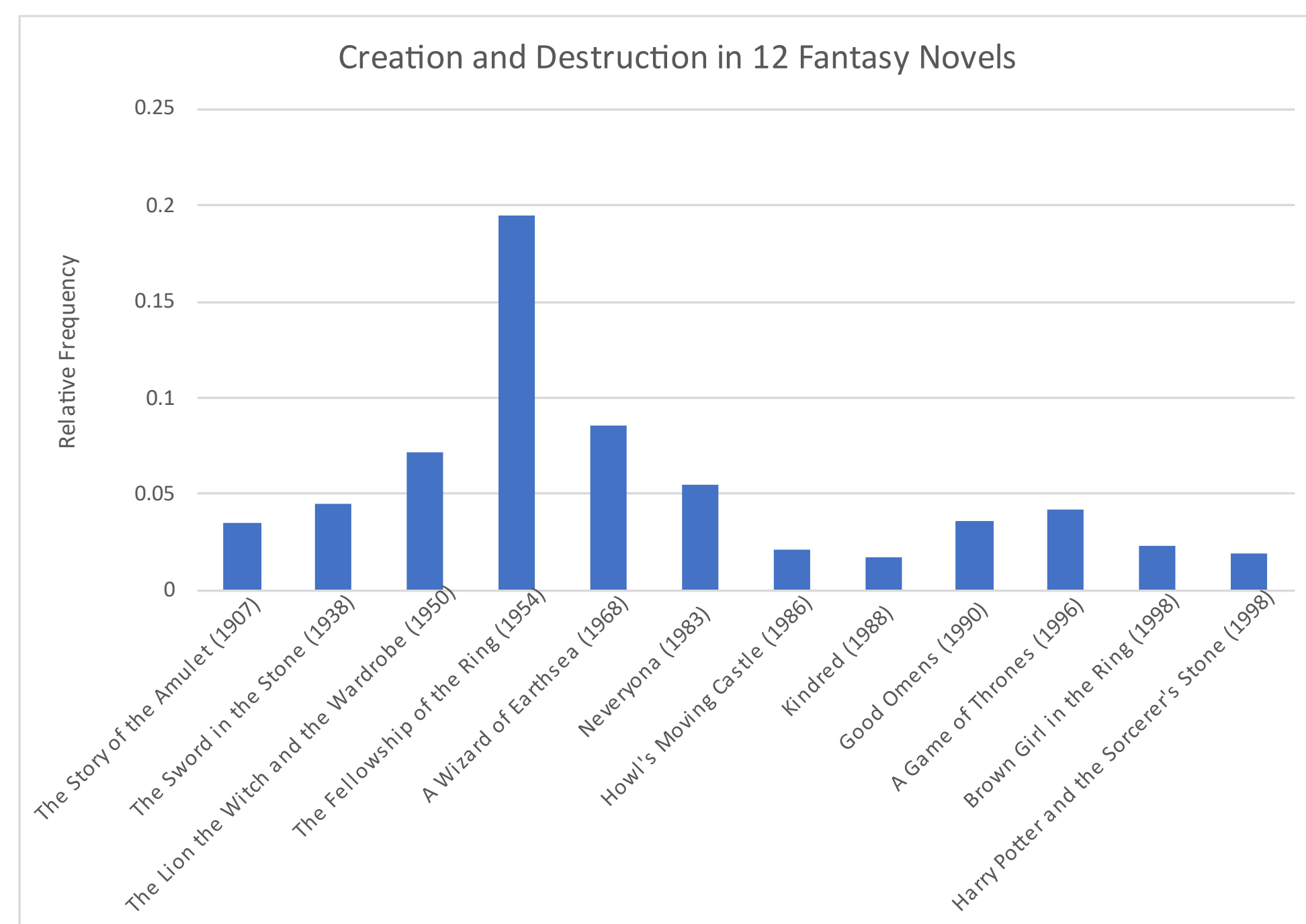


The Edge of Cognition: Asymptotic Reenchantment in Lovecraft and Negarestani

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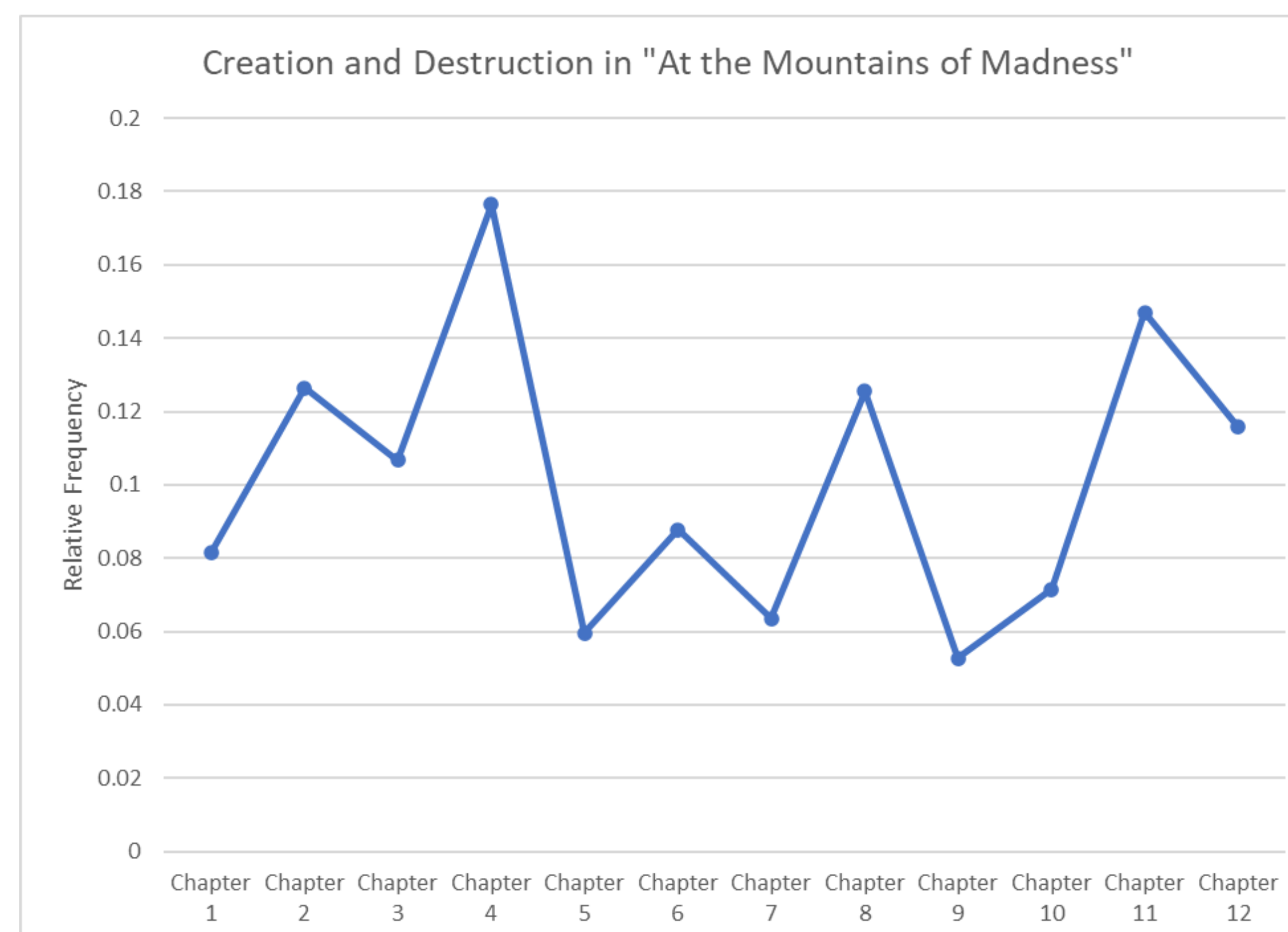


12 Fantasy Novels



Relative Frequency of "Creation and Destruction" MALLET Topic across Fantasy Corpus

"At the Mountains of Madness" (1936)



Relative Frequency of "Creation and Destruction" MALLET Topic in each Chapter of "At the Mountains of Madness"

Overview

1. My project aims to explain the enduring influence of H.P. Lovecraft's Cthulhu Mythos, especially among authors opposed to his racist and reactionary politics, by arguing that Lovecraft's work presents a philosophy of "asymptotic reenchantment."
2. Discourses of asymptotic re-enchantment begin as realism or science fiction but then progressively approach the boundary between these naturalistic genres and supernatural fantasy, without ever crossing the border.
3. To illustrate these epistemological shifts, I use topic modeling to isolate characteristic topics (including "Creation and Destruction," "The Past," and "Perception") from a set of 12 fantasy novels and then track the prevalence of these topics across Lovecraft's "At the Mountains of Madness" (1936) and Reza Negarestani's Lovecraftian treatise/novel *Cyclonopedia* (2008).
4. My results suggest that the magical character of these texts rises and falls periodically, cyclically disenchanting and reenchanting the world. This discourse provides an alternative epistemology to the racialized scientism and secularism of neoliberalism without abandoning science wholesale.

