

Visually Mapping the Narrative System of Dostoevsky's *The Idiot*

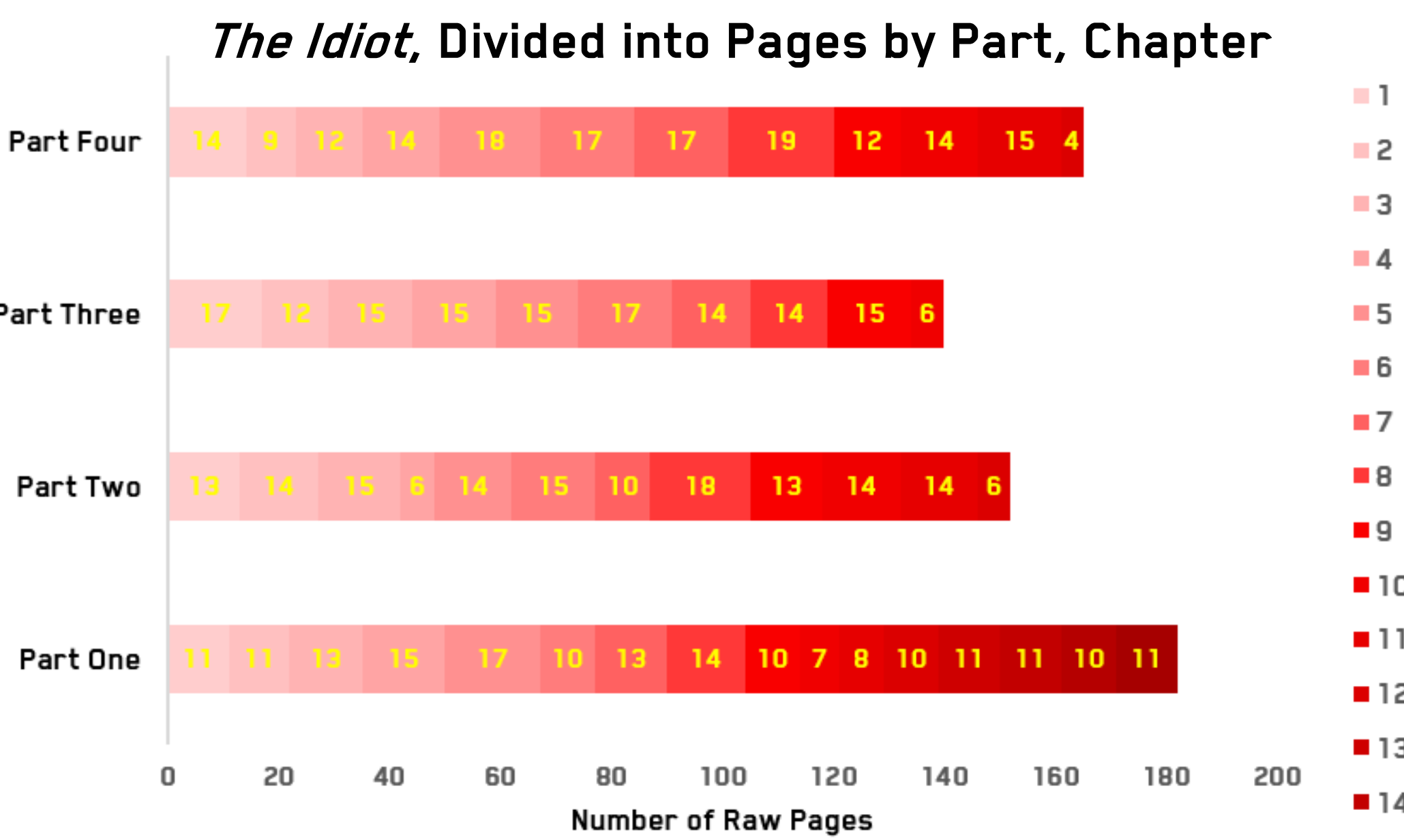
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ABSTRACT

