



Time Was Soft There: A Paris Sojourn at Shakespeare & Co.

Jeremy Mercer

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"Some bookstores are filled with stories both inside and outside the bindings. These are places of sanctuary, even redemption---and Jeremy Mercer has found both amid the stacks of Shakespeare & Co."

---Paul Collins, author of *Sixpence House: Lost in a Town of Books*

In a small square on the left bank of the Seine, the door to a green-fronted bookshop beckoned. . . .

With gangsters on his tail and his meager savings in hand, crime reporter Jeremy Mercer fled Canada in 1999 and ended up in Paris. Broke and almost homeless, he found himself invited to a tea party amongst the riffraff of the timeless Left Bank fantasy known as Shakespeare & Co. In its present incarnation, Shakespeare & Co. has become a destination for writers and readers the world over, trying to reclaim the lost world of literary Paris in the 1920s. Having been inspired by Sylvia Beach's original store, the present owner, George Whitman, invites writers who are down and out in Paris to live and dream amid the bookshelves in return for work. Jeremy Mercer tumbled into this literary rabbit hole and found a life of camaraderie with the other eccentric residents, and became, for a time, George Whitman's confidante and right-hand man.

Time Was Soft There is one of the great stories of bohemian Paris and recalls the work of many writers who were bewitched by the City of Light in their youth. Jeremy's comrades include Simon, the eccentric British poet who refuses to give up his bed in the antiquarian book room, beautiful blonde Pia, who contributes the elegant spirit of Parisian couture to the store, the handsome American Kurt, who flirts with beautiful women looking for copies of *Tropic of Cancer*, and George himself, the man who holds the key to it all. As *Time Was Soft There* winds in and around the streets of Paris, the staff fall in and out of love, straighten bookshelves, host tea parties, drink in the more down-at-the-heels cafés, sell a few books, and help George find a way to keep his endangered bookstore open. Spend a few days with Jeremy Mercer at 37 Rue de la Bucherie, and discover the bohemian world of Paris that still bustles in the shadow of Notre Dame.

"Jeremy Mercer has captured Shakespeare & Co. and its complicated owner, George Whitman, with remarkable insight. *Time Was Soft There* is a charming memoir about living in Whitman's Shakespeare & Co. and the strange, broken, lost, and occasionally talented, eccentrics and residents of this Tumblewood Hotel."

---Noel Riley Fitch, author of *Sylvia Beach and the Lost Generation: A History of Literary Paris in the Twenties & Thirties*

"There does seem to be something about the odd ducks that work at bookstores. Jeremy Mercer has captured the story of a wonderful, unique store that could only be born out of a love for books and the written word."

--- Liz Schlegel, the Book Revue bookshop, Huntington, New York

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