Methods

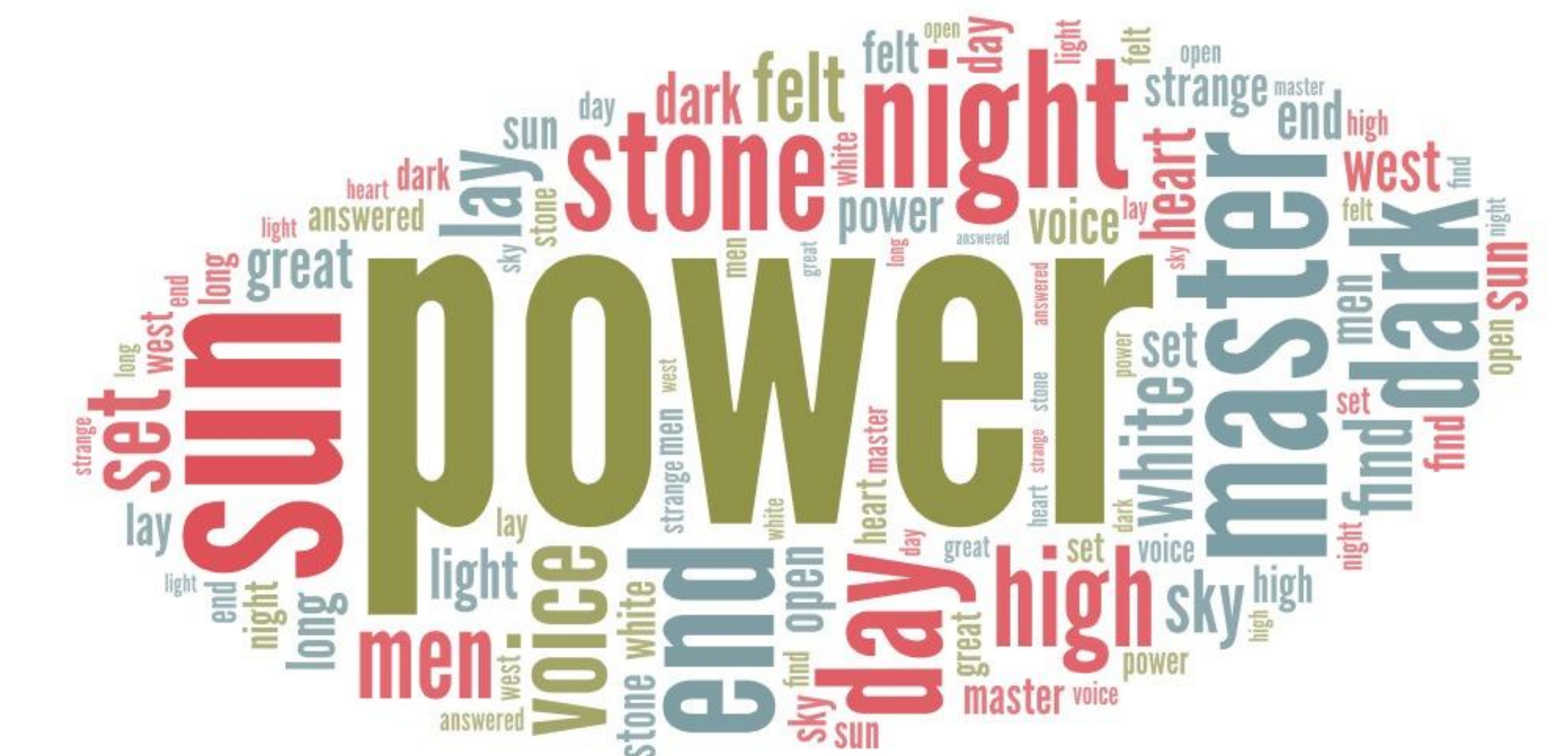
1. Topic modelling is a form of untrained machine learning in which an algorithm processes a series of text files and then outputs a set of lists of words that, based on proximity to each other and other factors, it believes represent themes or topics in that set of text files. The program also measures the relative frequency of each topic list in each text file and outputs those measurements.
2. Using the program MALLET, I ran topic modelling simulations on several data sets, always using the same 12 fantasy novels as a core but with different sets of texts written or influenced by Lovecraft added on. The three corpora I discuss in this poster are
 1. 12 fantasy novels (Fantasy)
 2. 12 fantasy novels + Lovecraft's "At the Mountains of Madness" broken up by chapter (Fantasy +MoM)
 3. 12 fantasy novels + Negarestani's *Cyclonopedia* broken up by chapter (Fantasy+Cyc)

Results and Conclusion

1. MALLET generated a topic I label "Creation and Destruction" (see Word Cloud) and which I believe to be an indicator of high fantasy magic because of its prevalence of words related to the elements, the distant past, and human agency. Together they evoke the ability to control the natural world by speech or will.
2. This topic appeared (in slightly different versions) in MALLET's analysis of the Fantasy, Fantasy+MoM, and Fantasy+Cyc corpora. Its prevalence across both Lovecraft's and Negarestani's texts rose and fell cyclically.
3. This leads me to conclude that these texts repeatedly approach toward and then retreat from the border between science and magic, constantly testing the boundaries of science without abandoning it.

