

## Jan Angermeier, “The Character-System of *The Great Gatsby* - an Intelligent System Visualized”

**Abstract:** “[O]ne of the most important contributions to literary theory of the past twenty or thirty years.” This is how literary historian Franco Moretti refers to narratologist Alex Woloch’s concept of character-space. Character-space describes the narrative space given to a single character in a text while a character-system is tantamount to the interplay between the different character-spaces. Or in Woloch’s words: “the discrete representation of any specific individual is intertwined with the narrative’s continual apportioning of attention to different characters who jostle for limited space within the same fictive universe.” The task of measuring character-spaces was tackled by scholar Graham Sack . For measurement in prose texts he employs character names as an instrumental variable, i.e. a value that is easily measurable but at the same time only an approximation of the concept that is supposed to be measured.

My approach builds on Sack’s paper, yet also features some different design choices. The object of this research is Fitzgerald’s novel *The Great Gatsby*. In the initial step I create a sensible catalogue of character names for the cast of the novel, i.e. I take care to consider as many name variants as possible, e.g. Jay Gatsby is also referred to as Jimmy and James Gatz. The next step involves the chapters of the novel as plain text files. A Python-script counts the name mentions of all characters in each chapter and saves the counts in csv-files. This extracted data is the basis for generating a multitude of visualizations which in turn offers insight into the novel’s character-system. Finally, a careful interpretation of the findings allows for a reading of *The Great Gatsby* in a new light, i.e. underpinned by measurement. In other words, Fitzgerald’s novel qua intelligent system can thus be made visible.

The meta-goal of this approach is to show an exemplary use case for instrumental variables in literary studies and that a sensible involvement of quantitative methods can be instructive in researching fictional texts.

**Jan Angermeier** is currently studying for his master’s degree in the Digital Humanities program at Stuttgart University. Before that, he completed his bachelor’s degree at Stuttgart in English and Political Science. Additionally, he had the privilege to participate in the Erasmus program for a trimester at Edinburgh Napier University. Developing an interest for (post-)colonial literature and Lacanian psychoanalysis led to his bachelor’s thesis “*Onlookers see most of the game*”: *Ideal and Individual Myth in Conrad’s Lord Jim*. During his master’s studies, he applied Lacanian thinking and adjacent theories to authors like Chopin, Yeats, and Auster. Exposure to digital humanities brought him experience in annotation (e.g., employment at the QuaDramA research project) and novel paradigms for literary studies, chiefly Moretti’s approaches. His research interests are world literature, narratology, Freudo-Marxian theories, applying and reflecting on digital methodology.