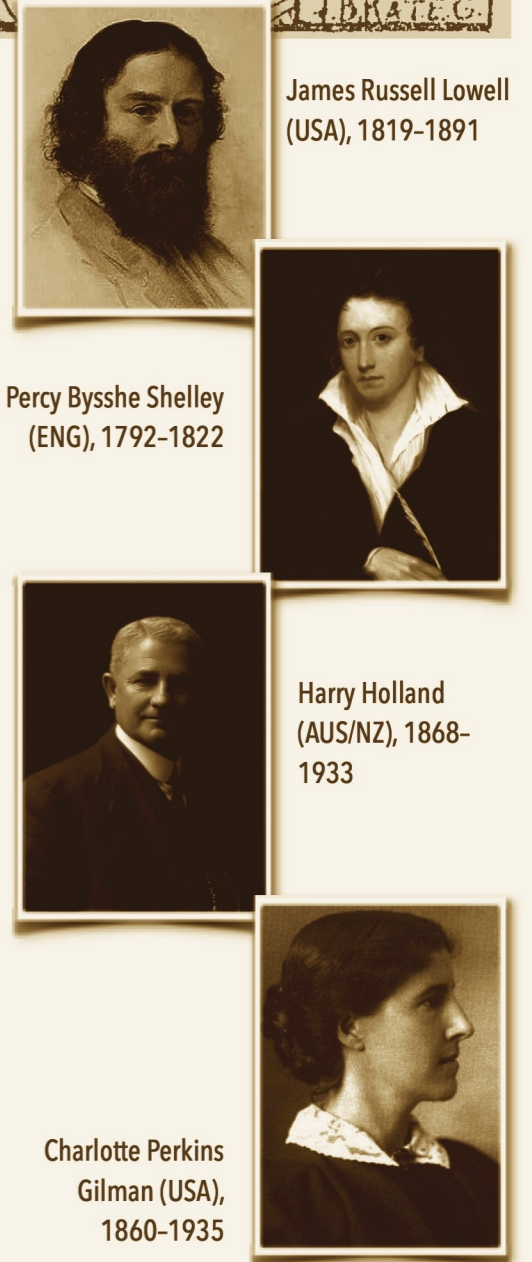
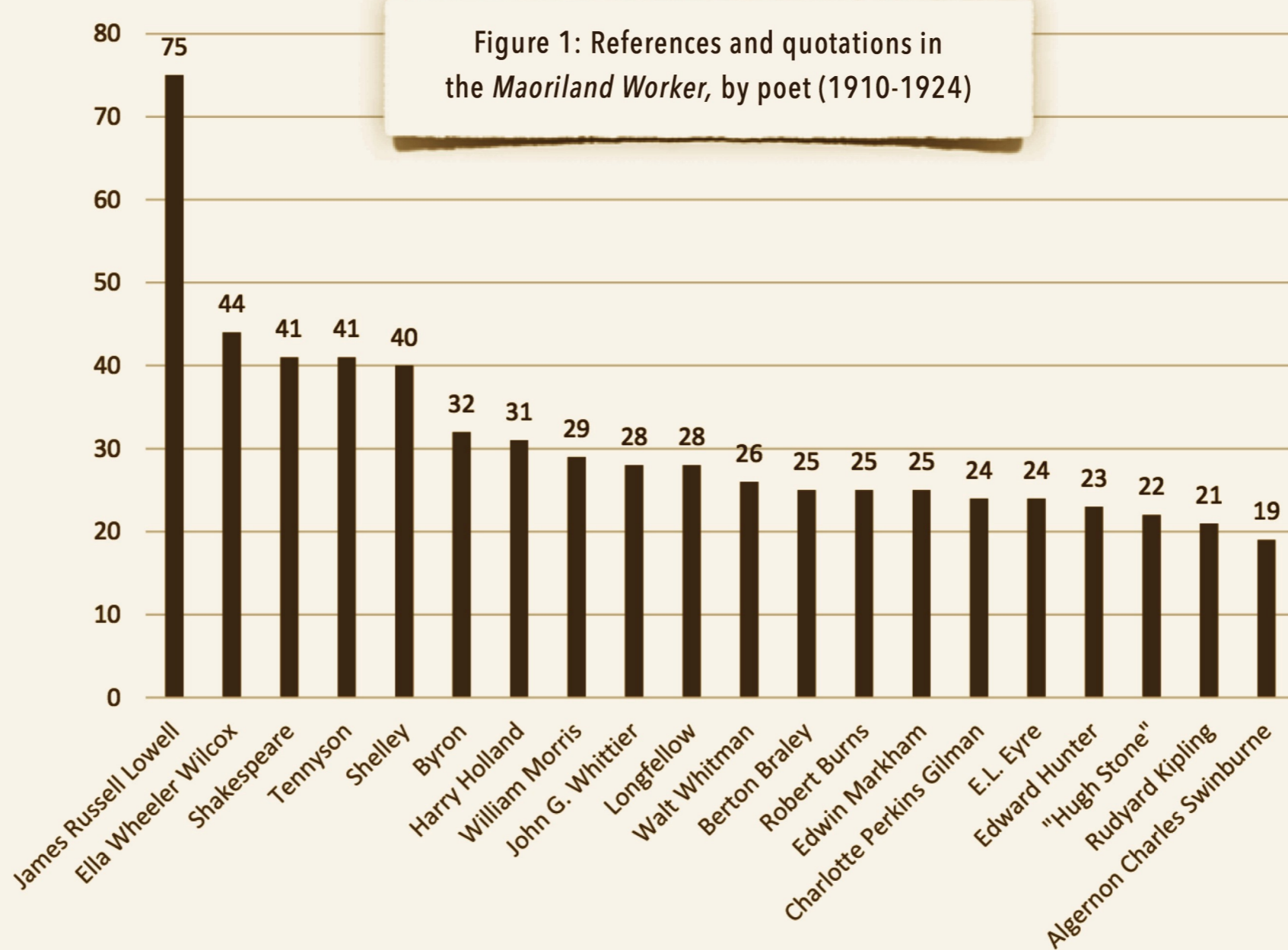




