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Writing About Shakespeare: 1960–2010

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DATA PAPER

Writing About Shakespeare: 1960–2010

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This dataset quantifies writing (in number of articles, books, dissertations, and monographs) about each of Shakespeare's plays during each year in the period 1960–2010. The information was extracted from the *World Shakespeare Bibliography* (www.worldshakesbib.org).

Keywords: literature; statistical data; scholarly publishing; academic publishing; digital humanities; Shakespeare

(1) Overview

Repository location

<http://hdl.handle.net/1969.1/156315>

Context

This data was used to write:

Estill, L, Klyve, D, Bridal, K 2015. 'Spare your Arithmetic, never count the turns': A Statistical Analysis of Writing About Shakespeare, 1960–2010. *Shakespeare Quarterly* 66(1): 1–28.

(2) Methods

The *World Shakespeare Bibliography* (WSB) is regularly called "invaluable" to Shakespeare studies: it is the only resource to comprehensively enumerate and annotate writing about Shakespeare from around the world [1]. The WSB began in 1950 as part of the print journal *Shakespeare Quarterly*; it moved to CD-ROM in 1996; and first went online in 2001 under the direction of then-editor James L. Harner. The data in the WSB is compiled by a team of international correspondents headed by the editorial team at Texas A&M University. It is a paywalled resource published by the Folger Shakespeare Library (Washington, D.C.) and Johns Hopkins University Press. This dataset makes information from the WSB accessible to those without a subscription, though it does not include publication information or annotations, which can be found by logging into the WSB site with an institutional or personal subscription.

Each publication in this dataset is contained in the WSB database, together with various metadata, including the name of any play that is substantially treated in the publication. The WSB can be browsed, for example, for all entries on *Hamlet*.

Steps

Using the "Browse" feature, we selected one play at a time to find all the WSB entries concerning that play. The web browser interface, however, does not lend itself well to accessing a large number of publications at once. In particular, the web interface was designed to display only 30

entries at a time (see **Figure 1**). Fortunately, this setting can be manually overridden by manipulating the browser's URL bar. As do several websites, the WSB encoded the information used in the search query within the URL itself, allowing the user to change the values of variables submitted to the server as desired. One of these values, "show", can be set to override the default setting of 30 entries per page.

Steps taken to access data:

1. Choose the play one wishes to study
2. Determine the total number of DSB entries for the play (*Antony and Cleopatra*, for example, has 2315 entries)
3. Choose a number larger than the number of entries (in practice, we simply rounded up to the next multiple of 1000), and set the value of "show" to that number in the URL.

For example, selecting *Antony and Cleopatra* brought up a webpage with the URL <http://www.worldshakesbib.org/search?searchtype=browse&index=30.04&order1=author>.

Adding the text "&show=3000" to the end of the URL allows all of the entries relating to this play to be displayed.

Once the web browser displayed all entries concerning a play in the WSB, we copied the list to Microsoft Excel. There we set up a series of Excel functions to count the number of entries coded as "Article", "Book Monograph", "Dissertation", or "Software" in each year.

Sampling strategy

Because our goal was to capture the entire population of entries in the WSB, we employed no sampling strategies.

Quality Control

Several plays and years were chosen and counted independently (by hand). All such checks matched our counts using the method described above.

The screenshot shows the 'World Shakespeare Bibliography Online' website. The header includes navigation links: Home, Introduction, Browse, Search, Advanced Search, and About. A search bar is present with the text '2336 documents found.' and a 'Jump to result number' field. The results are displayed in a table with columns: Title, Author, Type, and Date. The first ten results are listed, each with a 'Save' link. On the left side, there is a sidebar with 'View Saved Entries' and 'Sort order' options (Author, Title, Year, Reverse order). Below this is a 'Return to main menu' link and a list of categories: Individual Works — Plays; Antony And Cleopatra, Scholarship and Criticism, Bibliographies and Checklists, Editions and Texts, Translations and Adaptations, Sources and Influences, Textual and Bibliographical Studies, Criticism, Pedagogy, Other, Productions and Staging, General Bibliographies and Checklists, Reference Works, Actors, Acting, Directing, Ballet, Dance, Film, Cinema, Radio.

