

When they were not at cafés or exploring the city, Ginsberg, Corso and

Burroughs visited Le Mistral, only a short walk away from their hotel. In an interview with an *Observer Magazine* reporter in 2002, Whitman stated that the three poets, during their stay in Paris, were “in and out” of the bookstore “nearly every day” (Sharkey). The beat poets in Paris found a sense of community at Le Mistral, where they could meet and converse with others who had similar interests, while browsing the bookshelves, researching and writing. According to Jeremy Mercer, in his book *Books, Baguettes, and Bedbugs*, “...the beats arrived, with William Burroughs using George’s bookstore as a library to research medical deformities, Allen Ginsberg gulping wine to find the courage to give a reading of *Howl* on the front esplanade,” and “Gregory Corso stealing first editions to fuel his various habits” (31).

Indeed, Ginsberg, Corso and Burroughs were, according to Whitman, “some of the first to come to [his] poetry readings, but they were very shy about it” (Sharkey). In order to overcome their stage fright, they “had to get drunk or take their clothes off, do foolish things like that, in order to feel part of the whole thing” (Sharkey). Such accounts of the beat poets’ inhibitions about public readings are surprising, considering the carefree lifestyles that they led in Paris, as well as the outspoken and radical content of their literature that addressed homosexuality, drug use, and other topics mainstream America considered at the time to be social problems and threats to conformity.

In addition to participating in readings, Burroughs frequently consulted the library’s medical catalogues while working on his book *Naked Lunch*, and “attended Sunday afternoon tea parties” (Sharkey). Ginsberg and Whitman frequently ate dinner together, either at the Beat Hotel, or at the Mistral, and

Corso, repeatedly “stole “manuscripts, first editions and other valuable items from George, in order to sell them elsewhere” (Sharkey).

During his stay in Paris, Ginsberg wrote many of his most famous poems, some of which he would recite at poetry readings at the Mistral. In April of 1956, the beat poets held their first reading at Le Mistral, and “decided to make it a big event and crowd the place” (Miles, 105). Ginsberg read a few poems, and afterwards, when another writer “was reciting some uncommunicative junk” that he did not care for, Gregory Corso “protested it wasn’t real poetry” (105). When an observer questioned him as to what real poetry was, Corso promptly “took off all [his] clothes, and read [his] poems naked” (105).

For the beat poets, the Mistral served as a platform upon which to further their artistic goals, through the exposure gained with public poetry readings, the use of the store’s books as resources, and conversation with other visiting writers, some of whom lived at the store. None of this would have occurred, however, without the hospitality, encouragement and support of George Whitman himself.

In addition to serving as a catalyst for artistic development among beat poets, the Mistral was a place of psychological comfort, where writers could enjoy a sense of security, while also experiencing the excitement of the foreign culture outside of the bookshop’s doors. Le Mistral was a reminder of home to Ginsberg, Corso and Burroughs, as the shop, in structure and character, resembled the City Lights Bookstore in San Francisco. City Lights was the primary publisher and supporter of beat literature at a time when the American authorities shunned and discarded their work as obscene nonsense. Lawrence Ferlinghetti, a friend of George Whitman and a poet himself, opened City Lights

Bookstore in 1953, inspired by Whitman's Le Mistral. Ferlinghetti's bookshop, like Le Mistral, quickly gained a liberal reputation, through its beat clientele, as well as through its publication of beat literature, including Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* and Ginsberg's *Howl*.

In an article from the *Brisbane Times*, entitled "A Tale of Two Bookshops," journalist Penny Watson discusses the interconnectedness between Ferlinghetti and Whitman's bookshops, suggesting that the success of City Lights affected the success of Shakespeare and Company. According to Watson, regarding Le Mistral, the Beat Generation's "enthusiasm for this literary landmark- with its tradition of subversive writing and publishing and its history of outstanding writers and travelers- must have been, for them, a continuation of a mood set in motion by Ferlinghetti's City Lights store" (1). On the other hand, had it not been for Whitman's success with Le Mistral early on, Ferlinghetti might never have opened his own bookshop. Whatever the relationship between Le Mistral and its "sister bookstore" brought to the success of each shop, however, Ginsberg, Burroughs and Corso, among many others, "reveled in Le Mistral as a place to write" with the backdrop of "Paris as a source of inspiration" (1).

