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The Global Popularity of William Shakespeare in 303 Wikipedias

Jacob Blakesley

This paper aims to present empirical research on the contemporary popularity of Shakespeare around the world. For a comprehensive appraisal of the circulation, transmission, translation, and reception of Shakespeare's plays, we would need a comprehensive database with listings of all staged plays, all published translations, and all films and programmes based on his plays. In the absence of this information, however, there is a singular source that we can draw on: Wikipedia. There are 303 Wikipedias in as nearly as many languages

across the world¹. The 2017 article *World Literature According to Wikipedia: Introduction to a DBpedia-Based Framework*, written by Christoph Hube, Frank Fischer, Robert Jäschke, Gerhard Lauer, and Mads Rosendahl Thomsen², showed how Wikipedia statistics can be fruitfully analysed to reveal the canonicity of world authors. Following their lead, by analysing the data of how many people consulted the various entries on Shakespeare, on his plays, and on his poetry in the 303 Wikipedias, we can distinguish different levels of popularity of his works in different settings. We will first examine the reception of his biographical entry in the various Wikipedias, and then move on to the entries dedicated to his plays and poetry³. We will not be hazarding here any guesses into the reasons behind particular linguistic and cultural preferences for certain plays, leaving that for specialists in the field. Yet this empirical investigation is important, because it will allow us to have a birds' eye view of the contemporary popularity of Shakespeare, measured in pageviews, across the globe.

Wikipedia

Wikipedia began in 2001 with one English encyclopaedia and now, seventeen years later, there are official Wikipedias in about 300 national and regional languages, minority languages and dialects, classical languages like Latin and Sanskrit, and constructed languages like Esperanto, with tens of articles to over five million articles (English). An immense resource, Wikipedia includes “46 million articles accessed by 1.4 billion unique devices every single month, while an army of 200,000 editors and contributors patrol this

¹ There are a pair of Wikipedias for the same language: English and Simple English; Belarusian in two different orthographic systems (standard Belarusian and Taraškievica).

² Christoph Hube, Frank Fischer, Robert Jäschke *et al.*, “World Literature According to Wikipedia: Introduction to a DBpedia-Based Framework”, available at: <https://arxiv.org/abs/1701.00991>.

³ Just to make clear: I am not analysing the readership of his specific plays or poems, but rather the readership of the different entries dedicated to his plays and poems.

vast repository of online knowledge 24 hours a day”⁴. There are more than 6,000 new articles a day across all Wikipedias⁵. The 303 Wikipedia editions exist in 92% of all the 103 official languages of nations in the world, and among the top most 100 popular Wikipedias, people view anywhere from a minimum of eight million Wikipedia pages (Ghana) to over 3.4 billion Wikipedia pages (USA) per month. Wikipedia is viewed around the clock to a perhaps unimaginable degree. It is the fifth most visited website in the world⁶. Meanwhile, there are very few cases of Wikipedia censorship, with the most recent data indicating that only four governments currently censor Wikipedia in some form (China, North Korea, Thailand, and Uzbekistan)⁷.

The most serious objection raised about studying literary reception through Wikipedia is the question of the quality. While Wikipedia may consider itself the so-called people’s encyclopaedia, its symbolic capital is not that of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* and it is generally not accepted in academia. However, a notorious 2005 article in *Nature*, “Internet Encyclopaedias Go Head to Head”, found little difference in error between a small sample of articles in Wikipedia and *Encyclopaedia Britannica*⁸, a conclusion similarly reached in a 2012 Oxford University study, “Assessing the Accuracy and Quality of Wikipedia Entries Compared to Popular Online Encyclopaedias”⁹, as well. This certainly suggests that our

⁴ David Barnett, “Can We Trust Wikipedia? 1.4 Billion People Can’t Be Wrong”, *The Independent*, Sunday 18 February 2018, available at: https://www.independent.co.uk/news/long_reads/wikipedia-explained-what-is-it-trustworthy-how-work-wikimedia-2030-a8213446.html.

⁵ See: <https://stats.wikimedia.org/EN/TablesArticlesNewPerDay.htm>.

⁶ Włodzimierz Lewoniewski, Krzysztof Węcel and Witold Abramowicz, “Relative Quality and Popularity Evaluation of Multilingual Wikipedia Articles”, *Informatics*, 4:43 (2017), pp. 1-24.

⁷ Justin Clark, Robert Faris and Rebekah Heacock Jones, “Analyzing Accessibility of Wikipedia Projects Around the World”, *Berkman Klein Center Research Publication Series*, 4 (May 2017), available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2951312>.

⁸ Jim Giles, “Internet Encyclopaedias Go Head to Head”, *Nature*, 438 (15 December 2005), pp. 900-1, available at: <https://www.nature.com/articles/438900a>.

⁹ Imogen Casebourne, Chris Davies, Michelle Fernandes and Naomi Norman, “Assessing the Accuracy and Quality of Wikipedia Entries Compared to Popular Online Encyclopaedias: A Preliminary Comparative Study Across Disciplines in

preconceived notions about quality in encyclopaedias need to be reflected upon. Nevertheless, in this paper, we are not dealing with the quality of the encyclopaedia entries: we are dealing specifically with the number of times readers consulted various webpages dealing with Shakespeare and his works. The calculations of pageviews of each Wikipedia page come from the Wikimedia Foundation Analytics¹⁰ and the Pageviews analysis suite of tools¹¹. Because of privacy reasons, Wikipedia does not track individual users, so it is technically impossible to say how many visitors viewed each webpage; thus we will be speaking about ‘views’ rather than ‘viewers’ over the calendar year 2017. The choice of using one calendar year is motivated by two factors: first, current Wikipedia statistics go back only to 2015; and second, a one-year period has been shown by Hube *et al.* in their paper to be a stable measurement, with 95% correlation with adjoining years.

