

ARTICLE

Virginia Woolf's Common Readers in Paris

Helen Southworth¹, Alice Staveley², Matthew N. Hannah³, Claire Battershill⁴, Elizabeth Willson Gordon⁵

¹ University of Oregon, ² Stanford University, ³ Purdue University West Lafayette, ⁴ University of Toronto, ⁵ King's University

Keywords: Shakespeare and Company, Sylvia Beach, readers and reading, Virginia Woolf, feminism, archives, bookshops, libraries, digital humanities, modernism

<https://doi.org/10.22148/001c.116908>

Journal of Cultural Analytics

Vol. 9, Issue 2, 2024

In this article, we analyze historical, biographical, geolocational, and book distribution data from the *Shakespeare and Company Project* to understand Virginia Woolf's readership in Paris in the 1920s and 1930s. The lending library cards from Sylvia Beach's archive reveal the names of Woolf's readers, and include important information about their reading habits and professional lives. The article uses a mixed-methods approach, combining historical and archival research on individual readers with visualizations of demographic, literary, and geographical data. Datasets from the *Shakespeare and Company Project* provide unique access to the networks of distribution, circulation, and readership that defined Woolf's literary presence in Paris. These networks, in turn, resonate with Woolf's own deep interest in her various readerships and publics.

Prologue: A Woman “on a refuge”

On July 27, 1927, Vita Sackville-West wrote to Virginia Woolf, describing an unexpected encounter:

Today as I was driving down Oxford Street I saw a woman on a refuge, carrying [*To the Lighthouse*]. She was an unknown woman – up from the country, I should think, and just been to Mudie's or the Times, – and as the policeman held me up with his white glove I saw your name staring at me, Virginia Woolf, against the moving red buses, in Vanessa's paraph of lettering. Then as I stayed (with my foot pressing down the clutch and my hand on the brake, as you will appreciate), I got an intense dizzying vision of you: you in your basement, writing; you in your shed at Rodmell, writing; writing those words which that woman was carrying home to read. How had she got the book? Had she stalked in, purposeful, and said “I want *To the Lighthouse*” or had she strayed idly up to the counter and said “I want a novel please, to read in the train, – a new novel, – anything’ll do”? Anyhow there it was, one of the eight thousand, in the hands of the Public. (Woolf and Sackville-West 124)

Sackville-West depicts this “unknown woman” standing on a refuge (or traffic island) in the middle of the road in the heart of London’s commercial district holding a copy of Woolf’s novel, *To the Lighthouse*, published just

two months prior on May 5, 1927. The sighting is semi-erotic—"an intense dizzying vision"—and leads Sackville-West to contemplate where, how, with what purpose, and to what end "that woman"—an anonymous reader of Woolf's now considerable "Public"—had acquired a copy of the novel. Her vertiginous reaction arises in part from a conflict between access and admonition. Being stopped by the policeman allows her to spy the novel in the woman's hands, but the regulatory prohibition embodied by his white-gloved hand amplifies the estranging effect of the book's dust jacket. Its distinctive "paraph"—Vanessa Bell's elegant lettering—transmutes Woolf, lover and friend, into the more distant and replicable Woolf, esteemed author.

This defamiliarizing scene opens up questions, not just about the relationship between authors and readers, and about celebrity and desire, but about how books find their readers (and readers find their books): whether from bookshops or, as Sackville-West attests here, from prominent lending libraries, one of the more common, but now often forgotten, sites of modernist book circulation.¹ The Times Book Club and Mudies were subscription libraries whose Oxford Street storefronts were themselves cultural landmarks. Sackville-West conjures intimate scenes behind the composition of *To the Lighthouse* only she can know, but her inquiries point outwards to the spaces where anonymous common readers, their Woolf titles on loan and tucked beneath their arms, will come to shape their own private connections with her works. Sackville-West—in her full-circle reckoning with how the woman on the refuge embodies what Leah Price calls the "social life of books" (34)—finds comfort and resolution in what we might think of as the production cycle of the book, transiting from the hands of the one to the hands of the many. Numbers help resolve Sackville-West's ambivalent longing—"there it was, one of the eight thousand"—as she lets go of her own memories of the book before its publication, allowing Woolf to dissolve among the crowd of readers that the "unknown woman" comes to represent.

Woolf's Common Reader and Common Readers

As both novelist and publisher, Woolf understood the stakes of releasing a book into the world: "once a book is printed and published it ceases to be the property of the author; he commits it to the care of other people" ("An Introduction", 549). As a prolific reviewer, she also participated in shaping readers' literary perceptions by popularizing a borrowed conceit—the common reader—as a liberatory waystation between what she viewed as the hortatory role of the critic and the authoritative, but riskily authoritarian, role of the scholar. The common reader is many things: a person, "an abstract notion, a hypothetical construct," a "metaphor," "an alternative pedagogy," a way of reading, and a book (Koutsantoni 51; Rosenberg 55; Cuddy-

¹ For recent engagements with the circulating and private library cultures of this period, see Whelan; Katz; Eliot; Wilson.

Keane, *Woolf* 2). In 1925, Woolf published a collection of her reviews as *The Common Reader*, followed in 1932 by *The Common Reader: Second Series*. The titles allude to Samuel Johnson, whom Woolf quotes in the first collection's title essay: "I rejoice to concur with the common reader; for by the common sense of readers, uncorrupted by literary prejudices, after all the refinements of subtlety and the dogmatism of learning, must be finally decided all claim to poetical honors" ("Common Reader" 19). Woolf is drawn to Johnson's anti-elitist and anti-institutional language as well as to his aphoristic appeal, encouraging her readers to tack his words up, Post-it style, "in all those rooms, too humble to be called libraries, yet full of books" (19). Woolf makes a metonym of open spaces and open reading; of common spaces—bookful but not over-regimented—and common readers. An older sense of the "commons" (shared grazing lands) mingles with the "Commons" of representative democracy. Mutually constitutive of one another, these intimate but public spaces are where readers discover communality through a shared love of books: throw open the private home library so "readers living in the same neighborhood could use each other's books," Woolf boldly proposes in a BBC radio talk in 1927 (L. Woolf and V. Woolf 242).

Woolf wrote obsessively about reading and was deeply invested in the cultural formation of the Common Reader, but who were her actual readers? Did they realize her ambitions for them? Where did they access her books? How much did they have in common? Important archival work into Woolf's "fan mail" by Beth Rigel Daugherty, Anna Snaith, Melba Cuddy-Keane, and Claire Battershill has opened up the correspondence Woolf received about her books at the Hogarth Press (to which she frequently replied), enlarging our appreciation for their "diversity of readers and points of view" (Snaith 3).² But these readers' letters, while rich and fascinating documents, can be picaresque, obscuring the bird's-eye view of how cultural institutions (libraries, bookshops, book societies) mediated access to her works. Recent advances in the digital humanities, however, have allowed scholars to plumb readership archives in new ways. For instance, recent analysis of the Hogarth Press's Order Books mines 33,000 lines of sales data to reveal regional, national, and international distribution of Woolf's works (Staveley et al. "Virginia Woolf"). And the *Shakespeare and Company Project* reveals the borrowing habits of members of its famous lending library. In this article, we investigate how these newly digitized and shareable artifacts from the lending library generate new interpretations of modernism, reading, biography, and social history. We explore not only the names of some of Woolf's Parisian readers, but how this newly traceable cohort of continental and expatriate "common readers" reveals uncaptured stories at the complex intersection of people and books.

² See Daugherty; Cuddy-Keane, "From Fan-Mail"; Battershill.

Describing eighteenth-century book distribution models, Andrew Piper argues that “[w]hen we share a book with a friend, we are declaring our attachment—to an object, an idea, a person. *Sharing is a way of going public*. It is what transforms a private reading experience into a public act, however small or large such publics might be” (90, emphasis added). What is striking about the digitization of the Shakespeare and Company lending library cards is the two-fold amplification of this idea of “going public.” The lending cards depict in granular detail the checking in and out of Woolf titles—the same title passing through several different hands. The *Shakespeare and Company Project* aims to open for scrutiny both the metadata standards used on the site and the cards themselves as discrete objects to be read closely, their holographic surfaces sources of endless attention to what other “unculled” data—unculled not in the sense of untranscribed, but unannotated—they might contain. In short, the *Project* “goes public” with cards that depict a culture of shared contemporary reading practices while giving readers a century later the means to tell new stories about (some) formerly anonymous patrons of Beach’s “Famous Bookshop and Lending Library” (“The New Books” 2). The more we have attended to the cards as data sources, the more we have also been struck by how much Beach’s entrepreneurialism embodied common reader traits Woolf so admired: “As a librarian,” writes Noël Riley Fitch, “Sylvia’s only assets were her love of books and her interest in people. She had no card catalogue, no reference numbers on her books, no card file. . . . No formal procedure spoiled the intimacy of her library” (52).

Shakespeare and Company readers can now be viewed both at a distance and close-up: their personal histories excavated from the whole group of lending library members. In what follows, we use a combination of the published datasets and traditional humanities research methods, particularly biographical research, to reanimate readers’ lives. In so doing, we answer the question of who among the larger Shakespeare and Company subscriber base borrowed Woolf. In the spirit of Sackville-West’s fixation on the anonymous woman on the refuge, we focus our attention initially on Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse*, closely reading a few of its particular borrowers. Here the slippage between borrowers and readers should be briefly noted; while the lending library cards provide evidence only of borrowers, imagining the reading experiences of “common readers” was crucial for Woolf as it is for present-day scholars. *To the Lighthouse* is a novel deeply invested in examining congruences and dissimilarities in acts of shared reading, rendering it an ideal text through which to focalize an analysis of digital and analog examinations of an archival cache of lending cards. While borrowing should not be directly equated with reading, the borrowing evidence on the cards evokes questions too about reading and readership that are animated both in the novel and in the historical excavation of material sources about lending library patrons; for convenience, therefore, we use the term reader to denote the borrowers and readers of Woolf’s books. As one of the first of Woolf’s novels to be translated into French, moreover, and winner of the 1928 Femina Vie

Heureuse prize, whose jury was composed solely of women, *To the Lighthouse* offers an ideal case study to reexamine gender dynamics in the *Shakespeare and Company Project* records themselves.³ Poignantly, in the sense that Woolf called *To the Lighthouse* “an elegy” for her parents, Beach would have been in receipt of Woolf’s novel just prior to her own mother’s untimely death by suicide in 1927. Indeed, it appears that *To the Lighthouse* was among the books Beach found on her mother’s bedside table when she died. Beach subsequently withdrew that particular copy of the novel from circulation and kept it among her personal effects, suggesting a unique and especially intimate connection between Shakespeare and Company and Woolf’s semi-autobiographical novel.