Le Mistral to Shakespeare and Company: The Bookstore Today

The Beat Generation poets came and went throughout the 1950s and 1960s, but the Mistral remained popular among expatriates even after the Beat movement had passed. In 1964, George Whitman changed the name of his bookshop to "Shakespeare and Company" in honor of Sylvia Beach after her death. Unsurprisingly, because of the name change, most visitors today do not

realize that Shakespeare and Company was actually two different bookstores, at two separate locations.

Throughout the latter half of the twentieth century, Whitman's Shakespeare and Company maintained its reputation as a socialist refuge for poor writers wandering the city, and is still today a meeting place for radical poetry readings and get-togethers. The bookstore remains "a tiny enclave of radicalism, a place where strangers are invited to 'raid the icebox, kick off your shoes and lie in bed,' an oasis of literary tranquility in a desert of over-priced tourist cafés" (Sharkey). Perhaps the greatest change that has occurred to the reputation of the bookstore over the years, a place described by Observer Magazine, as "so otherworldly, so anachronistic, it seems to exist in a time warp" (Sharkey), has been the enormous growth of its tourist clientele. Not only does the bookstore still house penniless writers, historically known as "tumbleweeds," it is now a major tourist destination in Paris for American, British and other English-speaking visitors from around the world.

Owing to Shakespeare and Company's growing tourist base is the shop's reputation as a "socialist utopia masquerading as a bookstore" (), as well as its rich history regarding American subculture with the Beat Generation. Tourists travel from all over to buy a copy of Hemingway's, *A Moveable Feast*, a Paris travel guide, the latest in British or American fiction, and to get the official Shakespeare and Company logo stamped onto the front page of their books.

Thus, Shakespeare and Company, throughout the twentieth century, and into today, has changed into an entity that is more than a refuge for the struggling bohemian. The bookstore has become a site of pilgrimage, for writers and tourists from all over the world.

Analysis: The Transformation of Shakespeare and Company from Refuge to Institution

There is no doubt that, almost instantaneously, both Shakespeare and Company bookstores gained mass popularity among expatriate travelers and writers living in France throughout the twentieth century. Whitman's Shakespeare and Company became, and still is, a popular tourist destination. The question remains, however, as to what exactly caused the transformation of Shakespeare and Company from a radical, eclectic bookstore, to a world famous literary institution.

Cultural and government forces in twentieth century America that fueled the writer's desire to leave the country and relocate to France were factors that helped to transform Shakespeare and Company into an institution. During World War I, Congress passed the Sedition Act and the Espionage Act, both of which outlawed interfering with or speaking out against the war effort in any way. After the end of the war and the Bolshevik Revolution, in which anti-war and anti-capitalistic factions overthrew the Russian monarchy, Americans generally began to fear the spread of communism within the United States. During this "Red Scare," the United States government campaigned to suppress political dissent through the Palmer Raids, in which law enforcement officials

weeded out and arrested supposed socialist sympathizers and union members, and deported thousands of immigrants believed to be communists. The government impressed fear upon the American public through the Espionage and Sedition Acts, and suppressed dissent with post war campaigns like the Palmer Raids. The response of most of the American public was to assimilate to a government-shaped homogenous culture that valued conformity and discouraged diversity and dissent.

