Visualizing Objects, Places, and Spaces: A Digital Project Handbook

Shakespeare and Company Project

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Team

Project Director: [Joshua Kotin](#), Associate Professor of English, Princeton University

Technical Lead: [Rebecca Sutton Koeser](#), Lead Developer, [Center for Digital Humanities at Princeton](#)

In addition to the Project Director, Joshua Kotin, and Technical Lead, Rebecca Sutton Koeser, dozens of Princeton students, staff, and faculty have contributed to the *Shakespeare and Company Project* over its seven-year history.

The Project, previously known as “Mapping Expatriate Paris,” was founded in 2014 by Kotin, [Jesse McCarthy](#) (then a graduate student at Princeton), and [Clifford E. Wulfman](#) (Princeton University Library).

For a full list of contributors, past and present, see:
<https://shakespeareandco.princeton.edu/about/credits/>.

Project URL

<https://shakespeareandco.princeton.edu>

Project Abstract

The *Shakespeare and Company Project* allows scholars and the general public to explore and analyze the activities of the Shakespeare and Company bookshop and lending library in interwar Paris. Visitors to the site can discover what influential writers (including Ernest Hemingway, James Joyce, and Gertrude Stein) read and read in common, analyze the shifting demographics of expatriate communities in Paris, and address theoretical questions about the connection between proximity and taste, and elite and mass culture. The Project draws from the papers of Shakespeare and Company owner and founder Sylvia Beach, which are held at the Princeton University Library.

Project Director Joshua Kotin collaborated with Technical Lead Rebecca Sutton Koeser and a team of researchers and developers to build the current web application, which is implemented with [Python](#), [Django](#), and [Solr](#). The open source codebase is available on [GitHub](#). The Project also required a team of students to transcribe and research archival documents and bibliographic records.

Date
 Member Name
 Address
 Borrow Date
 Membership Dates
 Note
 Title Borrowed
 Return Date
 Brought Back

1925
HEMINGWAY
 113 Rue N.D. des Champs.
 69 rue Froidevaux 140
 Hotel Rossi
 92nd
 M.O. 13.
 Suisse
 copy of Farewell to Arms = \$ 1.87
 sub to March 23-1926
 Oct 8 Mamm on art.
 " 12 Pentimental Education
 " 14 Sailing around the World
 " " Sea and the Jungle.
 Oct 22 Fear of the Steppes
 Sportsman's Sketches vol 2
 Nov 27 Torrens of Spring
 Nov 9 Bread of Deceit
 Nov 16 Travel Diary of a Philosopher 2 vols
 " 23 Parody Outline of History
 Nov 24 More Tales of the Uneasy
 Nov 28 Terrible Hobby of Sir J. Londe
 Dec 1 Charles House of Parma in 2 vols.
 " 10 Budden Brooks in 2 vols.
 " " Children of the Age
 " " House of Gentlefolks
 " " Father and Children
 Jan 28 Gunning Wonder D'Looks at Literature
 30 In Our Time (new copy) Bought
 March 29 Best Short Stories 1925 Am
 April 13 Flaming Years
 " 11 Along the Road
 " 13 Strait is the Gate
 " 17 Collected Poems Sandburg
 " 21 The Crime at Vanderhydens
 B B
 Oct. 27
 Oct. 22
 " 11
 Oct 27
 Nov 16
 Nov 16
 Nov 24
 " "
 Dec 10
 Dec 1
 Dec 1
 Dec 10
 Jan 19
 Apr. 13
 Feb. 2
 Jan 15
 Feb. 2.
 Jan 30
 May 10
 Apr. 13
 Apr 25
 " "
 " "
 B B

An example of a Shakespeare and Company library lending card. Annotations provided by the project team.

Number of active members at the Shakespeare and Company lending library, 1919-1942. [Learn more.](#)

Time Needed

When did you begin this project? When did you complete this project?

Time Span: October 28, 2014 - present

Length: 6+ years

Outcomes

What is the outcome of the project?

