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ARTICLE

The World of Shakespeare and Company: An Introduction

Joshua Kotin[1], Rebecca Sutton Koeser[1]

[1] Princeton University

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What's left to learn about Shakespeare and Company, Sylvia Beach's bookshop and lending library in interwar Paris? This introduction addresses this question by discussing the eight articles collected in the special cluster, "The World of Shakespeare and Company," co-published by the *Journal of Cultural Analytics* and *Modernism/modernity*. All eight articles use data from the *Shakespeare and Company Project* to develop new accounts of modernism, the sociology of reading, and historical archives. Combining qualitative, quantitative, and computational methods, the articles open new paths for studying one of the most important institutions in literary history.

I

What's left to learn about Shakespeare and Company, Sylvia Beach's bookshop and lending library in interwar Paris?

The story of Shakespeare and Company has been told and retold—by Beach herself in *Shakespeare and Company* (1959) and *The Letters of Sylvia Beach* (2010), by Noël Riley Fitch in *Sylvia Beach and the Lost Generation* (1984), and by Laure Murat in *Passage de l'Odéon* (2003). Ernest Hemingway mythologized the bookshop and lending library in *A Moveable Feast* (1964), and Woody Allen satirized that mythology in *Midnight in Paris* (2011). Countless writers have described Beach's publication of James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922): Richard Ellmann in *James Joyce* (1959), Kevin Birmingham in *The Most Dangerous Book* (2014), Keri Maher in *The Paris Bookseller* (2022)—to name just three. In the aftermath of the *Ulysses* centennial, we might assume we know all there is to know about Beach's "famous bookshop and lending library on the Left Bank" ("The New Books" 2).

This cluster of articles, co-published by the *Journal of Cultural Analytics* and *Modernism/modernity*, challenges that assumption. The cluster focuses on Beach's archives at Princeton University through the lens of the *Shakespeare and Company Project*, a digital humanities initiative that details the lending library's operations, including what its members read and where they lived.[1] By analyzing documents and data provided by the *Project*, the cluster does not

1 For a history of the *Shakespeare and Company Project* and an account of its datasets, see Kotin and Koeser, "Data Sets."

simply deepen standard accounts of Shakespeare and Company and its world; it presents new stories and asks new questions that alter our understanding of the institution and its impact, and establish its relevance to present-day debates in literary history and theory.

Reading the cluster, we gain new insights into canonical authors and the modernist canon. (One article, for instance, compares Virginia Woolf's theory of the "common reader" to her actual readers in Paris.) We discover how members of the lending library influenced the reception of modernist literature, and how reading can influence personal identity. (An article examines the reading practices of Reed Peggram, a queer African American scholar studying in Paris.) We also learn about Shakespeare and Company's influence on various communities and movements, including a transnational Black avant-garde. Finally, we discover how Beach's obsessive yet incomplete record keeping can help us develop tools to compensate for and interpret the gaps that perforate almost all historical archives and cultural datasets.

The cluster also contributes to debates about methodology. Articles embrace a range of methods, illuminating ways to attend to individual and often ephemeral documents—a borrowing record, a letter—as well as large collections of documents organized and curated into datasets. These qualitative, quantitative, and computational methods are not in competition. The cluster demonstrates how a commitment to interdisciplinary and collaborative research, whether jointly authored articles or coordinated responses to a common object, can move literary studies in new directions. The joint publication of this cluster by the leading journals in modernist studies and cultural analytics further demonstrates this commitment.

The cluster, in this way, shows how digital humanities projects can ground and motivate an astonishing range of research. The *Shakespeare and Company Project* is a work of scholarship and an instrument of scholarship. By interpreting, structuring, and supplementing an extensive and at times chaotic collection of documents, the *Project* transforms archival sources into data. The *Project* makes this data available for analysis through a user-friendly web interface and published, carefully documented datasets. Researchers can work at different scales, embracing both close and distant reading—as well as what has been variously called "scalable," "zoomable," and even "macroscopic" reading (Mueller; Cordell; Graham et al.). The article on Woolf begins by close reading a series of lending library records and then shifts to a medium-scale analysis of the members who borrowed Woolf's books. An article comparing readers at Shakespeare and Company to reading communities today moves in the opposite direction: a large-scale analysis of borrowing networks reveals a friendship between two lending library members based on similar reading practices. Even the articles that do not employ quantitative and computational methods take advantage of the *Project*'s data, whether to develop an argument based on the circulation of