After looking at *To the Lighthouse*’s particular readers, we then shift our attention to the larger corpus of Woolf’s readers in general. We employ data visualizations and analysis to see what different stories both interactive graphs and static photographic snapshots reveal about the contours of Woolf’s collective readership. Toggling between the close-up view and the more distant or perhaps mid-range view (these data sets are not, after all, terribly large) helps us to reconceptualize digital archives, not as places to recover a fixed past, but where instead we might interrogate the historicity of our drive to open brick and mortar archival artifacts to digital presentation:

Rather than limit our practices to discovering or finding or “collecting” an a priori reality, producing knowledge infrastructures such as digital archives gives us a glimpse of a break in the clouds, a place where we can dream differently the contexts, controversies, complexities, and conversations that go into our sense-making. (Verhoeven 17–18)

In this spirit of excavation but also of imagining lost lives as lives lived in books—perhaps the quintessence of Woolf’s common reader ideal—the digitization of the Shakespeare and Company lending library cards generates manifold possibilities for how we think about the readers through whose hands Woolf’s novels passed. The data visualizations in this last section of our article thus offer both a real and imaginary view of readership: real in that these are facts drawn from historical records; but imaginary in the sense that no reader at the time would necessarily have had access to the totality of readers sharing the same books. That view is ours, thanks to the affordances of both hindsight and digital humanities tools and methods. These tools help materialize ideas about reading that theorists such as Rita Felski describe in far more abstract terms: “Perhaps there is a sensed affinity

³ The Prix Femina Vie Heureuse Prize, originally funded by Hachette, was designed to “reward a strong and original piece of work, excellent in matter and in style, promising for the future, and calculated to reveal to French readers the true spirit and character of England.” *To the Lighthouse* was published in French in 1929 alongside *Mrs Dalloway*, the first full Woolf novels to appear in French. In 1926, a year prior to the original publication of *To the Lighthouse*, a translation of the “Times Passes” section appeared in the magazine *Commerce*. See Finding Aid, Femina Vie Heureuse Prize.

with other readers of the same book; one feels oneself to be part of a virtual community of kindred spirits" (*Hooked* 26). Or, to put it in terms more akin to Woolf's conceptualization of the common reader, the reading communities our visualizations conjure from the depths of the paper archive are at once factual and constructed, real and imaginary, biographical and auto-fictional. Woolf's common reader embodies these antinomies, coming "alive" in unfettered navigation of their appositions, both now and in the past.

Reading *To the Lighthouse* at Shakespeare and Company

"common readers are often, maybe always, extraordinary people, and their individuality is *what makes the pool of common readers such a fascinating, complex reflection of a book's multiple and plural life.*" (Cuddy-Keane, "From Fan-Mail" 16, emphasis added)

"a book, in order to live, must have the power of changing as we change." (Woolf, "Charlotte Brontë" 18)

We have chosen to begin with some case studies of readers of Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, taking our cue from the anonymous woman on the refuge, to show just how much we can learn about previously unknown readers from the lending library records. We do this not because these readers are exemplary, but because—as, to use Melba Cuddy-Keane's phrase, "always extraordinary [emphasis added]" people—they offer an important metacommentary on the integrative tensions of reading the *Project's* published metadata alongside the idiosyncrasies of reading the messy materiality of the digital archive itself.

And so, to the narratives. One set of unusually paired cards caught our eye for their mutual citation of *To the Lighthouse*: the lending library cards of a married British couple, Margaret (Kitty) and Gordon Waterfield. They (the cards and the people) took us down a rabbit hole, where "mute and inglorious" reading lists suddenly came to refract at once tantalizing and distressingly commonplace stories about marriage, betrayal, education, class, and gender (Woolf, *Room* 45). But they also gave us an intriguing glimpse into the temporalities and bookish networks and exchanges—the bibliographic colloquies—of a cultured set of expatriates in 1930s Paris. How books are shared or recommended to other subscribers within the *Shakespeare and Company Project* is speculative, but the procedure becomes more legible by the chronological orderings within their cards. Additionally, these paired but discrete cards (a selection shown in fig. 1 and 2) are notable in the *Shakespeare and Company Project* corpus because many (but not all) other couples, married or otherwise related, shared accounts and thus cards. Couples who shared an account include Frances and Morrill Cody; the Martin du Gards (but the cards for both of these couples are missing); the

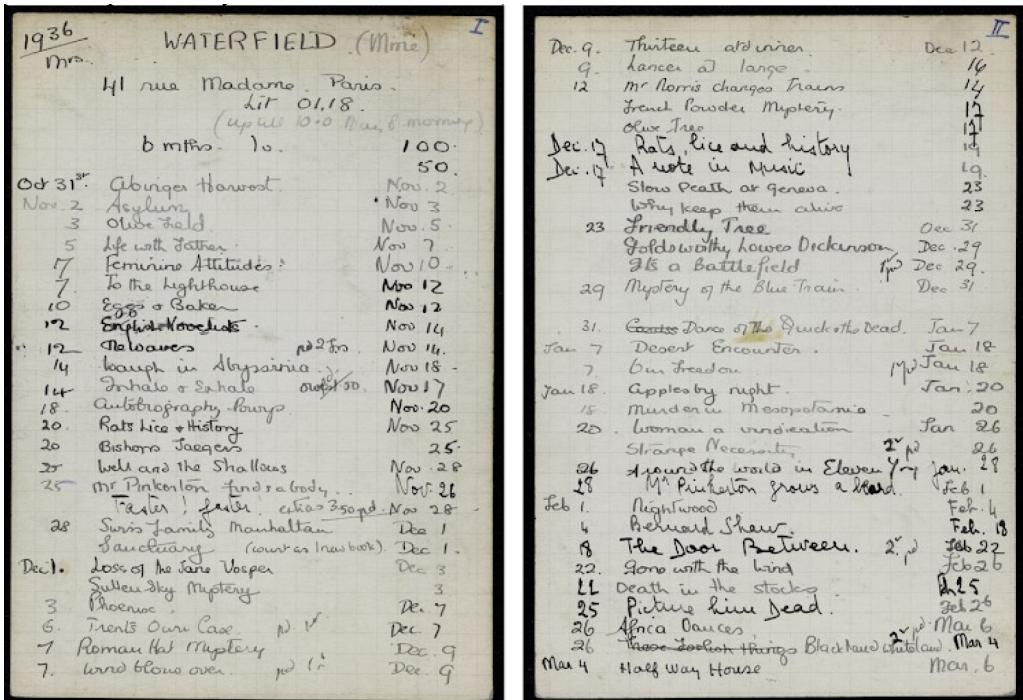


Figure 1. Margaret (Kitty) Waterfield's Shakespeare and Company lending library cards. *Shakespeare and Company Project*, Center for Digital Humanities, Princeton University (2023), <https://shakespeareandco.princeton.edu/members/waterfield-kitty/cards/>.

poet and his wife, Archibald and Ada MacLeish (although Ada's name does not appear on the cards); and the obscure Misses Somerville, possibly sisters, living in the now iconic rue de Fleurus, at number 9, in 1922, a two-minute walk to number 27, home to Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas. Although the Waterfields may not have been the only married couple to have separate cards, they *may* have been the only couple to share a copy of *To the Lighthouse* (a parochially speculative idea to be sure, but it raises another question whose answer is not entirely legible within the Shakespeare and Company metadata: beyond naming conventions within marriage or known filial partnerships, can the data by itself, removed from more traditional historical research, tell us which discrete cards might link other kinds of partnerships or family relations to one another?).

The Waterfields—Gordon and Margaret (Kitty)—were members of Shakespeare and Company between 1936 and 1939, with Kitty joining first, visiting more regularly and staying on later than her husband. While in Paris, they lived at 41 rue Madame, a short walk from Beach's shop. Their "his and hers" reading records, like recto and verso pages or even bookends, recall the scenes of reading in *To the Lighthouse*, where, in the last chapter of the first section, "The Window," Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay read together, but separately and differently: she, a Shakespeare sonnet; he, Walter Scott.

