



BOOK REVIEW:

*Identifying Self through Society: A Socio-
psychological Perspective of A Song of Ice and
Fire*

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Dhantal, Smita. *Identifying Self through Society: A Socio-psychological Perspective of A Song of Ice and Fire*. Christ University, 2024.

Dr. Smita Dhantal's doctoral thesis, *Identifying 'Self' Through Society: A Socio-Psychological Perspective of A Song of Ice and Fire*, sets out to promote a new model for describing fictional characters relative to social and psychological factors. SPCAM (the Social Psychological Character Analysis Model) aims to help researchers be "more methodical and thorough" (vii) in their analyses, offering a novel approach to organizing social and psychological data on fictional characters. The model contextualizes each character's development against affecting social forces and psychological factors, through which those conflicting influences are renegotiated. It then tabulates social and psychological influences on characters, offering various visualizations to depict how the factors interrelate. These charts and tables require careful interpretation but present a thoroughness that could assist researchers in addressing details that might otherwise be overlooked.

The first character from George R. R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* that Dr. Dhantal analyzes is Sansa Stark, examined through the lens of adolescence. This is the least theoretically complex of the readings, and Dr. Dhantal uses this analysis to illustrate the model's basic operations while offering general insights into Sansa's development. Building on this, Dr. Dhantal then expands into a focus on engagement with more overtly external social forces by analyzing Arya Stark in the context of religion. This second analysis highlights the complex interplay between religious influence and individual psychology in the novels, as it manifests in Arya's life experiences.

Next, to further illustrate the model's versatility, Dr. Dhantal shows how it can offer insights even into comparatively minor characters. To this end, the study on Viserys Targaryen in the third analysis chapter contrasts the character's self-perception with their perception by society, highlighting a productive interplay between the contrasting perspectives.

Lastly, in the culminating analysis, Dr. Dhantal builds on the preceding examples to engage with the social model of disability and analyze the development of Tyrion Lannister. Aimed at emphasizing SPCAM's ability to engage with major theoretical perspectives, the analysis highlights how social and psychological forces work together to construct or deconstruct Tyrion as a disabled character. This illuminates how various actors and social trends work to hide his abilities and undermine his accomplishments by reference to his disabled status. At the same time, Tyrion's actions and perspective are found to show various attempts to resist, renegotiate, or occasionally exploit that construction. Finally this is compared to other characters with the same physical condition, demonstrating that Tyrion's perspective is shaped by factors beyond disability and ability. Hence the analysis demonstrates how gender, class, and other forms of social privilege have been central to his ability to resist and renegotiate his status and how they have contributed to the nuances of his sense of self.

Dr. Dhantal notes that the model has been published as a patent by the Government of India and forms the basis of several forthcoming publications, suggesting further developments and explorations yet to come. While in the long run we may come to see this as an early iteration of SPCAM, already the present version shows interesting avenues for refinement and adaptability toward ongoing research. Although in its current form SPCAM is more descriptive than analytical, as Dr. Dhantal shows, it provides a basis that can lay the groundwork for nuanced analytical conclusions. Furthermore, the tables and charts that can be generated with the model may provide a constructive way for researchers to organize their observations. Overall, Dr. Dhantal's work establishes a foundation for methodological character analysis, inviting further development and scholarly engagement. It will be interesting to see how the model evolves across subsequent applications.

Biography: Nicholas Wanberg holds a PhD from the University of Tampere, where his research focused on intelligent non-human creatures in speculative fiction and their role in engaging with race and Whiteness. His published and forthcoming works examine Whiteness, gender, reproduction, and aesthetics across fan fiction, film, and literature. He is not currently affiliated with academia or pursuing an academic career.