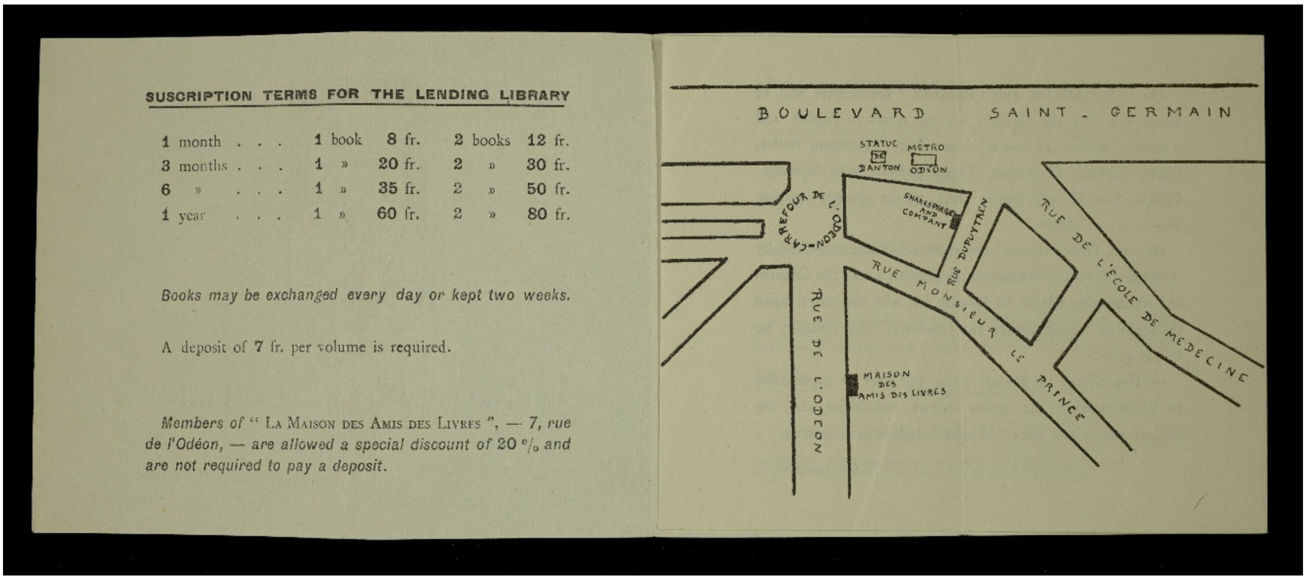

Figure 1. Shakespeare and Company lending library pamphlet. Lending Library Pamphlet, box 75, folder 8, Sylvia Beach Papers, Princeton University Library.

a particular book or a single data point such as Beach's gift of Bryher's *The Heart to Artemis* (1962) to a young literary critic months before Beach's death. This is what the best digital humanities projects can do: harness intellectual and methodological differences to address a common set of concerns.

II

When Sylvia Beach opened Shakespeare and Company in 1919, it combined two businesses: a bookshop and a lending library. When she published *Ulysses* in 1922, she added a third: publisher. For the next two decades, she balanced these businesses: ordering and selling books, collecting membership fees, and printing and reprinting *Ulysses*. Yet the lending library was always the heart of the operation. English-language books were expensive to import; a lending library was the best way to meet the needs of a diverse community of readers (fig. 1). As Beach recalls in her memoirs, "Lending books . . . was much easier in Paris than selling them" (Beach 21).[2] When Shakespeare and Company closed in 1941, she stopped selling books altogether, but continued to loan books from her Paris apartment until her death in 1962.