Like Mr. Ramsay, Gordon's interests lie with geopolitical concerns, with Paris and French politics, and given his profession (he was a journalist in Paris and Rome, Oxbridge educated, with ties to Bloomsbury on his mother's side) he

1936		WATERFIELD (Mr)	
Mr. Gordon 41 rue Madame			
6 mths	10.	70.	Deposit 30
paid 15 Nov 2		paid Nov 7.	
Nov 2.	France Huddleston	Nov 10	
7.	Back to Montparnasse	Nov 10	
10.	Bohemian Literary Circle	Nov 12	
	New Statesman Nov 7. 25	Nov 12	
12.	Autobiography Alice Toklas	Nov 12	
	Dear Encounter 200 Nov 14		
14.	Autobiography Alice Toklas		
16.	Sexualism (extra)	Nov 17	
	Doom of Youth	Nov 18	
18.	Waugh in Abyssinia	Nov 19	
19.	Abinger Harvest	Nov 20	
20.	Statesman and Nation 25c owes 20.		
25.	Autobiography Alice Toklas	Nov 25.	
Dec 1.	Bohemian Literary Circle	Dec 1	
	Modern French Painters 25c Dec 31		
1.	Wanderer in Paris - new Dec 15.	Dec 31	
31.	Warmer	Jan 18	
31.	Cards in the Table	Jan 7	
Jan 26.	Spanish Cape Mystery	Jan 23	
28.	The Ages of God	Feb 1	
Feb 1.	Mr. Pickwick has a clue	Feb 4	
4.	In Search of History	Feb 18	
18.	From Anne to Victoria (extra)	Feb 22	
22.	How France is governed.	March 13	
Mar 13.	Mme Tailors	March 21	

WATERFIELD	
Mar. 26.	Murder must advertise
April 2.	Gaudy Night
3.	Business Honey moon - until Monday. 1 extra
	5. Lord Peter visits the body
	7. Have his carcass
	10. Talks with Mussolini.
	12. Some People.
	13. It can't happen here
	16. San Michele
	23. Brazilian Adventure
	23. Room with a view
	Renewed Mar. 2nd - August 2.
May 4.	Howards End
27.	To the Lighthouse
June 17.	Richard and Brown.
July 2d.	Pamela
	28. Sent pc to Mr. Waterfield about closing
Sept 13.	Keep the Aspidistra Flying
	subtols be dated from day renewed - will return soon
Sept 20.	Letters from Scotland
	Scandal
Sept 23.	Dead Men Do Tell
	Corpses in the Crimson Slippers
Sept 24.	Forbidden Journey
	Planned Sept 20 1937 - March 20 1938 2 vols 100 (can take out new books without extra charge)
Oct 1.	Behind the Spanish Barricades
	In Memory of Merton
Oct 5.	5. Clue of the Silver Cellar
	(Oct 7)
	(Oct 9)
	(Oct 11)

Figure 2. Gordon Waterfield's Shakespeare and Company lending library cards, 1936–1937. *Shakespeare and Company Project*, Center for Digital Humanities, Princeton University (2023), <https://shakespeareandco.princeton.edu/members/waterfield-gordon/cards/>.

may have used Beach's lending library for his book research.⁴ While Gordon checks out nonfiction and periodicals at first, Kitty starts with an eclectic selection of contemporary work, E. M. Forster's collection *Abinger Harvest* (1936) leading to William Seabrook's *Asylum* (1935), a firsthand account of psychiatric treatment for alcoholism, followed by *The Olive Field* (1936) by Richard Bates, an organizer of the International Brigade in the Spanish Revolution. Kitty takes out Clarence Day's satirical *Life with Father* (1935) before turning to Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* in November 1936.

Subsequent books track gendered themes. Kitty weaves more stereotypically feminine titles and lowbrow genre fiction with experimental modernism, a move which, interestingly, aligns her tastes with other readers of Woolf: two of Woolf's most engaged readers, Alice Killen and Françoise de Marcilly, for instance, are often reading the same things. Alongside *To the Lighthouse*, Kitty borrows dress historian C. Willett Cunnington's *Feminine Attitudes in the Nineteenth Century* (1935) and English poet laureate John Masefield's *Eggs and Baker* (1936) before coming back to Woolf with *The Waves* (1931) and subsequently *The Years* (1937) and *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), both also in 1937. A little later in 1937, making her way across a veritable landscape of women's issues, Kitty reads Ray Strachey's *Our Freedom and Its Results*

⁴ Gordon Waterfield had a traditionally upper crust Oxbridge education, moving in social circles not far removed from Bloomsbury. He decided against going into the family cotton business, instead becoming a journalist. He served in World War II, and later became the first head of Eastern and Arabic services at the BBC. His memoir is titled *What Happened to France?* (1940).

(1936), published by the Hogarth Press (its only other reader was the forgotten actress Agnes Claudius), then, at the other end of the political spectrum, Anthony M. Ludovici's "anti-feminist" *Woman: A Vindication* (1923), followed by Rebecca West's *The Strange Necessity* (1928) and Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood* (1936). Tantalizingly, there are only two events—the term the *Project* uses to indicate books either borrowed or bought—attached to the Ludovici title: Mrs. Waterfield and James Joyce. Kitty had the book for six days, Joyce for eight years!

In this sense, we might read Kitty's cards as evidence of an education or apprenticeship of sorts. Kitty—daughter of Sir Bertram Hornsby, governor of the National Bank of Egypt, who married Gordon at twenty-one—is otherwise discoverable in the public records only via her husband, whose published outputs lean heavily on his illustrious female lineage.⁵ As a result, her library cards limn another otherwise unrecorded inner life. The mix of "genre fiction" reading with "serious" reading provides proof that her thirst for knowledge was at least partly quenched by access to Shakespeare and Company.

Unlike the fictional Ramsays, the Waterfields do seem to have traded reading materials, and a pattern of exchange, signaled by the sharing of *To the Lighthouse*, can be traced. Thus, Kitty appears to recommend to her husband *Abinger Harvest*, Evelyn Waugh's memoir *Waugh in Abyssinia* (1936)—he checked it out the day she returned it—as well as *To the Lighthouse*, which he reads in May 1937 (she had read it about six months earlier). Gordon follows Woolf with Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (1740) and then George Orwell's *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* (1936). Based on the chronology of his loans, Gordon likely recommended to Kitty the Danish travel narrative writer Knud Holmboe's *Desert Encounter* (1936). Both liked murder mysteries, including a number by Dorothy L. Sayers; both checked out a Pinkerton mystery, for instance, she at the end of January 1937, he on February 1. Perhaps drawn romantically to its title, Gordon read Warwick Deeping's bestselling *Kitty* (1927).

While the Waterfields' shared and divergent borrowing habits are captured on dyadic cards, other less legible, but still recoverable relationships among subscribers can be gleaned from marginalia on the cards. These holographic traces constitute, in Deb Verhoeven's sense of the word, the "bridges" that "reconfigure the sense of, and possibility for, acts of connection and the felt experience of connectedness" afforded in digital environments (Verhoeven, "As Luck Would" 9). These bridges are undergirded, we argue, by richly

⁵ Gordon Waterfield's family appears to have been full of literary Mrs. Brutons (to cite a character from *Mrs Dalloway*). His aunt, Janet Ross, was author of a famous Tuscan cookbook, *Leaves from Our Tuscan Kitchen, or, How to Cook Vegetables* (1899), actually written by her chef, Giuseppe Volpe; and Waterfield's mother, Lina Duff Gordon Waterfield, co-authored a book on Perugia with Margaret (Madge) Symonds, who was, in fact, Woolf's aunt. Like Woolf's mother, Julia Stephen, Duff had been painted by Frederic Watts. Waterfield also wrote a book about his mother, *Lucie Duff Gordon in England, South Africa and Egypt* (1937).

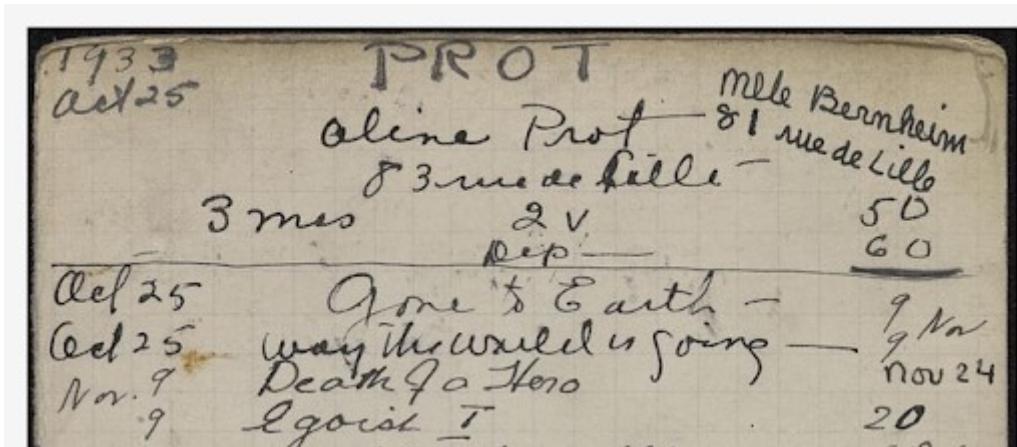


Figure 3. Detail from Aline Prot's first Shakespeare and Company lending library card. Aline Prot's Lending Library Cards, *Shakespeare and Company Project*, Center for Digital Humanities, Princeton University (2023), <https://shakespeareandco.princeton.edu/members/prot-aline/cards/>.

textured historical research charged with the “voltage” of relationality” information architecture affords (12). For instance, scrawled at the top right hand corner of the second of three lending library cards of Aline Prot, another *To the Lighthouse* borrower, the words “Mlle Bernheim / 81 rue de Lille” appear (fig. 3). Prot, who lived at 83 rue de Lille, was the daughter of Suzanne Rodrigues-Henriques (daughter of Eugène Rodrigues-Henriques, alias Erastène Ramiro) and parfumeur Jacques Prot. After her father was killed in the war in 1914, her mother married Guillaume Lerolle, the head of the Carnegie Museum; in 1919, she modeled for painter Jacques-Emile Blanche.

In fact, there were two Bernheims living next door to Prot: the sisters Françoise and Antoinette, both of whom had their own individual lending library cards.⁶ Françoise Bernheim (1912–1943) is a familiar name to those who know the history of Beach’s shop; she was a Shakespeare and Company volunteer, “a young Jewish friend” of Beach, who had been excluded from her studies at the Sorbonne and who was tragically killed in Auschwitz after being arrested in 1943 (Fitch 214, 402–03). Neither of the Bernheim sisters borrowed *To the Lighthouse*. However, Françoise (fig. 4), a member from 1934–1940, did borrow *A Room of One’s Own* (1929) in 1936 and *The Common Reader* first and second series, both in 1937, alongside lots of theosophy and Irish literature. Antoinette, who was a member in 1934–1935 and 1938–1942, borrowed *Three Guineas* (1938) twice in 1938 and 1939, *Jacob’s Room* (1922) and *Night and Day* (1919) in 1939 and *Orlando: A Biography* (1928) in 1942. Their different routes through Woolf, seen in their paired lending cards (fig. 5 and 6) mirror their divergent reading tastes; D.H. Lawrence is one of just a few authors the sisters shared in common.

