

Parisian bookshop

Books, Resonances & Beginnings
Author: Jeremy Mercer
Publisher: Princeton (New Ed edition), 255 pages

Review by MARTIN SPICE

There is one bookshop that lies at the heart of 20th century literature - Shakespeare & Co, situated on Paris' Left Bank. Not only was this bookshop at the core of literary life for Americans in Paris, it was also the publisher of that epitome of 20th century literature, James Joyce's *Ulysses*. The roll call of its visitors reads like a huddle of 20th century greats: Scott Fitzgerald, Stein, Ezra Pound, Ernest Hemingway and James Joyce.

Its founder was Sylvia Beach but the original shop was shut down in 1941 when the Nazis occupied Paris. Sylvia Beach spent the war in an internment camp. There are claims that it was closed when she refused to sell her last copy of Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* to a Nazi officer. Ten years later, with the war over, another literary writer opened a bookshop and in homage to the original, gave it the same name. Its owner was "a naive American... a vagabond

dreamy and writer by the name of George Whitman", who had spent years roaming the world until he decided to settle in Paris and devote his life to the quixotic pursuit of bookelling.



If your idea of a bookshop is something really quaint, with uniformly arranged tomes and hill of self-help books of dubious merit, then walking through the doors of Shakespeare & Co will be a revelation of a shop.

A glittering chandelier hung from a cracked ceiling, while in the corner, an obese man splashed rainwater from his turquoise umbrella. A horde of shopaholics crowded the desk, clamouring for the clerk's attention in a loud wash of languages. Art books were everywhere. They sagged from wooden shelves, spilled from cardboard boxes, scattered in tall piles on tables and chairs...

The author, Jeremy Mercer, was a

young man on the run in 1959. A crime reporter in Toronto, he had collaborated with a thief in the writing of a book. Unwittingly, he had included details that he had been expressly told to omit and, worst of all, he had used the thief's name. Threats of extreme violence followed and he fled. Like many literary refugees before him, he ended up at Shakespeare & Co.

The account of the time he spent there is a riveting trail of the most bizarre bookshop you will ever encounter with a cast of characters that makes most eccentric mystery book narratives. Towering over them all is the indomitable, hard unpredictable and occasionally generous George Whitman, who runs a bookshop that provides beds in sofas, meals for the chosen few. Whitman hosts tea parties and soup kitchens whilst grubbing round for cheap food in the neighbouring shops and markets. This is a man who loses a fortune in stolen books yet betrays his soul for the vibrant, unnecessary expenditure of his bread and bayonets in which and falls desperately in love with a girl a fraction of his age. He is a wonderful, beloved character and with his writing, Mercer does justice not only to Whitman but to the crowd of wannabes that surrounded him.

But, *Resonances and Beginnings* is that most unlikely of books, a compelling page-turner of literary passion that is almost impossible to put down.

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SPIDER 2 11:30, 1:30, 3:30, 5:30, 7:30, 9:30, 11:30 pm	PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN 2 11:30, 11:30, 12:30, 2:30, 4:30, 6:30, 8:30, 10:30, 12:30, 11:30 pm	SPIDER-MAN 2 12:30, 2:45, 5:00 pm

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SNEAK PREVIEW
300 POUNDS BEAUTY
TO SIR WITH LOVE
*Free 1st Show

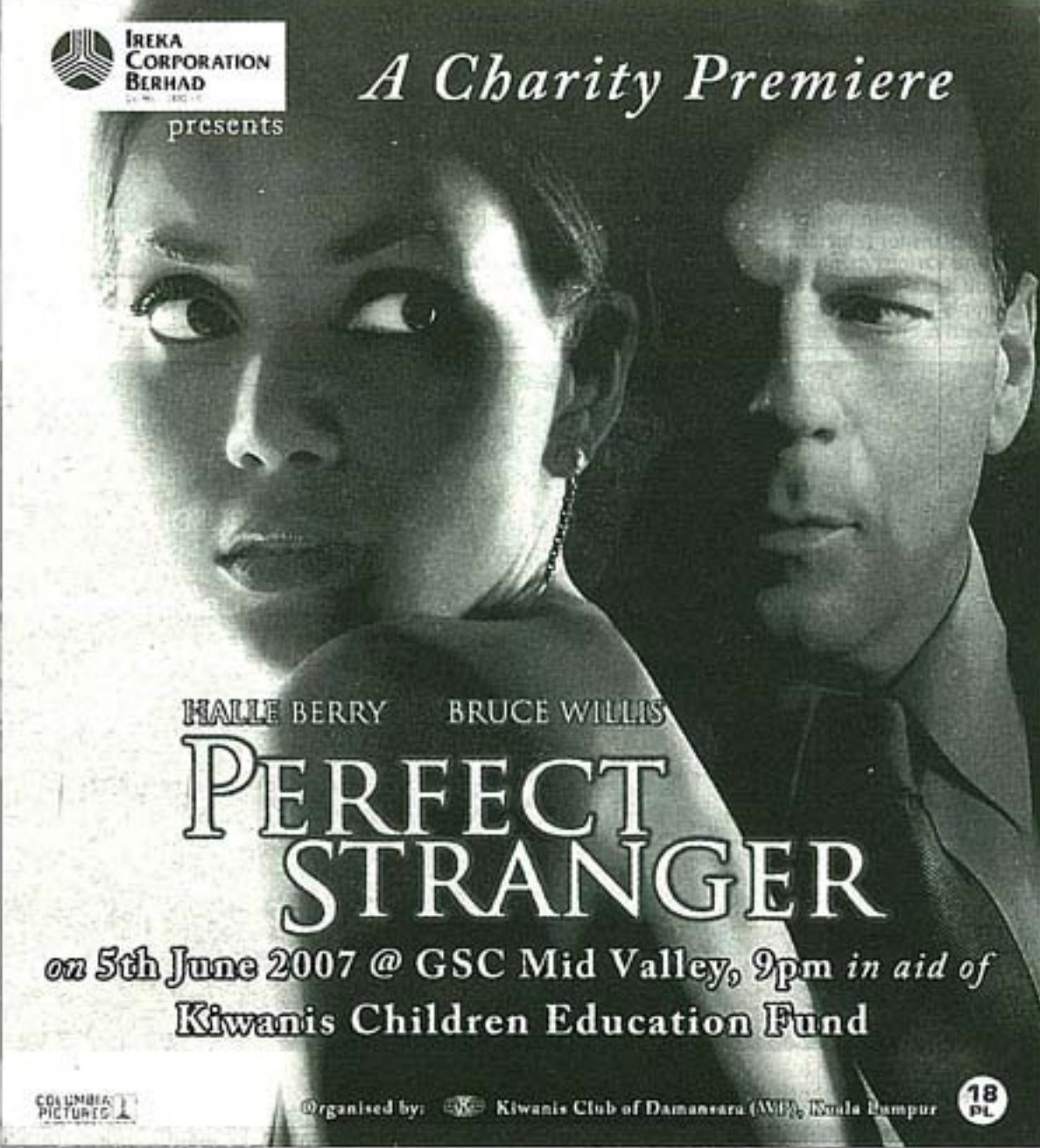
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13 - 7872 2000 (KUALA LUMPUR)
26 - 547 7288 (SINGAPORE)
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