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Shakespeare's Early Footprint:

An Empirical Report

Elizabethan playwright; author of *Hamlet*; greatest tragedian of all time: these are some of the ways we remember Shakespeare today, but how was he thought of in his own time? What was Shakespeare's most popular work in his own day? These questions might be answered by counting the number of editions of his works, but that tally would leave out performances. We could add recorded performances, but that tally would still leave out critical commentary on Shakespeare's works, which are obviously an important index to their popularity. Fortunately, a new database has emerged: the Folger Shakespeare Library's *Shakespeare Documented* website, "the largest and most authoritative collection of primary-source materials documenting the life of William Shakespeare (1564-1616), bringing together all known manuscript and print references to Shakespeare, his works, and additional references to his family, in his lifetime and shortly thereafter."

I. Method

To gauge Shakespeare's early modern "footprint" – *which of his texts were most popular? when was he most popular?* – I gathered some data from *Shakespeare Documented*. The database allows users to filter the results by work (the "Plays & Poetry" tab) and by date (the "Decade" tab). By combining these filters, I was able to track which works were popular at which times, as well as totals for each work and each decade.

II. Results

Text	1590s	1600s	1610s	1620s	1630s	Total
<i>All's Well That Ends Well</i>	0	0	0	1	0	1
<i>Antony and Cleopatra</i>	0	1	1	1	0	3
<i>As You Like It</i>	0	2	0	1	0	3
<i>The Comedy of Errors</i>	2	2	0	1	0	5
<i>Coriolanus</i>	0	0	0	1	0	1
<i>Cymbeline</i>	0	0	1	1	0	2
<i>Hamlet</i>	2	12	1	2	1	18
<i>1 Henry IV</i>	4	8	1	3	0	16
<i>2 Henry IV</i>	0	5	0	2	0	7
<i>Henry V</i>	0	6	1	0	0	7
<i>1 Henry VI</i>	2	1	0	0	0	3
<i>2 Henry VI</i>	2	2	1	0	0	5
<i>3 Henry VI</i>	2	1	1	1	0	5
<i>Henry VIII</i>	0	0	3	1	0	4
<i>Julius Caesar</i>	0	1	1	1	1	4
<i>King John</i>	0	0	1	0	0	1
<i>King Lear</i>	0	3	1	0	0	4
<i>Love's Labor's Lost</i>	3	11	1	0	0	15
<i>Lucrece</i>	12	12	2	0	0	26
<i>Macbeth</i>	0	0	1	2	0	3
<i>Measure for Measure</i>	0	1	0	1	0	2
<i>The Merchant of Venice</i>	1	6	2	0	0	9
<i>The Merry Wives of Windsor</i>	0	4	1	0	0	5
<i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i>	0	5	1	0	0	6
<i>Much Ado About Nothing</i>	0	5	1	0	0	6
<i>Othello</i>	0	2	3	5	1	11
<i>Pericles</i>	0	8	3	1	0	12
<i>The Phoenix and the Turtle</i>	0	1	1	0	0	2
<i>Richard II</i>	7	11	1	1	0	20
<i>Richard III</i>	6	9	1	2	0	18
<i>Romeo and Juliet</i>	4	9	0	3	0	16
<i>Sonnets</i>	3	4	2	0	0	9
<i>The Taming of the Shrew</i>	1	2	0	0	0	3
<i>The Tempest</i>	0	0	2	1	1	4
<i>Timon of Athens</i>	0	0	0	1	0	1
<i>Titus Andronicus</i>	4	3	1	0	1	9
<i>Troilus and Cressida</i>	0	4	0	1	0	5
<i>Twelfth Night</i>	0	3	0	1	0	4
<i>Two Gentlemen of Verona</i>	0	0	0	1	0	1
<i>Two Noble Kinsmen</i>	0	0	0	0	2	2
<i>The Winter's Tale</i>	0	0	3	2	1	6

<i>Venus and Adonis</i>	18	14	3	1	1	37
Total	73	158	42	39	9	321

III. Discussion

This research suggests that, in his own day, Shakespeare was primarily known as a poet and a writer of history plays. As Figure 1 shows, his most popular works were his two narrative poems, *Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece*. After his poetry, his most popular works were his history plays: three of his top four plays were histories (*Richard II*, *Richard III*, and *1 Henry IV*).

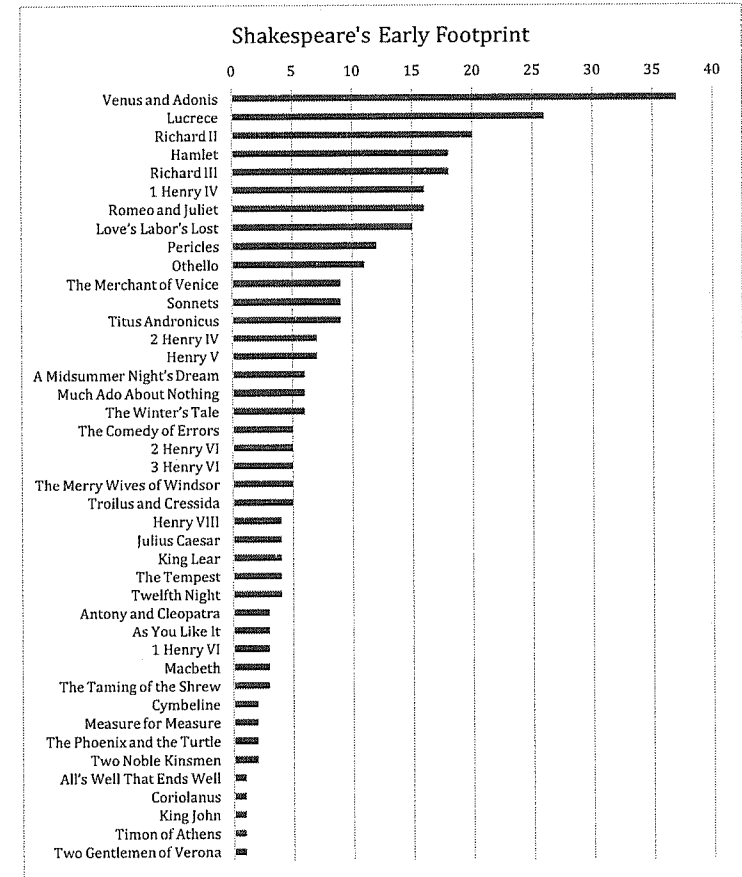


Figure 1: Shakespeare's Early Footprint According to Items Catalogued in *Shakespeare Documented*.

Looking more closely at Shakespeare's most popular plays confirms some expectations but also reveals some surprises. First, as Figure 2 shows, it is somewhat surprising that *Hamlet* was not Shakespeare's most prominent play in the early-modern era: that honor goes to *Richard II*, with *Hamlet* coming in second. More generally, the top five plays (*Richard II*, *Hamlet*, *Richard III*, *1 Henry IV*, and *Romeo and Juliet*) are rather predictable, but Shakespeare's sixth

most-popular play, *Love's Labor's Lost*, and his seventh, *Pericles*, are surprising because neither is particularly popular in the modern era.