⁶ A “Mrs. Bernheim” was also a member between 1919 and 1931. She does not appear to be related to Françoise and Antoinette.



Figure 4. Françoise Bernheim, permission of Françoise Findlay.

2 April - 1935		BERNHEIM
28 Oct.	Dubliners	3 Nov.
3 Nov.	Greek Mourning	Nov 15
3 -	Baron's Roof	?
7 -	Women in Love	?
Nov 15	Apple Cart	Nov 29
	Harrow	1 Dec
29	Those Barren Leaves	15 -
1 Dec.	Colonel's Daughter	24
15 -	Pleasant Plays	21
21	Gitanjali	21 Jan
	Painted Veil	15 Jan
	American Tragedy	21
15 Jan.	Early Eng. Lit. c. 17 (8 books)	0.50 - 30
21 -	Constant Nymph	37 26.50
26	South wind	31
31	305ae - Anglo-Saxon Poetry	0.50 Feb 20
Feb 20	Anglo-Saxon Dictionary, sweet	Feb 26
	Good Earth	?
	Lawrence in Taos	?
2 March.	Anglo-Saxon - 20	?
9 -	Vanderer in Rome	2 April
9 -	Conquistadors	27
27 -	Aspects of The Novel	April 8
	Subsc. due 2 epis	
owes 35	will pay when receives subsc.	
		fine paid in full 50¢
Sept 28	Early Leaves	Oct 4
Oct 4	Celtic Twilight	Oct 12
4	Getting of the Apaches	"
Oct 12	Life and Writing of S. Vico	Dec 27
12	Blaile Nonesuch Edition	returned

Figure 5. Antoinette Bernheim's Shakespeare and Company lending library cards, 1934–1935, 1938. *Shakespeare and Company Project*, Center for Digital Humanities, Princeton University (2023), <https://shakespeareandco.princeton.edu/members/bernheim-antoinette/cards/>.

More than once, the clerk at Shakespeare and Company links “Mlle Bernheim” to Prot, specifying in a later mention that it is Antoinette (not Françoise). It seems that either the two exchanged books directly or that Beach engaged informal channels of book retrieval. Trace evidence of these

BERNHEIM		France
Nov. 9.	Shepherds in Sackbuts	Nov. 28.
Nov. 9.	Good Companions	1. 25
1. 28	White Peter-roles	2. 11
Dec. 11	Crown of the Lord	Jan. 8
8	Imperial Palace	Jan. 16
Jan. 16	Madame	1. 22
" 22	Virgin & the Gipsy	Feb. 4
Feb. 4	Alleged Pauculus	March 13
March 13	Recluse Dame	" 21
" 21	Note in Music	2. 10
1935	1 year evolution	pd 157.50
25 Nov.	Mary Mary	11
	Aaron's Rod	11. Dec.
11 Dec.	Noi l'hai Re wird	16
16	D.H. Lawrence by E.L.	18
18	Requiem in red	28
28	National velvet	Jan. 4
Jan. 4	Irish Fairy Tales	Jan. 25
16	Thy Servant a Dog	Jan. 24
25	Poisoned Roof	29
	Backwater	24
	Honeycomb	20
	Flowering Sidas	Feb. 11.
29.	Journal	Feb. 12.
Feb. 12.	Wood How to Read . . . 0.50	March 1
3rd	Keepers Woods G. Barker	
March 19.	Mr Morris changes hands	March 1
16.	Woods G. Barker	16
	Room of one's own.	26.

Sept. 25 20, 1936	26. Hollywood Cemetery	April 3. 1936
	BERNHEIM	
Apr. 3	Portrait of a man	May 8.
	The Hatch	27
	Exiles	27
	Lord. Ormonde his Amiula	27
	Cosmopolitans	25
	Babylon	27
	Contemporary Poetry & Prose Plays	June 3
	Teen in America	8
27	Street Land	12
June 3	Going, Night	16
12	Loss of the Paro Vospe	16
16	Peter Abelard	17
17.	Many Mansions	July 3
	Moon Calf	June 28.
	Weather in the Street	29
	To the North	26.
29.	Rodney's Hall. 70.450	July 11
	Exiles	8
July 1.	Eyeless in Gaza	250.
8	Music at night	8
8	Brief Candles	11
8	Evening	23
11.	South Riding.	30
11.	Men of Ness	24.
	Third Act in Venice	30.
24	Masks off at midnight	30.
NOV. 23rd	House in Aragon	
2. 23rd	Living Torch	
2. 23rd	Happier Pastime	
2. 23rd	I live under a Black Sun	

Figure 6. Françoise Bernheim's Shakespeare and Company lending library cards, 1934–1936. *Shakespeare and Company Project*, Center for Digital Humanities, Princeton University (2023), <https://shakespeareandco.princeton.edu/members/bernheim-francoise/cards/>.

27	Three Plays of Puritans	March 1
March 1	Dryden, Saunterer	March 10
" 16	Walter Gurnee	March 23
12	Lake Miss Bernheim will try to get	April 24
23	Cytherea if from Mme Prot - daughter gone to England	6 Opis

Figure 7. Detail from Aline Prot's second Shakespeare and Company lending library card. *Shakespeare and Company Project*, Center for Digital Humanities, Princeton University (2023), <https://shakespeareandco.princeton.edu/members/prot-aline/cards/>.

informal, but intimate, bookish relationships appear in the image below: a clerk notes that one of the Miss Bernheims will “try to get [George Moore's *Lake*] from Mme Prot” whose daughter has left for England (fig. 7).

Our research into the stories radiating from these particular cards has, in fact, led us from the digital “dust” of the archives to virtual, living conversations with Antoinette Bernheim's daughter, who lives today in the UK and is named for her aunt, Françoise. Among the finds that Françoise shared with us recently was Antoinette's very own card catalogue of books read including cards for *To the Lighthouse*, on which she noted “symbol of the futility of wishing something,” *A Room of One's Own* (dated 1935) and *Mrs Dalloway*, precisely those titles not borrowed from *Shakespeare and Company*. Antoinette's daughter also confirmed that Aline Prot was her mother's friend and neighbor, and she has passed on many more stories of crucial friendship

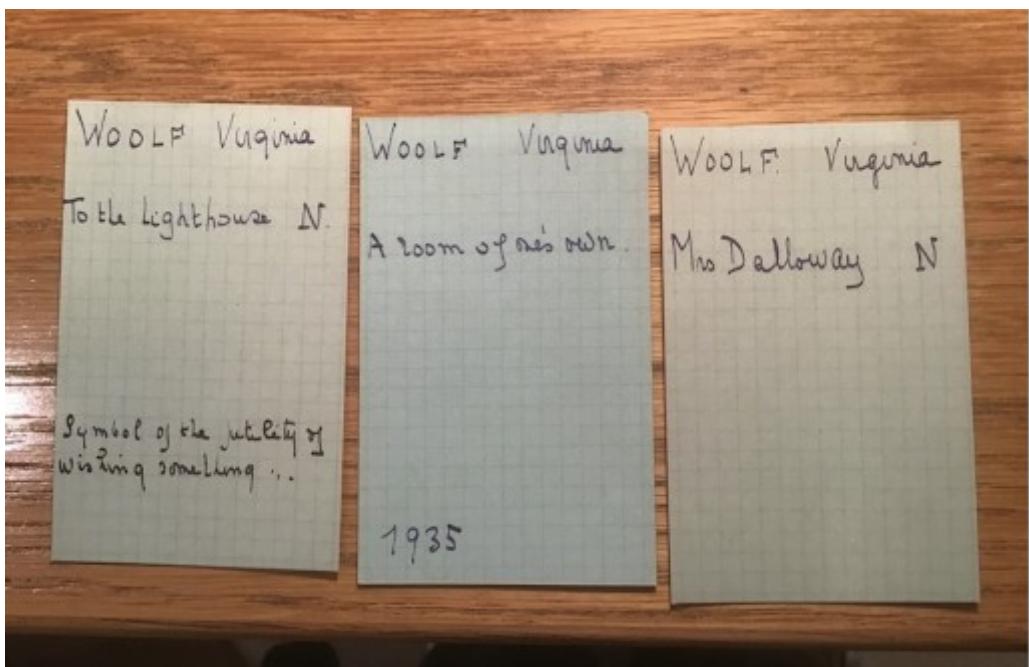


Figure 8. Cards from Antoinette Bernheim's personal book catalog (we speculate that 'N' is a genre marker for "novel").

networks, based on school and neighborhood affiliations, including membership at Shakespeare and Company, family relocations, and postwar survival.⁷

Sometimes, the hand of the anonymous clerk lifts off the page of the card altogether, metamorphosing into our hands as researchers, tapping into online archives, whizzing emails around the globe, finding tendrils of connections that expand the margins of these cards to hold associations written, as it were, in invisible ink and unrecoverable as metadata. For instance, in searching for Monique de Vigan, another *To the Lighthouse* reader, whose presence in the *Shakespeare and Company Project* lending cards is distinguished by two "events," meaning that she both borrowed and eventually bought *To the Lighthouse*, we discovered that she too was connected with Françoise Bernheim. In her published diary, Hélène Berr—the so-called French Anne Frank—links de Vigan to Françoise in her capacity as a friend of both women; furthermore, letters from Sylvia Beach to de Vigan, deposited at the Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF), by de Vigan, doubly confirm their friendship. So, we could, should we so desire, set Françoise Bernheim's lending cards alongside de Vigan's, now that we know them to have been friends, to ponder (narratively and perhaps later

⁷ Personal email correspondence, 8 Nov. 2021, with Françoise Findlay, whose mother was Antoinette Bernheim. We were led to Findlay thanks to the sleuthing of Mélanie Péron: "[Françoise Bernheim and Hélène Berr] were raised a few streets away from each other. [Bernheim] volunteered at Sylvia Beach's American bookshop, Shakespeare and Company. She was completely bilingual—raised by an English governess after the premature death of her mother—and she loved drinking tea at WH Smith's. [Berr] spent her free time at the English language bookshop Galignani's. [Bernheim] studied Sanskrit at the Sorbonne. [Berr] studied English. Both had been refused admission to the university because they were Jewish." (Our translation.) See "[Hélène Berr | Françoise Bernheim](#)," *Paris sous l'occupation*.

algorithmically) which books they too might have exchanged or shared in common. De Vigan, who became a translator and a librarian, ultimately in charge of building the BnF's Slavic collection (in the 1960s and 1970s), also had one of the longest lending relationships with Beach's shop, her fifteen cards stretching into the late 1940s as she continued to borrow books from and to correspond with Beach even after the bookshop and lending library closed, and Beach continued lending from her home.