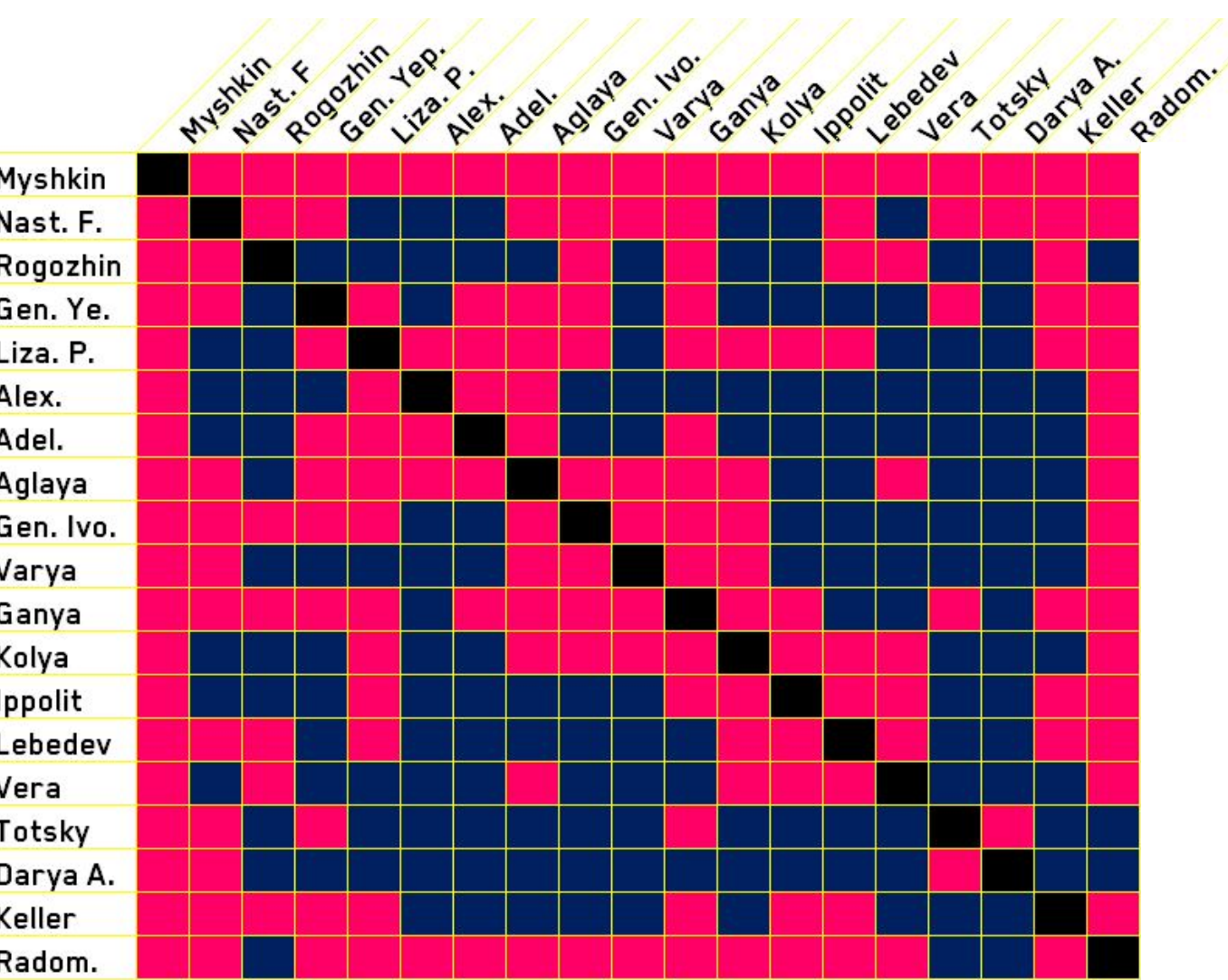
This research creates a visual system for analyzing Dostoevsky's *The Idiot*. I define five factors—space, time, character (individual actor), network (unique aggregate of certain actors), and narrative voice—and visually explore their dyadic and triadic relationships. Taking the dyad of character and network, I identify all named entities within the novel and describe each person to whom they are connected. I then define factors for determining the degree of closeness in each of these relationships, and represent the degree via line value; those more closely related will be connected by thicker, darker lines. Other dyads and triads rely on visualizing schemes inspired by music notation, thermal imaging, and set theory. In visualizing and representing the novel's varied mechanisms and parts, I track the evolution of Dostoevsky's narrative and artistic system at a bird's eye view. *The Idiot* is a vast narrative universe rich in events, actors, and narratorial turns; the reader's task is additionally overwhelmed by the novel's sheer mass and density. *The Idiot's* layered sources of complexity invite the visual approach undertaken in this study.

