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POSSIBLE WORLDS FOR FICTION. A RECONSTRUCTIVE APPROACH, WITH A PRACTICAL OUTLOOK INTO IAN MCEWAN'S *ATONEMENT*, *ON CHESIL BEACH* AND *THE CHILD IN TIME*

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ABSTRACT. ***Possible Worlds for Fiction. A Reconstructive Approach, With a Practical Outlook into Ian McEwan's* Atonement, On Chesil Beach *and* The Child in Time.** The present paper aims at presenting how the possible world framework can function for fictional worlds. It starts from presenting different perspectives on how fictional universes can be understood. It then grounds its reconstructive approach in modal logic theories, such as the ones postulated by Kripke and Lewis, attempting to find a possible world system which can be adapted and become custom-fit for fiction. The theoretical approach favorizes re-creations of the modal system for fiction, as presented by Marie-Laure Ryan or Ruth Ronen. The study of this particular topic is eclectic, putting together various perspectives on literature, fiction and modality. The theoretical input is accompanied by practical reverberations from the three novels presented in the title, which function as its scientific playground.

Keywords: *possible worlds, possible world semantics, fiction, fictional worlds, counterfactuals, postmodern fiction, fictional entities, modal logic*.

REZUMAT. ***Lumile posibile şi domeniul ficţional. O abordare reconstructivă cu aplicaţii practice în romanele lui Ian McEwan* Ispăşire, Pe plaja Chesil *şi* Copilul furat.** Prezenta lucrare îşi propune să prezinte modul în care sistemul lumilor posibile poate fi aplicat şi lumilor ficţionale. Demersul de cercetare porneşte de la prezentarea unor perspective diverse asupra modului în care

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lumile ficţionale pot fi înţelese. Apoi fixează abordarea reconstructivă în teoriile logicii modale, aşa cum apar ele prezentate de Kripke sau Lewis, încercând să găsească un cadru modal care să poată fi adaptat şi să fie relevant pentru studiul ficţiunii. Abordarea propusă favorizează re-creaţii ale sistemului modal pentru domeniul ficţional, cum ar fi teoriile lui Marie-Laure Ryan sau ale lui Ruth Ronen. Viziunea teoretică este una eclectică, analizând diverse perspective asupra literaturii, ficţiunii şi modalităţii. Perspectivele teoretice sunt însoţite de exemplificări practice din cele trei romane expuse în titlu, acestea funcţionând ca un ideal teritoriu practic.

Cuvinte-cheie: *lumi posibile, semantica lumilor posibile, ficţiune, lumi ficţionale, ficţiune postmodernă, entităţi ficţionale, logică modală*

Introduction

The prospects of considering the possible world framework for the study of fiction raise an interesting topic with a vast territory for discussion. There are valid arguments which support the idea that possible world theory can function for fiction and reveal an in-depth view of the inner modal structure of the fictional universe and all of its contents. While there are so many ways to study fiction, the present paper will analyze the fictional discourse and will operate with the notion that being fictional signifies acquiring a special ontological status.

To clarify, the possible world framework is based on possible world semantics, according to which meanings (or semantic values) are assigned to sentences in terms of the truth values they have across possible worlds (Kripke 1981). Kripke is best known for his application of possible world semantics in the field of modal logic (1981), with meaningful contributions also presented by David Lewis and his theory of counterfactuals (2001). Kripke intended to resolve the contradictions left over by Frege (1980) and Russel (1905) by providing the necessary means to identify entities across possible worlds by way of rigid designation (Kripke 1981). While Kripke's theories are mostly related to epistemology, the philosophy of language and other areas where truth values are connected to the idea of assigning sense and reference, literary studies also have an applicability in literary studies. Still, certain alternations are needed for the possible world framework to have theoretical validity in fiction.

