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NARRATIVE LANGUAGE AND POSSIBLE WORLDS IN POSTMODERN FICTION. A BORDERLINE STUDY OF IAN McEWAN'S *THE CHILD IN TIME*

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ABSTRACT. ***Narrative Language and Possible Worlds in Postmodern Fiction. A Borderline Study of Ian McEwan's* The Child in Time.** The present paper is a study of more traditional hermeneutics combined with a tinge of possible world modality, with the purpose of creating a thorough picture of narrative worlds and balancing it against the possible world system, with practical applications onto postmodern fiction, in Ian McEwan's novel *The Child in Time*. The article focuses on exposing narrative language, worlds and characters, viewing them through Seymour Chatman's perspective and slightly counterbalancing this approach with the possible world semantics system (as envisioned by Kripke, Lewis, Nolan, Putnam) for a diverse understanding of the inner structure and functioning of narrative text and fictional worlds.

Keywords: *possible worlds, possible-world semantics, narrative worlds, fictional worlds, narrative language, fiction, postmodern fiction, fictional characters.*

REZUMAT. ***Limbajul narativ și lumile posibile în ficțiunea postmodernă. Un studiu hibrid al romanului* Copilul furat*, de Ian McEwan.*** Prezenta lucrare este un studiu hibrid al hermeneuticii tradiționale îmbinat cu trimiteri către semantica modală a sistemului lumilor posibile, al cărui scop este acela de a se concretiza într-un studiu aprofundat al lumilor narative, prin intermediul semanticii modale a lumilor posibile, oferind aplicații practice asupra ficțiunii postmoderne, în romanul *Copilul furat* de Ian McEwan. Articolul se concentrează pe expunerea particularităților limbajului narativ, precum și a lumilor și personajelor ficționale, mai întâi din perspectiva lui Seymour Chatman și apoi printr-o ușoară contrabalansare a acestei abordări cu sistemul lumilor posibile (propus de Kripke, Lewis, Nolan, Putnam), oferind o imagine diversificată a structurii interne a textului narativ, a funcționalității acestuia, dar și a lumilor ficționale.

Cuvinte-cheie: *lumi posibile, semantica lumilor posibile, lumi narative, lumi ficționale, limbaj narativ, ficțiune, ficțiune postmodernă, personaje ficționale.*

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1. Introduction

To a considerable amount of surprise, perpetual studies in linguistics or specifically language in general, have, up to this point, had the impoverishing side effect of rendering a raw degree of incompleteness as far as reference or meaning is concerned or for that matter in providing that long enquired for answer to one of the most basic dilemmas, namely: "What do you mean?"

There has been much skepticism about how or even why possible worlds[2] should be considered by our present-day language philosophies, but the 21st century is all about multifold identities or codes that not only operate in one way in one world, but rather find plentiful resources to evade, to transcend what has so far been understood to be the world of experience and reality. Hardly any act of speech we enter is in some way tinged with a particular amount of possibility, triggering the emergence of a variety of possible worlds intrinsically connected to the source of their existence, none other than language itself.

From the starting point of logic, possible worlds and how they can or cannot function appear to be a legitimate narrative tool as well. However, applying the same framework to the realm of fiction may prove that the system needs more molding in order to fit the broader spectrum that fiction readily opens for research. This means that much wider ranges of accessibility relations are imminently required. As such, the present paper will revisit the notion of fictional entities and objects, attempting to reinterpret them through the methods of a different magnifying glass, that of possible world semantics and by applying this system to a more practical fictional realm, that of McEwan's novel *The Child in Time*.

2. A New Approach

First, it proves useful to resort to an analogy to Daniel Nolan's theory (2012) of the representation of things that do not have an actual form of existence. Of course, Nolan uses this approach to refer to representing aliens, but the logical principles are all valid. The same type of theory can be fruitfully employed to refer to objects and entities which gain some sort of existence in the actual world[3], simply because they are referred to and not because they physically exist. This is what aliens and fictional entities have in common. They are non-existent objects which still signify something at a referential level.

[2] Possible worlds are concepts in modal logic representing statements about what might be, could be or should be true. The possible world system proposed in this paper adheres to the modern philosophical use of the concept, as pioneered by Saul Kripke and David Lewis.

[3] The actual world needs to be understood as "reality". According to David Lewis, the actual world is special only in that "we live there".

Nolan blends his own views with a theory of "linguistic ersatizsm", which is a version of representational abstractionism about possible worlds.