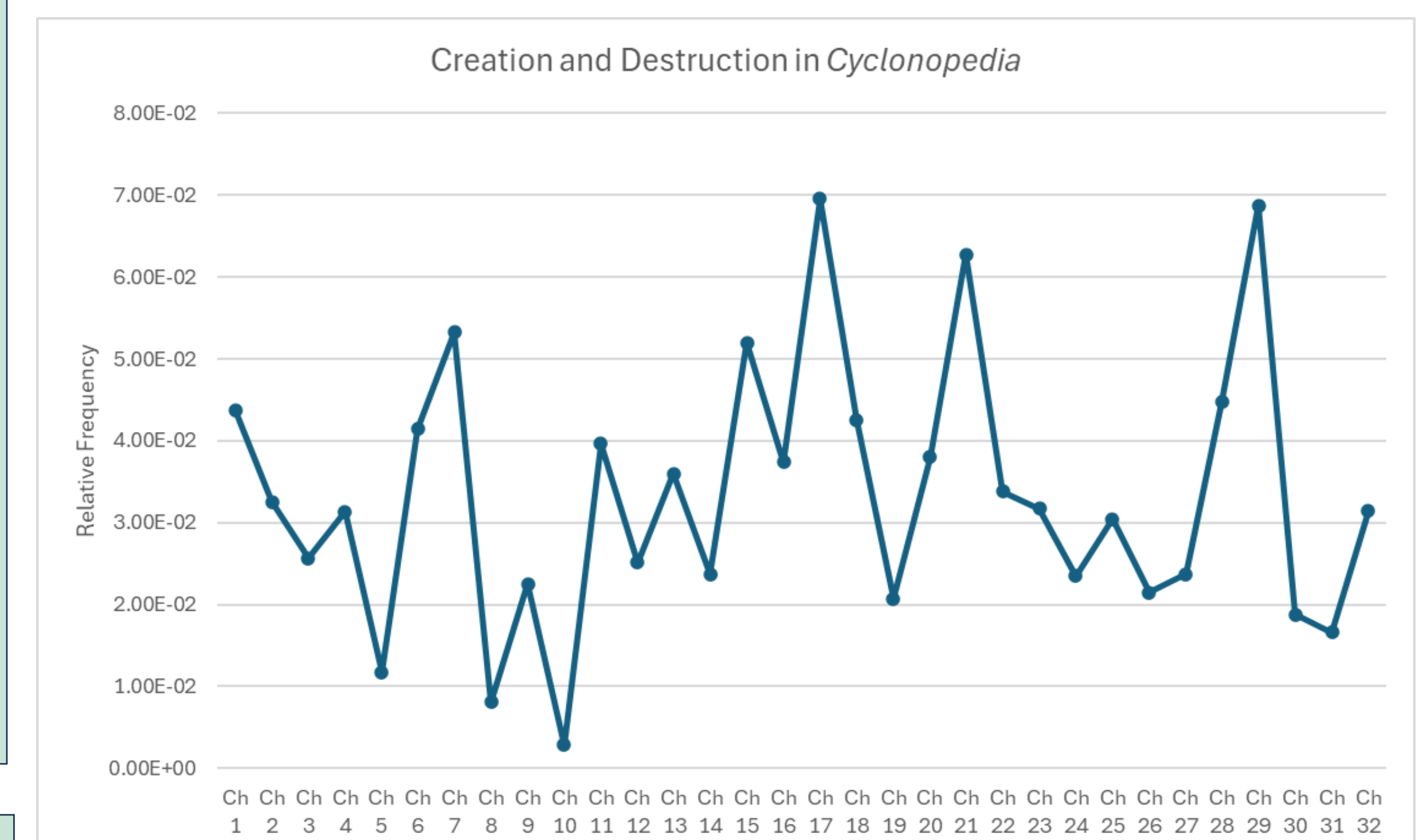


Creation and Destruction Topic



Word Cloud of the "Creation and Destruction" MALLET Topic Created with Voyant Tools

Cyclonopedia (2008)



Relative Frequency of "Creation and Destruction" MALLET Topic in each Chapter of *Cyclonopedia*