While the United States government cracked down upon civil rights such as freedom of speech during and after World War I, Congress began to infringe further upon civil liberties with the passing of the 18th Amendment that established Prohibition. Supported by Progressives, Congress enacted the prohibition of alcohol in order to curb family violence, and to reinforce values within the home, especially amongst working class immigrants in the cities. According to David Hanson, in *National Prohibition of Alcohol in the US*, Progressive reformers advertised prohibition “as the almost magical solution to the nation's poverty, crime, violence, and other ills” (6). Activists viewed the consumption of alcohol as detrimental to both achieving the domestic ideal and to the financial stability of families already struggling just to survive. Progressives believed that alcohol led to domestic violence and poverty, as some men spent all of their wages at the bar instead of using it to support their families. Social legislation like prohibition affected the civil liberties of Americans, as it created pressure to conform to the Progressive vision of the domestic ideal, that of the nuclear family, which alienated certain members of society.

Thus, it is no surprise that many of the post World War I writers who would later compose the Lost Generation would leave America because of these government and cultural “suppressions” and relocate elsewhere. The decision to expatriate to Paris came in part due to their belief in Paris as a cultural capital, as well as the freedom Paris offered to foreigners to live as they chose. The Lost Generation felt alienated “from a U.S. that, basking under President Harding's “back to normalcy” policy, seemed to its members to be hopelessly provincial, materialistic, and emotionally barren” (“Lost Generation”).

Although Paris too pressured its citizens to conform to a dominant culture, the French did not hold the same expectations for foreign visitors, and consequently, the Lost Generation writers experienced a great deal of cultural freedom while living in Paris.

Thus, for Sylvia Beach, opening her bookstore at a time when writers expatriated to Paris because of a feeling of alienation accounts for much of Shakespeare and Company’s success, and later its transformation into an institution. Her bookshop offered the Lost Generation authors a place of security and comfort in a foreign country. Paris was a safe haven from the suppressions of American society, and Shakespeare and Company became a refuge from the foreignness of Paris. Shakespeare and Company’s role in the lives of expatriate writers ironically tells of the importance of American culture (parts of which they sought to escape) to their sense of security. The emergence of the bookstore in a time and place where foreign artists flooded into Paris accounts for its success and popularity.

The same situation occurred for George Whitman after World War II, in the 1950s. Post war anxieties were even higher among the American public after

the Second World War, as the Cold War with the Soviet Union scared people once again about the spread of communism. The government pressured citizens to conform to a dominant culture through the establishment of the House Un-American Activities Committee, or HUAC, which “was created in 1938 to investigate alleged disloyalty and subversive activities on the part of private citizens, public employees, and those organizations suspected of having Communist ties” (Black). Although established before the war, HUAC lacked the popular support needed to investigate supposed Communists until after the war, with the emergence of an “atmosphere of fear and contempt for the Soviet Union, at which time HUAC's activities commanded broad popular support and consistently attracted major headlines” (Black). In addition to HUAC, Senator Joseph McCarthy rose to prominence with his witch-hunt of accused communists.

Coupled by fears of the spread of communism and attack by the Soviet Union was a strong urge among the American people to return to a state of normalcy after years of wartime turmoil that was preceded by the devastating Great Depression. After World War II, a baby boom ensued as soldiers returned home and married, the economy flourished, and Americans put great value on the nuclear family and in providing a life for their children that they had not been able to enjoy as children. With a continuing emphasis of the idea of the nuclear family came increasing pressures for strictly defined gender roles. Although many women had enjoyed greater freedom during World War II to work outside of the home in order to help the war effort (as much of the male labor force was away at war), afterwards they were called back into the homes to play a domestic role as mothers and housewives. In the 1950s, pressures were

strong for Americans to conform to this model of the nuclear family, with the male figure working a white-collar job, while the female stayed in the home and performed domestic chores while taking care of the kids. This model of the domestic ideal left no room for people who had conflicting lifestyles, such as wandering artists, and homosexuals.