The major difficulty encountered when dealing with non-actual objects in general is their non-existence status, which would automatically imply that it is impossible to refer to these entities and postulate any sort of truths about them. The problem arises mostly in the referential department, for one cannot refer to something that does not exist. The condition would be adhering to a set of more general features these objects possess and which makes it all the more possible to refer to them in different kinds of possible worlds, despite the fact that they are not available in the actual world continuum. In this respect, we would be able to speak of green monkeys in different kinds of possible worlds, even if we are aware of the fact that there are no such things as green monkeys. In the same manner, we would be speaking about the lost child in McEwan's novel, either within the possible worlds of the fiction or referring to these worlds as a part of a generalized discourse in the actual world.

The problem with this particular kind of perspective arises when considering the general features considered in relation with the non-existing objects. We might be thinking of a set of fleeting features which would make it impossible to maintain the sufficient degree of individuation. And yet, there is still this possibility out there of non-existent objects being imaginable or conceivable and there is also the possibility of speaking and describing fictional entities outside the claim of irrationality, as it has also been shown before. This is where Nolan introduces the concept of "universals" (2012, 95), which he applies to his broader alien discussion, but in this particular study, it will be applied onto the nature of fictional entities. The story about universals consists of considering that some universals that exist are uninstantiated, and that every possible kind of universal exists. This represents one of the first methods to be adopted on universals and it is revealing because it allows for working with certain concepts which may not be actualized or "instantiated" enough, when accessing this chain of possible worlds and alternatives. The possibility of the non-existence of fictional entities is always out there and it is a valid possibility just like any other. Still, it may not yet be the best of choices since fictional entities do make the object of various forms of discourse.

Nolan's theory (2012) of representing aliens has something in common with David Lewis' system of modality (1986), namely the willingness to demonstrate that it is after all possible to talk about and logically incorporate within discourse entities which cannot be directly named or represented by way of descriptions or properties. Nolan (2012) insists that the nature of those types of properties which do not reside in the actual world of existence are to be considered as conjunctive properties. The particulars about this kind of

properties, is that it is fairly easy to construct descriptions for them, thus excluding the pre-stated notion of existential universals. In addition to the conjunctive properties, David Armstrong (1989) identifies another type of properties and relations specific for non-existents under what he calls structural properties, which have only actual universes as their constituents.

Lewis' system of modality opposes Armstrong's position on structural properties. Armstrong's arguments state that a set of universals are structural which means that they display properties of a series of structural states or entities "consisting of instantiations of various simpler properties or relations" (Nolan 2012, 102). In order to exemplify this situation, we might consider one of the examples preferred also by Hilary Putnam (1983). If we considered the property of something being water and bearing the formula of H_2O, then the instantiated property of this water would be a structure consisting of one oxygen and two hydrogen atoms. Structural universals have their properties strongly engendered within the actual world of existence and therefore constitute the category of being the only sort of accepted universals. What is truly important when it comes to universals, is the fact that it is possible to produce such descriptions of them which might be considered as being individuated. This means that the descriptions can be as detailed and as minute as being able to depict the very arrangement of their constituents. Water in its broadly known formula H_2O may be described down to its very last atom, which is altogether acceptable as a logical endeavor. However, this is where Armstrong (1989) introduces his solution for dealing with non-existent universals. If water is made out of oxygen and hydrogen then we would still be able to describe it even if we had no idea of it being water. This proposes a very interesting situation for the fictional environment. It offers the possibility to refer to fictional entities, going beyond the ever-present impediment of actual world existence. In this manner we could refer to the lost child in McEwan's novel, Kate, and be able to refer to her in the terms of the properties ascribed to her by the narrative universe of the novel.

Accepting this theory in terms of universals has been contested especially by Lewis' system of modality (1986), which indicates that formulating such descriptions which go towards the very structural organization of entities is either not required at all or it makes very little sense. Even so, Nolan (2012) seems to argue that Lewis' approach could offer a similar type of construction without going through structural universalism. Within the Lewisian system, if we think yet again about the previously stated example of water and H_2O, the property of being hydrogen, oxygen, the property of being colorless etc., and all the relations bringing them together will be seen as sets. However, this in itself is not enough. In order to perceive what should be understood as a set of mereological relations between the parts of a whole, it is necessary that a sort of

epistemic access is granted to this mereological connection, an access which can be achieved by way of descriptions. The pathway to this kind of access should be available despite the rather unusual form of its metaphysical nature. What this means for our example is that it is possible to define the whole of the H_2O molecule by way of the properties of the hydrogen molecule and the oxygen molecules and the properties of the relations linking them together. However, an individuating description of the entire H_2O molecule would still be possible, even without having the proper descriptive knowledge of its properties or of any of the properties of its constituents. Thus, in a similar way, it should be possible to refer to fictional entities and objects on the basis of the set-based theory stemming from Lewis as well as of the mereological relations engendered.

