

Press Release: Shakespeare and Company Bookstore, Paris, France

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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HEADLINE: Travel in Words: A Four-Day Literary Celebration

PARIS, France.—Aspiring travel writers from rural America to Europe's largest cities will have the opportunity to study their craft this summer for free at France's Shakespeare and Company during a literary celebration entitled, *Travel in Words*.

Lasting from June 15 to 18, this is the second literary festival presented by the legendary Paris bookshop, and its panel discussions and readings filled with 21 award-winning international travel writers will take place under a tent in the Rene Viviani park next to the store, located on the Left Bank opposite Notre Dame. Documentary screenings will be showing at a near-by cinema, as well.

"Travel writing has always interested me, and it is a popular section at the bookshop," said Sylvia Whitman. "Paris is a crossroads in Europe, and travelers are always passing through before their next stop to Amsterdam, Prague, Barcelona, and Berlin; so, it seemed a topic that was ideal for such a city and for such a bookshop."

After going to university in England, Sylvia returned to Shakespeare and Company just after the turn of the century to run the store for her father, George Whitman.

"George (everyone calls him George) may be secretly excited about the travel theme, as he wandered the world as a hobo and dreams of traveling, still," Sylvia said.

"I once expected to spend seven years walking around the world on foot," George posted on the bookshop's Web site. "I walked from Mexico to Panama where the road ended before an almost uninhabited swamp called the Choco Colombiano. Even today there is no road."

At 90-plus years old, George recently retired but still sits as a figurehead above his store. The Massachusetts native opened his literary oasis over five decades ago, changing the name to Shakespeare and Company in 1964 in honor of the late Sylvia Beach. Beach's store served as an anchor for a generation of writers, including Ernest Hemingway and Gertrude Stein, and it was the first publisher of *Ulysses*.

This travel festival continues the store's rich literary history.

"First and foremost, a literary festival brings an author to his or her readers," said Travel Writer Rory Maclean. A Canadian-born author who lives and writes in London, Maclean is heavily involved in the festival, participating in panels and delivering the inaugural reading from his new book, *Magic Bus: On the Hippie Trail from Istanbul to India*. "Festivals remind writers that they are part of a living, changing community. It also gets us out of the house."

"Be prepared to bring more to life than is expected or required, pay attention to everything and everybody, and have respect for the treasures of the past and beauties of the present," said David Amram about the writing process. The composer of over 100 orchestral and chamber works and the writer of many scores for theater and films, including *Splendor in the Grass* and *The Manchurian Candidate*, Amram participated in the 2003 festival.

"(In 2003), Sylvia spent months planning the entire eight days of non-stop events with two other young women her own age who ran the whole show!" Amram said. "The three of them were extraordinary, and people from all over Europe, the USA and Canada attended."

"That shows how naïve we were," Sylvia said of the event entitled, *Lost, Beat and New: Three Generations in Literary Paris*. "At 21, we didn't realize how much work something like this takes. It was a huge success, and people came from all over to participate."

"It's magic to be in that place, to live in the same place that housed the likes of Alan Ginsberg," said John Emerson. Emerson—an Andes, New York native—recently spent three months living in the bookshop as the official Writer in Residence. "It's incredibly inspiring to be with other writers, to see them writing and to be surrounded by books and books and books, using typewriters and writing by hand; it's a bohemian lifestyle that makes you feel like a writer."

Since the shop opened in 1951, thousands upon thousands of struggling artists and writers passed through the shop's doors, exchanging a few hours of work each day for a safe spot to sleep and a quiet place to read and write. That tradition continues.

According to Sylvia, "a lot of the beds at the shop will be filled by literature students, interns and young writers who want to be a part of the festival by being helpers during the events, so, most of the places (in the shop) will be going to these people."

"Time was that travel books were about physically dangerous journeys," Maclean said. "It is no longer enough for a travel writer to skim over the physical surface of the country. He or she must become less a geographer of place, more a geographer of the human heart."

Another key aspect of the festival will be a travel photography exhibition by artist Gillian Thompson.

"The exhibition is a documentary of my journey around the world without ever leaving Paris," Thompson said. "It celebrates the diversity of cultures found within Paris."

The event will even offer a travel writing contest with the top three winners divvying up such prizes as free access to travel writing workshops, two first class Eurostar tickets and travel books.

"Travel writing is a hybrid form that mixes the story-telling techniques of the novelist and the real-life reportage of the journalist," said Jonathan Lorie. "Those are vital sources for the writer to know and use. You also need to be adept at describing places, people and atmosphere, which are the building blocks of our trade."

Lorie is the director of the London-based travel writing agency Travellers Tales, and he spent seven years as editor of *Traveller* magazine. In addition to judging the contest, he will serve on a variety of panels and is offering a separate travel writing workshop on June 19 and 20 at the bookstore.

"The fastest way for a travel writer to advance his or her career is to marry the son or daughter of a newspaper baron," Maclean said. "If that's not possible, try to win a prize."

MacLean continued: "I'm not being flip. There are dozens of travel writing competitions. Researching and writing a travel article forces a writer to focus. Winning a competition opens the doors to agents and publishers."

"The festival brings together writers and artists whose work has been influenced and inspired by travel," Thompson said. "We hope that people who come to the festival will take away a greater sense of the environment that surrounds them. Beauty and inspiration come in many forms; you've just got to be open and aware."

According to Sylvia, there is no charge to the public for the festival.

"I couldn't imagine charging a fee for any events," Sylvia said. "With the help of our sponsors (Eurostar, *Time Out*, *Granta*, Travellers Tales, The American University of Paris, and Mairie de Seme), we will be able to break even, and that is our aim. I think these kinds of events should, as much as possible, be open and free to all."

Whether a media mogul, international organization or regular bloke, everyone has a chance to support the bookshop and help keep its next literary festival free with membership in the *Friends of Shakespeare & Company*.

"With budgets so small that shoestrings seem long, we're always looking for ways to finance new jam jars, scratch pads and pencils," Sylvia said. "Rest assured that all of your money will go directly to supporting our biannual festivals." For full details on the festival, the contest and the membership, check it out online at: www.shakespeareco.org/featured.html or call Shakespeare and Company at 00 33 (0) 1 43 25 40 93. Set in the heart of the Left Bank opposite Notre Dame, Shakespeare and Company has grown from a bookstore into an institution. It is situated in the Latin Quarter, which for centuries has been the center of Parisian creativity and intelligentsia.

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Editorial Note: David Amram quotes used courtesy of the author from his new book *Nine Lives of a Musical Cat*, to be published in 2007.