METHODS

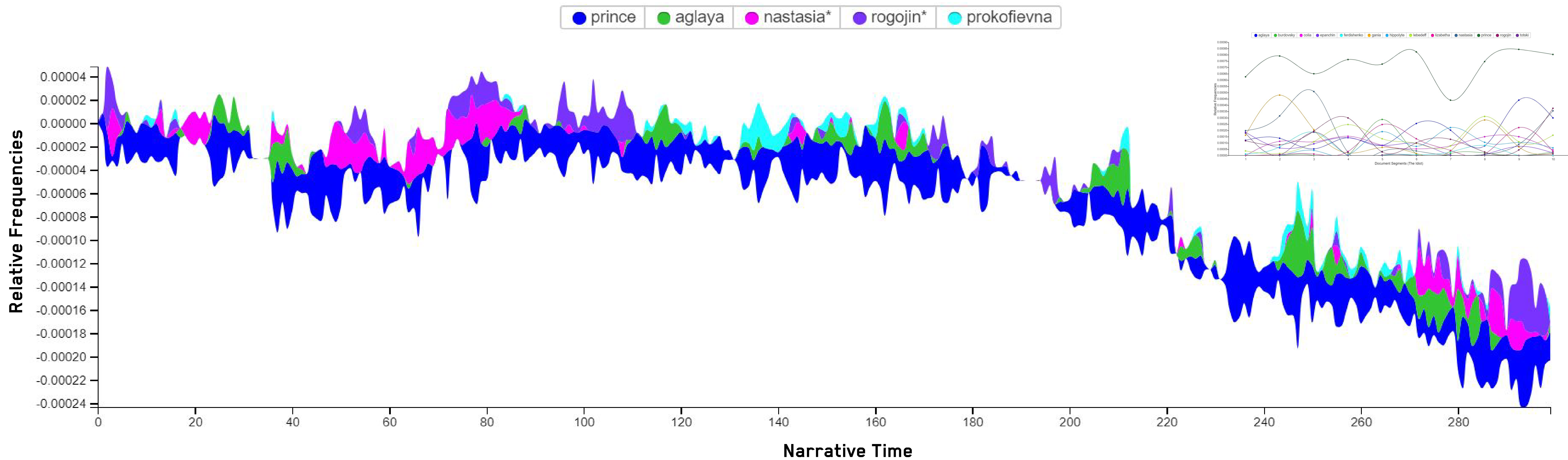
I first constructed a data table of *The Idiot's* characters, and marked who shared a relationship with whom. I determined the presence or absence of a relationship on the basis of whether or not two characters had conversed. Rather than aligning individuals based on family belonging or occupying a shared social space (both assuming ties that may or may not be present), I wanted to analyze the network of interactions and thus the true energy of the narrative system. I completed other analyses of the text to look at how the narrative was organized along the five factors I note in my abstract. Using the software Voyant Tools, I began to explore the texture of the narrative fabric on a few levels, including frequency of characters' appearance, distribution of characters, and the degrees of their correlation within the text.



Character Relation Chart (Raw)