Beach's archives ended up at different institutions. In 1951, she donated 5,000 books from the lending library to the American Library in Paris ("Dispersal"). In 1959, she sold the first of two batches of Joyce material to the University at Buffalo (James Joyce Collection). (The second batch followed after her death.) In 1964, Princeton acquired the remainder of

2 In *Paris Salons, Cafés, Studios* (1928), Sisley Huddleston writes: "French books have, in my time, mounted from 3fr.50 to 12 francs—occasionally 15 francs—rarely more. But the cheapest English or American book works out in French money to 60 or 70 francs, and often it is well over 100 francs" (208).

Figure 2. Princeton librarian Howard C. Rice in Beach's apartment, 1964. "The Dispersal of Sylvia Beach's Books." *Rare Book Collections @ Princeton*, 6 Jan. 2011, https://blogs.princeton.edu/rarebooks/2011/01/the-dispesal-of-sylvia-beachs/.

her archives, including her personal library (fig. 2). Princeton then donated between 3,000 and 4,000 lending library books to the University of Paris and consigned another group to a rare book dealer. In 1986, the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas acquired a collection of Shakespeare and Company material from Beach's friend, Maurice Saillet ("Dispersal").

The Beach Papers at Princeton's Firestone Library are vast—78.3 linear feet of documents, plus 1,500 books from Beach's personal library. In contrast, the James Joyce Collection at Buffalo consists of 22.25 linear feet of documents, and the Saillet collection at the Ransom Center, 1.68 linear feet of documents. The Beach Papers include correspondence, memoir drafts, family and personal records, photographs, and extensive business records. These business records detail the daily operations of Shakespeare and Company, including the lending library.

Three sets of sources drawn from those business records provide the foundation for the *Shakespeare and Company Project*. Lending library cards document the borrowing activity and addresses of lending library members. Ernest Hemingway's card from 1925 is representative (fig. 3). His name appears at the top next to his membership dates, followed by his addresses. (When he moved, Beach or an assistant would cross out the old address and write the new one.) Below the addresses, three columns document his borrowing activity: borrow date, book title, return date. "BB" stands for "brought back."