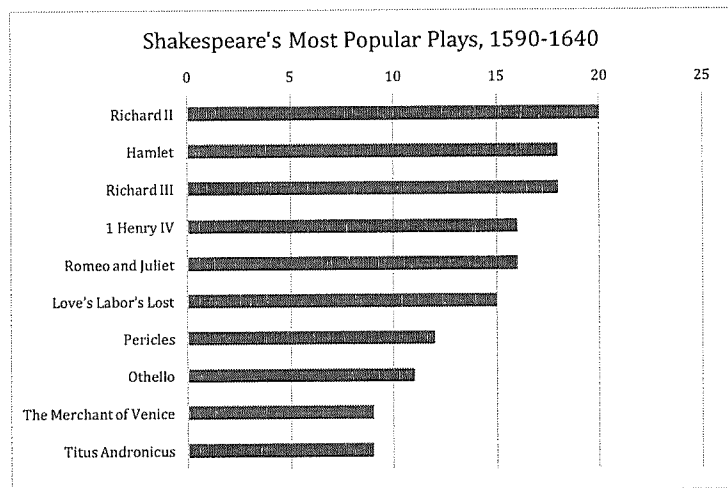


Figure 2: Shakespeare's Most Popular Plays, 1590-1640, According to Items Catalogued in *Shakespeare Documented*.

Looking more closely at Shakespeare's active decades, we can re-affirm that Shakespeare's early artistic identity was centered upon his history plays: the top three plays in the 1590s were histories, and six of the top eleven were histories, as Figure 3 shows. Similarly, in 1600-10, five of Shakespeare's top ten plays were histories, as Figure 4 shows.

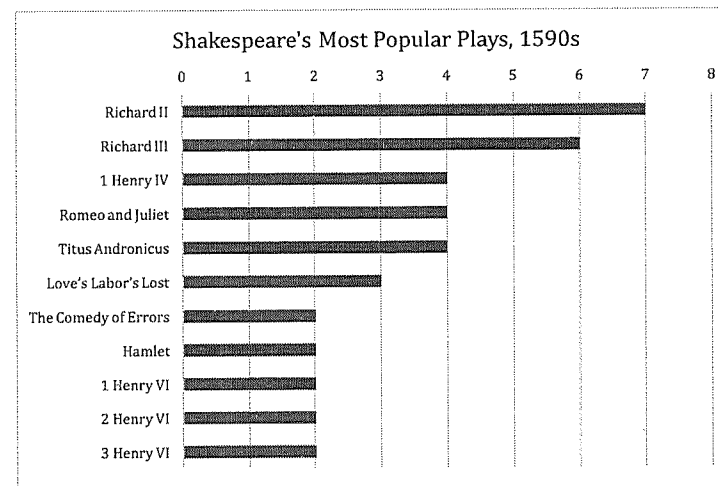


Figure 3: Shakespeare's Most Popular Plays, 1590s, According to Items Catalogued in *Shakespeare Documented*.

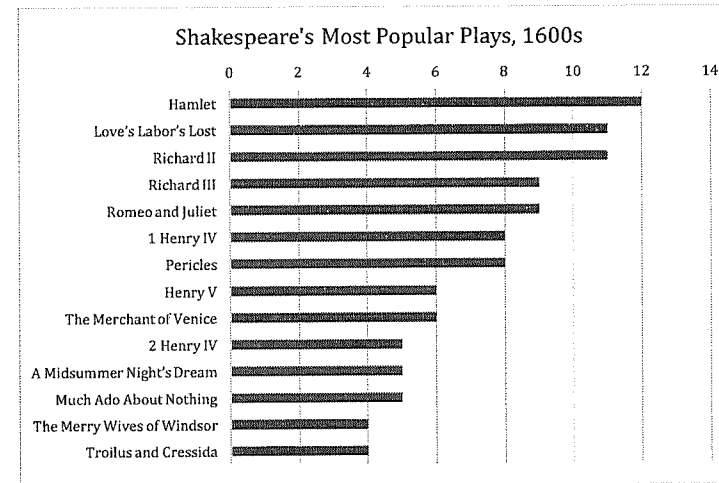


Figure 4: Shakespeare's Most Popular Plays, 1600s, According to Items Catalogued in *Shakespeare Documented*.

IV. Questions for Further Research

Shakespeare's earliest artistic identity seems to be that of a poet and of a writer of history plays, which leads to several questions:

1. Why were Shakespeare's poems popular among his earliest audiences?
2. How and why did Shakespeare's history plays resonate with early-modern English culture?
3. Why was *Richard II* Shakespeare's most popular play in the early-modern age? What was it about *Richard II* that appealed to some aspect of early-modern English culture to result in the prominence of that text?

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Expos 20.043

2 November 2017

Shakespeare's Popularity in English-Speaking Cultures, 1700-2008:

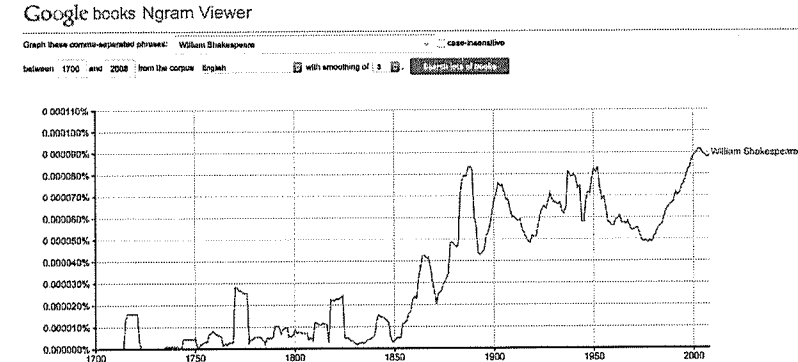
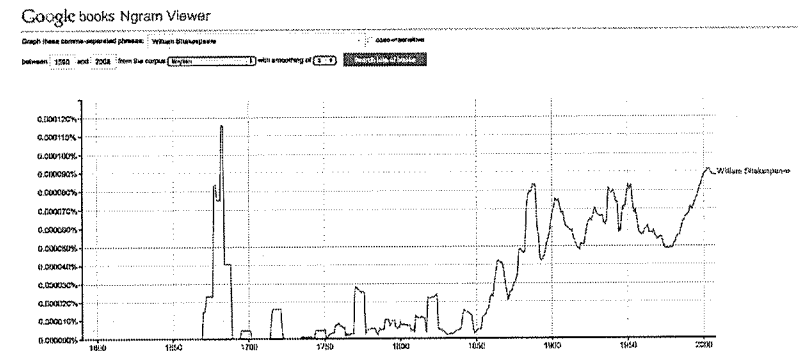
An Empirical Report

Shakespeare is the most popular author in the Western tradition, but he hasn't always been. As scholars such as Gary Taylor have discussed, Shakespeare's popularity has grown over the centuries. If so, can we measure Shakespeare's popularity over time? When did he become popular? How popular is he now compared to the past?

I. Method

To measure Shakespeare's popularity over time in English-speaking cultures, I performed a series of searches using Google's Ngram Viewer, which tracks the relative frequency of words over time in a representative sample of the books digitized in Google Books. I did a series of searches in the English language with the "smoothing" set to 3. The searches were case sensitive. I knew I would encounter a problem regarding the spelling of Shakespeare's name, since his last name was not spelled consistently until around the start of the twentieth century. In an effort to account for this limitation, I included a search using the most popular spellings (*Shakespeare*, *Shakspeare*, *Shakespear*, *Shakespeare*, *Shaxper*, and *Shakspere*).