Character Relation Map (Relative) with Respect to Narrative Time



Ranking by Relationships

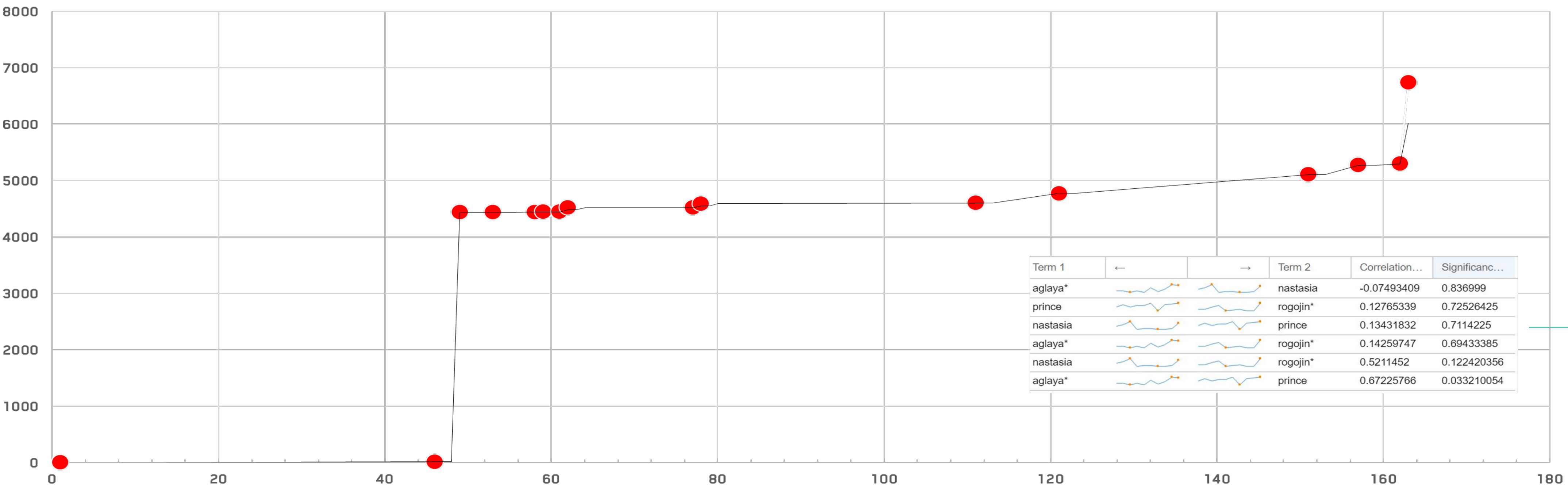
| | | | | |
|----|----------|---------|--------|------|
| 18 | Myshkin | | | |
| 15 | Radom. | | | |
| 14 | Ganya | | | |
| 12 | NF | LP | Aglaya | |
| 10 | GY | GI | Kolya | |
| 9 | Keller | | | |
| 8 | Ippolit | Lebedev | | |
| 7 | Rogozhin | Adel. | Varya | Vera |
| 5 | Alex. | Totsky | | |

NOTE: The most prominent characters, thematically and in the development they receive, are Prince Myshkin, Aglaya, Nastasya Filippovna, and Rogozhin. That this does not exactly correlate with most "inter-connectedness" to the rest of the narrative's actors yields many productive questions.

Distribution, Visual Frequency of Characters through the Text



In-universe Time with respect to Narrative Time



As noted in the abstract of this project, one of my research goals is to characterize networks of interaction based on the intensity of the bond between individuals. I then sought to understand how those relationships develop with respect to time, both narrative and in-universe. One way to explore intensity and begin that research is through the significance of the correlation between two characters in the text.

DISCUSSION

This research began with a written analysis of the nature of belief and beliefs surrounding the nature of sin and redemption in *The Idiot*. I attempted to access the novel's structure and the narrative system, which I argued then and now to be at one with its aesthetic meaning. Due to the difficulty of the task, I then looked to explore visual modes of analysis. The process of visually and artistically exploring this text yielded a number of unexpected readings and understandings. Characters who I had not considered important were revealed to be better-connected and more communicative than originally perceived. The novel's manipulations of time obscured significant simultaneities, such as the development of a pivotal relationship that is subtly revealed under cover of the novel's final chaos of tragedy. Going forward in my research, I will explore different theories for the novel's narratorial authority. This research further enabled me to engage with the growing area of digital humanities. I explored the text with Voyant Tools, and on a deeper level, began to explore how others are integrating concepts from computer science, data analysis, and other disciplines to analyze literature.

References

Dostoevsky, Fyodor. *Myshkin, Alan, and Leatherbarrow, William J. The Idiot*. Oxford: New York: Oxford UP, 2008. Print. Oxford World's Classics (Oxford University Press).
Martin, Eva. *The Idiot*. Project Gutenberg. Web.
Sinclair, Stefan and Geoffrey Rockwell. *Voyant Tools*. 2019. Web. 14 Apr 2019.



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