	Title	Author	Type	Date	
1	Alchemical Reference in Antony and Cleopatra.	Abraham, Lyndy.	Article	1982	Save
2	Entoni ra Kliyopetra.	Acarya, Netra,	Book monograph	2010	Save
3	Shekspir v perevodakh A. A. Feta V. [A. A. Fet's Translations of Shakespeare].	Achkasov, A.	Article	2003	Save
4	The Shakespearean Object: Psychoanalysis, Subjectivity, and the Gaze.	Adair, Vance.	Dissertation	2003	Save
5	Antony and Cleopatra.	Adams, John,	Production	1991	Save
6	The Origins of the Concept of Romantic Love as It Appears in the Plays of William Shakespeare.	Adams, Martha L.	Dissertation	1968	Save
7	The Greek Romance and William Shakespeare.	Adams, Martha Latimer.	Article	1967	Save
8	Notes on William Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra.	Adamson, Elgiva.	Book monograph	1967	Save
9	Antony and Cleopatra.	Adamson, Eve,	Production	1999	Save
10	The Common Liar: An Essay on Antony and Cleopatra.	Adelman, Janet.	Book monograph	1973	Save

Figure 1: The first ten results when browsing *Antony and Cleopatra* on the previous *World Shakespeare Bibliography* interface. Image courtesy of the *WSB*.

(3) Dataset description

Object name

Writing about Shakespeare

Format names and versions

ASCII, CSV, Excel

Creation dates

Start date 2013-04-13; end date 2014-11-02.

Dataset Creators

A first draft of the dataset was created by Kate Bridal, Duke University School of Law.

The final draft was created by Dominic Klyve.

Language

The dataset contains four variables: "Play," "Year," "# Publications on 2013-04-13", and "# Publications on 2014-11-02". These variables are named in English.

The complete *World Shakespeare Bibliography* site includes Production, Film, Dissertation, Computer Software (now "Digital Project"), Book Monograph, Book Collection,

Article (now "Journal Article" and "Book Chapter"), Audio Recording, and, in the new version, "Musical Score" as document types. This dataset combines the categories Dissertation, Book Monograph, Journal Article/Book Chapter, and Computer Software into one broader category, as these represents writing about Shakespeare. Computer software is a category that includes digital editions, such as the *Internet Shakespeare Editions* (ise.uvic.ca) and online projects such as *Hamletworks* (Hamletworks.net), the latter of which aggregates both original and republished scholarly essays about *Hamlet*.

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Repository name

Texas A&M University Oak Trust. oaktrust.tamu.edu.

Publication date

Published to the repository 2016-04-21.

(4) Reuse potential

The *World Shakespeare Bibliography (WSB)* [2] data gathered here was initially used to provide an overview of writing about each of Shakespeare's plays over time during the period 1960–2010 [3]. This data, gathered by the *WSB*'s international correspondents and editorial team, includes writing about Shakespeare and editions of Shakespeare's plays published in all languages (even Esperanto!). This dataset omits generalized publications about Shakespeare that do not focus on a particular play (for instance, a survey of cursing across Shakespeare's oeuvre or a biography) and also omits publications about the poems and apocryphal plays.

Our original study, based on this dataset, focused on comparing plays by genre or as individual units. Further analyses, however, will surely draw different comparisons between plays and group the plays in different ways. For instance, researchers could consider the relative or changing popularity of writing about "Falstaff plays," a grouping that moves beyond generic categorizations and includes *1 Henry IV*, *2 Henry IV*, and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. Shakespeareans could compare early plays to later works. Scholars might also be interested in, for example, investigating the relative popularity of Shakespeare's Roman histories (*Julius Caesar*, *Coriolanus*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, and *Titus Andronicus*) with his English histories (*1 & 2 Henry IV*, *Henry V*, *1–3 Henry VI*, *Henry VIII*, *King John*, *Richard II*, *Richard III*) or quasi-historical British plays (*Cymbeline*, *King Lear*). Sharing these data openly allows scholars to define the bounds of their inquiries and the connections they want to explore in their own analyses. In our analysis, we selected particular categories and offered visualizations of the data to show our results: defining different categories and applying new data visualization tools will surely offer fresh insights.