2.1. Narrative Content Revisited

When we think about the narrative structure the question is if it pervades any other type of meaning than the one contained by the story in itself. Could it then be possible for the narrative to mean anything in itself, by way of its structure? The analytical endeavors mentioned above indicate that there is a structure of the narrative which tends to reveal a bit more about the manner in which these structures are created. The obvious conclusion is that, within the narrative, the form of expression is revealed by the story, while discourse is the form of that very expression. What interests us more at this level is not the traditional Saussurean distinction langue-parole, but rather what the substance and the form of the narrative content represent, in itself. In this context, Seymour Chatman (24) indicates that: "The substance of events and existents is the whole universe, or, better, the set of possible objects, events, abstractions, and so on that can be "imitated" by an author (film director, etc.)". He further distinguishes between expression and content on the one hand and between substance and form on the other. We know that substance is the field of all the events which can be "imitated". Going a bit further, content includes representations of objects and actions in both real and imagined worlds which can occur in a narrative medium; form refers to the narrative discourse including the narrative story components.

One of the most important issues which Chatman (1978) raises represents one of the key aspects of the present paper as well, namely understanding whether the structure of the narrative is meaningful irrespective of the story itself. The problematic at hand would then be: what does the narrative mean on its own? If we were to remove the story from the narrative, we would still be left with some sort of narrative matrix upon which the epic line is laid out. It is precisely this matrix which must be pursued, for it is within here

that some key elements of the narrative structure are to be encountered. Within the narrative environment there will always be precisely three sets of permanent coordinates centered around these three determinates: event, character and setting. In a sense, these are the pre-existing elements with a priori existence when it comes to any narrative whatsoever, merely forms waiting to be filled, endowed with characterhood as Chatman (1978) would express it.

If we pictured *The Child in Time* according to this scheme, we would have to unfold the narrative of its entire story line meaning. In the lines of this behavior when looking at McEwan's book we would have to infer, without knowing anything of the story whatsoever, that it has to be a regular intermingling of different preset instances, which exist overall in every narrative anywhere. This would be the first starting point in this particular analysis as well, unfolding the narrative completely, dismantling it, in order to demonstrate that there is a core structure which governs the formation of worlds and plots.

Still, keeping in mind the narrative is an environment of possible worlds, we should identify one principle within the narrative, namely the principle of selection according to which, the narrator chooses which events are to be stated, and which events are solely to be implied. If we were to stop on defining the concept of the story in itself, we would have to imagine it as a continuum of facts and events in their totality, containing all those which can be projected by being applied to the regular laws of the actual world. However, despite the fact that the story line continuum displays this great range of possibility, this range is, in the end, limited to the inferential attempts of the reader, which would also leave too great a room for interpretation. For instance, there is an infinity of possible worlds linked to the narrative of *The Child in Time*, but in the end, we operate only with those worlds we actively infer, when coming into contact with the story line of the novel. Irrespective of the type of narrative, the discourse is intended as a form of dialog between an authorial voice of some sort and someone at the other end of the narrative, a reader of any sort. This provides the necessary room for inference and interpretation and while the possibilities offered are next to limitless, it is in the end the authorial voice which selects which elements are necessary to fill the sense of story continuum.

Since we are now dealing with the principle of selection within the narrative, we might start considering the fact that it is not always possible that the narrative reveals all details related to character, setting and all other elements of the plot. There are occasions when the narrative harbors areas of indeterminacy, which mostly appear due to the fact that the narrative might avoid presenting particular details about the characters. Chatman (1978) compares the areas of indeterminacy between narratives and the cinema,

stating that it is far more difficult to avoid indeterminacy within the cinema as the imagery is prone to reveal details which might not be made as obvious within the narrative. The example he offers is that in the narrative one might say that X was dressed in street clothes for instance, while the cinema will inevitably reveal precisely the kind of clothes X was wearing. Still, as we have seen before, such areas of indeterminacy are also possible in the narrative. We might refer in this case to areas which are left undetailed intentionally and which need to be filled in by the receivers of the fiction.