'SWEETNESS AND LIGHT BELONG TO US'

POETRY IS PROMINENT in early 20th century socialist newspapers in New Zealand, but its significant presence has remained almost entirely unstudied. By recording and analysing the use of poetry in one such publication – the *Maoriland Worker* (1910-1924), one of the leading socialist newspapers of the period – this project aims to give a partial account of the circulation of global literature in and among local working-class reading communities in early 20th century New Zealand. ♦

Headline source: "Democracy of Letters," *Maoriland Worker* 18 Feb. 1920, p. 1.



STOP READING – START COUNTING!

Moretti's methods shake up literary studies

IN TERMS OF METHOD, this project engages with a growing but contentious field: the digital humanities. English literary studies typically makes its claims on the basis of close readings of a canon, or a small and privileged selection of texts. But this approach – which emphasises sustained attention to individual details – is necessarily selective in its objects. Against this "theological exercise" (48), the critic Franco Moretti argues for a radically new approach to the study of literature: "distant reading." That is, using quantitative methods adapted from the social sciences.

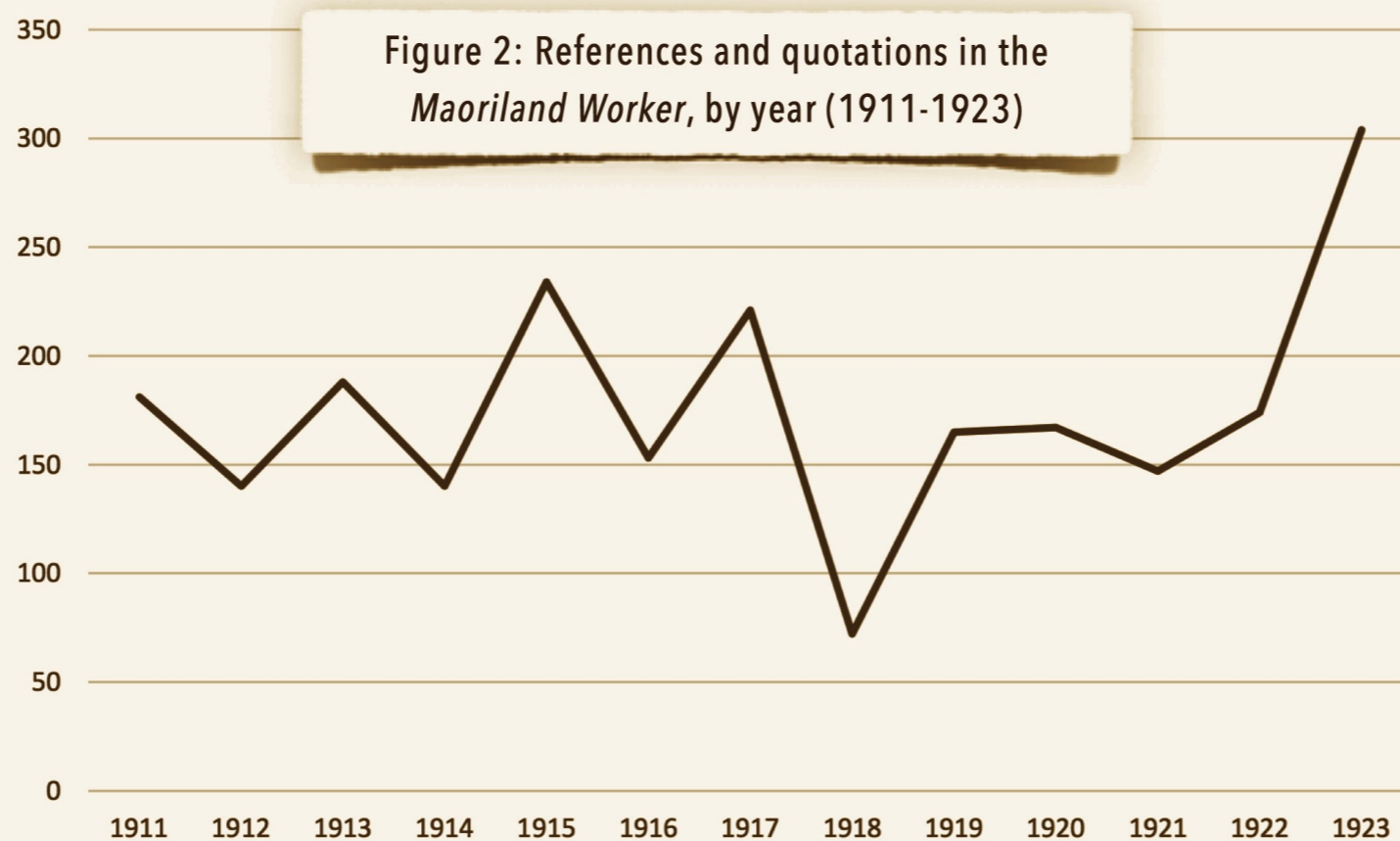


Italian Marxist literary critic Franco Moretti (Image: Stanford)

The number of poems alone (I recorded 2,361 in a page-by-page digital survey) rules out close reading as a viable approach. Instead, following Moretti, my research employs simple quantitative tools to track references to poetry across the *Worker's* archive. ♦

Poetry is political, study claims