Shakespeare’s biographical entry

During 2017, Shakespeare’s biographical page entry was viewed over twelve million times in 186 Wikipedias, including the English Wikipedia. This amount is more than every single winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature (except for Winston Churchill), and more than canonical authors like Homer and Virgil. We can note that there were far more Wikipedias with a biographical entry on Shakespeare – namely, 186 – than Wikipedias with one or more entries on Shakespeare’s plays and poetry – 109. In other words, there were 77 Wikipedias in which there was a ‘William Shakespeare’ biographical entry but no entry for any of his works: clearly, in languages like these, we can hypothesize that the interest of readers is lower than in languages where there do exist entries on Shakespeare’s works as well. On the contrary, there were only five Wikipedias with at least

English, Spanish and Arabic” (2012), available at: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/2/29/EPIC_Oxford_report.pdf. It must be acknowledged that the Oxford study was funded by Wikipedia.

¹⁰ See: <https://stats.wikimedia.org/EN/Sitemap.htm>.

¹¹ See: <https://tools.wmflabs.org/langviews/?project=en.wikipedia.org>. ‘Bot’ or web crawler views are not included in these statistics.

one entry on his works but without any 'William Shakespeare' biographical entry¹². In total, then, he and his work were viewed in a total of 191 Wikipedias last year. Nonetheless, even if there were more Wikipedias with a biographical entry on Shakespeare, there were twenty million more views of the pages dedicated to his works: 33.1 million. This equates to over 90,000 *daily* visits to his works in 109 different languages. If we add those to the 35,000 *daily* visits to his biographical entry in 186 different languages, we thus have a total of over 125,000 daily visits to Shakespeare and his works in the 191 Wikipedias. One very important result immediately emerges from this data: the majority of views of Shakespeare's biographical entry and his 43 works across the world are foreign: 56% in the case of 'William Shakespeare' and 52% in the case of his works; the other 44% and 48%, respectively, are visits to his pages in the English Wikipedia. Figure 1 shows the foreign Wikipedias with the most visits to Shakespeare's biography entry.

¹² There was no bio-page in the Cebuano, Kyrgyz, Lak, Ripuarian, or Somali Wikipedias.

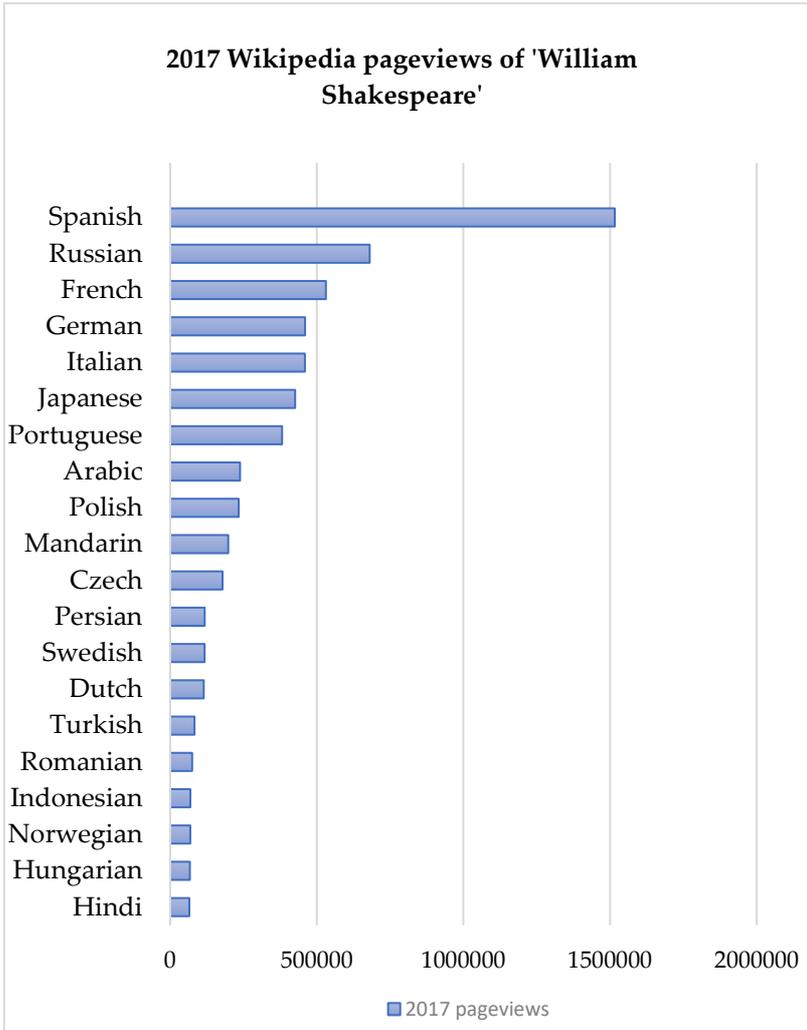


Figure 1. 2017 pageviews of William Shakespeare in 303 Wikipedias

The data reveals that by far the most readers consulting Shakespeare's entry in a foreign Wikipedia are Spanish, with over 1.5 million pageviews in 2017, or over 4,000 daily pageviews. Russian comes next, with less than half the amount of Spanish pageviews, and slightly fewer than 2,000 daily visits. French follows behind, with a bit over 500,000 pageviews. German and Italian are practically tied at slightly under 460,000 pageviews, or about 1,260 pageviews a day. Japanese is the first Asian language to appear here, with 426,000