Beyond being a mere question of interpretation, dealing with areas of indeterminacy in a narrative also includes operating with various sets of alternative possible worlds. The reason for considering this notion, lies in formulating an even better understanding of the narrative structure as a whole and in preparation for the further analysis of the intricacies of McEwan's novel, *The Child in Time*, from the proposed perspective of the present article. This novel in particular does have quite a few areas of indeterminacy, despite the fact that we have a third person narrator, bound by nature to reveal every private world of the characters. Of course, the areas of indeterminacy are to be expected especially as a result of the nature of this narrative in particular which presents the abduction of a young child. It is precisely these areas of indeterminacy that make room for accessing the possible world system within the narrative.

The manner in which these alternatives within the narrative are chosen is determined by yet another governing principle within the narrative selection scheme and this is the logical principle of coherence. This entails that, certain contents of the narrative must remain the same throughout the entire story line. For instance, if we refer to McEwan's novel and say that: Kate was five/Kate was Stephen's daughter/Kate was kidnapped, we logically need to assume that Kate is one and the same person. A sense of coherence must always exist. In the example presented here, if we consider this Kate not to be the very same person within the three statements, then it is still necessary to find some connection between the three, all the other Kates had the same age as Stephen's Kate, they must all have been kidnapped at similar times in their lives and so on. A coherent consistency must prevail at all times and because of this, all the operative possible worlds within the narrative will have to abide by this unshakeable principle. We might also mention that while coherence is absolutely necessary for the further progression of the narrative, the causality linking the events together might come in as formally optional. The events within the narrative do not need to have a specific cause in order to happen, but they absolutely do need to intermingle coherently. This is after all one of the binding rules of operating with possible worlds within the narrative and if we

considered Marie-Laure Ryan's analysis (2004) we might yet again state that the coherence within the narrative needs to respond to the logical requirements preformatted within the Textual Actual World[4].

Thus, the narrative needs to be understood as an interactive environment within which a system of coherence is established, a system which leaves just enough space for the creation and exploration of alternative universes, not in an unbound and disconnected manner, but much rather in a very consistent acknowledged endeavor. Traditionally, the manner in which a receiver operates with the different possible worlds available within the narrative is referred to in the simple terminology of offering an interpretation to the said fiction, but this approach does not fall short from being obsolete at this time. The act of interpretation, if we choose to look at it in this particular manner, does not need to stop at the simple stage of drawing some sense of meaning from the story line itself, as a prerequisite of the human brain to finding an everlasting sense of coherence. Interpretation, if we need to refer to it in this way, is a multi-faceted process of drawing meaning, assigning inference, drawing new meaning yet again and readjusting the narrative environment according to the range of alternatives made available. As such, the interpretation is as much a meaning gathering process, as it is a filling in process, the neglect of the latter involving a rejection of at least half of the existence engendered by the text of the narrative.

When referring to the narrative discourse, Chatman (1978) introduces the notion of "narrative statement", which should be seen as "a technical term for any expression of a narrative element viewed independently of its manifesting substance" (31). The sense of the terminology does not need to be understood in the strictest semantic sense, for it encompasses a much more general notion extending from what we would regularly understand as statements to questions or commands which would normally not be included within such a category. These narrative statements, in their broader sense, are the tools which make up the narrative discourse and particularly because of this enlarged concept, as Chatman would have it, they create a vibrantly communicative environment between the author and the audience, projected at the outskirts, with the very clear specification that it is not an actual communicative act between a real author and a real kind of audience, but much rather between an implied author and an implied audience, which are, after all, textual instances as well.

We will now return for a more in depth understanding of the narrative, on the same path indicated by Chatman (1978) through his narrative statements, namely process and stasis. Following the name indicative, a process would refer

[4] According to Marie Laure Ryan (2004) the Textual Actual World (TAW) should be considered as the actual world of the fictional text.

to something happening or to something being done, while the stasis would refer to simple facts, existent within the story. However, differentiating between the two might appear to be a bit problematic at times, but if we keep in mind that stasis statements generally identify or qualify: "She was half asleep" (McEwan 1992, 8), "Kate was at an age when her burgeoning language and the ideas it unraveled gave her nightmares" (7), and that process statements have to do with enactments: "He buttoned her woolen shirt" (9). discerning between the two becomes vividly materialized. These distinctions further demonstrate the manner in which the relation implied author-implied audience create alternative worlds of meaning within the narrative. The nature of any statement would indicate that it cannot occur on its own. As such, its appearance needs to be mediated, more specifically, these statements are placed within the narrative. This task will be fulfilled either by the author himself or by a voice within the narrative.