The *Shakespeare and Company Project* offers a new portrait of modernist literature and the Lost Generation in interwar Paris. (The Project encompasses both the website and its analytical content, including its three datasets.) Work based on the Project is available from various scholarly and popular venues. In 2022, a special joint feature in the *Journal of Cultural Analytics* and *Modernism/modernity* will present additional work based on the Project. Currently, we are collaborating with the Princeton Public Library on a series of events, including a book club featuring the most frequently borrowed books at Shakespeare and Company.

Resources

What tools, resources, programs, or equipment did you use for this project?

The *Shakespeare and Company Project* draws from archival material in the [Sylvia Beach Papers at Princeton University Library](#). The site is implemented as a custom [Python/Django](#) web application.

A summary of the technologies used is documented on the [site technical page](#); more detailed documentation about the code and database architecture are available on [GitHub](#).

Funding

Please describe any costs incurred for this project, and (if relevant) how you secured funding for these costs.

The *Shakespeare and Company Project* has been supported by departments and programs at Princeton, including:

- Center for Digital Humanities
- University Committee on Research in the Humanities and Social Sciences
- Humanities Council
- Princeton-Mellon Initiative in Architecture, Urbanism, and the Humanities
- Dean's Innovation Fund for New Ideas in the Humanities

Grants for the Project total \$127,700 over seven years. These grants were used to employ undergraduate and graduate student researchers.

Workflow

Please give an overview of the workflow or process you followed to execute this project, including time estimates where possible.

Kotin, McCarthy, and Wulfman founded the Project in 2014. They encoded the lending library cards using a customized TEI XML, and developed a WordPress site, [“Mapping Expatriate Paris,”](#) which launched in 2016. Since then, Kotin has collaborated with Koeser and a team of researchers, developers, and designers to build the [current web application](#), which launched in May 2020.

This second phase of the Project began by migrating the XML into a relational database, modeled on the complexity of the lending library cards and logbooks. The database includes a footnote feature to

link borrowing events to digital editions of the lending library cards, and a custom solution for partially known dates.

The Project design emphasizes clarity, transparency, and accessibility. Search pages dynamically load revised results but remain functional with JavaScript disabled, which the Technical Lead considers important for accessibility as well as durability. [Data exports](#) are available to enable further research. The workflow reflected two tracks of intersecting activity: technical development of Project infrastructure and extensive research on the people, books, and locations connected to Shakespeare and Company.

Here are two examples of the research required for the Project: From 2016 to 2020, graduate students researchers matched lending library member names to [Virtual International Authority File \(VIAF\)](#) records. In 2018, a team of eight Princeton undergraduates matched titles on the lending library cards with author names and dates of publication for over 6,000 books.

Challenges & Opportunities

What, if anything, changed between beginning your project and its current/final form?

The Project began with a focus on space—the geography of expatriate life in interwar Paris, based on member addresses on lending library cards. Over the years, the Project expanded to include other archival materials and focus on the world of Shakespeare and Company—its membership and holdings, as well as its geography and history. The initial approach using TEI was not the best solution for connecting and analyzing data from these disparate sources, which is why we switched to a relational database.

Is there anything specific you wish you had known when beginning your project that might help other people to know?

We started the Project thinking we would complete it in a year. As the Project Director, I wish I had known more about the technical requirements of the Project and about the complexities of Sylvia Beach's archive. I didn't know much about structuring data, and had a difficult time estimating (and understanding!) the skills and labor necessary to realize my vision. I also did not fully understand the richness Beach's archive—especially the intricacy and multiplicity of her record keeping. Ultimately, I learned a lot about both DH and Beach during the course of the Project. Indeed, by learning about one, I've learned about the other.

Next Steps

Do you have any plans to follow up on this project or work on something similar in the future?

Work on the project is ongoing. We continue to refine our data, and released updated data exports in January 2021. We are also partnering with the *Journal of Cultural Analytics* and *Modernism/modernity* on a special feature with articles based on *Shakespeare and Company Project* data. The site's [analysis page](#) is regularly updated with new essays.