- **AN ALTERNATIVE CANON:** The 20 most-frequently-quoted poets in the *Worker* are plotted in fig. 1. Many of them are canonical (Tennyson, Shelley), but others are, to the contemporary reader, relatively obscure (Lowell, Markham).
- **GLOBAL POETICS:** Poetry was syndicated from publications like the *London Herald* (25 poems) and the *New York Call* (10 poems). Studies of colonial audiences tend to focus on the circulation of texts within the empire, but here American poets were used to comment on local politics.
- **LOCAL POETRY:** The *Worker* supported a lively culture of original verse, publishing at least 155 original poems, including those by Harry Holland, Edward Hunter, E.L. Eyre, and "Hugh Stone" recorded in fig. 1. Original work served to form affective bonds among a political community of readers.
- **STABILITY:** The paper's use of poetry as a resource for political and ideological rhetoric was relatively consistent over time (see fig. 2). Figure 2 also shows a gap in the archive in 1918 and a change in format in 1922.



"[A]rchives are not messages that were meant to address us, and so they say absolutely nothing until one asks the right question."

– FRANCO MORETTI (180)

NZ LITERATURE 'DOES NOT YET EXIST', SAYS MURRAY

HAVE WE BEEN asking the right questions about this period? The nation as critical frame obscures the *international* scope of the *Worker's* poetic references, and the global situation to which its original contributors responded. The paper's consistently high poetic output also suggests the gaps in our existing cultural and literary histories: we must attend not only to bourgeois poetry, but to the poetic archive of the working classes as well. ♦

REFERENCES

Moretti, Franco. *Distant Reading*. London: Verso, 2013. Print.

Papers Past. National Library of New Zealand, 2015. Web. 16 Feb. 2016.