In order to make any sense of the possible worlds engendered within the narrative and in order to evaluate the narrative statements in an appropriate manner, the discussion needs to go on the lines of a clear-cut demarcation between all the stances of the author and of the reader. Chatman (1978) identifies the following categories: real author, implied author, narrator, real reader, implied reader or narratee. Discerning between the overall creator of the fiction and the narrator has always been a quest of any approach to fiction, as it is obvious that the author and the narrator cannot be one and the same entity, not even in those cases where the author intentionally identifies himself with the narrator by making use of the first person singular. This argument makes perfect sense also from Marie Laure Ryan's perspective (2004), since we would need to place the narrator within one of the alternative universes of the fiction, more precisely within the Textual Actual World. Therefore, the author and overall creator cannot be identical with the narrator primarily because they belong to strikingly different ontological universes, one is placed outside within the actual world of existence, while the other resides in the world of textual reality.

Within the field of narrative theory, Wayne Booth (1983) comes up with the theory of the implied author. Booth poses a very interesting problematic which really enforces the idea that the narrator is implied by the reader, so it is taken out of the content of the actual world and placed somewhere within the alternative worlds of the text; Chatman would see it as a transgression not towards the narrator, but much rather towards the principle that invented the narrator along with all the on-goings within the narrative, which organize the events within a certain sequence and, we might add, actualize different realities of the textual world, while leaving several others unactualized. The implied author is nothing else than an implied presence and in itself the governing

principle of the narrative. If we have a look at *The Child in Time*, we can distinguish the narrative voice in the presence of a third person narrator with apparent overall knowledge of the characters' minds and thoughts, it is this particular voice which narrates about Stephen and Kate and Julie in such terms as: "Jigging and weaving to overtake, Stephen remained as always, though barely consciously, on the watch for children, for a five-year-old girl…" (McEwan 1992, 1).

The difficulty with the implied author at this stage in the novel makes a clear distinction between the all-knowing narrator and the separate instance of the implied author. This is also the case for the novel *The Child in Time*. The entire design of the novel is the result of the sustained efforts of the implied author. McEwan's novel poses a problematic distinction precisely because we are faced with a reliable narrator, a situation which tends to merge the alternative universes of these two separate instances within the Textual Actual World. Had it been the case of an unreliable narrator, the distinction between the two would have been perfectly clear. Though the authorial personas have been mentioned throughout this study, there are still a few details which have been left out. One such detail concerns the fact that just as much as there is an implied author, we need to accept the fact that there is also an implied reader, or what might be called a narratee.

This particular instance within the narrative might be vividly named and present within the text or it might simply be imagined there. In the case of *The Child in Time*, it needs to be imagined there, as it is not granted any palpable presence. Having entered this quest of identifying the voices of the narrative for the fiction of *The Child in Time*, it is important to see the fictional universe as a complete world of alternatives, making use of alternative instances to the actual ones providing the ultimate argument that the fictional universe is a complex modal construction.

2.2 Narrative Hierarchies

So far, we have analyzed the manner in which the voices within a narrative organize and formulate the fictional universe as a complex macrostructure of worlds and possibilities. In what follows, the analysis will focus on identifying a stronger sense of hierarchy within the narrative. It goes without saying that there are meaningful events within any narrative which take precedence over other events which appear to possess less meaningful content. There has to be a difference in structure between majorly important events and what we might label as minor events and it is this particular structure which also decides which possible worlds to actualize and which worlds to leave behind in the mere continuum of alternatives.

Chatman (1978) attempts to provide an explanation for this interesting process by using the word *kernel*, a term meant to refer to major events within the narrative. Taking on this terminology, kernels depict those events within a narrative which are decisive for the future course of the plot. One such kernel within McEwan's novel would have to refer to the essential moment when Stephen takes Kate to the grocery store. What this creates within the narrative is a crucial turning point in the direction of the course the events are intended to take. If Stephen, for instance, had not decided to take Kate with him, the ulterior flow of events within the narrative might not have taken place, the justification for the narrative might not have been there to begin with, the child would not have been lost and the rest of the plot would have crumbled to pieces. The fictional mechanism is thus organized as a logical sequence of kernels, each major kernel intervening within the narrative being a logical consequence of all the other kernels before it. The narrative presents itself as a massive logical scheme of essential nodes which form a logical sequence of major standing points, we could think of these as the essential milestones of the narrative, which function as central worlds around which less important events gather.