pageviews, over 1,150 pageviews per day, followed by Portuguese, the only other Wikipedia edition with more than 1,000 daily pageviews of Shakespeare's entry, having a total of 381,000 pageviews. Meanwhile Arabic, Polish, and Mandarin Chinese are the only other three Wikipedias with more than 500 daily pageviews of Shakespeare, ranging from some 230,000 annual pageviews in the case of the former two, and 197,000 in Mandarin. Even Turkish, Indonesian, and Hindi appear on this top-20 list – with anywhere from 65,000-82,000 yearly visits, and between 178-226 daily visits. Indeed, the statistics clearly demonstrate that readers in national European languages such as Belarusian, Bosnian, Bulgarian, Danish, Croatian, Estonian, Finnish, Greek, Latvian, Lithuanian, Macedonian, Serbian, Slovak, and Slovene view Shakespeare's biographical entry far less than their non-European peers. These surprising statistics suggest that we should be studying more often the vast interest in Shakespeare in Arabic-speaking countries, China, India, Indonesia, Japan and Turkey. In other words, the popularity of Shakespeare will not be found so much in Balkan or Baltic countries, but much farther afield both linguistically and culturally.

Shakespeare's plays

One critic, citing the popularity of *Romeo and Juliet* in the USA compared to the numerous stagings of *King Lear* abroad, asks: "Does the popularity of *King Lear* over *Romeo and Juliet* mean that the rest of the world is brooding over parental relationships and family dynamics [...] while Americans are just running around thinking about sex all the time?"¹³ In fact, as Table 1 illustrates, *Romeo and Juliet* is the most viewed Shakespeare play not only in the English Wikipedia, with nearly two million total pageviews last year, but also in foreign-language Wikipedias overall, with more than four million pageviews there combined.

¹³ Mya Gosling, cit. in Dan Kopf, "What Is Shakespeare's Most Popular Play", available at: <https://priceconomics.com/what-is-shakespeares-most-popular-play/>.

Play	Languages	2017 Pageviews (millions)	English pageviews (millions)	Foreign pageviews (millions)	% Foreign pageviews
<i>Romeo and Juliet</i>	84	6.21	1.91	4.30	69%
<i>Hamlet</i>	86	4.55	1.67	2.88	63%
<i>Macbeth</i>	69	3.42	1.67	1.75	51%
<i>A Midsummer's Night Dream</i>	60	2.30	0.98	1.32	57%
<i>Othello</i>	66	2.02	0.97	1.05	52%
<i>Merchant of Venice</i>	49	1.47	0.73	0.74	51%
<i>King Lear</i>	58	1.46	0.70	0.77	52%
<i>The Tempest</i>	49	1.38	0.78	0.60	44%
<i>Twelfth Night</i>	39	1.16	0.75	0.40	35%
<i>The Taming of the Shrew</i>	39	0.99	0.56	0.43	44%

Second comes *Hamlet*, with four and a half million total pageviews, including almost three million foreign pageviews. Third is *Macbeth*, which has the same amount of English pageviews as *Hamlet*, but only 1.7 million foreign pageviews. Fourth is *A Midsummer's Night Dream*, the most popular comedy, at 2.3 million total pageviews. *Othello*, fifth, is the only other play to reach 2 million pageviews: while having about the same number of English pageviews as *A Midsummer's Night Dream*, it is viewed considerably less in foreign Wikipedias. *The Merchant of Venice* and *King Lear* are in sixth and seventh places, each with around the same number of overall pageviews, slightly under 1.5 million. The eighth and the ninth-place plays, *The Tempest* and *Twelfth Night*, actually have more English pageviews than either *The Merchant of Venice* or *King Lear*, but have significantly fewer foreign pageviews, with consequent lower overall pageview numbers. *The Taming of the Shrew* is in tenth place,

with slightly fewer than 1 million total pageviews, although with a few more foreign pageviews than *Twelfth Night*.

Two genres of Shakespeare plays are represented in Table 1: tragedies (*Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *Othello*, *King Lear*) and comedies (*A Midsummer's Night Dream*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *The Tempest*, *Twelfth Night*, *The Taming of the Shrew*), but surprisingly no history plays. All the same, genre is not the only variable here, since the three most popular tragedies – *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet*, and *Macbeth* – easily surpass the other seven plays (including the other two tragedies) in combined pageviews. The role of foreign appeal is evident, since for seven of the ten plays in the table the majority of their pageviews are in foreign Wikipedias: *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *A Midsummer's Night Dream*, *Othello*, *Romeo and Juliet*; the only other such Shakespeare play in our corpus, with a majority of foreign pageviews, is *Richard III*.

Overall, *Romeo and Juliet* is the tragedy with the highest percentage of foreign pageviews, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* the comedy with the highest percentage, and *Richard III* the history play with the highest percentage. These are the three plays that have travelled best across languages. The question, then, is why these plays are most popular for Wikipedia readers in other cultures: what is it about *Richard III*, for example, that makes it more appealing to foreign readers, compared to other history plays by Shakespeare? The same question can be asked of *Romeo and Juliet* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, with regard to genre.