Reading the cards closely, always attentive to connections the metadata itself might not initially disclose, but where it might latterly be operationalized when fugitive connections—like those between Bernheim and de Vigan—are archivally excavated therefore keeps us alert to where the lending cards hint at other stories, at other networks, allowing us to understand the complex structures of the cards themselves, their juxtapositions, and cross-references. As Dan Edelstein cautions in a review of Jo Guldi and David Armitage's *The History Manifesto* (2014), "Not only must we recognize the limits of what our data can tell us (in terms of their exhaustivity), but we must also continue to cultivate the skills of interpretation. Rarely do numbers alone tell the full story" (246). We, alongside Rebecca Koeser and Zoe LeBlanc in this cluster on "[Missing Data, Speculative Reading](#)," keep in mind the path laid out by Daniela Agostinho et al. "away from a techno-capitalism that identifies missingness as an excuse for compromise and control, and towards missingness 'as an engine of creativity and innovation'" (425). The gaps leave room for generative narratives and reimaginings. So, too, as Catherine D'Ignazio and Lauren Klein remind us in chapter six of *Data Feminism* (2020): "The Numbers Don't Speak for Themselves" (149–172). That gesture toward narrative, nonnumeric modes of being and belonging send us on rich interpretative quests to know more. Which is all to say: the cards make compelling reading material *tout court*.

Quantifying Woolf at the *Shakespeare and Company Project*

What quantitative approaches allow us to do, by contrast, is to generate in broad numeric strokes a profile of a "standard" common reader and to create visualizations of reader communities not readily visible—indeed, potentially invisible—in the paper archive itself. Metadata here serves a crucial purpose of allowing us to excavate and reanimate networks arising out of the exchange of books among actual readers; as we explained earlier, this data analysis embeds a recursive interpretative turn, helping us move from "real" historical assemblages of book readers to a meditation on the porous boundaries between fact and imagination, history and story, individual and community.

And so, to the numbers. According to initial analysis using the number of borrows as a unit of measurement, the *Shakespeare and Company Project* reveals Woolf to be the third most popular author at Beach's bookshop and lending library, after Lawrence and Aldous Huxley. She is one of only two

women in the top ten, with Dorothy Richardson at number five. For a more extended examination of gendered reading habits see “[A Counterfactual Canon](#)” in this collection. Karmanov and Kotin offer analysis of the gender of authors as well as the gender of readers, demonstrating that when calculated by number of borrows, Woolf is the most popular female author at the library. In terms of the top ten *titles* borrowed at the lending library, Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* sits at number seven; of books borrowed *by women* it moves up two spots to number five, with her later novel *The Years* a second favorite at number nine (Kotin and Koeser, “[Top Ten Lists](#)”).⁸ Of the eighteen Woolf titles held by Beach, *Mrs Dalloway* was borrowed the most often (thirty-four times), followed by *The Years* (twenty seven), with a tie for *To the Lighthouse* and *Jacob's Room* (twenty four) and *A Room of One's Own* (sixteen; see [fig. 8](#)). Woolf had a total of 115 readers at Shakespeare and Company, ninety four women and twenty one men. On average, women were 4.8 times more likely to borrow Woolf than men. The borrowing count by gender further clarifies the data: women checked Woolf's books out a total of 211 times whereas men only checked out a total of forty-three times. Interestingly, only about a third of her readers read her most popular novel, *Mrs Dalloway*, and only a sixth read *A Room of One's Own*. (Significantly, these were the two works that were most polarizing in terms of gender; see [fig. 9](#).)

Such data illustrate that actual, localized historical reading practices may diverge in some small part from scholarly canon formations and more broad-brushed critical assessments, in this instance possibly reflecting the ambiguous reception and late translation of *A Room of One's Own* into French.⁹ For an extended consideration of the changing popularity of Shakespeare and Company titles and authors over time—including Woolf—see “[The Afterlives of Shakespeare and Company in Online Social Readership](#)” in this collection (Antoniak et al.). We are also able to trace which Woolf titles a reader may have bypassed, not always by choice, but owing to vagaries of membership window, transit through and sometimes out of Paris or France, and book publication dates. *Kew Gardens* (1919; two borrows), *Reviewing* (1939; one borrow), and *The Mark on the Wall* (1920; one borrow) were by far the least popular titles.

The numbers reveal initial readership patterns, allowing us to create and rank hierarchies of most (*Mrs Dalloway*) and least (“*Reviewing*”; “*The Mark on the Wall*”) read, but they also recast those readers not so much islanded alone on traffic refuges but nested within networks and communities. If we cluster readers around the books, visualized as a relationship linking readers to their reading material, we gain a better sense of which readers group

⁸ That *Mrs Dalloway* was the most read of Woolf's books at the shop might be because it was the first book to appear in French in 1929 alongside *To the Lighthouse*.

⁹ The fact that *A Room of One's Own* was not translated into French until the 1950s reflects a resistance in France to this controversial work, one supported by evidence in folders pertaining to translation rights negotiations at the University of Reading.

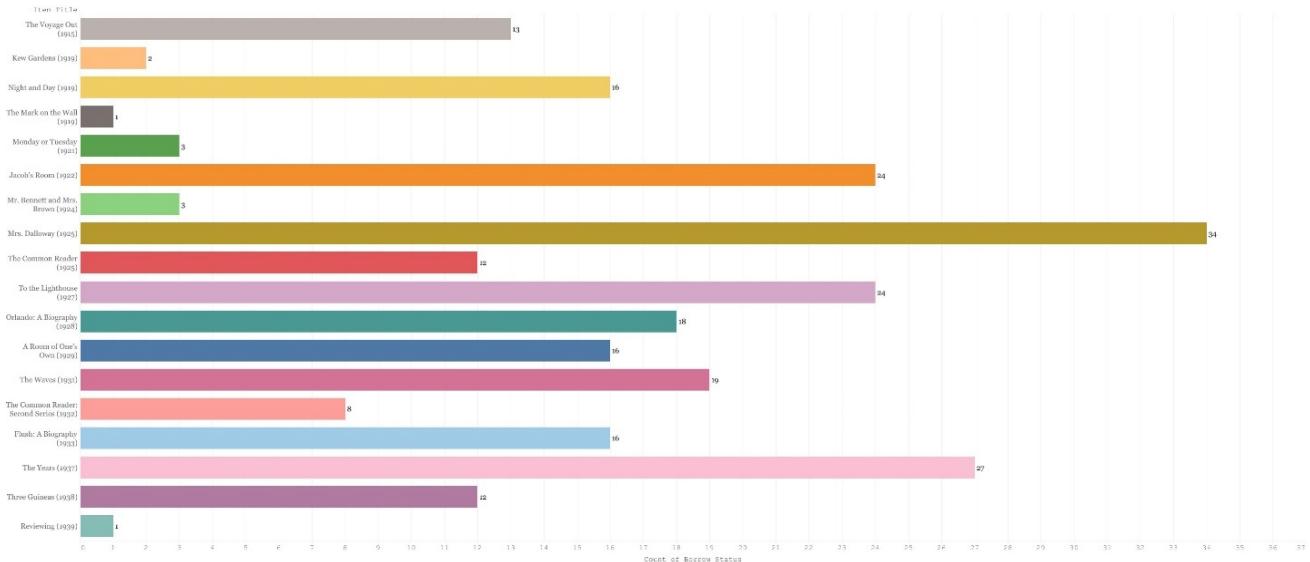


Figure 9. Number of times Woolf books were borrowed. Note: the books were not available to readers for the same amount of time; each was available only from the date of publication to the closure of the lending library. However, the number of borrows still reveals popularity insofar as the most popular titles—*The Years* and *Mrs Dalloway*—were published relatively late. An interactive version of this figure is available at <https://viz.shakespeareandco.princeton.edu/2024/woolf-common-readers/>.

with individual books, and which pathways connect one reader to another (fig. 10). We get a visualization that empirically models Felski's hypothesis that "a shared attachment to a book is a shared attachment to others" ("On Resonance"). In this case, we visualize this community as a bimodal network with two sets of nodes, Woolf's books and readers of them, connected by edges representing the borrowing of the book from Beach's library. Because this network connects reader nodes to book nodes, the statistic of most interest is connectedness. The network shows clearly the community of Woolf's readers as they encountered her books through Shakespeare and Company. If one looks at the data table in our interactive visualization, one will see that each node's connections reflect which of Woolf's readers were encountering her fiction more widely and which were only reading one or two books. Sizing the nodes to represent the degree, or number of connections, reveals the broader engagement with Woolf's books both in terms of width and depth. The readers who read the most Woolf through Shakespeare and Company include common reader Françoise de Marcilly (ten), scholar Alice M. Killen (nine), sculptor France Emma Raphaël (eight), and prépas professor Fernand Colens (eight) (fig. 12).¹⁰

In addition, the network map reveals which members of the community purchased Woolf's books (green nodes) rather than borrowed them from the lending library (yellow). Although the vast majority of readers in the data borrowed the books, some preferred to purchase, including Louise

¹⁰ For de Marcilly, see Tilliette (1–5). For Colens, see Robin and Bourdon.

