DREaM Report
April 14, 2015

i. Introduction

In September of 1666, the Great Fire destroyed four-fifths of the ancient commercial and topographic centre of London within three days. In *The Literary and Cultural Spaces of Restoration London*, Cynthia Wall argues that in the decades that followed, the literatures of the period were increasingly concerned with reassigning meaning to the urban places, spaces, and identities that had been dramatically altered by the Fire. These texts question what London and being Londoner meant and their genres are broad and varied, including sermons, journalism, broadsheets, poems, plays, maps, descriptive topography, and more.

My overarching question, therefore, is how do texts concerned with London change after the Great Fire? For this short post, I'll be focusing on how texts directly concerned with fire may be different after the critical juncture of the Fire of 1666.

To explore these questions, I will explore the texts published between 1632-1700, related to the Fire or otherwise divided by the Fire as representing an important juncture in the psychology and identity of London.



"A Plan of the City and Liberties of London after the Dreadful Conflagration in the Year 1666. The Blank Part Whereof Represents the Ruins and Extent of the Fire & the Perspective That Left Standing." By Emmanuel Bowen, based on an earlier map by Wenceslaus Hollar. London: printed for J. Wilkie; T. Lowndes; G. Kearsly, and S. Bladon, 1772. Courtesy of the Grub Street Project. [hyperlink that]
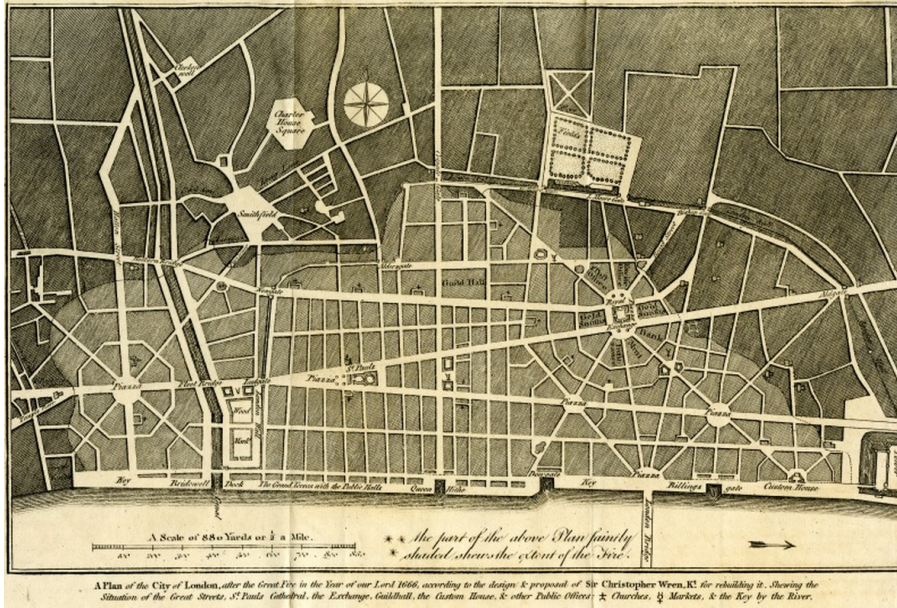
London (proposed design) (1809 print after Christopher Wren, 1666. Title: A Plan of the City of London, After the Great Fire in the Year of Our Lord 1666, According to the Design & Proposal of Sir Christopher Wren, Kt. for Rebuilding it. Shewing the Situation of the Great Streets, St. Pauls Cathedral, The Exchange, Guildhall, the Custom House, & Other Public Offices...London: J. Stratford, 1809.

ii. A step-by-step description of your research process, including screen shots or video. (This section will form the bulk of the report).

The very first thing I have to do is build a corpus. In many ways, the various corpus building tools were one of the most interesting aspects of exploring the texts. The most obvious division is pre-Fire and post-Fire. Because the DREaM corpus ends at 1700, my post-Fire corpus was 1666-1700 (CorpusB). A 34 year span on the other side places my pre-Fire corpus at 1632-1665 (CorpusA).

Already there's a potential issue here; the Fire was in September of 1666. Some texts published in this year were likely not to do with the Fire we're thinking of, but those small outliers should not affect the corpus and our data too much.

Now that we have a time period in mind, how do we isolate the texts that we want? Let's first identify the most obvious corpus: texts about fire. 171 texts had fire* in the title. Since I specifically wanted texts about London but I suspected not all of them would have London in the title, I tossed london* in the full-text, dropping an additional 20 texts, a method that certainly leaves a great deal of error but narrows the search down somewhat.