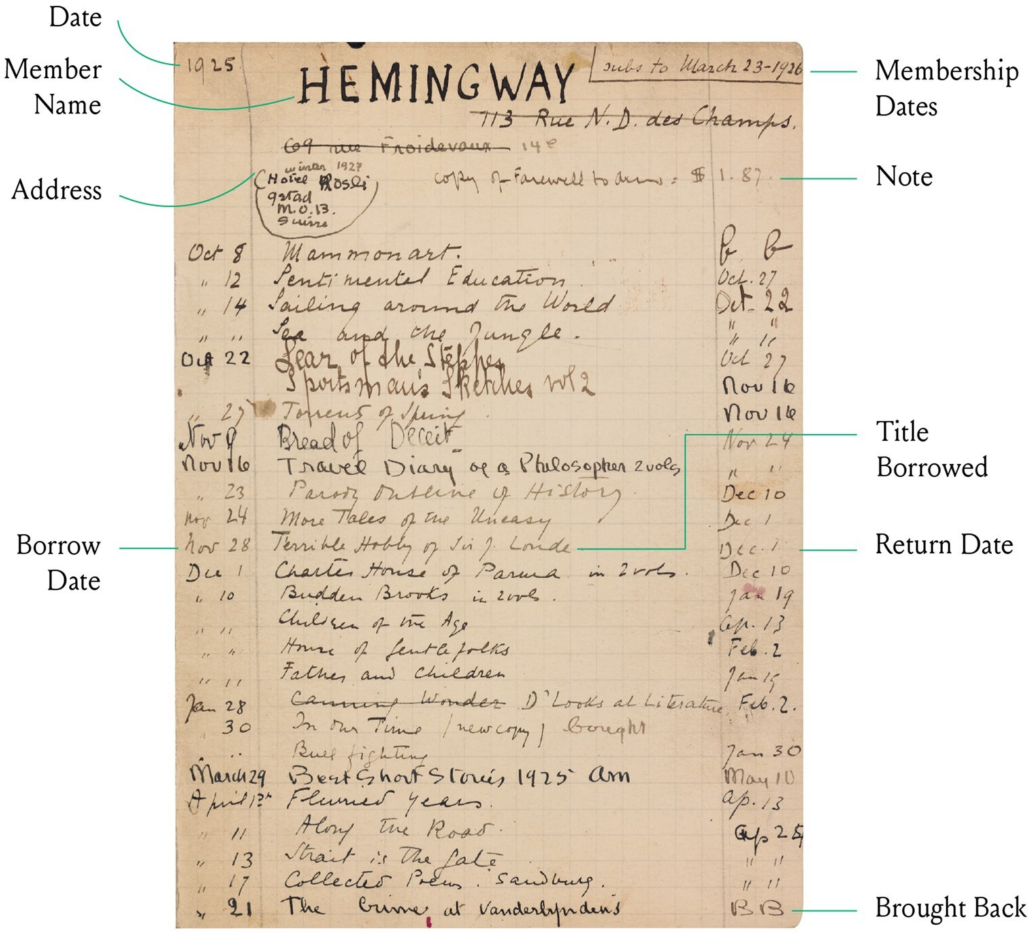

Figure 3. Ernest Hemingway's lending library card, 1925, annotated. "[Lending Library Cards](https://shakespeareandco.princeton.edu/sources/cards/)," *Shakespeare and Company Project*, Center for Digital Humanities, Princeton University (2023), https://shakespeareandco.princeton.edu/sources/cards/.

This particular card captures Hemingway immersing himself in books by Ivan Turgenev in Paris and on vacation at the Hotel Rössli in Gstaad. (He skied during the day and read at night [Reynolds 97].) Subsequent cards show him borrowing more Turgenev alongside books by Violet Hunt, W. B. Yeats, and James Huneker, among others, and returning to Paris to settle for a time at 6 rue Férou in the sixth arrondissement. The cards, thus, chart an intellectual journey as well as a literal one.

The Beach Papers include Lending Library Cards for over 600 members. The names are a who's who of American expatriates associated with the Lost Generation: Gertrude Stein, Archibald MacLeish, Janet Flanner, Glenway Wescott, Ezra Pound. Other names are more surprising, yet just as famous: Claude Cahun, Walter Benjamin, Aimé Césaire, Emma Goldman, Jacques Lacan, Maurice Merleau-Ponty. And some names are still just names, unconnected to specific biographies: a Mrs. Jackson, a Thomas Edwards, a Comtesse de Raousset. Together, the cards reveal the reading practices of a diverse community during the consolidation of modernism.