This data leads us to categorise those plays more viewed by English-language Wikipedia readers (*The Tempest*, *Twelfth Night*, and *The Taming of the Shrew*), those most viewed by foreign Wikipedia readers (*Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet*, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*), and those plays more or less viewed equally (*Macbeth*, *King Lear*, *The Merchant of Venice*, and *Othello*). These results, then, suggest that there are certain Shakespeare plays that are much more well attractive to foreign readers, and others much less appealing. Thus, for instance, *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* are equally consulted by English-language readers, but there are more than a million additional viewers of *Hamlet* than *Macbeth* in foreign Wikipedias.

Now we have identified the most popular plays, we can start from facts – e.g., the specific plays – instead of unverified hypotheses about what the most popular plays *might* be.

The pendant table to the above is a list of the least-viewed plays: almost all of them, except for *Pericles*, are history plays, as indicated in Table 2. The least appealing Shakespeare play for foreign Wikipedias is *Henry V*, with only 15% of its pageviews arising from non-English Wikipedias.

Play	Languages	2017 Pageviews (millions)	English pageviews (millions)	Foreign pageviews	Foreign pageviews %
<i>Henry VI, part 1</i>	16	0.11	0.08	0.03	25%
<i>Pericles</i>	21	0.09	0.07	0.03	30%
<i>Henry VIII</i>	22	0.09	0.06	0.03	32%
<i>King John</i>	23	0.08	0.05	0.03	37%
<i>Henry IV, part 2</i>	17	0.07	0.06	0.02	21%
<i>Two Noblemen Kinsmen</i>	15	0.05	0.04	0.01	25%
<i>Henry VI, part 3</i>	14	0.05	0.04	0.01	21%
<i>Henry VI, part 2</i>	15	0.05	0.04	0.01	21%
<i>Edward III</i>	13	0.03	0.02	0.01	30%
<i>Henry V</i>	10	0.02	0.02	0.00	15%

There were, in fact, only 3,000 some pageviews of this play last year in foreign Wikipedias. Most of the other Henriad plays – *Henry IV, parts 1 and 2*, and *Henry VI, parts 1, 2, and 3* – are likewise relatively unattractive abroad: between 75-80% of their pageviews are English. While widely viewed plays like *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *Othello*, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* appear in between 60 and 86 Wikipedias, these less popular plays – such as the *Henry VI* trilogy –

often exist in fewer than twenty languages, with *Henry V* in a mere ten Wikipedias, including the English Wikipedia. If we compare the two tetralogies – the First Tetralogy (*Richard III* and *Henry VI, parts 1, 2, and 3*) and the Second Tetralogy (*Richard II, Henry IV, parts 1 and 2, and Henry V*), the numbers reveal that the First Tetralogy is more than twice as often viewed as the Second Tetralogy, with 391,000 pageviews in 2017, compared to only 141,000. The only such plays with 100 or more daily views are *Richard III* (947 views), *Richard II* (197), and *Henry IV, part 1* (140). Future investigations should seek to understand why Shakespeare's history plays are less interesting to foreign readers.

I will now address the pageviews of each play by genre across the whole range of Wikipedias. The tragedies are the most viewed in the Spanish Wikipedia, with very near 2 million pageviews, almost double the amount of the second-place Russian and Italian Wikipedias (these two are practically tied). German, Japanese, and French are the next three Wikipedias, with a 100-150 thousand fewer pageviews than Russian and Italian. Portuguese and Mandarin are the only other Wikipedias with more than 500,000 pageviews of Shakespeare's tragedies. The last two in Figure 2, Arabic and Polish, are far behind at fewer than 300,000 pageviews.

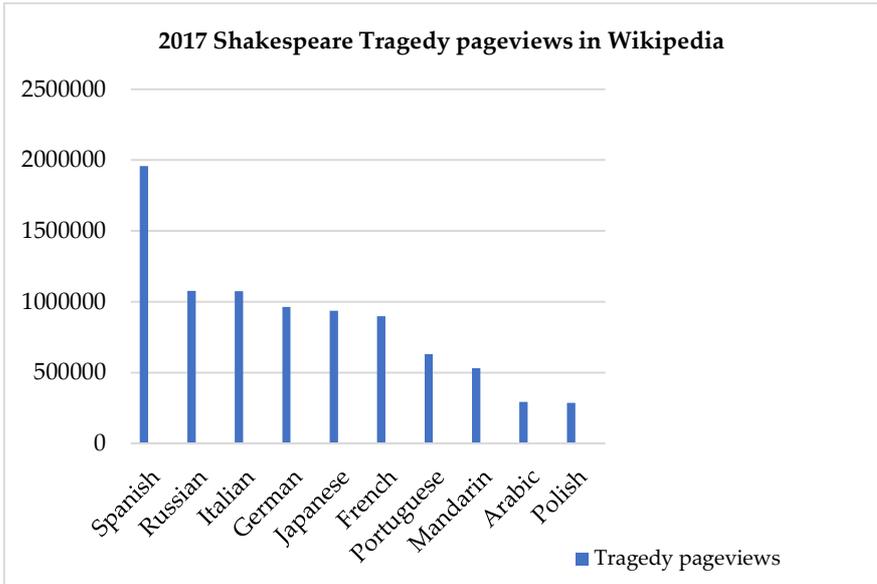


Figure 2. Most 2017 pageviews of Shakespeare's Tragedies among 303 Wikipedias

Overall in the corpus, 105 out of the 109 Wikipedias have more tragedy pageviews than comedy or history pageviews. This allows us to clearly see that tragedy is the most appealing genre for foreign Wikipedia readers.