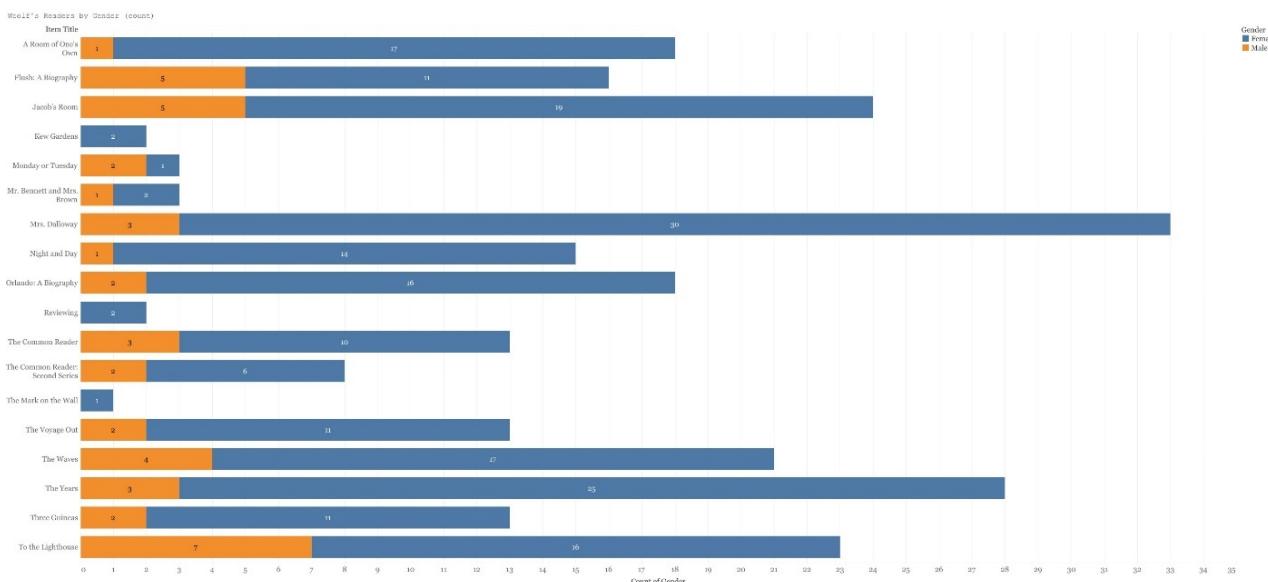


Figure 10. Woolf's borrowers by gender. An interactive version of this figure is available at <https://viz.shakespeareandco.princeton.edu/2024/woolf-common-readers/>.

Olga Bouniols who purchased two books (*Night and Day* and *The Voyage Out* [1915]), Louis Gillet (*Flush: A Biography* [1933]), Carmen Muñoz Rocatallada (*A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas*), and Elvira de Alvera (*A Room of One's Own*). Only two readers in our dataset both borrowed and purchased Woolf. Monique de Vigan purchased *To the Lighthouse* in addition to borrowing it (as well as the rest of Woolf's oeuvre) and Maud Burt purchased *The Common Reader* despite not borrowing it, preferring to borrow *Flush*, *Reviewing*, and *The Years*. Graphing the network of readers reveals the richness of the Shakespeare and Company dataset for understanding the circulation of books in an immediately visible way.

Engaging interactively with this visualization involves impressionistic pleasure of being able to see readers gathered around books, like guests at a dinner party table—a metaphor for reading that Woolf herself uses in one of her many essays on reading, “Byron and Mr. Briggs,” to conjure the kinds of bookish conversations that nurture the common reader. As a user “pulls” on the people nodes, there is the evocative sense that a reader is never *not* attached to books and people. Folding in what we might now be able to discover about their personal biographies, the visualization gives a strong sense for how “zooming in and out” between biographical detail and networked or numerical visualizations can be mutually animating. Here a common reader can be both the protagonist of her own story and part of a larger collective of common readers.

Another attribute of such an interactive network visualization is that it equalizes the community of “famous” and “non-famous” readers, drawing perhaps even more attention to the predominance of unfamiliar names. A perusal of Woolf’s readers reveals, in fact, that she had few celebrity readers among Shakespeare and Company members; most were “common readers” in

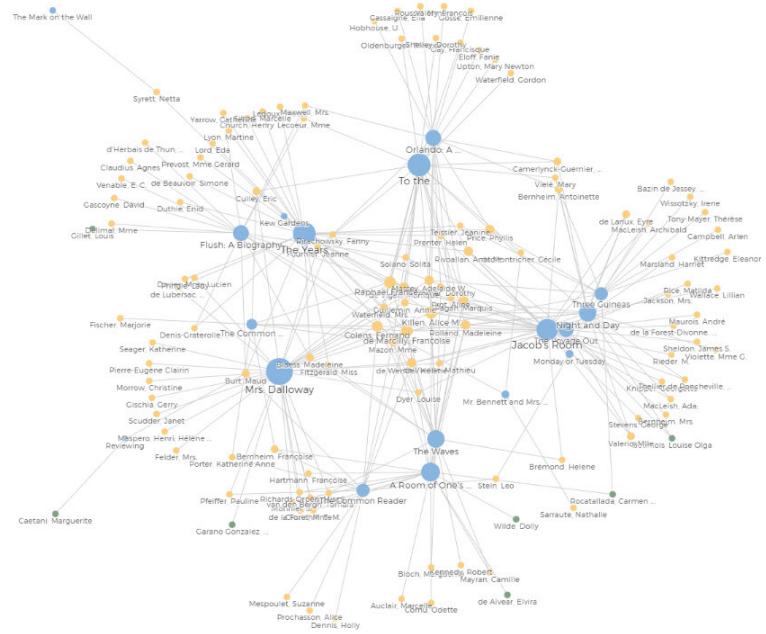


Figure 11. The community of readers (yellow nodes) of Virginia Woolf's books (blue nodes). The size of the book node reflects the number of times it was borrowed. An interactive version of this figure is available at <https://viz.shakespeareandco.princeton.edu/2024/woolf-common-readers/>.

Woolf's sense. By naming these readers and indicating their relations through the books they read, it becomes possible to excavate the rich archival histories that attend ordinary reading practices. We hope that the graph above will act as an invitation to our own readers to click through to the additional resources relating to each reader and/or text available at the *Shakespeare and Company Project* to learn more about these individual patrons beyond the ones whose stories we've told in this article: their histories, their reading habits, their lives.

Turning to the more recognized Shakespeare and Company patrons, James Joyce, for example, did not borrow any Woolf, although he appears to have had a copy of *The Voyage Out* in his library in Trieste, circa 1920 (Ellmann 97–134, 133). American journalist Pauline Pfeiffer, a member for just six months, according to extant records, borrowed *Mrs Dalloway* and *The Common Reader* in March and April 1926 at the start of her relationship with future husband Ernest Hemingway (fig. 12). Hemingway himself, however, did not borrow any Woolf. While Pfeiffer might have been accompanying Clarissa Dalloway and Septimus Smith from Westminster to Regents Park, Hemingway was communing with Yeats, Conrad, Huxley, and Gide, alongside Violet Hunt's autobiography *The Flurried Years* (1926), one of very few women on Hemingway's borrowing cards. Whether he filched the Woolf off Pfeiffer's night-table, we can only guess, but we know from a sales receipt from Shakespeare and Company, reproduced in Keri Walsh's edition of Beach's letters, that Hemingway did buy copies of *Jacob's Room*, *The Voyage Out*, *To the Lighthouse*, and both *Common Readers* in 1934



Figure 12. American journalist Pauline Pfeiffer (pictured with her husband, Ernest Hemingway, in Paris in 1927) borrowed *Mrs Dalloway* and the *Common Reader*. Ernest Hemingway Photograph Collection. John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, Boston.

(Beach x). Following Pfeiffer herself on our network graph also shows how and sometimes why she actually missed other Woolf books; Woolf's feminist polemic *A Room of One's Own* appeared in print, for instance, only after her brief membership in 1926 had ended. A quick name-check of other famous readers: André Maurois, who prefaced the French translation of Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* (1929); modernist novelist Nathalie Sarraute, who translated Woolf's *The Waves*; Simone de Beauvoir borrowed *The Years* in 1937, reading Woolf alongside Elizabeth Bowen and Kay Boyle; and art collector Leo Stein who read multiple Woolf titles, while his sister, Gertrude Stein, did not.¹¹

Much more common, however, than celebrity readers were the behind-the-scenes "midwives" and middlemen of modernism, those in Sylvia Beach's professional and artistic orbit: scholars, translators, students, and educators. Now that we have access to their names, most are readily identifiable with a little online (and offline) sleuthing. One attractive feature of the *Shakespeare and Company Project* is that it uses linked open data to connect members with Wikipedia and Virtual International Authority File (VIAF) records; the majority of names, however, have no Wikipedia or VIAF connections, inviting us to do the work of excavating these lives and entering them

¹¹ Fitch quotes Beach as saying that "Gertrude's subscription was merely a friendly gesture. She took little interest, of course, in any but her own books" (55). If this citation is true, it shows Beach was an inattentive reader of her own lending cards. Despite Stein's brief membership between 1920 and 1922, she actually borrowed sixty books to her brother's 216, a small but provocative example of how received cultural history can be challenged when oral histories meet digital archives.

into the public record.¹² We are conscious, however, that unless we do the Sisyphean work of excavating the lives of *all* the readers in the network graphs, even those whom we select, drawn perhaps by interesting features of the lending cards themselves, can only be partial and (riskily, from a statistical point of view) anecdotal, even if they help us speculate on demographic or professional trends.