151/23896 = 0.0063

Before jumping to exporting with Voyant, let's compare to the pre-Fire.
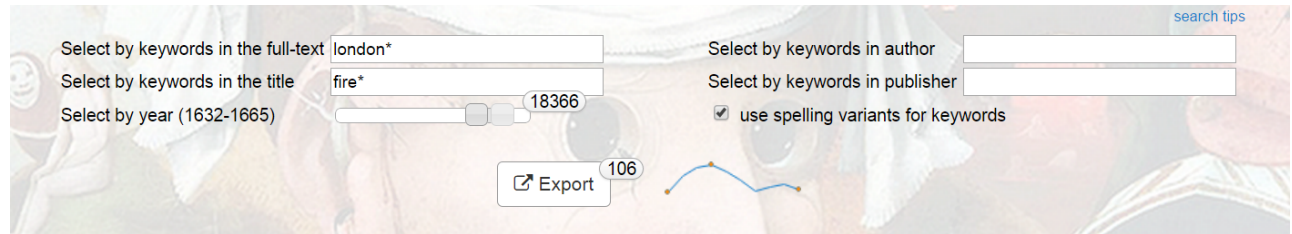


106/18366 = 0.0058

The number of texts with fire* in the title isn't significantly higher post-Fire in the span of 34 years. Perhaps, however, differences exist in the text; did the *Great* Fire cause a different perspective of fires following 1666?

In order to explore this question, I turned to Voyant, a quick-and-dirty yet powerful toolset for looking at large corpora like those created by DREaM.



A general overview of some of the tools in Voyant

The first and most obvious section is the Corpus terms. What are the most common words across the corpusa? Voyant includes a visualization of the terms…

[insert Cirrus images]

…and they look pretty similar. Let's take a look at the top 15 words.

**1632-1665**

| Term | Count |
|------|-------|
| god | 10615 |
| shall | 6606 |
| christ | 4790 |
| hath | 4480 |
| lord | 4371 |
| great | 4149 |
| make | 3810 |
| man | 3584 |
| men | 3414 |
| unto | 3385 |
| water | 3355 |
| spirit | 3141 |
| said | 2948 |
| time | 2917 |
| like | 2912 |

**1666-1700**

| Term | Count |
|------|-------|
| god | 14359 |
| shall | 8650 |
| hath | 6052 |
| great | 5895 |
| christ | 5703 |
| lord | 5341 |
| men | 4981 |
| make | 4736 |
| man | 4398 |
| good | 4219 |
| time | 4163 |
| said | 4062 |
| like | 4061 |
| water | 3870 |
| things | 3539 |

I doubted that the texts would change that dramatically as to be represented in the top 15 words. Religious words and inevitable verbs like shall and hath dominate.

And what about collocates? Does fire appear near different words after the Great Fire?

Text for 1632-1665

|   | Term | Collocate | Count (context) |
|---|---|---|---|
| | fire | shall | 209 |
| | fire | water | 162 |
| | fire | brimstone | 141 |
| | fire | god | 135 |
| | fire | set | 130 |
| | fire | great | 119 |
| | fire | make | 106 |
| | fire | consumed | 98 |
| | fire | hell | 98 |
| | fire | heaven | 90 |
| | fire | lord | 87 |
| | fire | hath | 83 |
| | fire | time | 82 |
| | fire | cast | 81 |
| | fire | burnt | 80 |
| | fire | like | 80 |
| | fire | london | 79 |

Here is the text for the 1666-1667

|   | Term | Collocate | Count (context) |
|---|---|---|---|
| | fire | god | 290 |
| | fire | shall | 263 |
| | fire | water | 231 |
| | fire | set | 188 |
| | fire | great | 176 |
| | fire | brimstone | 170 |
| | fire | hath | 150 |
| | fire | consumed | 145 |
| | fire | london | 134 |
| | fire | time | 134 |
| | fire | hell | 133 |
| | fire | houses | 133 |
| | fire | make | 130 |
| | fire | burnt | 121 |
| | fire | like | 121 |
| | fire | house | 113 |
| | fire | heaven | 104 |

A-ha! Here, the differences are a little more interesting. God dominates post-Fire, even more so than pre-Fire, but other religious words have dropped, making room for the rise of terms like London and house(s). Could this point toward a greater concern for the physical consequences of fire displacing some of the spiritual aspects? Such a claim can certainly not be substantiated here,

but the suggestions from these are at the very least fuel for thought.

At this point, as we think about changes in word usage, a look at the overall parts of speech may be in order. For this, I turned to IPython, a powerful programming language. Coming from essentially nonexistent experience with coding, I managed to examine the two corpora.