II. Results



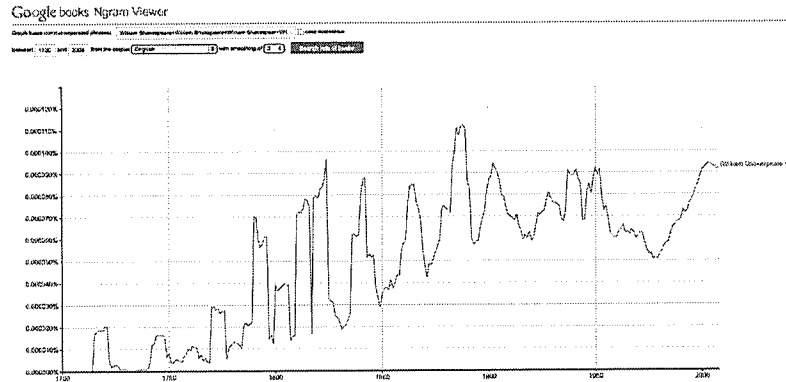


Figure 3: A Google Ngram search for “William Shakespeare+William Shakspeare+William Shakespear+William Shakspear+William Shaxper+William Shaksper” in the years 1700-2008 (controlling for the various spellings of Shakespeare’s name).

IV. Discussion

Figure 1 reveals that Shakespeare experienced a remarkable surge in popularity in the late seventeenth century (during the era of Restoration drama). Figures 1 and 2 reveal three additional phenomena. First, Shakespeare was relatively unpopular in the eighteenth century, grew in popularity during the nineteenth century, and has remained very popular during the twentieth century. Second, during the twentieth century, Shakespeare’s popularity dipped during World War II (1939-45) but then jumped right back up in the post-war period (1945-50). Third, Shakespeare’s popularity underwent a steady decline between 1950-75, but then it steadily increased from 1975-2002. According to Figure 2, Shakespeare’s popularity started its ascent around 1850, and he is now (in the twenty-first century) more popular than ever, although Figure 3 tells a slightly different story. According to Figure 3 (which accounts for the various spellings of Shakespeare’s name), Shakespeare’s popularity started its ascent much earlier, around 1775 or

so, grew more gradually over the nineteenth century, and peaked (even higher than it is today) in 1875.

V. Questions for Future Research

1. Why did Shakespeare’s popularity spike in the 1660s and 70s but then fall back down?
2. Why wasn’t Shakespeare very popular until at least the third quarter of the eighteenth century?
3. Was Shakespeare’s rise to massive popularity more of a gradual change that occurred from the mid eighteenth century to the early twentieth century, or was it a more “overnight” change (in line with a Kuhnian “paradigm shift”) in the middle of the nineteenth century?
4. Are the peaks and valleys evident in Shakespeare’s general rise in popularity during the nineteenth century significant? Did things happen that led Shakespeare to rise in the 1850s, fall in the 1860s, rise back up even higher in the 1870s-80s, and then fall again in the 1890s?
5. Given Shakespeare’s decrease in popularity during WWII and increase in the post-war period, how does Shakespeare relate to war? Did all literature exhibit a similar pattern, or just Shakespeare?
6. Why did Shakespeare’s popularity steadily decline from 1950-70?
7. Why did Shakespeare’s popularity steadily increase from 1980-2000?
8. Can we recognize patterns in the increase and decline of Shakespeare’s popularity that would allow us to predict Shakespeare’s popularity in the future?

Works Cited

Taylor, Gary. *Reinventing Shakespeare: A Cultural History from the Restoration to the Present*.
Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991.

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Shakespeare in the New York Times

We know that Shakespeare is extremely popular in the United States thanks to scholarship such as Lawrence Levine's *Highbrow/Lowbrow* (1988), Michael Bristol's *Shakespeare's America, America's Shakespeare* (1990), Alden T. Vaughan and Virginia Mason Vaughan's *Shakespeare in America* (2012), and James Shapiro's collection of essay, *Shakespeare in America* (2014). But was Shakespeare always popular in the U.S.? Has Shakespeare's popularity remained constant? If the answer to either question is *no*, then when did Shakespeare become popular in the U.S., and how has Shakespeare's popularity been affected by U.S. history?

I. Method

In response to these questions, I formulated a data-gathering experiment using the *New York Times*, the paper of record in the U.S. The search function on the NYT website (<https://query.nytimes.com/search/sitesearch/>) allows one to query keywords by year, so I simply searched for "Shakespeare" in each year from 1851 to 2015. I also did a blank search for the total number of articles for each year: dividing the "Shakespeare" hits by the total number of articles allowed me to calculate the relative frequency of Shakespeare in the NYT over the years (i.e., the percentage of attention given to Shakespeare year-to-year).

There was one key limitation to this project. Obviously, a simple search for "Shakespeare" will return some results for articles that aren't about the English playwright (e.g., an obituary for Sally Shakespeare). My hope was that this liability in the raw data would be controlled when looking at relative frequency because it affects all years equally.

II. Results

Year	Shakespeare Items	Total Items	Relative Frequency
1851	2	4,547	0.044%
1852	5	18,670	0.027%
1853	2	22,495	0.009%
1854	4	20,400	0.020%
1855	2	18,336	0.011%
1856	21	18,162	0.116%
1857	13	18,168	0.072%
1858	32	17,388	0.184%
1859	23	14,595	0.158%
1860	54	19,288	0.280%
1861	34	27,009	0.126%
1862	31	25,180	0.123%
1863	51	22,563	0.226%
1864	84	20,458	0.411%
1865	42	22,727	0.185%
1866	18	20,555	0.088%
1867	23	21,310	0.108%
1868	21	23,705	0.089%
1869	14	29,660	0.047%
1870	20	26,553	0.075%
1871	43	29,860	0.144%
1872	55	34,046	0.162%
1873	71	35,416	0.200%
1874	102	40,519	0.252%
1875	73	37,590	0.194%
1876	66	39,010	0.169%
1877	60	42,742	0.140%
1878	95	47,106	0.202%
1879	141	48,729	0.289%

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1880	206	45,118	0.457%
1881	146	47,627	0.307%
1882	137	49,116	0.279%
1883	155	57,869	0.268%
1884	145	59,113	0.245%
1885	176	57,848	0.304%
1886	120	57,656	0.208%
1887	121	57,085	0.212%
1888	162	58,706	0.276%
1889	112	57,418	0.195%
1890	185	47,820	0.387%
1891	156	48,887	0.319%
1892	191	53,545	0.357%
1893	182	45,467	0.400%
1894	212	45,699	0.464%
1895	288	67,228	0.428%
1896	211	54,732	0.386%
1897	256	61,912	0.413%
1898	339	65,543	0.517%
1899	375	66,607	0.563%
1900	311	70,431	0.442%
1901	337	67,227	0.501%
1902	377	66,877	0.564%
1903	418	67,926	0.615%
1904	328	59,485	0.551%
1905	315	57,257	0.550%
1906	297	53,401	0.556%
1907	275	61,579	0.447%
1908	248	59,545	0.416%
1909	317	59,021	0.537%
1910	303	66,868	0.453%
1911	271	64,042	0.423%
1912	325	69,781	0.466%
1913	254	69,252	0.367%
1914	269	74,115	0.363%
1915	177	74,522	0.238%
1916	498	66,156	0.753%
1917	126	74,818	0.168%
1918	173	73,112	0.237%
1919	169	78,237	0.216%
1920	194	88,737	0.219%
1921	238	102,368	0.232%
1922	327	108,491	0.301%
1923	407	85,605	0.475%
1924	259	86,946	0.298%