These pressures to conform to a communist-fearing, cookie cutter America alienated certain members of society, and led to the emergence of the Beat Generation subculture. Through their poetry, the Beats spoke out against pressures to conform to the domestic ideal, as well as against materialism that Americans embraced during a post-war consumer revolution. As factories turned from wartime to peacetime production, department stores provided the latest in electrical appliances, and Americans purchased homes and automobiles in great numbers. Advertisers played upon the psychology of homemakers who sought the domestic ideal, in order to sell refrigerators, stoves, irons and other amenities that their parents had not been able to offer them. The beats rejected the American love of consumerism and mainstream society thus cast them off as rebels.

Though the Beat movement began with Jack Kerouac in San Francisco, many beat poets expatriated to Paris in order to escape post World War II suppressions as their predecessors, the Lost Generation writers, had done. In Paris, the Beat poets were able to write and experience lifestyles free of the pressures and judgment of Americans. Paris was a place more accepting of homosexuality as an identity than the United States, as the Napoleonic code in the 1800s had long since decriminalized homosexuality, which attracted poets such as Ginsberg and Burroughs.

As was the case for Beach's Shakespeare and Company, Whitman's bookstore may also have emerged in the right place at the right time. Le Mistral served as a haven for English-speaking writers living in Paris who had no interest in French culture, but were interested in Paris, and Whitman's bookshop, as an escape of American culture.

In addition to societal factors in America that helped to achieve popularity for Shakespeare and Company that aided in its ultimate institutionalization was the aspect of language. As English-speaking writers expatriated to Paris and learned of the eclectic Shakespeare and Company, the bookstore became a natural flocking ground for writers and tourists. Because of both bookstores' American owners, who sold and lent English language books, writers of the Lost Generation and the Beat Generation found an outlet for poetry readings and conversation, which was a relief for the sense of isolation they felt as foreigners.

Another factor in the popularization and institutionalization of Shakespeare and Company was the fact that the bookstore intermeshed the spheres of commerce and socialization. The idea of a bookstore being a place to socialize is an American one, and an idea that Americans embrace today at home, and at Shakespeare and Company. Whereas in France, the social sphere is mostly separate from the sphere of consumerism, in America, the two intertwine. The practice of meeting at a bookstore to socialize and buy a product, or to hang out within a place of commerce, is something foreign to Parisians.

Where in America shopping is a popular way to spend leisure time and is a form of entertainment, Parisians are more likely to visit a café to sit, converse and debate with friends, or go to a park to enjoy their free time. Although

Parisians do plenty of shopping, they do not associate the practice with being a primary form of social entertainment as Americans do.

Thus, Shakespeare and Company served as an American model of a social, as well as commercial venue. Writers and tourists traveled, and still travel, to Shakespeare and Company to find the perfect mix of the consumer and social sectors, a blend of spheres that Americans would witness nowhere else in Paris.

The popularity of Shakespeare and Company conveys the psychological need of Americans to intermesh the sphere of socialization with that of commercialization, and this is very telling of the subcultures that met at the bookstore. Although the Lost Generation and the Beat Generation were attempting to escape the materialism of American society by expatriating to Paris, they still felt comforted by an atmosphere of consumerism, hence, their frequent visits to Shakespeare and Company and Le Mistral. The fact that the bookstores were such a popular meeting place for English speaking writers perfectly exemplifies that for a subculture to exist, there must be a dominant culture that surrounds it.

Shakespeare and Company owes most of its transformation into an institution, however, to its tourists. Since the bookshop opened, American tourists from all over have stopped by Whitman's store in order to see where countless writers have held poetry readings and where tumbleweeds have slept for decades. Because of tourists, Shakespeare and Company has taken on an almost mythical quality, through which their perception of the store's history has become somewhat skewed. Some tourists, with a distorted idea of Shakespeare and Company, visit the bookstore thinking they are retracing the steps of the

Lost Generation, when really they are a few streets off. Tourists walk into Whitman's shop believing they are traveling the route of Hemingway, when his visits to Shakespeare and Company actually took place several blocks away. Many arrive at the bookstore believing that Beach and Whitman's bookshops were one entity, not knowing that the original Shakespeare and Company was actually at a different location. The mythical element of Shakespeare and Company is a significant factor in its transformation from bookstore to institution, distorted as the facts may be.