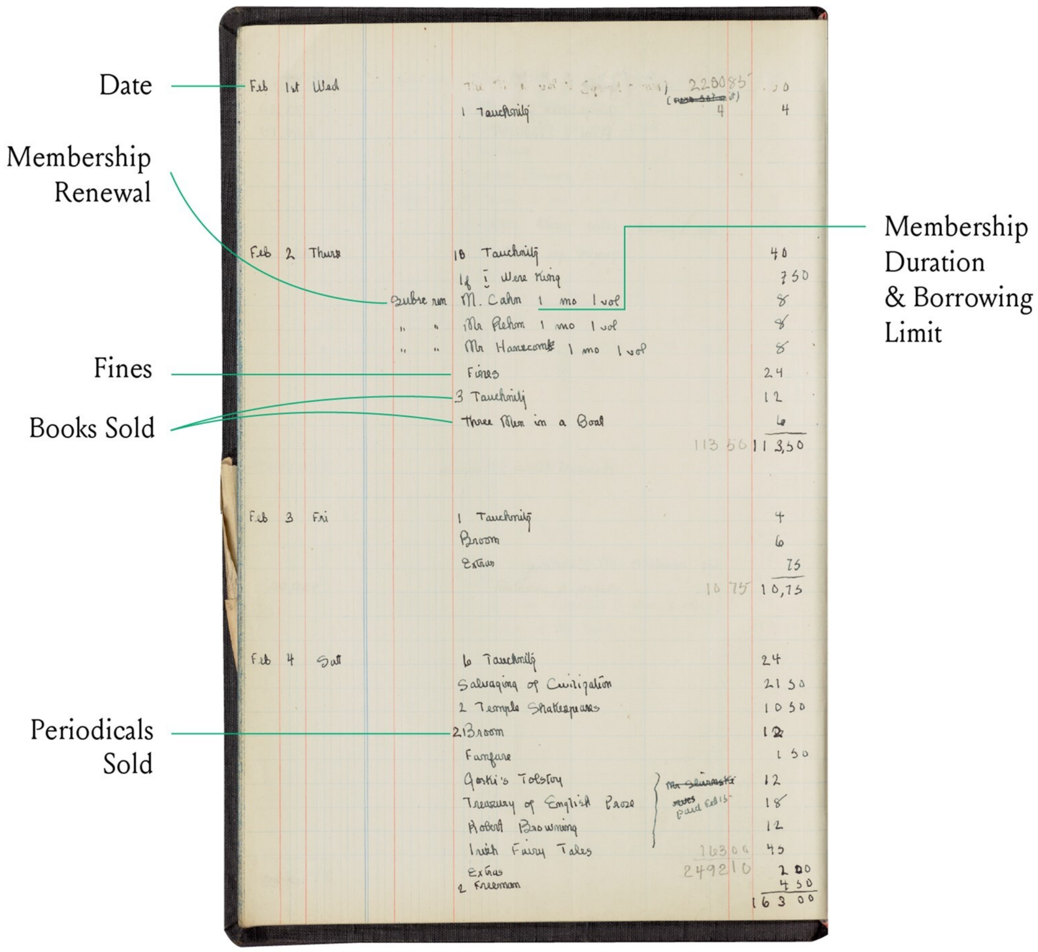

Figure 4. Logbook revenue page, 1922, annotated. "[Logbooks](https://shakespeareandco.princeton.edu/sources/logbooks/)," *Shakespeare and Company Project*, Center for Digital Humanities, Princeton University (2023), https://shakespeareandco.princeton.edu/sources/logbooks/

But the lending library cards are incomplete. Shakespeare and Company had thousands of members. Beach did not preserve all their cards. Hemingway is a case in point: he joined in 1921, but his first extant card is from 1925. To compensate for these gaps, the *Shakespeare and Company Project* uses a second set of sources: logbooks The logbooks track daily revenue and expenditures, including all the lending library memberships, renewals, deposits, and reimbursements (fig. 4). As a result, they offer a portrait of the lending library community and finances.

This particular logbook page from 1922 shows the revenue for the first few days in February, including February 2—the day Beach published *Ulysses*. On that historic day, three members renewed their memberships, paying 8 francs each to borrow one book at a time for a period of one month. The page also shows fines and books sold. The logbooks, in this way, present a nearly comprehensive, yet comparatively superficial, portrait of the lending library: names and dates, but no borrowing activity or addresses. The logbooks are also incomplete: the Beach Papers do not include logbooks for 1931, 1932, or 1937. Nevertheless, they complement the lending library cards and improve our understanding of Shakespeare and Company and its world.