Wilson 4

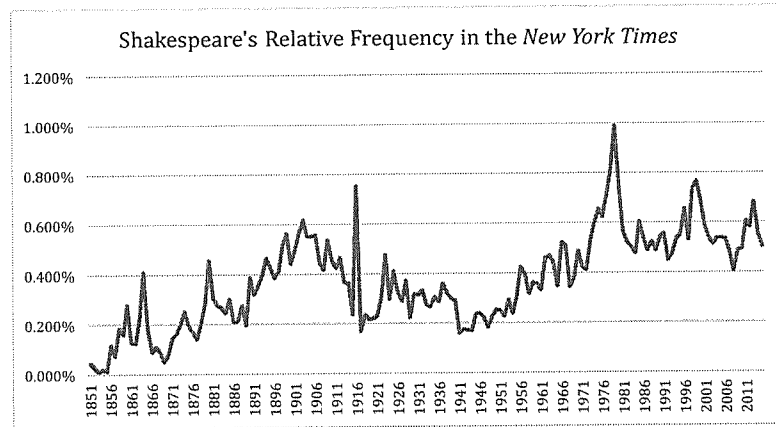
1925	402	97,885	0.411%
1926	416	125,079	0.333%
1927	465	159,533	0.291%
1928	602	161,908	0.372%
1929	375	168,450	0.223%
1930	537	168,479	0.319%
1931	522	165,250	0.316%
1932	472	141,142	0.334%
1933	432	156,989	0.275%
1934	448	167,997	0.267%
1935	515	167,997	0.307%
1936	498	172,951	0.288%
1937	612	169,257	0.362%
1938	507	156,456	0.324%
1939	482	160,434	0.300%
1940	457	156,446	0.292%
1941	267	168,549	0.158%
1942	268	153,506	0.175%
1943	240	140,127	0.171%
1944	226	133,762	0.169%
1945	299	126,247	0.237%
1946	344	143,369	0.240%
1947	345	154,971	0.223%
1948	282	154,174	0.183%
1949	362	158,579	0.228%
1950	408	161,337	0.253%
1951	406	162,389	0.250%
1952	362	159,337	0.227%
1953	442	150,914	0.293%
1954	349	146,799	0.238%
1955	442	144,163	0.307%
1956	610	143,920	0.424%
1957	562	142,145	0.395%
1958	458	144,111	0.318%
1959	536	147,561	0.363%
1960	517	145,355	0.356%
1961	469	140,899	0.333%
1962	636	138,690	0.459%
1963	539	114,966	0.469%
1964	593	134,188	0.442%
1965	418	120,525	0.347%
1966	679	130,449	0.521%
1967	618	122,222	0.506%
1968	412	119,768	0.344%
1969	413	109,146	0.378%

1970	500	102,665	0.487%
1971	402	94,470	0.426%
1972	397	96,540	0.411%
1973	511	97,773	0.523%
1974	581	97,442	0.596%
1975	630	96,332	0.654%
1976	574	91,948	0.624%
1977	654	92,230	0.709%
1978	524	65,120	0.805%
1979	803	81,143	0.990%
1980	962	126,927	0.758%
1981	518	91,298	0.567%
1982	486	92,946	0.523%
1983	491	97,757	0.502%
1984	490	102,520	0.478%
1985	612	101,463	0.603%
1986	567	105,460	0.538%
1987	499	102,113	0.489%
1988	526	100,413	0.524%
1989	481	98,613	0.488%
1990	504	93,540	0.539%
1991	453	81,462	0.556%
1992	372	82,619	0.450%
1993	375	78,977	0.475%
1994	405	75,998	0.533%
1995	446	81,037	0.550%
1996	508	77,815	0.653%
1997	479	90,168	0.531%
1998	693	94,076	0.737%
1999	735	95,788	0.767%
2000	678	98,411	0.689%
2001	581	99,658	0.583%
2002	549	102,428	0.536%
2003	516	101,001	0.511%
2004	528	98,303	0.537%
2005	519	96,803	0.536%
2006	708	132,507	0.534%
2007	716	148,222	0.483%
2008	638	157,665	0.405%
2009	808	165,233	0.489%
2010	781	159,099	0.491%
2011	995	164,538	0.605%
2012	864	148,879	0.580%
2013	800	117,288	0.682%
2014	767	139,160	0.551%

2015	667	133,134	0.501%
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III. Discussion

In general, Shakespeare's popularity in the New York Times has risen since the mid-nineteenth century, as shown in Figure 1. It rose gradually in the 1850s until the start of the Civil War in 1861 halted Shakespeare's rise. Somewhat surprisingly, Shakespeare was more popular in the *Times* than ever before in 1864, toward the end of the Civil War, after which Shakespeare experienced a relative lull in popularity from 1866-77. Shakespeare's popularity in the *Times* gradually rose in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, peaking in 1903. It then fell gradually as American minds turned to World War I, although there was a remarkably popular year in 1916, the 300th anniversary of Shakespeare's death, which the *Times* commemorated with a series of articles. In the interim between World War I and II, Shakespeare was relatively popular, but he sank to a 70-year low in 1941 as America entered World War II. Shakespeare's popularity then gradually rose of the next 40 years, peaking at its all-time high in 1979. Since the 1980s, Shakespeare's popularity in the *Times* has levelled off: he was relatively popular in the late 1990s, relatively unpopular in the early 2000s, and again relatively popular in the early 2010s.



Works Cited

Grady, Hugh. "Shakespeare Criticism, 1600-1900." *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare*. Eds. Margreta de Grazia and Stanley Wells. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001. 265-78.

IV. Questions for Future Research

1. What brought about the rise in Shakespeare's popularity from 1850 to 1900?
2. How did the New York Times cover Shakespeare's tercentenary in 1916?
3. What is the relationship between Shakespeare's popularity and wartime (e.g. Civil War, World War I, World War II)?
4. What led to the rise in Shakespeare's popularity between 1940 and 1980?

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Shakespeare on Screen:
An Empirical Report

I. Question

Since the 1990s, Shakespearean film has transformed from relatively benign theatrical performances that happen to be filmed to fully cinematic artworks that make the most of the representational resources of film. Now, it seems like we hear about a new Shakespeare film every day. We continue to see fairly straightforward performances, such as the 2015 *Macbeth* featuring Michael Fassbender or the 2012 *Much Ado About Nothing* directed by Joss Whedon. But now more obscure plays like *Coriolanus* (2012) and *Cymbeline* (2014) have recently been brought to the silver screen. And Shakespeare has also become a major source of inspiration even when film-makers aren't working directly off his scripts; popular examples of Shakespearean "adaptations" include *She's the Man* (2006) and *Gnomeo and Juliet* (2011). In the past few years, Shakespearean inspiration has also expanded to the small screen, including popular and critically acclaimed television shows such as *House of Cards* (2013-Pres.), *Game of Thrones* (2011-Pres.), *Sons of Anarchy* (2008-14), and *Empire* (2015-Pres.).

Are we living in a "golden age" of Shakespeare on screen? Is this wealth of adaptations unique, or has Shakespeare always been this popular on screen?

II. Method

In an effort to get a sense of Shakespeare's popularity on screen over the past 100 years or so, I gathered some data from the Internet Movie Database (IMDB.com), the largest film and television database in the world. IMDB allows users to view all credits for a given actor, writer, director, etc., and thus it lists all the films that give William Shakespeare a writing credit.