While much of this imagined reuse has focused on how literary scholars might appropriate the data, this dataset might also be of interest to researchers working on publication history, higher education, popular culture, or statistical analysis. Digital humanists might use this dataset to test new tools. An artistic director or theatre manager might use this data to argue for the need to adapt an often-overlooked play; an editor or author could show the exigence of a new book by showing how it contributes to a growing field. While there are extensive arguments to be made from a thorough reassessment of this dataset, these data as presented here can also be used to support small points in broader arguments, appearing as a footnote in an article with an altogether different focus. A scholar can now definitively point to the relative popularity of one of Shakespeare's plays over another during, for instance, the Vietnam War, as registered in the writing about those plays published during that period. This dataset allows previously qualitative claims to be quantified and supported with evidence beyond the anecdotal.

In the classroom, this data could be used as an entering point for students to consider the shape of Shakespeare studies. Students could be asked to find patterns or anomalies in this data and then suggest the reason for their findings. This distant reading approach to the field of "writing about Shakespeare" would work well in conjunction with some calculated close reading. If, for instance, a student wants to write about the popularity of *Hamlet*, they could then go to the *WSB* and find examples of writing about *Hamlet* in order to see the ways people interact with Shakespeare's play, from traditional literary analyses to graphic novel adaptations. The potential pedagogical applications of this dataset are underscored by its genesis: this data collection was begun by an undergraduate student interested in applying quantitative methods to Shakespeare studies. Today, the second author regularly uses the dataset to teach advanced use of the R programming language.

One of the potential barriers for re-use is that the *WSB* is constantly being updated. By focusing on historic data from 1960–2010, however, we have mitigated the amount of change that would otherwise happen if we included more recent data. Although the *WSB* does continue to add entries from material that was previously overlooked, the majority of the added entries in each *WSB* update are recent publications. (Often, previously overlooked material was published print-only in a language other than English [4]). People interested in repurposing this data could take it as is (a handful of added publications will not change the basic shape of the data) or could supplement the data with recent additions by searching by "update," an advanced search option in the *WSB*. This data was compiled using update 20143 (fall 2014): any additional quarterly updates could be taken into account or added.¹ The data published in the repository is, furthermore, open even to those who do not subscribe to the *WSB*.

Additional potential reuse could be undertaken by those who want to expand this dataset. Our dataset does not, for instance, include performances of the plays, which could lead to fruitful comparisons with the writing about Shakespeare we offer. Other avenues for expanding this dataset include adding Shakespeare's poems, considering the apocryphal plays, or analyzing general writing on Shakespeare (such as biographies) that are not associated with a particular play. These avenues for future research could also rely on the information in the *WSB*. Furthermore, a researcher could use this data as a starting point and consider the more granular levels of the *WSB* taxonomy, looking at, for instance, publications in particular languages or narrowing their focus to cover only editions rather than adaptations and scholarship. Moving beyond *WSB* would allow researchers to compare writing about other literary figures, though we add the caveat that it is important to know the scope of non-*WSB* data. Data derived from the *Marlowe Bibliography Online*, the *MLA International Bibliography*, or other literary bibliographies would be naturally complementary [5, 6]: though they might not, for instance, include dissertations, editions, or adaptations. We encourage any scholars who repurpose, expand, or refine

this dataset to also share their data and methodologies in order allow further fruitful investigations.

Notes

- ¹ The recent redesign of the *World Shakespeare Bibliography* (summer 2016) will make it even easier to search this data, as researchers will be able to select multiple options from the drop down menu, searching updates Winter 2014 to present at once.

Additional Files

The additional files for this article can be found as follows:

- **Additional File 1: Appendix.** <http://dx.doi.org/10.5334/johd.4.s1>

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Competing Interests

Dr. Laura Estill is editor of the *World Shakespeare Bibliography*.

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