We can partially stress test this paradox by narrowing our scope once again, looking more closely at quantitative features of *To the Lighthouse*. Looking at the names that cluster around *To the Lighthouse*, we notice that most readers were obscure, comparable with those whose lives we unearthed above. Of the twenty-five readers of *To the Lighthouse* between May 1927 and 1940, eighteen are women, while seven are men, an accurate reflection of the fact that according to Kotin and Koeser, “Shakespeare and Company was a community of women” with almost seventy percent of total borrows by women.¹³ The majority lived on the Left Bank close to Shakespeare and Company itself (fig. 13), which aligns with the relative geographical distribution of Woolf’s overall readership (fig. 14).¹⁴ The average loan time for *To the Lighthouse* was approximately ten days. Men appear to spend both the least time *and* the most time with it (Francisque Gay, Marquis Pagan, Eric Culley at one, two, and three days; Fanie Eloff is close to the average with a twelve-day borrow, but Colens, Waterfield, and Anatole Rivoallan clock in at eighteen, twenty, and twenty-six days, respectively). Borrowing length, too, represents a tricky interpretive challenge: does a very short borrow indicate that a reader picked up and began but didn’t like or didn’t finish a particular book? Or does it, conversely, indicate that they devoured the book immediately in one enchanted reading session? These aspects of reading and borrowing history remain tantalizing and mysterious, testament to the partiality of our own view of past interior experiences. Unless illuminated by letters, diaries, or other accounts of reading, we cannot know why male readership has such outliers, temporally-speaking, but we can determine that, of all *To the Lighthouse* readers, men were also *less* likely to read other works by Woolf than her female readers.

Although obscure, several clusters nonetheless exist in terms of professional affiliation among readers of *To the Lighthouse* and their extended networks—the kinds of affiliations that are only unearthed through gumshoe academic trekking and with only twenty-five readers, this is a plausible task.

¹² The *Project* allows a user to toggle fluidly between digitized library cards and transcribed metadata which encourages this kind of deep biographical research, expanding the VIAF corpus. Thus far, only forty percent of members with lending cards have VIAF records. See Kotin and Koeser, “[Cards in Context](#).”

¹³ “Women were responsible for nearly 70% of the total borrows—14,422 to 6,096.” See Kotin and Koeser, “[Cards in Context](#).”

¹⁴ For a brilliant geographical treatment of the readers around Shakespeare and Company, see McCarthy and de Sá Pereira, “[The Literary Right Bank](#).” They note the racial, ethnic, class, intellectual, and national aspects of urban geographical positioning and point out that the “cosmopolitan cultural milieu that sustained the bookshop was particularly vulnerable” in Paris during this fragile pre-war moment.



Figure 13. Location of *To the Lighthouse* readers.

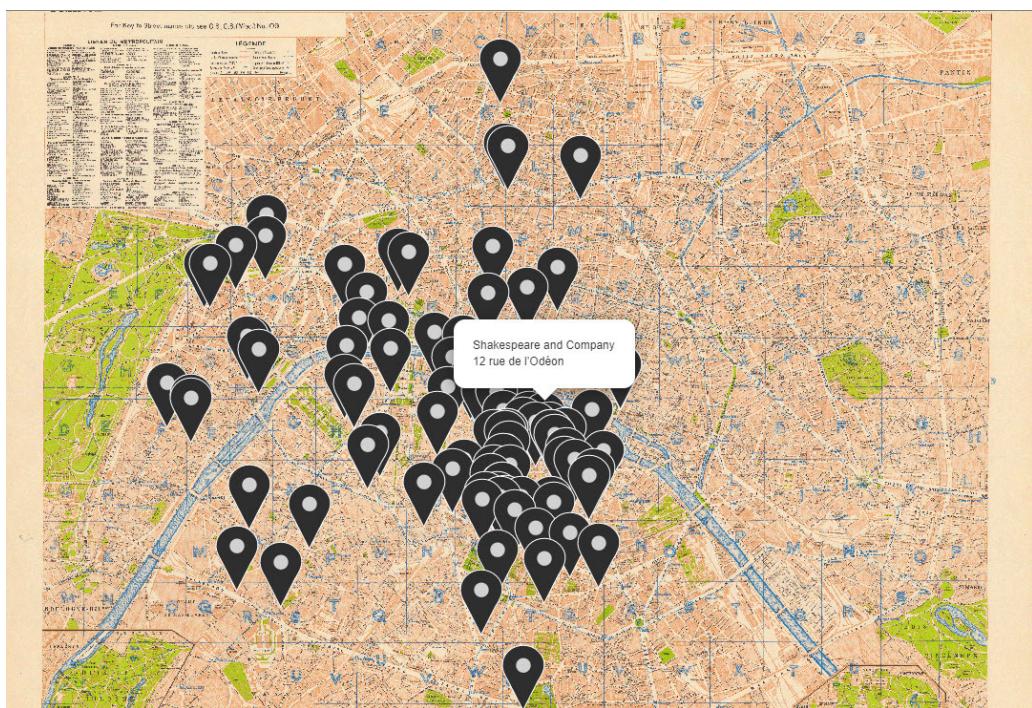


Figure 14. Locations of all Woolf's readers.

Putting pressure on Kotin and Koeser's assessment of the full range of general readership at the bookshop—"most were not public figures . . . Shakespeare and Company was not only—or even primarily—a community of writers and artists," our targeted excavation of *To the Lighthouse* readers suggests that a high proportion appear to have had either some direct or adjacent public identity as professionals in the fields of arts and literature. We find



Figure 15. Madeleine Rolland (left, with Yvonne Paquet, right) borrowed five Woolf titles. Fonds Rolland Romain.

three translators (Jeanne Fournier-Pargeoire, Madeleine Rolland, and Jeanne Mazon; see [fig. 15](#) for a photo of Rolland); a Shakespeare and Company employee (Eleanor Oldenburger); several teachers/professors/scholars (Killen, Colens, Rivoallan, Le Coeur); and two artists, both sculptors (Raphaël and Eloff). In terms of nationalities, of the twenty-five readers, fourteen are French, four or five American, four or five British, one Dutch/French, and another South African. We also find a network of younger female readers: in addition to Prot and de Vigan, Phyllis Price and Oldenburger, both American (see [fig. 16](#) for a photo of Price). Indeed, very few readers of *To the Lighthouse* are “common readers” if we use Jonathan Rose’s definition of a common reader (after Richard Altick’s): someone who “read[s] not for professional reasons, but for pleasure and edification” (1). But they may well be the type of common reader Woolf had in mind, one for whom reading is both pleasure and work, but a type of work that is broadly educational, not tied to the dictates of professors and universities, or even the Johnsonian eminences of their generation. Unearthing small pieces of these formally unheralded readers’ lives and reading habits reminds us, ethically, that though removed from us, they were not obscure to themselves or their intimate circles. For a significant subset of readers, then, Beach’s Shakespeare and Company was a vital hub, tied into pedagogical and professional literary communities, which is perhaps an *à propos* finding for a novel about the development of the (female) artist figure.

It is, indeed, tempting to mine more missing biographies on the *Shakespeare and Company Project*, imaginatively reenacting how individual readers might themselves have become connected beyond or via their discrete lending library



Figure 16. American Phyllis Price (pictured with husband, Anthony Boucher) borrowed *To the Lighthouse* as a visiting student in the early 1930s, and returned later in the decade to borrow four Woolf titles, including *Orlando* twice. Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington.

cards, formed together in reading communities, and reconjured within the hustle and bustle, day-to-day business of the bookshop. Like a dance card, Beach's records enable us to follow the exchange of a single title from hand to hand, tracing its path, à la *Mrs Dalloway*, around and often out of Paris. From time to time, one sees the same title checked in and out on the same day. Translator Jeanne Fournier-Pargoire, a member from 1925 to 1931, for example, borrowed *To the Lighthouse* on May 23, 1928, the same day teacher Fernand Colens returned it; she kept it until June 21. Might this be a recommendation from one friend to another, or strangers crossing paths at the counter in rue de l'Odéon? A book literally passed from hand to hand, like the coin of Marguerite Yourcenar's *A Coin in Nine Hands/Denier du rêve* (1934)? Or a book so popular it was on a wait list? Or maybe it signals an exchange made by Beach or one of her staff members to honor a less formal, more ad hoc wait list, something suggested by the holographic traces of a penciled note on Mrs. Waterfield's card to remember to telephone another subscriber, Mrs. Kalbfleisch, when Mrs. Waterfield returns Katherine Anne Porter's *Pale Horse, Pale Rider* (1936) (fig. 17). Whatever the circumstances, the cards testify to the intimacy of the loans as a set of shared exchanges that constitute as much as they record the making of a reading public, day by day, year by year. Leveraging digital affordances in using these cards for computational analysis, data visualizations expand the collective view, giving these readers "seats" at the tables of literary culture, conversation, and localized geography, congregating them in space and time.

24	Three Marragos	May 26
26	Wickford Point	May 31
26	Not to be Taken Upd.	May 31
31	Grapes of Wrath	June 3
June 3	Pale Horse, Pale Rider	8
	Sub ren inv 5	50-
June 3	Unnatural Death - paid 5/-	8

Figure 17. Detail of Kitty Waterfield's lending library card with staff instructions to telephone another library subscriber, Mrs. Kalbfleisch, when Waterfield returns her books.

Epilogue: A Refuge in Lists

So what, in the end, can lists of titles and readers reveal? How might they record as well as constitute a common reader's life? Woolf imagined that one could write one's autobiography based on a lifetime's re-readings of one book, *Hamlet*: "To write down one's impressions of *Hamlet* as one reads it year after year, would be virtually to record one's own autobiography, for as we know more of life, so Shakespeare comments upon what we know" (Woolf, "Charlotte Brontë" 27). Books and (auto)biographies, lives of books and lives of people, are intimately connected for Woolf. Reading and re-reading are also ways of marking time and marking change: as life proceeds, books "have the power of changing as we change" (27). She wrote, too, in "Hours in a Library," an essay where the common reader, now called the "true reader" possesses "intense curiosity" and is "open minded and communicative" about the elements of a reading life that can indeed be captured in personal records and lists of books: "most interesting of all are lists of books that have actually been read, as the reader testifies with some youthful vanity by a dash of red ink" (56). While the lending library cards don't offer readers' substantive impressions or interpretations of the texts, they do present chronological reading lives that flow around and intersect with one another. In so doing, they offer the researcher various paths radiating outwards from the lists. Biographical research can lead us to uncover glimpses of connections that might have stemmed from the kinds of "stupendous argument[s]" with readerly friends that Woolf conjures from the listed titles, "in which the Greeks were pitted against the moderns, romance against realism, Racine against Shakespeare, until the lights were seen to have grown pale in the dawn" ("Hours" 56).