From Shakespeare's page on IMDB, I counted all his writing credits per year since the first in 1898. But this count only produced absolute numbers when what I needed were relative numbers that show how Shakespeare's popularity has increased or decreased over time given the general increase in the films and shows that have been made over the past 100 years.

There were some grey areas in the data. For example, a work only gives Shakespeare a writing credit when it uses his words. What about a film such as *Forbidden Planet*, which was inspired by Shakespeare's *The Tempest*? Such works that are loosely inspired by or adapted from Shakespeare were not included in my results even though they are clearly related to the popularity of Shakespeare on screen. Another problem came in the cataloging of television shows and series, some of which involve multiple shorter episodes and span multiple years (e.g., Should I count each of the episodes in *Shakespeare: The Animated Tales* as one entry or not?). These cases came down to a judgment call.

III. Results

First, I looked at the works that listed Shakespeare as a writer. There were 1,079 items listed. I counted the number of items for each year and got the following results:

Table 1: Number of Shakespeare "Writer" Credits Per Year According to IMDB

Year	Shakespeare "Writer" Credits	1936	3	1977	3
1898	1	1937	6	1978	10
1899	1	1938	1	1979	22
1900	2	1939	3	1980	15
1901	0	1940	3	1981	16
1902	0	1941	1	1982	22
1903	0	1942	2	1983	17
1904	0	1943	4	1984	11
1905	2	1944	1	1985	11
1906	1	1945	0	1986	9
1907	1	1946	5	1987	14
1908	17	1947	7	1988	5
1909	11	1948	6	1989	12
1910	11	1949	7	1990	16
1911	11	1950	7	1991	7
1912	8	1951	10	1992	13
1913	10	1952	4	1993	5
1914	11	1953	16	1994	8
1915	6	1954	7	1995	10
1916	6	1955	14	1996	12
1917	1	1956	7	1997	11
1918	4	1957	10	1998	11
1919	5	1958	9	1999	17
1920	2	1959	11	2000	19
1921	2	1960	13	2001	17
1922	5	1961	7	2002	18
1923	3	1962	11	2003	18
1924	2	1963	12	2004	14
1925	2	1964	31	2005	17
1926	1	1965	20	2006	17
1927	1	1966	12	2007	18
1928	1	1967	21	2008	16
1929	2	1968	17	2009	23
1930	0	1969	16	2010	18
1931	0	1970	17	2011	18
1932	0	1971	17	2012	32
1933	1	1972	11	2013	24
1934	0	1973	15	2014	27
1935	3	1974	8		
		1975	10		
		1976	13		

Table 2: Total Number of Movies Listed in IMDB by Year

Year	Total Films	1938	1769	1979	2990
1898	22	1939	1669	1980	2957
1899	6	1940	1598	1981	2911
1900	12	1941	1445	1982	3030
1901	3	1942	1364	1983	3063
1902	3	1943	1245	1984	3070
1903	9	1944	1128	1985	3076
1904	5	1945	1033	1986	3117
1905	9	1946	1213	1987	3238
1906	16	1947	1333	1988	3295
1907	14	1948	1470	1989	3229
1908	21	1949	1630	1990	3552
1909	85	1950	1687	1991	3403
1910	135	1951	1689	1992	3392
1911	219	1952	1789	1993	3234
1912	363	1953	1872	1994	3181
1913	663	1954	1912	1995	3237
1914	1085	1955	1945	1996	3286
1915	1563	1956	2093	1997	3462
1916	2003	1957	2165	1998	3575
1917	2105	1958	2235	1999	3737
1918	2069	1959	2202	2000	3766
1919	2213	1960	2319	2001	3930
1920	2517	1961	2355	2002	3873
1921	2507	1962	2316	2003	3828
1922	2098	1963	2252	2004	4010
1923	1810	1964	2444	2005	4408
1924	1707	1965	2545	2006	4811
1925	1589	1966	2608	2007	5050
1926	1551	1967	2886	2008	5812
1927	1614	1968	3251	2009	6866
1928	1623	1969	3035	2010	7156
1929	1482	1970	3279	2011	7850
1930	1505	1971	3103	2012	8231
1931	1639	1972	3021	2013	8692
1932	1590	1973	2876	2014	9327
1933	1515	1974	2869		
1934	1629	1975	2789		
1935	1695	1976	2809		
1936	1788	1977	2764		
1937	1776	1978	2873		

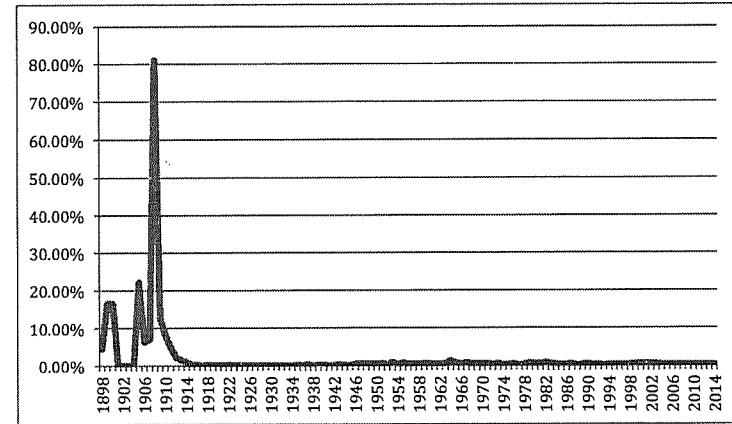
These results were interesting, but they could be compromised. There could be more Shakespeare movies made in 1994 than in 1954 simply because there were more total movies made in 1994. Thus, I needed to determine the relative popularity of Shakespeare movies (i.e., the proportion of movies each year which featured Shakespeare). I searched for the total number of movies made in each year and got the following results:

Knowing how many Shakespeare movies were made each year and how many total movies were made each year allowed me to calculate the relative frequency of Shakespeare movies:

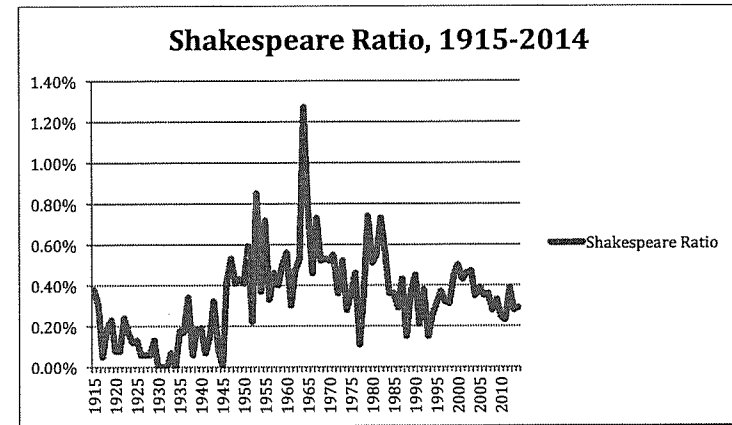
Year	Shakespeare "Writer" Credits	Year	Shakespeare "Writer" Credits
1898	4.55%	1936	0.17%
1899	16.67%	1937	0.34%
1900	16.67%	1938	0.06%
1901	0.00%	1939	0.18%
1902	0.00%	1940	0.19%
1903	0.00%	1941	0.07%
1904	0.00%	1942	0.15%
1905	22.22%	1943	0.32%
1906	6.25%	1944	0.09%
1907	7.14%	1945	0.00%
1908	80.95%	1946	0.41%
1909	12.94%	1947	0.53%
1910	8.15%	1948	0.41%
1911	5.02%	1949	0.43%
1912	2.20%	1950	0.41%
1913	1.51%	1951	0.59%
1914	1.01%	1952	0.22%
1915	0.38%	1953	0.85%
1916	0.30%	1954	0.37%
1917	0.05%	1955	0.72%
1918	0.19%	1956	0.33%
1919	0.23%	1957	0.46%
1920	0.08%	1958	0.40%
1921	0.08%	1959	0.50%
1922	0.24%	1960	0.56%
1923	0.17%	1961	0.30%
1924	0.12%	1962	0.47%
1925	0.13%	1963	0.53%
1926	0.06%	1964	1.27%
1927	0.06%	1965	0.79%
1928	0.06%	1966	0.46%
1929	0.13%	1967	0.73%
1930	0.00%	1968	0.52%
1931	0.00%	1969	0.53%
1932	0.00%	1970	0.52%
1933	0.07%	1971	0.55%
1934	0.00%	1972	0.36%
1935	0.18%	1973	0.52%
		1974	0.28%
		1975	0.36%
		1976	0.46%
		1977	0.11%
		1978	0.35%
		1979	0.74%
		1980	0.51%
		1981	0.55%
		1982	0.73%
		1983	0.56%
		1984	0.36%
		1985	0.36%
		1986	0.29%
		1987	0.43%
		1988	0.15%
		1989	0.37%
		1990	0.45%
		1991	0.21%
		1992	0.38%
		1993	0.15%
		1994	0.25%
		1995	0.31%
		1996	0.37%
		1997	0.32%
		1998	0.31%
		1999	0.45%
		2000	0.50%
		2001	0.43%
		2002	0.46%
		2003	0.47%
		2004	0.35%
		2005	0.39%
		2006	0.35%
		2007	0.36%
		2008	0.28%
		2009	0.33%
		2010	0.25%
		2011	0.23%
		2012	0.39%
		2013	0.28%
		2014	0.29%

These results can be graphed as follows:

Figure 1:



If we shift the span of years covered to 1915-2014, we can get a better picture of the trends in Shakespearean film during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries:



IV. Discussion

The most obvious conclusion that can be drawn from these results is that, contrary to expectations, we are not in a clear “Shakespearean golden age” since the 1990s. It turns out that Shakespeare was *much* more popular on screen during the first decade of the twentieth century than he was during the first decade of the twenty-first. Even after that initial boon in popularity, Shakespeare reached the most screens during the middle decades of the twentieth century: his popularity peaked in 1964 with almost a bell curve around that date. Other peaks occur in the early 1950s and the early 1980s. The low-point of Shakespeare on screen was the early 1930s, and there is a marked spike in popularity immediately after World War II, probably connected with Laurence Olivier’s *Henry V* (1944).

V. Questions for Future Research

It may be that energies directed toward Shakespearean performance are now being directed toward cinematic and television works that are more loosely “inspired by” or “adapted from” Shakespeare’s texts. Indeed, television shows inspired by Shakespeare such as *House of Cards*, *Game of Thrones*, *Sons of Anarchy*, and *Empire* are not registered in the above results because Shakespeare is not given a writing credit in these shows. Maybe, instead of asking whether we are more or less Shakespearean right now, we have to ask the more difficult question of what kind of Shakespeareanism do we currently exhibit. It may be that, in the past, we displayed a Shakespeareanism marked by straightforward performance, which is why Shakespeare was named as a writer more often in the mid 1960s and early 1980s than in the 1990s and 2000s. Perhaps now our Shakespeareanism is marked more by inspiration and adaptation than performance.

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The Popularity of Shakespeare in Non-English Languages

The World Shakespeare Festival, a massive global series of more than 70 productions presented as the culmination of the Cultural Olympiad held in conjunction with the 2012 London Olympic Games, was inspired by the fact that, according to research conducted by the British Council and the Royal Shakespeare Company, 64 million children worldwide study Shakespearean in the classroom – that’s 50 percent of the world’s children (see “About the Festival”). The research presented below began because I wanted to know where, outside of England and the United States, Shakespeare was popular. And where was Shakespeare more or less popular than we might expect him to be?

I. Method

This report discusses the popularity of Shakespeare in various non-English languages by comparing search results from the World Shakespeare Bibliography (WSB). Currently edited by Laura Estill, the WSB catalogs over 146,670 items related to Shakespeare since 1960 (ranging from academic books and articles to editions and performances). To gather my data, I performed a series of searches on the WSB website, specifying only the “Language” drop down box, with no other details. I recorded the total search results for each language that yielded more than 5 results (unfortunately, this meant excluding Klingon, which only returned three results). This data was collected in January 2016.

With this data in hand, I wanted to be able to determine if Shakespeare is significantly more or less popular in any certain language than we might expect. In order to do so, I needed to be able to compare each language’s percentage of the total items listed in the WSB (giving us

what I’ll call a “Shakespeare ratio”) with each language’s percentage of total people worldwide (a “language ratio”). If, for instance, a certain language had a 2.5 percent Shakespeare ratio and a 1.3 percent language ratio – meaning that 2.5 percent of the items listed in the WSB come in that language, but only 1.3 percent of the world’s population speaks that language – it could indicate a significant and unusual Shakespearean prominence in that culture which might merit additional scholarly attention.

The language ratio was calculated using the website *Ethnologue*, “a comprehensive reference work cataloging all of the world’s known living languages” (“About the Ethnologue”). *Ethnologue* lists 6,291,192,624 total language speakers in the world. Dividing each language’s number of speakers by that global number produced the language ratio.

II. Results

Table 1: Items in the World Shakespeare Bibliography by Language

Language	Items	Shakespeare Ratio
Afrikaans	25	0.0170%
Albanian	36	0.0245%
Arabic	166	0.1132%
Armenian	36	0.0245%
Azerbaijani	8	0.0055%
Bengali; Bangla	129	0.0880%
Bulgarian	167	0.1139%
Byelorussian	5	0.0034%
Catalan	103	0.0702%
Chinese	1336	0.9109%
Croatian	212	0.1445%
Czech	771	0.5257%
Danish	206	0.1405%
Dutch	595	0.4057%
English	81097	55.2922%
Esperanto	41	0.0280%
Estonian	90	0.0614%
Finnish	207	0.1411%
French	4048	2.7599%
Frisian	9	0.0061%
Galician	20	0.0136%
Georgian	60	0.0409%
German	8280	5.6453%

Greek	299	0.2039%
Gujarati	18	0.0123%
Hebrew	657	0.4479%
Hindi	63	0.0430%
Hungarian	768	0.5236%
Icelandic	24	0.0164%
Indonesian	12	0.0082%
Italian	2737	1.8661%
Japanese	4180	2.8499%
Kannada	11	0.0075%
Kirghiz	12	0.0082%
Korean	1309	0.8925%
Latvian; Lettish	26	0.0177%
Lithuanian	154	0.1050%
Macedonian	46	0.0314%
Malay	17	0.0116%
Malayalam	12	0.0082%
Maori	6	0.0041%
Marathi	12	0.0082%
Nepali	5	0.0034%
Norwegian	262	0.1786%
Persian	21	0.0143%
Polish	1320	0.9000%
Portuguese	687	0.4684%
Punjabi	10	0.0068%
Romanian	605	0.4125%
Russian	2204	1.5027%
Sanskrit	5	0.0034%
Serbian	191	0.1302%
Serbo-Croatian	191	0.1302%
Setswana	6	0.0041%
Sign Language	8	0.0055%
Singhalese	5	0.0034%
Slovak	179	0.1220%
Slovenian	87	0.0593%
Spanish	1913	1.3043%
Swahili	8	0.0055%
Swedish	610	0.4159%
Tagalog	10	0.0068%
Tamil	17	0.0116%
Tegulu	18	0.0123%
Turkish	168	0.1145%
Ukrainian	361	0.2461%
Urdu	16	0.0109%
Vietnamese	10	0.0068%
Welsh	10	0.0068%
Yiddish	6	0.0041%
Zulu	6	0.0041%