Publications & Presentations

Version 1.0 of the Project was released in 2020. The Project is currently on version 1.4.

Selected Publications

Koeser, Rebecca Sutton, Gissou Doroudian, Nick Budak, and Xinyi Li. "Data Beyond Vision," *Startwords*, October 2020. [doi:10.5281/zenodo.3713670](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3713670).

Kotin, Joshua, and Rebecca Sutton Koeser. "The Shakespeare and Company Lending Library Cards in Context," *Shakespeare and Company Project*, September 25, 2020.

<https://shakespeareandco.princeton.edu/analysis/2020/03/shakespeare-and-company-lending-library-cards-context/>.

Kotin, Joshua, and Rebecca Sutton Koeser. "Shakespeare and Company: Top Ten Lists," *Shakespeare and Company Project*, November 16, 2020.

<https://shakespeareandco.princeton.edu/analysis/2020/11/shakespeare-and-company-top-ten-lists/>.

Selected Presentations

Koeser, Rebecca Sutton, Rebecca Munson, Joshua Kotin, and Elspeth Green. "Documents to Data: The Evolution of Approaches to a Library Archive." Poster presented at the Association for Computers and the Humanities conference, Pittsburgh, PA, July 24, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3277320>.

Kotin, Joshua. "Shakespeare and Company Project." Presentation at the Workshop in the History of Material Texts, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA, September 16, 2019.

Kotin, Joshua. "Shakespeare and Company Project." Presentation at the Humanities Research Center, Rice University, Houston, TX, April 26, 2018.

Kotin, Joshua and Clifford E. Wulfman. "Mapping Expatriate Paris: The Shakespeare and Company Lending Library Project." Digital exhibit presented at the Modernist Studies Association (MSA) Conference, Pasadena, CA, November 18, 2016.

Selected Media

Bridge, Mark, Rosa Ellis, and James Marriott. "Shakespeare and Company Reveals Its Authors' Guilty Pleasures." *Times* (London), November 13, 2020. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/paris-bookshop-reveals-its-authors-guilty-pleasures-p0qdqz0zg>.

Flood, Alison. "Legendary Paris Bookshop Reveals Reading Habits of Illustrious Clientele." *Guardian*, May 15, 2020. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2020/may/15/legendary-paris-bookshop-reveals-reading-habits-ernest-hemingway-gertrude-stein-shakespeare-and-company>.

Leone, Alessandro. "¿Qué libros compraban Simone de Beauvoir, Joyce, Hemingway o Lacan en París?" *El Pais*, May 19, 2020. <https://elpais.com/cultura/2020-05-19/que-libros-compraban-simone-de-beauvoir-joyce-hemingway-o-lacan-en-paris.html>.

Nussbaum, Virginie. "Que lisaient Joyce et Hemingway?" *Le Temps*, May 22, 2020. <https://www.letemps.ch/culture/lisaient-joyce-hemingway>.

Dataset

Kotin, Joshua, Rebecca Sutton Koeser, Carl Adair, Serena Alagappan, Paige Allen, Jean Bauer, Oliver J. Browne, Nick Budak, Harriet Calver, Jin Chow, Ian Davis, Gissoo Doroudian, Currie Engel, Violet Gautreau, Alex Gjaja, Elspeth A. Green, Isaac Hart, Benjamin Hicks, Madeleine E. Joelson, Carolyn Kelly, Sara Krolewski, Xinyi Li, Ellie Maag, Elizabeth Macksey, Cate Mahoney, Francesca Mancino, Jesse D. McCarthy, Mary Naydan, Sally Root, Isabel Ruehl, Sylvie Thode, Katherine Vandermel, Camey VanSant, and Clifford E. Wulfman. *Shakespeare and Company Project Dataset: Lending Library Members, Books, Events*. Version 1.1. January 2021. Distributed by DataSpace, Princeton University. <https://doi.org/10.34770/39sq-bm51>.