In Figure 3, the discrepancy between Wikipedias that favour Shakespeare's tragedies and those that prefer his comedies becomes evident. So, while Spanish, German, and French remain at the same rankings (first, fourth, and sixth), Japanese, Italian, Mandarin, and Polish rise up in the ranks; whereas others like Russian, Portuguese, and Arabic descend.

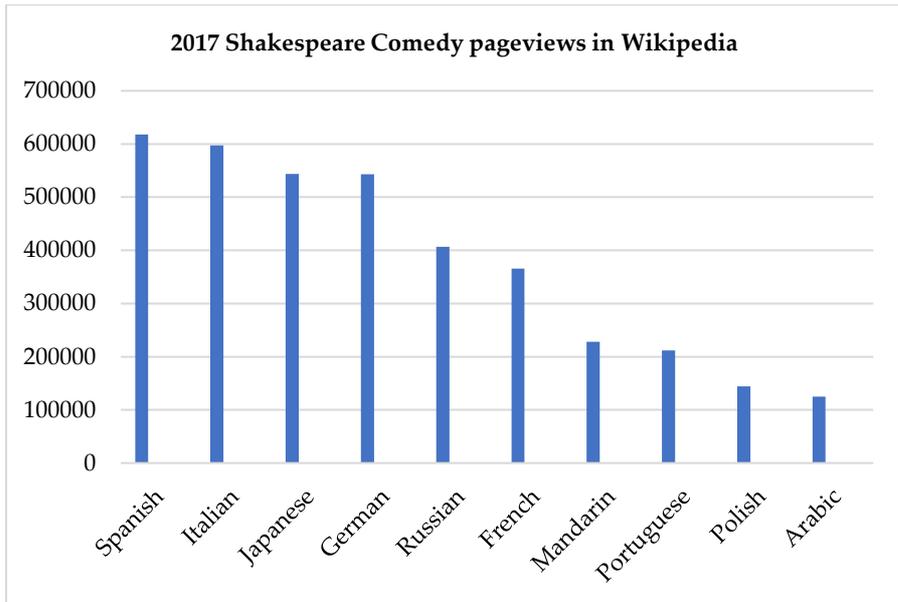


Figure 3. Most 2017 pageviews of Shakespeare's Comedies among 303 Wikipedias

Nonetheless, we note that there are no new entrants: the top ten Wikipedias in tragedy pageviews, even in a different order, remain the top ten here too. Be that as it may, comedy was the number one genre in only four languages: Breton, Low Saxon, Maltese, and Sicilian.

Meanwhile Figure 4 shows the Wikipedias with the greatest number of views of Shakespeare's history plays.

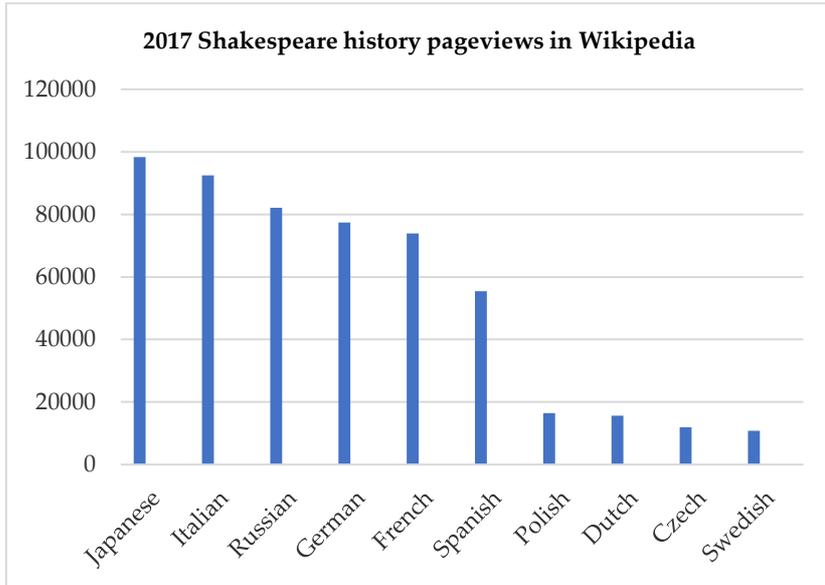


Figure 4. Most 2017 pageviews of Shakespeare's Histories among 303 Wikipedias

In fact, the history corpus of entries shows an immense divergence from the other two corpora: the only Wikipedia to remain in the exact same rank is German, at number four. Japanese has risen to first, Italian has risen from third in tragedy to second here, Russian has ascended to third, French to fifth, and Polish to seventh, whereas Spanish has dropped from first to sixth. Meanwhile we see the entrance of three new Wikipedias: Czech, Dutch, and Swedish, which weren't in the top lists of tragedies or comedies. On the contrary, Wikipedias like Arabic, Mandarin and Portuguese have fallen by the wayside: they have fewer pageviews of history plays than their competitors. Not one language leads in history pageviews in the entire corpus.

We will turn to the most viewed plays in an individual non-English Wikipedia: the ten most viewed plays in a single Wikipedia (excepting English) in 2017 are included in Table 3.