Table 2: Language Speakers and Language Ratios According to *Ethnologue*

Language	Speakers	Language Ratio
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Afrikaans	7,096,810	0.1128%
Albanian	5,627,000	0.0894%
Arabic	206,000,000	3.2744%
Armenian	5,900,080	0.0938%
Azerbaijani	24,226,940	0.3851%
Bengali; Bangla	189,261,200	3.0084%
Bulgarian	7,799,970	0.1240%
Byelorussian	--	--
Catalan	4,079,420	0.0648%
Chinese	1,197,294,060	19.0313%
Croatian	5,609,290	0.0892%
Czech	10,619,340	0.1688%
Danish	5,520,860	0.0878%
Dutch	21,944,690	0.3488%
English	335,491,748	5.3327%
Esperanto	2,000,000	0.0318%
Estonian	1,132,500	0.0180%
Finnish	5,392,180	0.0857%
French	75,916,150	1.2067%
Frisian	467,000	0.0074%
Galician	--	--
Georgian	4,237,010	0.0673%
German	78,093,980	1.2413%
Greek	13,391,140	0.2129%
Gujarati	46,636,510	0.7413%
Hebrew	5,302,770	0.0843%
Hindi	260,333,620	4.1381%
Hungarian	12,605,590	0.2004%
Icelandic	313,840	0.0050%
Indonesian	23,200,480	0.3688%
Italian	63,783,247	1.0138%
Japanese	128,056,940	2.0355%
Kannada	37,739,040	0.5999%
Kirghiz	--	--
Korean	77,155,030	1.2264%
Latvian; Lettish	1,552,260	0.0247%
Lithuanian	3,001,430	0.0477%
Macedonian	1,408,340	0.0224%
Malay	15,848,500	0.2519%
Malayalam	33,590,300	0.5339%
Maori	148,660	0.0024%
Marathi	71,780,660	1.1410%
Nepali	15,360,100	0.2442%
Norwegian	4,640,000	0.0738%
Persian	47,408,100	0.7536%
Polish	38,636,480	0.6141%
Portuguese	203,352,100	3.2323%
Punjabi	62,613,000	0.9952%
Romanian	23,681,610	0.3764%
Russian	166,167,860	2.6413%
Sanskrit	15,770	0.0003%
Serbian	8,638,906	0.1373%
Serbo-Croatian	--	--
Setswana	--	--

Sign Language	--	--
Singhalese	--	--
Slovak	5,187,740	0.0825%
Slovenian	--	--
Spanish	398,931,840	6.3411%
Swahili	15,437,390	0.2454%
Swedish	9,197,090	0.1462%
Tagalog	24,310,000	0.3864%
Tamil	68,776,460	1.0932%
Tegulu	74,049,000	1.1770%
Turkish	70,890,130	1.1268%
Ukrainian	34,868,740	0.5542%
Urdu	64,035,800	1.0179%
Vietnamese	67,778,030	1.0773%
Welsh	536,890	0.0085%
Yiddish	1,510,430	0.0240%
Zulu	11,969,100	0.1903%

Table 3: Shakespearean Impact Factor

Language	Language Ratio	Shakespeare Ratio	Change
Afrikaans	0.1128%	0.0170%	- 0.0958%
Albanian	0.0894%	0.0245%	- 0.0649%
Arabic	3.2744%	0.1132%	- 3.1612%
Armenian	0.0938%	0.0245%	- 0.0693%
Azerbaijani	0.3851%	0.0055%	- 0.3796%
Bengali; Bangla	3.0084%	0.0880%	- 2.9204%
Bulgarian	0.1240%	0.1139%	- 0.0101%
Byelorussian	--	0.0034%	--
Catalan	0.0648%	0.0702%	+ 0.0054%
Chinese	19.0313%	0.9109%	- 18.1204%
Croatian	0.0892%	0.1445%	+ 0.0553%
Czech	0.1688%	0.5257%	+ 0.3569%
Danish	0.0878%	0.1405%	+ 0.0527%
Dutch	0.3488%	0.4057%	+ 0.0569%
Esperanto	0.0318%	0.0280%	- 0.0038%
Estonian	0.0180%	0.0614%	+ 0.0434%
Finnish	0.0857%	0.1411%	+ 0.0554%
French	1.2067%	2.7599%	+ 1.5532%
Frisian	0.0074%	0.0061%	- 0.0013%
Galician	--	0.0136%	--
Georgian	0.0673%	0.0409%	- 0.0264%
German	1.2413%	5.6453%	+ 4.4040%
Greek	0.2129%	0.2039%	- 0.0090%
Gujarati	0.7413%	0.0123%	- 0.7290%
Hebrew	0.0843%	0.4479%	+ 0.3636%
Hindi	4.1381%	0.0430%	- 4.0951%
Hungarian	0.2004%	0.5236%	+ 0.3232%
Icelandic	0.0050%	0.0164%	+ 0.0114%
Indonesian	0.3688%	0.0082%	- 0.3606%
Italian	1.0138%	1.8661%	+ 0.8523%
Japanese	2.0355%	2.8499%	+ 0.8144%

Kannada	0.5999%	0.0075%	- 0.5924%
Kirghiz	--	0.0082%	--
Korean	1.2264%	0.8925%	- 0.3339%
Latvian; Lettish	0.0247%	0.0177%	- 0.0070%
Lithuanian	0.0477%	0.1050%	+ 0.0573%
Macedonian	0.0224%	0.0314%	+ 0.0090%
Malay	0.2519%	0.0116%	- 0.2403%
Malayalam	0.5339%	0.0082%	- 0.5257%
Maori	0.0024%	0.0041%	+ 0.0017%
Marathi	1.1410%	0.0082%	- 1.1328%
Nepali	0.2442%	0.0034%	- 0.2408%
Norwegian	0.0738%	0.1786%	+ 0.1048%
Persian	0.7536%	0.0143%	- 0.7393%
Polish	0.6141%	0.9000%	+ 0.2859%
Portuguese	3.2323%	0.4684%	- 2.7639%
Punjabi	0.9952%	0.0068%	- 0.9884%
Romanian	0.3764%	0.4125%	+ 0.0361%
Russian	2.6413%	1.5027%	- 1.1386%
Sanskrit	0.0003%	0.0034%	+ 0.0031%
Serbian	0.1373%	0.1302%	- 0.0071%
Serbo-Croatian	--	0.1302%	--
Setswana	--	0.0041%	--
Sign Language	--	0.0055%	--
Singhalese	--	0.0034%	--
Slovak	0.0825%	0.1220%	+ 0.0395%
Slovenian	--	0.0593%	--
Spanish	6.3411%	1.3043%	- 5.0368%
Swahili	0.2454%	0.0055%	- 0.2399%
Swedish	0.1462%	0.4159%	+ 0.2697%
Tagalog	0.3864%	0.0068%	- 0.3796%
Tamil	1.0932%	0.0116%	- 1.0816%
Tegulu	1.1770%	0.0123%	- 1.1647%
Turkish	1.1268%	0.1145%	- 1.0123%
Ukrainian	0.5542%	0.2461%	- 0.3081%
Urdu	1.0179%	0.0109%	- 1.0070%
Vietnamese	1.0773%	0.0068%	- 1.0705%
Welsh	0.0085%	0.0068%	- 0.0017%
Yiddish	0.0240%	0.0041%	- 0.0199%
Zulu	0.1903%	0.0041%	- 0.1862%