1632-1700 [insert link to IPython notebook]
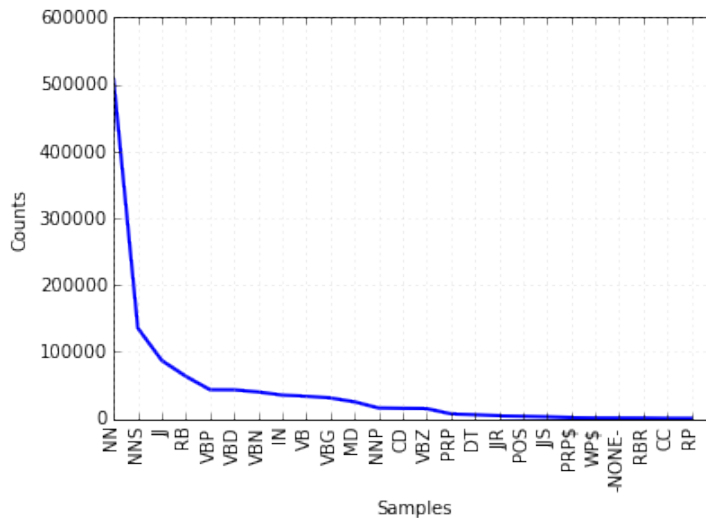


1666-1700
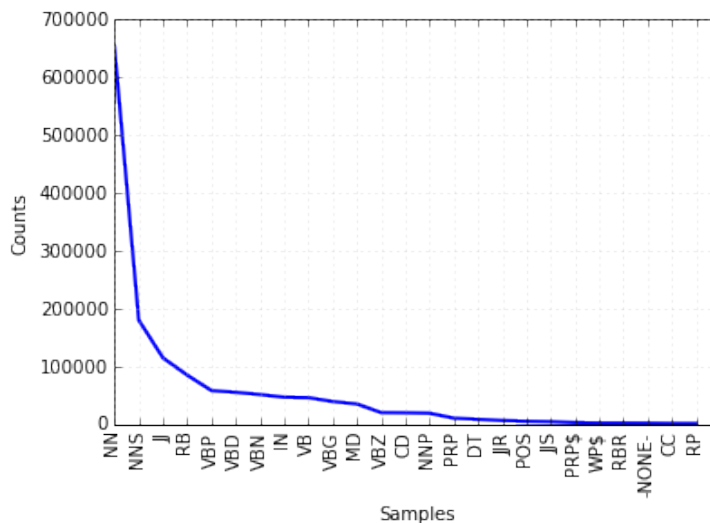


The shapes of the graphs are quite similar. The most common terms are, of course, nouns, singular or mass, and nouns, plural. The most interesting shift from this cursory look is that two terms switch order. In the 1666-1700 texts, 3rd person singular present verbs are more common than proper nouns. A has 15826 NNP and 14834 VBZ, while B has 19228 VBZ and 18225 NNP.

In both cases, the difference is about 1000 words. Considering room for errors (what's the accuracy of pos?), we might not be able to give too much attribution to these discrepancies in numbers, but, when taken in concert with Wall's assertion that that type of verb started to be used more in regards to describing London after the Fire, perhaps some further investigation is due.

At this point, I decided to check on a year-by-year basis around the Great Fire to see how many texts were published with fire* in the title.

| Year | title: fire* | total texts | Percentage of texts with fire* of total texts |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1661 | 2 | 570 | 0.35% |
| 1662 | 2 | 395 | 0.51% |
| 1663 | 2 | 354 | 0.56% |
| 1664 | 0 | 302 | 0.00% |
| 1665 | 3 | 317 | 0.95% |
| 1666 | 13 | 208 | 6.25% |
| 1667 | 12 | 196 | 6.12% |
| 1668 | 3 | 207 | 1.45% |
| 1669 | 3 | 182 | 1.65% |
| 1670 | 1 | 370 | 0.27% |
| 1671 | 4 | 241 | 1.66% |

The boom in 1666-1667 is to be expected, and the next investigation I did of the subject would more carefully take those into consideration and comparison.

iii. Conclusion

The majority of this article may seem like it is just scratching the surface – and that's because it is! Figuring out what questions to ask is half the battle. However, even these cursory results are inspiring and could easily build into a larger project. Are there differences between "official" narratives of the Fire, such as from the King, and texts like broadsheets? How do genres build into this narrative of the fire—do plays, sermons, and poetry handle the Fire differently? Another aspect remaining unexplored here is the increase of cartographical language following the Fire – Wall argues that other genres started borrowing from the topographical, and the results of house(s) rising in the collocates after the fire tempts me to delve deeper into these two corpora using the same time-span but with different keywords combining genres, and the language of different genres, in new ways.