The denomination Chatman (1978) finds for this other kind of evens is that of *satellite*. A satellite event is a happening of no consequence, namely an occurrence which can be removed without creating any impact on the further flow of the narrative. While it is highly essential for the sequence of events of *The Child in Time* that Stephen take his daughter to the supermarket, it is quite insignificant that before leaving home "Kate came towards him talking loudly, holding up the scuffed toy donkey" (McEwan 1992, 9). This event is an auxiliary detail to Stephen's preparing the little girl for the supermarket scene and while we could easily imagine a toddler presenting the very same pattern of behavior as Kate's, this is absolutely irrelevant for the next flow of events.

Despite the fact that their contribution to the sequence of events is not major enough, the role of the satellites is that of expanding the content of the narrative. If kernels are the milestones within the narrative, then the satellites automatically need to fill in the gaps between them. So, satellites should be seen as overall content set over a pre-established matrix of unchangeable facts. Probably the greatest sense of distinction between the two lies in the fact that kernels imply a choice, which means that it is after all kernels which give rise to the sense of alternatives and possibilities within a narrative, while satellite events do not possess this kind of property. Thus, when we see Stephen preparing Kate for the supermarket, we intuitively infer that there is an alternative universe within which Stephen does not take Kate to the supermarket or an alternative universe in which Kate stays home with Julie, the outcome of which being that the child, in the end, is not lost. When comparing this kind of situation to the one

in which Kate speaks loudly and holds up her stuffed donkey, it becomes obvious that the latter event does not posit any alternative universe choice and that it is merely there to enrich the plausible image derived from the major kernel of Stephen taking his daughter out shopping as many other times before.

There have been objections against reducing the narrative to such mechanical schemes which are considered not to bring any revelation whatsoever in the field of strict interpretation, in the manner in which the reading of the text is perceived. Still, this has nothing to do with the traditional sense of interpretation of a certain text and is much rather concerned with providing a theoretical approach of the workings of the narrative itself, unveiling its mechanisms, watching it progress and grow into a complex environment of alternatives and thoughts. It is obvious that it is not necessary for the reader to mechanically divide the narrative into kernels and satellites or to come up with a complex theoretical approach in order to understand the meaning of a text. For most readers this is an unconscious process, quite similar to language acquisition. Children are not familiar with grammar rules, but are still able to talk and make correct generalizations.

Within the same realm of narrative hierarchies, Chatman (1978) makes a further distinction between what was traditionally considered the mechanism of the narrative, by introducing the notion of the antistory. This new terminology refers to envisioning the narrative not as opening up those possibilities which are believed to be possible, but rather as treating all possibilities within the narrative as having the same chance to be valid. Narrative alternatives within the antistory system call into question all the logical movements of the narrative universe, one event leading to the other towards a finale, but despite the fact that these alternatives are mere possibilities without them being actualized, we would still need to accept them as being part of the plot. Thus, it is incorrect to deem them as being exterior to the narrative or exterior to plot formation. *The Child in Time* also opens the way to a few sets of antistories within the plot. We can consider the main line of the story when Stephen takes Kate to the supermarket and we can also consider the alternative of Stephen going on his own. In the case of the first alternative, which is the one actualized within the narrative, Stephen does take Kate to the store and she disappears. In the case of the second one, unactualized by the plot, Stephen goes alone and Kate is saved. This alternative is not activated within the story, but it is just as legitimately present as any other event presented. The fact that we even operate with such an alternative, attests to its very legitimacy.

The narrative text can be viewed as a complex equation and as such, we should consider all of the available data and the manner in which it is structured together in order to render worlds of meaning and logical comprehension. In

this respect, we should work with one of the terms specific for narrative theory, which has been made popular yet again by Gérard Genette (1972), and that is: order. What this term brings for discourse is the possibility of rearranging the events of the story as much as possible as long as the story-sequence remains discernible. In addition, the orderly sequence of events still needs to remain faithful to the basic dichotomy of kernels/satellites in order for the progress of the plot to be logically ensured. There are several ways in which a story line might be organized. First and foremost, there is the regular sequence of events succeeding each other in an utterly chronological manner. Then we might come across an anachronous flow, where the regular sequence is interrupted in order to make room for accounts of past events. And finally, there is also the category of flashforwards when the discourse abandons the present moment in order to leap ahead and tell of events at a particular time in the future.

