

Margret Gunnarsdottir Champion, *Dwelling in Language: Character, Psychoanalysis and Literary Consolations*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2013. ISBN 978-3-631-64437-9. 337 pages.

Literary character as a transferential node is one of the main focuses of Margret Gunnarsdottir Champion's foundational book on the ontological and therapeutic nature of character. As such, literary character positions itself in the text simultaneously as analyst and analysand/reader resulting in a therapeutic space for the alienated subject, the reader/spectator. By referencing character in Greek Tragedies (Oedipus via Freud), Old English Elegies (*The Wife's Lament*), and Shakespearean neurotic portraits (Hamlet via Lacan) as well as contemporary modernist works, Gunnarsdottir Champion weaves an innovative perspective on literary character as a primal and psychoanalytical nexus of ritual and identity. Senior Lecturer in English Literature at the University of Gothenburg in Sweden and possessing an extensive publishing history, Gunnarsdottir Champion demonstrates in depth her expertise in literary theory and her skill in arguing the crossover of the latter into an aesthetically anchored psychoanalytic register centered in character.

In *Dwelling in Language*, Gunnarsdottir Champion explains that throughout literary history, character, as 'mode of being,' (re)produces the recursive effects of primary narcissism thereby effecting a revisiting of the *l'heure*, the hour/the *allure*, of the maternal desire. And this (re)triggers the primal cathexis in a pathological bliss at the cusp of subjectivity where secondary narcissism and loss of selfhood emerges. Gunnarsdottir Champion further posits that subsequently, like an analyst staging the therapeutic processes, character becomes both witness and transferential reflection guiding the reader/analysand, in a *scripted* semblance of the *talking cure*, toward eventual resolution in ethical renewal and consolation.

Relying on Freudian psychoanalytic innovations primarily through the structuralist lens(es) of Lacan, Gunnarsdottir Champion adeptly illustrates and substantiates her case for character as stand-in for the reader/analysand in the (re)possessing of the phallus that results in an altruistic sublimation of 'mOther' as the *objet petit a*—the Lacanian construct. Her deployment of Lacan in *Dwelling in Language* is extremely substantive and offers her readers the fringe benefit of an innovative review of the Lacanian opus as it relates to identity in alienation and to literature.

Gunnarsdottir Champion argues that the "partly fantasized, and partly real" quality of the 'object *a*' -that is, the subject's sublimating of the pre-lingual fixation in "mOther's desire" at "the mere level of signifiers," correlates to the "partly fantasized and partly real" quality of character and so contributes to a binding effect for the reader. What this signifies is that literary character brings the reader back to the primal tipping point of plenitude and misrecognition where s/he experiences the equivalent of Plato's *agalma*, a kind of altruistic or noble "pathological *jouissance*,"

that marks the commencement of the reader/analysand's therapeutic journey to symbolic identity and consolation. Gunnarsdottir Champion continues her argument in a scintillating manner by re-evaluating the Shakespeare's quintessential character Hamlet. Drawing from Lacan's psychoanalytic treatment of the reluctant protagonist, Gunnarsdottir Champion posits that Hamlet is a prime example of the character-as-instigator triggering the effect of "noble *jouissance*" in the reader/spectator. Hamlet, as stand-in for the subject, experiences a neurotic, albeit at the verge of modulating, primal *jouissance*: regressive and reluctant on the one hand, but, on the other hand, already socially mobilized, already nobly tipping the scale in the pathological morass of narcissistic bliss toward the assumption of the phallus. Hamlet's second-order (Imaginary to Symbolic), noble spark of *jouissance* lies in his (and our) persistent struggle to sublimate "mOther's desire" and resolve the Oedipal drama in an altruistic structure of alienated self-knowledge. And this, in Gunnarsdottir Champion's project, is the work of character, *who*, as the reader's prosopopeia, as well as signifier, bears the recursive *ethos* of the human condition. Given these qualities, Gunnarsdottir Champion's character in literature is intrinsically elegiac and so at many levels consolatory to those who *consume* literary works. *Dwelling in Language* posits that character accomplishes consolation by evoking a renewal of ritual, transference, and Oedipal resolution at the level of psychoanalytic (re)structuring of identity for the alienated subject.

Gunnarsdottir Champion brilliantly lays out the Lacanian concept that the alienated human identity is a contradiction and a split subject (\$), not the misconstrued whole that narcissitic subjectivity seems to reflect onto the ego. She argues that this is precisely the condition of literary character: split between the materiality of the text comprised of insentient letters on the one hand, and the sense of a whole person one identifies with in the narrative, on the other. Both the subject/reader and the character consist of a Narcissus-like 'poor-plenty,' a *lack*: a parallel *meconnaissance* creating a cross-identification similar to the analyst/analysand relationship that results in a transference work zone in the narrative.

Making a strong case for differentiating her book from others in the field, Gunnarsdottir Champion argues that literary character is under-theorized and consists traditionally of hyperbole and reductions. She substantiates this position by referring to the accomplished, albeit limiting, work on character by Cixous and Wensheimer, among others, including Anglo-American theorists, who narrow their research and so miss what Gunnarsdottir Champion calls the "surplus of the term" character: "the way in which it exceeds its own status as structure, portrait or fetish." Gunnarsdottir Champion agrees with John Frow in his concern over this under-theorization; and she has answered the call of his self-proclaimed 'prolegomenon' on the subject (John Frow, *Poetics Today*, Vol. 7, Issue 2, 1986 pp. 227-250). Frow invokes the field of narratology to correct what both he and Gunnarsdottir Champion consider a critical

lacuna in the study of character. Gunnarsdottir Champion's answer to this gap is to produce *Dwelling in Language*, a foundational tome on the psychoanalytical and consolatory nature of literary character.

Gunnarsdottir Champion's book is intellectually stimulating--albeit not for the faint of heart. Her writing, directed towards scholars in the fields of semiotics, psychoanalysis and literary criticism, is succinct and technical at times. However, enthusiasts in these areas of study will be greatly rewarded for their perseverance. *Dwelling in Language* would be of substantial benefit to scholars in the fields of narratology, especially those who specialize in literary character, psychoanalysis, and structuralism, as well as the trans-historicity of these. In addition, Gunnarsdottir Champion's tome is of great value to those scholars and enthusiasts with interests in the subjects of semiotics, psychoanalysis and literary history.

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