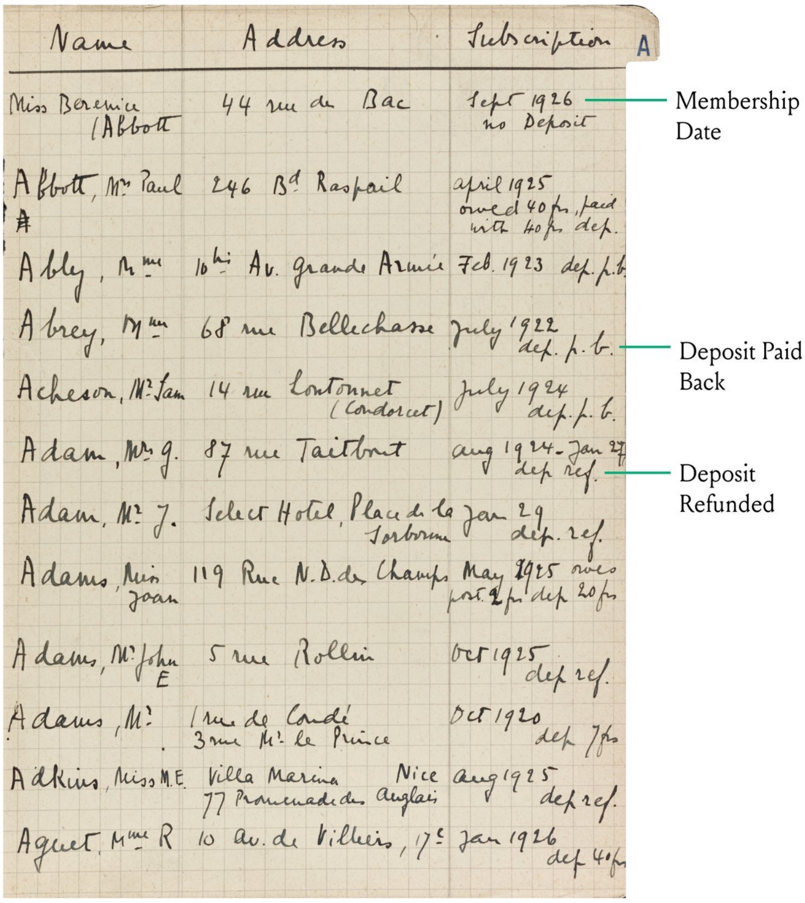

Figure 5. Pre-1936 address book page, annotated. "[Address Books](https://shakespeareandco.princeton.edu/sources/address-books/)," *Shakespeare and Company Project*, Center for Digital Humanities, Princeton University (2023), https://shakespeareandco.princeton.edu/sources/address-books/.

The third set of sources—address books and lending library inventories—help fill gaps in the lending library card and logbook record. Two address books are especially useful, supplying names and addresses, and confirming membership dates. One of these address books focuses on members who joined before 1936 and the other on members who joined after 1936.

This page from the pre-1936 address book shows members with last names beginning with the letter "A" (fig. 5). The photographer Berenice Abbott is listed first: the entry is the only record of her membership. The inventories, in turn, help identify the books that circulated in the lending library, including books not listed on extant cards. (Beach only included book titles on the cards, making identification difficult at times.) Yet even these additional sources are incomplete. The pre-1936 address book, for example, stops abruptly at "M." As a result, the *Project* has more addresses for members from the first half of the alphabet than the second. The final article in the cluster discusses the significance of these gaps and how to respond to them.

The *Project* makes all this information about the lending library available to the public through a web interface, including images of the lending library cards. The *Project* also supplements information from archival sources with bibliographic and demographic details about individual books and members. (The *Project* has so far matched over fourteen hundred member names to actual biographies, and continues to identify members.) Visitors to the site can search for particular members and books, and delimit by various criteria—membership year, birth year, nationality, and arrondissement for members, and circulation year for books. The *Project* also makes all the information available in three datasets, which allow for more robust analysis. These datasets are the basis for the quantitative and computational research in this cluster.[3]

The fact that the lending library information exists at all is astonishing. The records of few historical libraries survive, and for good reason: the American Library Association requires libraries to destroy their records to protect the privacy of their patrons ("Privacy Tool Kit" 34). Beach did not adhere to this requirement—a fact that Ethelene Whitmire discusses in her article about Reed Peggram in this cluster. But perhaps even more astonishing is that Shakespeare and Company turned out to be Shakespeare and Company: one of the most important institutions in literary history.

The *Shakespeare and Company Project* dispels several popular misconceptions about the bookshop and lending library. Shakespeare and Company didn't only serve a coterie of American expatriates. Beach loaned books to more than 5,000 lending library members from over forty-five different countries. A significant number of members were French—indeed, if you were to visit Shakespeare and Company on a random day, you'd be almost as likely meet a French intellectual as an American tourist or expatriate. Most members of Shakespeare and Company were not part of the "Lost Generation"—the generation born between 1883 and 1900. Based on the *Project*'s most recent demographic information, over sixty percent of members were born either before or after that period. (The oldest member, born in 1849, was Edmond Renoir, Auguste Renoir's brother. The youngest, born in 1942, was Julia Wright, Richard Wright's daughter: she visited Shakespeare and Company with her father and borrowed children's books.) Members did not only borrow modernist novels and poetry. Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* (1936) circulated as frequently as Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* (1929). P. G. Wodehouse was as popular as Gertrude Stein. Stein even

3 Most articles in this cluster use version 1.1 of the *Shakespeare and Company Project* datasets, which were published in January 2021; a few articles use version 1.2, which was published in January 2022. In 2024, version 2.0 will be published; this version includes new identifications of a significant number of members, as well as additional information about the books that circulated in the lending library. These enhancements, however, do not significantly impact the arguments or conclusions in the articles.

borrowed a novel by Wodehouse! These examples only scratch the surface. As the articles in the cluster demonstrate, the *Project* transforms standard accounts of Shakespeare and Company and even modernism itself.