Taking into consideration the nature of these distinctions, the next step would be incorporating them into the narrative sequence of the novel under discussion and envisioning how the sequence of events is pushed forward. Structurally, *The Child in Time* starts from a particular moment, considered to be the present and then turns to the key moment, considered to be the past describing the episode of Kate's disappearance. We might then note that the sequences of events would change from a regular flow, which could be represented in a 1,2,3,4 manner, to a different kind of sequence of the nature 2,1,3,4. The retrospection continues in Part Two of the novel, when abandoning the essential episode of Kate's disappearance, the narrative takes several steps forward describing Stephen's acquired wealth by way of writing books for children. The events are still presented retrospectively, but not as far in the flashback sequence as the moment of Kate's disappearance. This would indicate that the narrative constantly envelops an initially established moment in the present with notions stemming from various moments in the past. The movement back and forward between these events creates various satellite events which have the function of pushing the plot forward, towards the formation of higher order kernels, which in their turn will generate different sorts of satellites marking the natural progression of the plot.

Thinking about the narrative as a cumulative sum of flashbacks, returns to the present and flashforwards implies awarding a good sense of imagery to the discursive process, an imagery which would be more specific for cinematic representations, but this characteristic of the narrative works very well in our favor. The fact that it is possible for the narrative to support such a rich amount of imagery as would be specific for a cinematic representation, constitutes an additional argument for the narrative working with alternatives and possibilities, actualized or non-actualized. It is probably within this imagery that the

modalization of the fictional universe becomes all the more plausible. The narrative sequence within *The Child in Time* presents an interesting inception of anachrony. We start from a present moment, then we are taken back to the moment of Kate's disappearance, then we move forward a few steps in order to understand more things about Stephen only to come back to a present state pictured by a combination of events dominated by the constant look out for Kate and accompanied by Stephen's book publishing intentions and Julie's constant acts of appearance and disappearance. This type of structure is what Genette (1972) would call mixed anachrony, which occurs before and ends after what is acknowledged to be the present time of the narrative.

An entire world of possibilities is engendered here and if we think about the previous figure representing satellites and kernels, we might imagine these possibilities on the outskirts of the entire scheme, as adjacent happenings maintained at that level of unactualized sets of events. When encountering events of this nature, the mind of the audiences is bound to operate in similar manners and create a valid world of possibilities that would explain the actions of the characters as they appear actualized within the plot. So, when reading about Julie's exit from the monastery and moving into her very own apartment, several alternative universes are projected outside the narrative, which are meant to logically account for Julie's sudden actions. One such example might be Julie's inability to cope with her daughter's disappearance forces her into committing herself into a place of solace. Then there is also the possibility of a rift between the couple of Stephen and Julie caused by the dramatic sequence of events. Another such alternative explanation might even refer to Julie's blaming Stephen for Kate's disappearance.

Either way, the audience might subconsciously project scenarios in order to account for the set of elliptic events which are placed within the narrative. The fact of the matter is, that these alternatives will exist independently of the course of the narrative itself and their presence is required for making sense of the narrative world in the same way one would make sense of sequences of random events in everyday experiences.

3. Towards a Macrostructure: Modalizing Entities, Space, Time

All these elements discussed so far are bound to indicate in as complete a manner as possible that there is a very distinguishable microstructure of the narrative which functions according to a precise set of principles engendered within, principles which do nothing but confirm the necessity of perceiving fictional texts under a modalized view of alternatives and possibilities. By contrast with the theories which reduce plot to merely structural schemes,

kernels must be seen as actual properties of the plot. They are not there as a result of reduction; they simply exist within the plot, irrespective of what reductionist operations one theory or other might try to impose onto the plot. The same goes for satellites which tend to cover the space between kernels anticipating and detailing them. Also, dividing the plot into kernels and satellites serves much better for the purpose of understanding the narrative world for what it really is, a complex organization of worlds and alternative universes, pretty similar to the modal systems of reality, but ontologically different from any of them.

Going further into the story, there are several distinctions which need to be mentioned and understood in order to comprehend the nature of the coordinates within the narrative universe. Considering the notions of story-space and story-time, it becomes rather simple to conclude that the domain of fictional entities is obviously the story-space, while the story-time is the specific environment for events. Events cannot occur in a spatial dimension, but the entities which are the main actors of these events are in their nature spatial. The distinction performed by Chatman (1978) at this level is quite basic, but it constitutes a good starting point here, as it sets a plausible boundary between the different categories operating at the level of the narrative text. McEwan's *The Child in Time* can comprise and accommodate dozens of images of Kate for the one reason that there is very little description given of the lost child to begin with and for the other that there is no way of excluding any alternative universe within which Kate would have one physical appearance or another. It is all up to the constructive endeavor of the reader.