Table 3. 10 most viewed plays in one foreign Wikipedia during 2017			
Wikipedia	Play	2017 pageviews	2017 daily pageviews
Spanish	<i>Romeo and Juliet</i>	863,821	2,367
Spanish	<i>Hamlet</i>	488,838	1,339
French	<i>Romeo and Juliet</i>	410,843	1,126
Russian	<i>Romeo and Juliet</i>	384,813	1,054
Italian	<i>Romeo and Juliet</i>	336,304	921
German	<i>Romeo and Juliet</i>	318,916	874
Japanese	<i>Romeo and Juliet</i>	294,051	806
Portuguese	<i>Romeo and Juliet</i>	281,092	770
Russian	<i>Hamlet</i>	250,814	687
Spanish	<i>Macbeth</i>	250,064	685

The most viewed play is *Romeo and Juliet*: it accounts for seven out of the ten most viewed plays, in four Romance languages, along with German, Japanese, and Russian. *Hamlet* appears twice on this list, in Spanish and Russian, with *Macbeth* the other most widely viewed play, in Spanish. The predominance of *Romeo and Juliet* is clear, and this predominance is confirmed if we look at the top five works viewed in the 25 Wikipedias with the most Shakespeare pageviews (Table 4).

Table 4. Top five works per Wikipedia in 2017 pageviews

Wikipedia	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th
<i>Arabic</i>	Romeo	Hamlet	Merchant	Othello	Macbeth
<i>Czech</i>	Romeo	Hamlet	Othello	Taming of the Shrew	Macbeth
<i>Dutch</i>	Romeo	Hamlet	Macbeth	Othello	Midsummer
<i>Finnish</i>	Romeo	Hamlet	Macbeth	Midsummer	Othello
<i>French</i>	Romeo	Hamlet	Macbeth	Midsummer	Othello
<i>German</i>	Romeo	Hamlet	Macbeth	Midsummer	Othello
<i>Greek</i>	Hamlet	Romeo	Macbeth	Midsummer	Othello
<i>Hebrew</i>	Romeo	Hamlet	Macbeth	Midsummer	As You Like It
<i>Hindi</i>	Macbeth	Hamlet	As You Like It	Julius Caesar	Romeo
<i>Hungarian</i>	Hamlet	Midsummer	Romeo	Twelfth Night	King Lear
<i>Indonesian</i>	Romeo	Hamlet	Macbeth	Othello	Tempest
<i>Italian</i>	Romeo	Hamlet	Macbeth	Midsummer	Othello
<i>Japanese</i>	Romeo	Hamlet	Midsummer	Macbeth	Merchant
<i>Mandarin</i>	Hamlet	Romeo	Macbeth	Midsummer	King Lear
<i>Norwegian</i>	Romeo	Hamlet	Midsummer	Macbeth	As You Like It
<i>Persian</i>	Romeo	Hamlet	Othello	King Lear	Macbeth

<i>Polish</i>	Romeo	Macbeth	Hamlet	Midsummer	Othello
<i>Portuguese</i>	Romeo	Hamlet	Midsummer	Macbeth	Othello
<i>Romanian</i>	Romeo	Hamlet	Midsummer	King Lear	Othello
<i>Russian</i>	Romeo	Hamlet	Macbeth	Othello	King Lear
<i>Spanish</i>	Romeo	Hamlet	Macbeth	Midsummer	Othello
<i>Swedish</i>	Hamlet	Romeo	Midsummer	Othello	Macbeth
<i>Turkish</i>	Romeo	Hamlet	Macbeth	Othello	Midsummer
<i>Ukrainian</i>	Romeo	Hamlet	King Lear	Sonnets	Othello
<i>Vietnamese</i>	Romeo	Hamlet	Macbeth	Othello	King Lear

There are twelve different plays in this table, with the *Sonnets* making one appearance here as well. The most regular order, on average, is *Romeo and Juliet* number one, followed by *Hamlet* in second place, and *Macbeth* in third. *A Midsummer's Night Dream* is most often fourth, with *Othello* fifth. This exact order is evident in Finnish, French, German, Italian, and Spanish Wikipedias, and another six Wikipedias have all these identical plays in the top five. Sometimes the order changes, however, so we have *Hamlet* first and *Romeo and Juliet* second (Greek, Hungarian, Mandarin, and Swedish). With that said, in other Wikipedias, other plays also do appear: *King Lear* seven times; *As You Like It* and *The Merchant of Venice* twice each; and *Julius Caesar*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *The Tempest*, and *Twelfth Night* all with one appearance. Thus, we see *King Lear* instead of either *A Midsummer's Night Dream* (Persian, Russian, Ukrainian, and Vietnamese), *Macbeth* (Hungarian and Romanian), or *Othello* (Mandarin); *As You Like It* instead of *Macbeth* (Hindi and Norwegian); *The Merchant of Venice* instead of *A Midsummer's Night Dream* (Arabic) or *Othello* (Japanese).

Yet what is astonishing, perhaps, is that the order most common among the top 25 Wikipedias – *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *Othello* – is the exact same order in the

native English Wikipedia. Thus, in many foreign Wikipedias, the popular preference for plays is identical to that of the source culture.

If we analyse the entire corpus of Wikipedias, not merely the above list of 25, *Romeo and Juliet* is the leader, in nearly 50 Wikipedias. The most obvious preference for this is evident in the Tagalog Wikipedia: there are 87 daily views of *Romeo and Juliet* in Tagalog, but only seven of second-place *Hamlet*. A remarkable discrepancy is also clear in Thai, where there are about five times more views of *Romeo and Juliet* than of the next leading play. Ukrainian, as well, shows a significant preference, with about three times more views of *Romeo and Juliet* than its closest competitor. In Arabic, while there may be 200 visits a day to *Hamlet*, there are 50% more visits to *Romeo and Juliet*. Overall, *Romeo and Juliet* is first in the Wikipedia editions of languages such as Arabic, Bengali, Bosnian, Catalan, Czech, Dutch, English, Finnish, French, Georgian, German, Indonesian, Italian, Japanese, Latvian, Norwegian, Persian, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, Slovene, Spanish, Tagalog, Thai, Turkish, Ukrainian, and Vietnamese.