Given the broader and more communal records that the *Shakespeare and Company Project* offers, it is tempting here to think about a collective biography of *To the Lighthouse* readers. Like the flowers, maps, and starbursts of visualized networks, lists and quantities of names can lead in many different directions for historical research. Each archival library lending card is a palimpsest of experiences and relationships both documented and undocumented, documentable and undocumented. By reading through the

layers, we can begin to envision and sometimes precisely identify “a woman on a refuge,” one out of thousands, crossing a busy street in a distant past, with a book tucked under her arm.

Submitted: January 08, 2024 EDT, Accepted: February 08, 2024 EDT



This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CCBY-4.0). View this license's legal deed at <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/> and legal code at <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/legalcode> for more information.

WORKS CITED

Agostinho, Daniela, et al. "Uncertain Archives: Approaching the Unknowns, Errors and Vulnerabilities of Big Data through Cultural Theories of the Archive." *Surveillance and Society*, vol. 17, no. 3/4, 2019, pp. 422–41, <https://doi.org/10.24908/ss.v17i3.4.12330>.

"Antoinette Bernheim's Lending Library Cards, 1934–1935, 1938." *Shakespeare and Company Project*, Center for Digital Humanities, Princeton University, 2023, <https://shakespeareandco.princeton.edu/members/bernheim-antoinette/cards/>.

Antoniak, Maria, et al. "The Afterlives of Shakespeare and Company in Online Social Readership." *Journal of Cultural Analytics*, vol. 9, no. 2, May 2024, <https://doi.org/10.22148/001c.116919>.

Battershill, Claire. *Modernist Lives: Biography and Autobiography and Leonard and Virginia Woolf's Hogarth Press*. Bloomsbury, 2018.

Beach, Sylvia. *The Letters of Sylvia Beach*. Edited by Keri Walsh, Columbia UP, 2010, <https://doi.org/10.7312/beac14536>.

Berr, Hélène. "Françoise Bernheim." *Paris Sous l'occupation*, edited by Mélanie Péron, <https://pennds.org/melanieperon/exhibits/show/parcours/helene-francoise>.

---. *Journal 1942–44, Suivi de Hélène Berr, Une Vie Confisquée*. Editions Tallandier, 2008.

Cuddy-Keane, Melba. "From Fan-Mail to Readers' Letters: Locating John Farrelly." *Woolf Studies Annual*, vol. 11, 2005, pp. 3–32.

---. *Virginia Woolf, the Intellectual, and the Public Sphere*. Cambridge UP, 2003, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511485060>.

Daugherty, Beth. "'You See You Kind of Belong to Us, and What You Do Matters Enormously': Letters from Readers to Virginia Woolf." *Woolf Studies Annual*, vol. 12, 2006, pp. 1–212.

D'Ignazio, Catherine, and Lauren F. Klein. *Data Feminism*. Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 2020.

Edelstein, Dan. "Intellectual History and Digital Humanities." *Modern Intellectual History*, vol. 13, no. 1, 2016, pp. 237–46, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244314000833>.

Eliot, Simon. "Circulating Libraries in the Victorian Age and After." *The Cambridge History of Libraries in Britain and Ireland 1850–2000*, edited by Alistair Black and Peter Hoare, Cambridge UP, 2006, pp. 125–46, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CHOL9780521780971.013>.

Ellmann, Richard. *The Consciousness of Joyce*. Oxford UP, 1977.

Felski, Rita. *Hooked: Art and Attachment*. U of Chicago P, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/978022629770.001.0001>.

---. "On Resonance." Talk given to the Contemporary Workshop, Division of Languages, Cultures, and Literatures, Stanford, University, 21 Jan. 2022, Stanford University.

Femina Vie Hereuse Prize. Finding Aid. *Femina Vie Hereuse Prize: English Committee: Minutes and Papers*. Department of Manuscripts and University Archives, Cambridge University Library.

Findlay, Françoise. Personal Email Correspondence with the Authors. 8 Nov. 2021.

Fitch, Noël Riley. *Sylvia Beach and the Lost Generation*. Norton, 1983.

"Françoise Bernheim's Lending Library Cards, 1934–1936." *Shakespeare and Company Project*, Center for Digital Humanities, Princeton University, 2023, <https://shakespeareandco.princeton.edu/members/bernheim-francoise/cards/>.

"Gordon Waterfield's Lending Library Cards, 1936–1937." *Shakespeare and Company Project*, Center for Digital Humanities, Princeton University, 2023, <https://shakespeareandco.princeton.edu/members/waterfield-gordon/cards/>.

Karmanov, Fedor, and Joshua Kotin. "A Counterfactual Canon." *Journal of Cultural Analytics*, vol. 9, no. 2, May 2024, <https://doi.org/10.22148/001c.116915>.

Katz, Peter J. "Redefining the Republic of Letters: The Literary Public and Mudie's Circulating Library." *Journal of Victorian Culture*, vol. 22, no. 3, 2017, pp. 399–417, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13555502.2017.1306452>.

Koeser, Rebecca Sutton, and Zoe LeBlanc. "Missing Data, Speculative Reading." *Journal of Cultural Analytics*, vol. 9, no. 2, May 2024, <https://doi.org/10.22148/001c.116926>.

Kotin, Joshua, and Rebecca Sutton Koeser. "Shakespeare and Company: Top Ten Lists." *Shakespeare and Company Project*, 16 Nov. 2020, <https://shakespeareandco.princeton.edu/analysis/2020/11/shakespeare-and-company-top-ten-lists/>.

---. "The Shakespeare and Company Lending Library Cards in Context." *Shakespeare and Company Project*, 9 Mar. 2020, <https://shakespeareandco.princeton.edu/analysis/2020/03/shakespeare-and-company-lending-library-cards-context/>.

Koutsantoni, Katerina. *Virginia Woolf's Common Reader*. Routledge, 2009.

"Margaret (Kitty) Waterfield's Lending Library Cards." *Shakespeare and Company Project*, Center for Digital Humanities, Princeton University, 2023, <https://shakespeareandco.princeton.edu/members/waterfield-kitty/cards/>.

McCarthy, Jesse, and Moacir P. de Sá Pereira. "The Literary Right Bank." *Shakespeare and Company Project*, 5 Apr. 2021, <https://shakespeareandco.princeton.edu/analysis/2021/04/literary-right-bank/>.

Piper, Andrew. *Book Was There: Reading in Electronic Times*. U of Chicago P, 2012, <https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226922898.001.0001>.

Price, Leah. *How to Do Things with Books in Victorian Britain*. Princeton UP, 2012, <https://doi.org/10.23943/princeton/9780691114170.001.0001>.

Prot, Aline. "Aline Prot's Lending Library Cards." *Shakespeare and Company Project*, Center for Digital Humanities, Princeton University, 2023, <https://shakespeareandco.princeton.edu/members/prot-aline/cards/>.

Robin, Armand, and Alain Bourdon. *Armand Robin: Ou, La Passion Du Verbe*. Seghers, 1981. Poètes d'aujourd'hui series.

Rose, Jonathan. "Introduction." *The Edinburgh History of Reading: Common Readers*, edited by Jonathan Rose, Edinburgh UP, 2020, pp. 1–8, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781474461894-003>.

Rosenberg, Beth Carole. *Samuel Johnson and Virginia Woolf: Common Readers*. MacMillan, 1995.

Snaith, Anna. "Wide Circles: The Three Guineas Letters." *Woolf Studies Annual*, vol. 6, 2000, pp. 1–12.

Staveley, Alice, et al. "Virginia Woolf in Circulation: The Hogarth Press Order Books, Modernist Bookselling, and Digital Practice." Article under review, 2024.

"The New Books at Sylvia Beach's Famous Bookshop and Lending Library." *New York Herald Tribune*, 18 May 1936.

Tilliette, Xavier. "Claudel et Françoise de Marcilly." *Bulletin de La Société Paul Claudel*, no. 163, 2001, pp. 1–5.

Verhoeven, Deb. "As Luck Would Have It: Serendipity and Solace in Digital Research Infrastructure." *Feminist Media Histories*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2016, pp. 17–18, <https://doi.org/10.1525/fmh.2016.2.1.7>.

Whelan, Timothy. "Room[s] of Her Own': Libraries and Residences in the Later Career of Mary Hays, 1814–1828." *Women's Writing*, vol. 29, no. 3, 2022, pp. 402–27, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09699082.2021.1995312>.

Wilson, Nicola. "Boots Book-Lovers' Library and the Novel: The Impact of a Circulating Library Market on Twentieth-Century Fiction." *Information and Culture: A Journal of History*, vol. 49, no. 4, 2014, pp. 427–49.

Woolf, Leonard, and Virginia Woolf. "Are Too Many Books Written and Published." *PMLA*, edited by Melba Cuddy-Keane, vol. 121, no. 1, 2006, pp. 235–44, <https://doi.org/10.1632/003081206X129846>.

Woolf, Virginia. *A Room of One's Own and Three Guineas*. Penguin, 1993.

---. "An Introduction to Mrs Dalloway." *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, vol. 4, 1925–1928, edited by Andrew McNeillie, Harcourt, 1994, pp. 548–50.

---. "Charlotte Brontë." *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, vol. 2, 1912–1918, edited by Andrew McNeillie, 1987, pp. 26–13.

---. "Hours in a Library." *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, vol. 2, 1912–1918, edited by Andrew McNeillie, The Hogarth Press, 1987, pp. 55–60.

---. "The Common Reader." *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, vol. 4, 1925–1928, edited by Andrew McNeillie, Harcourt, 1994, p. 19.

Woolf, Virginia, and Vita Sackville-West. *Love Letters: Vita and Virginia*. Vintage, 2021.