III. Discussion

Before beginning my research, I expected that languages with similar cultural contexts to English would exhibit the greatest affinity for Shakespeare, and that generally there would be more results for a language the more common that language is. Therefore, I expected Western European languages like German and French to have the most results, potentially followed by languages with many speakers like Chinese and various Indian languages. As Figure 1 shows,

testing revealed that some aspects of this pattern do exist. French, German, Italian, and Spanish were all in the top ten, and German had easily the most results, with more than twice the results of the second most common language. Russian, and Eastern European languages like Polish and Czech, appeared high on my list overall, which is largely consistent with my hypothesis.

Likewise the languages with very few results were largely from small countries and/or far removed from Shakespeare's original cultural context, while the middle part of the spectrum contained mainly Eastern European, Mediterranean, and Scandinavian languages.

While the overall pattern I expected was not absent from my results, there were some significant divergences from my expectations. There was also a high number of results for certain East Asian languages, specifically Japanese and Korean. Indian languages had fewer results overall than was expected given the population of India, but they are culturally removed. The high placement of Chinese makes sense given how many people speak Chinese, but the other East Asian languages were more unexpected, as they are not particularly widely spoken outside their relatively small countries of origin and are not European. I would speculate that this might be caused by Korea and Japan importing more of Western culture than other countries in Asia, though the position of Japanese above all European languages other than German still seems unusual and may merit further research.

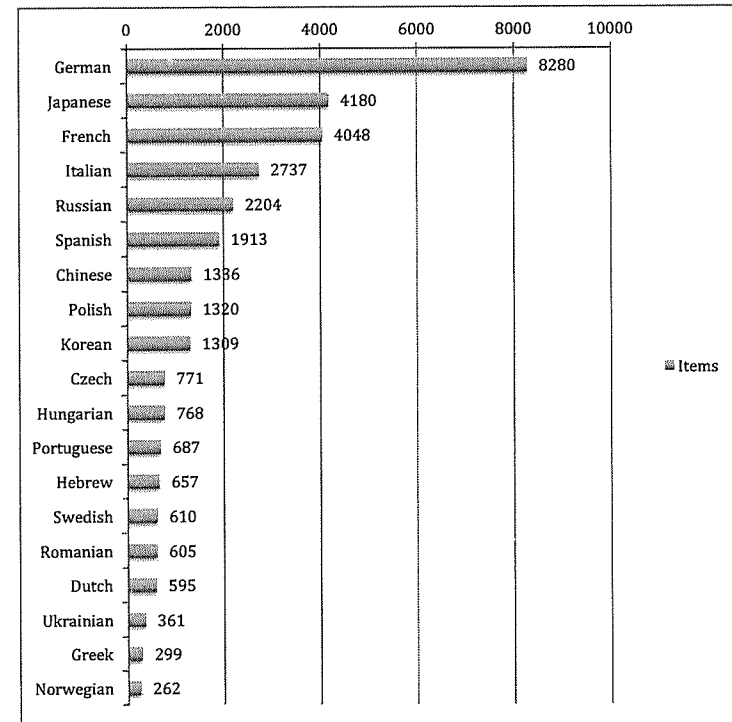


Figure 1: The Top 20 Languages (Other than English) Represented in the World Shakespeare Bibliography.

This research also revealed the countries in which Shakespeare is disproportionately popular and unpopular. Again, outside English-speaking nations, Shakespeare is by far most popular in Germany. Shakespeare is also disproportionately popular in other Western European nations, such as France and Italy, as expected. More surprising results included Shakespeare's popularity in Japanese and Hebrew, both nations with tight Western relations since World War II. By the same token, Shakespeare is disproportionately unpopular in Chinese, Hindi, and Arabic, eastern languages that did not have strong ties to the West after World War II. But the

unpopularity of Shakespeare in Latin Western European nations, Spain and Portugal, is noteworthy.

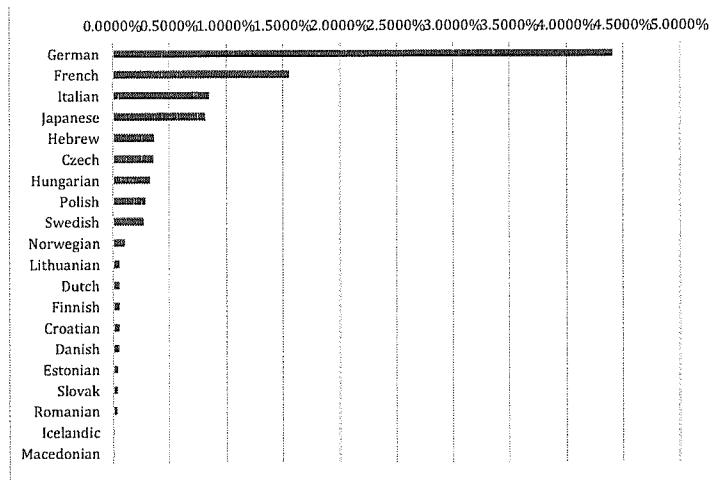


Figure 1: Languages in Which Shakespeare is Most Popular.

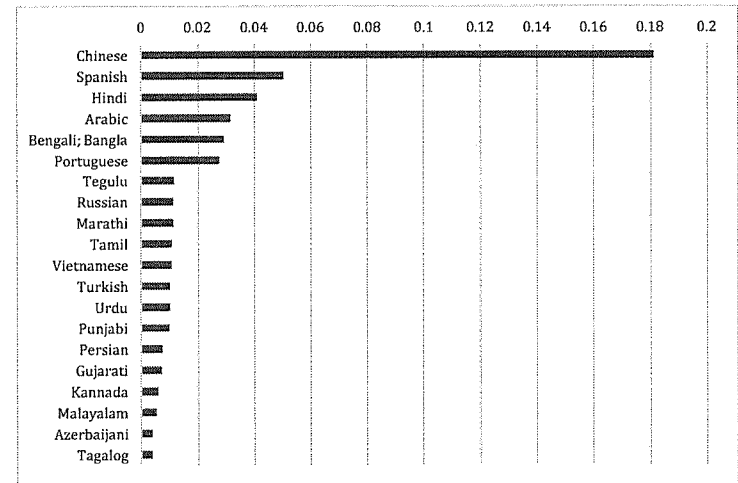


Figure 2: Languages in Which Shakespeare is Least Popular.

IV. Questions for Future Research

1. Why is Shakespeare so popular in Germany?
2. Why is Shakespeare so popular in Japan?
3. Why is Shakespeare so popular in Hebrew?
4. How did post-war international relations affect Shakespeare's popularity in Germany, Japan, and Hebrew?
5. Why is Shakespeare so unpopular in China?
6. Why is Shakespeare so unpopular in Spain?

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