Placing this acknowledgement out of the sheer domain of narrative theory and within a more modal context, there would be sufficient ground to consider the necessity of the narrative to operate with alternative universes precisely because it lacks the luxury – which we might add visual narratives naturally possess - of offering a single, clear-cut representation of its characters. This would also be the explanation for why it is necessary to place fictional entities within their private alternative universe each, as Marie Laure Ryan (2004) also indicates in her modal system of applying possible worlds to the fictional realm. Still, the story-space of the narrative cannot only be limited to what is rendered via discourse.

When faced with a narrative in particular, the first instinctual attitude is that of absorbing the facts as they are given within the text and then instantly filling the given notions with a sense of our very own remnants of experience, be it actual or fictionally inflicted by other narrative works and worlds. Thus, when reading *The Child in Time* where we are told about the disappearance of five-year-old Kate in very strange and ambiguous conditions, we are immediately prone to speculate and project alternative universes which are meant to explain

how such an occurrence might be believable or we are prone to find valid explanations, which could rationally account for the happening according to the system of normality engendered within ourselves, but yet in full concordance with the narrative. This way, audiences constantly project. They become part of countless worlds of alternatives which they match against the pattern prescribed by the reality of the text, or TAW (Textual Actual World) according to Marie-Laure Ryan (2004).

But even at this level, the construction of alternative universes is never performed in an unfruitful manner, meaning that instinctively, when inferring these worlds of possibility, audiences are guided by a strong sense of logic, which is not necessarily theoretically acquired, but much rather needs to be understood as a logical indication raised by intuitive knowledge of facts. This is why when reading about Kate's disappearance in the novel, there are a couple or even several alternatives which readers instinctively reject.

Examples of unlikely alternatives for *The Child in Time*:

- the child might have been abducted by aliens
- the child might have disappeared into thin air
- the child might have been a mere figment of Stephen's imagination.
- the child might have vanished into a different dimension etc.

These alternative universes are automatically blocked from the range of possibilities, precisely because there are clues within the narrative bound to indicate which scenarios are indeed possible and which are not. This extends to those alternatives which are not even actualized within the plot. For instance, the readers may indeed explain the child's disappearance by making certain inferences which receive a particular sense of narrative validation.

Examples of likely alternatives for *The Child in Time:*

- the child might have been kidnapped by one of the shoppers
- the child might have been kidnapped by a parent who has already lost a child
- the child might have been kidnapped by a sociopath
- the child might have been kidnapped with the purpose of an eventual ransom.

The range of examples can include far more alternatives for each category. Within this system of worlds and alternatives pertaining to the narrative universe, the notion which pervades is that a narrative universe is a space generated by a very specific structure, whose nature is preexistent. The

story lines and the characters, as well as their particular features, inhabit a matrix which has been there all along, waiting to be filled by the varying shapes and forms of plot, events and entities and modal possibilities.

4. A Brief Conclusion

The present paper has exposed in a quite detailed manner a set of views and interpretations related to the narrative universe, ranging from the narrative text to its worlds and its characters, while also, applying, to a lesser, but nonetheless, ever present extent, a dose of textual modality stemming from the formal semantics nature of the possible world system. The element of novelty that this paper brings to what can be considered a conventional study of a narrative text, resides in the fact that it aims to portray the narrative universe through a different viewpoint, which stems from the intricacies of the possible world system.

The paper starts by comparing fictional entities to non-existent objects, tackles the notion of "universals" and shows that it should be possible to refer to fictional entities and objects on the basis of the set-based theory. In terms of the narrative, the paper pursues the idea that there exists a narrative matrix upon which the epic line is constructed. This is the core structure, a macrostructure, which governs the formation of worlds and plots and acts as the Textual Actual World, in Marie Laure Ryan's terms. Through the possible worlds magnifying glass, the narrative text can also project alternative worlds which stem from the narrative reality, the Textual Actual World. Their presence is required for making sense of the narrative world in the same way one would make sense of sequences of random events in everyday experiences. This constitutes a microstructure which functions according to a precise set of principles which confirm the necessity of perceiving fictional texts under a modalized view of alternatives and possibilities.

The major theoretical inputs considered, on the one hand Chatman's (1978) rhetoric of narrative in fiction, and on the other hand several approaches from within the semantics of possible worlds, such as Marie Laure Ryan (2004), Hilary Putnam (1983, 2011), Daniel Nolan (2012) and their application onto the realm of postmodern fiction illustrated through McEwan's novel, could enable perhaps a bold final conclusion that there is an inner structure of the narrative which reveals itself much rather to the trained eye, a structure which completes the entire picture of a syntax of the narrative, and that this structure is also vividly complemented through the possible world determinism.

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