In contrast, there are 37 languages in which *Hamlet* is the leading play by pageviews, including such languages as Albanian, Armenian, Bulgarian, Mandarin Chinese, Croatian, Danish, Estonian, Greek, Hungarian, Korean, Lithuanian, Macedonian, Serbian, Slovakian, and Swedish. Most of these languages are Central, Eastern, or Northern European, in fact, including almost no Western European languages. Thus, for instance, in Croatian, *Hamlet* has five times as many page views as the next play. In Lithuanian, Macedonian, and Slovakian, *Hamlet* is clearly number one. In Albanian, *Hamlet* is viewed four times as much as its competitor. There are more views of *Hamlet* in Chinese than any other play.

The only other plays besides *Romeo and Juliet* and *Hamlet* to be the leader in pageviews are four tragedies and two comedies. *Macbeth* is the first in seven languages (Breton, Hindi, Igbo, Irish, Kannada, Malayalam, Picard, and Swahili); *Julius Caesar*, first in five languages (Esperanto, West Frisian, Latin, Nepali and Western Punjabi); *Othello*, first in three languages (Faroese, Ligurian, and Punjabi); *King Lear* (Egyptian Arabic and Kurdish), and *Antony and Cleopatra*, first in Cebuano. The two comedies which lead in pageviews are *A*

Midsummer Night's Dream, the leader in Low Saxon and Maltese, and *As You Like It*, the leader in Tamil.

Shakespeare's poetry

Yet we have almost forgotten about Shakespeare's poetry. In all the Wikipedias, views of Shakespeare's poetry always account for a small percentage of total pageviews, under 8% in all cases, except for the Sicilian Wikipedia¹⁴. However, there are quite a few languages where there are more visits to Shakespeare's poetry pages than to his history plays, owing often to the fact that there are no history pages at all in the respective Wikipedia editions: Arabic, Armenian, Bengali, Bulgarian, Catalan, Czech, Malayalam, Persian, Sicilian, Ukrainian, and Vietnamese, and Welsh. Numerically speaking, Russian has the most poetry page views, over 50,000. Three other Wikipedias have a little more than 30,000 poetry views each: Italian, German, and Japanese. Spanish and Mandarin are in the upper and lower 20,000s, respectively. French is seventh, with around 16,000, and the next three languages, eighth, ninth, and tenth, are all jumbled together: Persian, Polish, and Czech, around 14,000 pageviews. No other Wikipedia has 10,000 or more poetry pageviews.

Russian is the leading foreign Wikipedia for Shakespeare's *Sonnets* (as well as *A Lover's Complaint*); the Wikipedia page of his *Sonnets* is consulted more in Mandarin than in Spanish, and more in Japanese than in French. Shakespeare's other narrative poems show interesting receptions too: Japanese is the leading foreign language in pageviews for *The Rape of Lucrece*, Persian is the leading language in pageviews for his poem *Venus and Adonis*, and Italian is the leading language for *The Phoenix and the Turtle*.

The *Sonnets* are fifteenth in total pageviews (562k) and in foreign pageviews (226k): they beat out such popular plays as *Antony and Cleopatra*, *The Winter's Tale*, *The Comedy of Errors*, and *Richard II*. The narrative poems *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*, meanwhile, have more foreign pageviews (47k and 35k, respectively) than ten

¹⁴ The Sicilian Wikipedia has only two pages dedicated to Shakespeare's works: one to the *Sonnets* and one to *Much Ado About Nothing*. There were 187 views of the *Sonnets* and 100 of *Much Ado About Nothing*.

plays, mostly history plays. Nevertheless, the two narrative poems, *The Phoenix and the Turtle* and *A Lover's Complaint* have the lowest foreign pageviews of any of Shakespeare's works (both with 5k).

These statistics thus indicate that the popularity of Shakespeare's poetry generally outruns the popularity of his history plays; consequently, a fruitful line of approach would be looking into how they are translated, and how the Shakespeare sonnet has influenced many foreign literary traditions. The fact is that plays are staged and adapted much more than a piece of poetry, so it makes these statistics even more striking.

Conclusion

This paper has set the stage for an overall appraisal of popularity of Shakespeare and his works through the analysis of their reception in the 303 global Wikipedias. Results have shown that there is no common popularity of Shakespeare across languages, either in terms of plays or poems. Some Wikipedias wholeheartedly prefer his tragedies, to the tune of over 90% of all pageviews (Bosnian, Croatian, Lithuanian, Tagalog, and Vietnamese). Others show a much higher-than-average number of visits to Shakespeare's comedies (Hebrew and Hungarian). Some Wikipedias show no interest in Shakespeare's poetry (from Albanian and Greek to Hindi and Turkish). Others show a clear interest in his verse (Bulgarian, Catalan, Czech, Dutch, Persian, Polish, Russian, Serbian and Ukrainian). For a plurality of Wikipedias, almost 50, *Romeo and Juliet* is number one in pageviews; in many others, it is *Hamlet*. In seven more, *Macbeth* is number one, while *Julius Caesar* is first in several others. *Othello*, *King Lear*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *As You Like It*, and *Antony and Cleopatra* are the other rare leaders.