There is something more to the tourist's experience, however, that owes to Shakespeare and Company's institutionalization. As tourists visit the bookshop, hoping to feel the presence of the great literary minds who visited the store many years ago, they are actually seeking more than that. Shakespeare and Company, for tourists and its famous visitors alike, was and is not an escape from American society. In fact, it is the embodiment of an American ideal: a place of freedom of expression and artistic creativity, as well as commerce and capitalism. Instead of visiting Shakespeare and Company in order to experience an element of the exotic in a foreign place, the bookstore feels more like "home" to many than actual "home" does. Although Whitman himself established his bookstore as an experiment in socialism, since his shop opened, people have traveled to Shakespeare and Company, not to witness the exotic, but to experience an idealized version of America, a place that fosters free thought and diversity, but also has a capitalist element to it, subconscious as it is.

All of these factors, whether they be American societal problems that alienated and pushed writers to leave the country, the barrier of language, or

simply cultural values, helped in the mass popularization and institutionalization of the Shakespeare and Company bookstores.

Whereas Shakespeare and Company became an institution in part because of tourists mythologizing its famous writers, these writers had not always been mainstream icons. The bookstore itself played an important role in the popularization of these authors, who, at the time, were marginal figures, on the fringe of society because of the supposed radical and sometimes obscene nature of their work.

Had it not been for Sylvia Beach's work to help James Joyce publish *Ulysses*, or George Whitman's level of hospitality that allowed radical writers who came to readings at his shop to recite poems naked if they wished, these writers may never have received the boost they needed to become successful (let alone to transform into literary icons). Had it not been for Sylvia Beach's financial support of Joyce, he would not even have been able to take care of his family, let alone become one of the most studied literary figures in American history. Thus, while the Shakespeare and Company bookstores owe much of the credit for their mass popularization to famous visitors, these visitors owe much of their fame to bookshops themselves.

Shakespeare and Company's Influence on American Society

Through its rich history of harboring Americans who did not fit into mainstream American society, to its publication of works like Joyce's *Ulysses*, and Millers' *Tropic of Cancer*, Shakespeare and Company has become more than an institution, half a world away in France. The small bookshop, even in Paris,

helped to shape American subculture through its impact on the Lost Generation and the Beat Generation.

The bookstore influenced American society through its influence on the Lost Generation. Sylvia Beach's initiative to publish *Ulysses* led to mass attention of the work because of the obscenity trial that ensued in 1933. The Lost Generation writers changed the course of literature with their new style of writing, and paved the way for later groups who defied mainstream culture through their writing.

The Lost Generation writers greatly influenced American society and culture through their work. F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, as well as numerous other Lost Generation works, served as commentaries of post-war American society. These works, although considered subversive at the time, are today literary classics, taught in public schools across America. Ironically, whereas critics once discredited the works of Hemingway and Joyce for violating the literary standard at the time, their works have today become the standard for American literature.

Through their example of standing up for freedom of expression, even if it meant expatriation, the Lost Generation inspired and paved the way for the Beat Generation in the 1950s, which traveled to Paris in the spirit of their preceding literary peers. The Beat poets similarly influenced American society by becoming a symbol of dissent against a culture that they felt alienated them. Whereas critics once cast off the poems of Ginsberg, Corso and Burroughs as obscene, holding no literary merit, they too became extremely popular in America, and were later accepted and standardized as great works in twentieth century literature. The Beats helped to usher in later subculture groups, namely

the hippies in the 1960s, which influenced the emergence of later youth oriented subculture groups.

The institution of Shakespeare and Company thus affected the development of American subculture throughout the twentieth century, through its help in popularizing writers previously considered radical, on the fringe of society. These writers, with the help of Shakespeare and Company, became the standard for American literature as well as symbols of American dissent. As Shakespeare and Company is still just as alive as it was fifty years ago, only time will tell how it will shape literary history in the future.

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