III

The cluster begins with three articles about individual authors, readers, and books. In "Virginia Woolf's Common Readers in Paris," a team of scholars—Helen Southworth, Alice Staveley, Matthew N. Hannah, Claire Battershill, and Elizabeth Willson Gordon—analyze Woolf's reception in Paris in light of her notion of the "common reader." The article details the lives and practices of Woolf's readers as it addresses questions "about how books find their readers (and readers find their books)." In "Unpacking Reed Peggram's Library," Ethelene Whitmire investigates the connection between bibliography and biography in light of Peggram's borrowing records at Shakespeare and Company. "How much can we learn about a person by knowing what that person read?" she asks. The article also discusses the voyeuristic aspects of the investigation, which conflict with Whitmire's training as a librarian. In "Shakespeare and Company's Final Book," Keri Walsh analyzes the final data point in the *Shakespeare and Company Project* datasets: Beach's gift of Bryher's *The Heart to Artemis* to the critic Jean-Dominique Rey in 1962. The article uses the data point to discuss Beach's feminism and her intervention in the canonization of modernist literature.

Walsh's interest in canonization provides a link to the next two articles in the cluster, which use quantitative and computational methods to understand the connection between reading practices at Shakespeare and Company and reading practices today. In "A Counterfactual Canon," Fedor Karmanov and Joshua Kotin analyze the lending library's gender demographics. The article speculates about the influence of male readers on the canonization of female writers, and reveals a counterfactual canon of modernism: books by women that were more popular among women than men. In "The Afterlives of Shakespeare and Company in Online Social Readership," another team of scholars—Maria Antoniak, David Mimno, Rosamond Thalken, Melanie Walsh, Matthew Wilkens, and Gregory Yauney—connect data from the *Shakespeare and Company Project* to data from Goodreads and LibraryThing to examine changes in the popularity of books over time and the difference between popularity and canonicity. The article is packed with discoveries, including that the reading preferences of lending library members predicted the books that are considered "classics" today.

The next two articles in the cluster shift the focus from canons to communities. In "Black Internationalism and Shakespeare and Company," Caitlin O'Keefe examines the network of Black writers and intellectuals who patronized Shakespeare and Company, and the books by Black writers available to borrow and purchase. The article connects the "Lost Generation" to "Paris noir," and illuminates how literature of the Harlem Renaissance reached writers associated with Négritude. In "Lending Books on the Right and Left Banks," Nissa Ren Cannon compares Shakespeare and Company to its Right Bank counterpart: the American Library in Paris. The article outlines how the two lending libraries complemented each other.

The cluster ends with an article about the *Shakespeare and Company Project* data itself. In "Missing Data, Speculative Reading," Rebecca Sutton Koeser and Zoe LeBlanc reckon with gaps in the Beach Papers, using computational methods to estimate the contours of a complete dataset. The article ultimately presents a theory of "archival absences" and a set of tools to understand and address them. Speculative reading, the authors write, is "a way of modeling missing data, while remaining open to new ways of imagining and theorizing the archive." The article concludes with "an experiment in knowledge creation." Koeser and LeBlanc use tools designed to forecast future interactions to predict the past, specifically the books on Hemingway's missing lending library cards from the early 1920s.

With the publication of this cluster, do we finally now know all there is to know about Beach's famous bookshop and lending library? Of course not. By posing and addressing new questions about Shakespeare and Company, the cluster opens new paths for future research, while modeling how to conduct that research. We are excited about work currently underway that uses addresses in the *Shakespeare and Company Project* datasets to analyze the connection between geography and taste, and look forward to following work that engages the next update of the datasets. Once we begin looking at Shakespeare and Company through the lens of the *Shakespeare and Company Project*, new stories and questions constantly come into view.

Acknowledgements

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