We have seen that the overall statistics demonstrate that tragedies are the most viewed, especially *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet*, and *Macbeth*. This is not surprising, considering that tragedies account in the average Wikipedia for 73% of pageviews, with comedies consisting of only 24%. However, the genres of history plays and poetry are much less viewed, each accounting for less than 2% of total views, on average.

Certain languages show predilections for certain genres. Some Wikipedias evince a preference for tragedies. Russian is number two in tragedy pageviews, but only number five in comedy page views. Vietnamese does better than average in tragedies – at 18th – but falls all the way to 37th in terms of comedies. Spanish is number one in pageviews of tragedies (and comedies), but falls to sixth in pageviews of histories. Likewise, Portuguese, while well inside the top ten of tragedies and comedies, drops to 12th in histories. And Arabic, ninth or tenth in terms of tragedies and comedies, is only 16th in histories. On the other hand, some Wikipedias, like the Hebrew and Hungarian ones, do better in comedies than tragedies (13th/14th instead of 20th/23rd). Others, like Dutch and Japanese, do better in history plays. Japanese is number five in terms of tragedy page views, but number one in history page views. Dutch may be only 13th or 15th in comedies and tragedies, but it rises all the way to number eight in histories. This suggests that certain literary and cultural traditions are potentially more attuned to specific literary genres.

Likewise, we have found out which plays are the most viewed in non-English Wikipedias – the most popular tragedies, from *Hamlet* and *King Lear* to *Macbeth* and *Romeo and Juliet*, along with *Richard III*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *The Merchant of Venice* – and which are less viewed, namely the least viewed overall in the corpus, mostly history plays, along with several comedies and one tragedy (*Titus Andronicus*).

Using an approach based on Wikipedia allows us to clearly identify broad patterns of popularity – e.g., the readership of Shakespeare's tragedy, history or comedy plays, by genre – as well as pinpoint specific plays' popularity – e.g., *Hamlet* or *A Midsummer Night's Dream* – across 300-some languages. This empirical data provides a foothold into the concrete reception of Shakespeare texts worldwide. Rather than having to depend on misguided hypotheses – e.g., *Hamlet* is the most popular play worldwide – we have data that demonstrate the facts.

With these results, this paper can suggest further paths of research and indicate possible lines of enquiry. Now that we know which pages – and works – are the most viewed, we can begin to look more deeply into literary, cultural and political reasons behind these preferences. We now definitively know that Shakespeare's history

plays are neglected abroad. We can now proceed to examining why this is the case, since it is not specific to a single history play, but to a genre of play. Likewise, we can pursue investigations into why certain tragedies and comedies fared much better than others. In short, now that this article has presented the basic information about the global popularity of all of Shakespeare's works, we can proceed to more detailed levels of examination of Shakespeare's canonicity in different contexts across the globe.

Appendix A. All Shakespeare works in corpus by number of combined 2017 pageviews in 303 Wikipedias.

2017 Views	Daily views	Play
6,210,673	17,016	<i>Romeo and Juliet</i>
4,554,556	12,478	<i>Hamlet</i>
3,417,277	9,362	<i>Macbeth</i>
2,303,859	6,312	<i>A Midsummer's Night Dream</i>
2,021,790	5,539	<i>Othello</i>
1,468,230	4,023	<i>The Merchant of Venice</i>
1,461,785	4,005	<i>King Lear</i>
1,384,333	3,793	<i>The Tempest</i>
1,155,872	3,167	<i>Twelfth Night</i>
988,252	2,708	<i>The Taming of the Shrew</i>
850,164	2,329	<i>Much Ado About Nothing</i>
773,522	2,119	<i>Julius Caesar</i>
702,740	1,925	<i>As You Like It</i>
663,131	1,817	<i>Richard III</i>
562,637	1,541	<i>Sonnets</i>
459,966	1,260	<i>Titus Andronicus</i>
438,258	1,201	<i>Antony and Cleopatra</i>
385,153	1,055	<i>The Winter's Tale</i>
294,954	808	<i>Coriolanus</i>

287,247	787	<i>The Comedy of Errors</i>
232,274	636	<i>All's Well that Ends Well</i>
225,796	619	<i>Measure for measure</i>
220,393	604	<i>Love's Labour Lost</i>
215,082	589	<i>Richard II</i>
213,431	585	<i>Two Gentlemen of Verona</i>
207,913	570	<i>The Merry Wives of Windsor</i>
202,114	554	<i>Cymbeline</i>
198,460	544	<i>Henry IV, part 1</i>
121,049	332	<i>Timon of Athens</i>
111,661	306	<i>Henry VI, part 1</i>
106,881	293	<i>Venus and Adonis</i>
105,026	288	<i>The Rape of Lucrece</i>
94,059	258	<i>Pericles</i>
89,144	244	<i>Henry VIII</i>
77,528	212	<i>King John</i>
71,961	197	<i>Henry IV, part 2</i>
52,039	143	<i>The Two Noble Kinsmen</i>
50,028	137	<i>Henry VI, part 3</i>
49,296	135	<i>Henry VI, part 2</i>
33,627	92	<i>Edward III</i>
28,276	77	<i>The Phoenix and the Turtle</i>
25,579	70	<i>A Lover's Complaint</i>
22,525	62	<i>Henry V</i>