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What are you reading?

Martínez, M-A. (2018). *Storyworld Possible Selves*. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton.

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María-Ángeles Martínez's *Storyworld Possible Selves* (2018) offers a theoretical framework within the realm of postclassical narratology, positioned on the intersection of cognitive narratology, cognitive linguistics, and social psychology. The book provides a model to better understand the reader's engagement with a story. Basing itself on the idea of blending, as understood by Fauconnier and Turner (2002), Martínez seeks to embrace and map the idiosyncrasy of the reading experience by suggesting potential overlaps between two mental spaces: the reader's self-perception and their perception of the focalizing character. By blending these two mental spaces into one new space, different kinds of what Martínez calls storyworld possible selves or SPSs emerge, defined as 'imagings of the self in storyworlds' (Martínez, 2014, p.119). The model as conceptually delineated within the book is imminently suitable for the analysis of empirical data gathered from actual readers, bridging the wide gap that exists between academic and lay readers, as has recently been done in several studies. In that sense, it manages to escape the generic image of the reader as often reverted to in previous literary theories concerning readership.

In her book, Martínez delves deeper into the engagement readers might experience while reading a narrative by means of schematic illustrations of the possible blends formed in a reading experience. That is, readers can employ parts of their self-concept: who they think they are (self-schema), who they would like to be (desired possible self), who they fear they might become (undesired possible self), and who they once were (past possible self). The overlaps the reader can find between the self-concept and their perception of the character (the character construct) determines the engagement they experience with the narrative. Martínez delineates five types of SPSs in the process: the Self-schema SPS, the Desired possible self SPS, the Undesired possible self SPS, the Past possible self SPS, and the Past SPS (Martínez, 2018, p. 148-149). Each SPS type mentioned is supported by literary examples, lifting the book out of its mere conceptual dimension.

The last of the abovementioned SPS types, the Past SPS, entails blends based on previous narrative experiences. It illustrates how Martínez seeks to account not only for the idiosyncratic reading experiences themselves, but also the potential aftermath created by said experience as she suggests that narrative engagement as delineated in her theory might even 'transform the real-world self' (Martínez, 2018, p. 1). If readers can thus be altered by narrative, it could, by extent, be argued that this book helps connecting the discipline of literary studies to real world action.

Since I mostly focus on children's literature in my research, the transformative potential of narratives as discussed by Martínez proves itself especially interesting as adults actively seek narratives that aid in the development of the next generation. The storyworld possible selves' framework, in this sense, provides an excellent method to investigate exactly what it is children take away from narratives provided to them in their sections of the bookstore: Is a black Ariel or a Latina Snow White as detrimental to our sense of tradition as we sometimes think it is? Or do they bring the kind of inclusivity needed in children's narratives? It has been argued many times that children should be able to recognize themselves and others in the narratives they consume. Therefore, a diverse representation of gender and race, among other identity positions, proves crucial to include all children and not just those fitting the reigning norms.

To shed a new light on the concerns around preserving tradition while simultaneously enhancing inclusivity in tales with arguably outdated values, I intend to map children's perceptions of characters in traditional fairy tales who are discriminated based on age, gender, or bodily features and the potential development villain retellings might evoke in those perceptions. I thereby aim to expose to what extent a balance can be found between tradition and inclusive values in the transmission of said tales. By means of storyworld possible selves, the study seeks to understand how engagement with the characters in fairy tales might change if a kinder, extended attention is devoted to those characters usually

demonized or banned to the periphery of the story. Martínez's framework proves itself to be imminently suitable to trace the specific changes in children's perceptions that I seek to uncover.

In the recent years after *Storyworld Possible Selves* was released, Martínez, in collaboration with Melina Ghasseminejad, has published an article suggesting a revision to her original theory. In said article, they investigated the cultural determination of certain SPSs. That is, an SPS can be completely idiosyncratic, a blend only created by one or very few readers, which would be called a slipnet SPS, or it can apply to all readers, rendering it a primary SPS. Nevertheless, certain SPSs occasionally apply to multiple readers, but not all. This new category was dubbed secondary SPSs. In doing so, a nuance has been made to Martínez's original framework based on its use in a specific research project. In that sense, I can imagine this theory will be subject to some more minor alterations or additions as its use in the field of literary studies increases, inevitably bringing about necessary nuances to the larger structure. Nonetheless, the alterations suggested are witness of the imminent relevance of *Storyworld Possible Selves* to the present-day field of literary studies, a new tradition my research intends to uphold.

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