In this respect, Marie-Laure Ryan proposes two different theories of fiction, a referential and an intensional one (2004). Briefly put, the former refers to the fact that fiction creates an ontologically independent universe, for a limited number of entities and the latter focuses on the fictional discourse seen as a

special kind of communicative act (Ryan 2004). Similar to Ryan (2004), Curie also discusses a referential theory of fiction (1990, 2010). According to both perspectives, the best way to think of fiction is as the opposite of reality or perhaps even more to the point, as the opposite of actuality. In the actual world, truth values are assigned based on facts inherent in the actual world. As such, we can assign truth values to propositions which abide by those facts. When facts in the actual world cannot support the validity of a proposition, then those propositions are considered false, erroneous, even fictional. Thus, being the opposite of actual world facts, one can be tempted to believe that fiction itself is a set of incongruities and that the fictional discourse is in itself erroneous, depicting a distorted reality. The referential theory of fiction attempts to pinpoint that fiction can function under an ontologically independent system, which allows it to be free of "errors", "lies", irrespective of the intentionality of the speaker.

The present article aims at offering a unifying attempt of presenting several essential perspectives on how the possible-world framework applies to fiction, setting forward their strengths and weaknesses, as well as revealing the complex nature of such an analysis, taking into account the various areas of ambiguity that the fictional territory imposes. As such, the present paper will constitute an eclectic approach towards possible world modality, within the fictional universe, the results of which will be elaborated upon, in the hope of obtaining a clearer picture of how the language of fiction speaks through a system of modal logic.

2. Arguments against Possible Worlds

There are several philosophers who fiercely argue that introducing possible worlds in the study of language would inevitably lead to a highly chaotic representation of the relations within language, namely strictly referring to that particular vague process of assigning world relations to objects. Thus, one of the major counterarguments against possible worlds is that they are not necessary to describe language, being engulfed in a chaos of possibility and probability. The reason for this would be that speakers' beliefs are altogether different from what can be roughly identified as the actual world. If an element of whatever nature differs from what the actual world accurately indicates, that particular element is void of meaning and its existence is liable to be doubted, since it is impossible to enter a discussion regarding any other elements than the ones inhabiting our own world, the world of active experience. To an even lesser extent, we can then refer to such notions as fictional characters (see Cecilia in *Atonement* or Florence in *On Chesil Beach* or Stephen in *The Child in Time*), since

any statement made about such characters, would not be considered valid strictly because language does not work for anything else than for the elements in the actual world.

The resistance against introducing possible worlds within the spectrum of language study meets another high point when faced with the reality of accepting possible worlds within fiction. On the already shaky territory of fiction, possible worlds are mostly feared as a linguistic tool, mainly due to the even higher ambiguity they would be prone to create. Taking matters to a further extreme, the prohibition about making identity statements in fictional worlds is then extended to making statements about the actual world that are contrary to the state of facts. For instance, a question such as: *What if Selma Lagerlöf hadn't written The Wonderful Adventures of Nils?,* is meaningless, since it would require an equivalence between Selma Lagerlöf in the actual world and Selma Lagerlöf in that particular scenario in which she doesn't write the famous children's book. The argumentation brought forward for excluding any validity in the meaning of such statements, stands on a principle of identity. In order for these sentences to become acceptable samples of language, the object in the actual world would have to be identical to the object in the possible world, which according to the same theoreticians is logically impossible.

Goodman (1978) goes to assert that fictional discourse need not be concerned with possible worlds, since fiction is merely another way of speaking about the actual world. Within this view, any type of discourse, even the one concerned with possibility and probability, with that typical "what if", constitutes a readjusted description of the actual world. Surpassing the boundaries of the latter would mean that such a discourse would have to be ranked as a false description of the actual world. Therefore, any type of discourse lacking strict correspondence with the actual world is invalid. But what about fictional characters? Abiding by this theory, any fictional character, in order to be taken into consideration, should be a mere projection of a set of qualities identifiable in the actual world. Under no circumstances could such characters be considered individuals inhabiting their own possible worlds, for that would automatically mean that their correspondent in the actual world would not exist, casting them into inexistence as well.

However, using ambiguity as a pretext against possible worlds for fiction only indicates the lack of understanding of the appropriate manner in which such a valuable tool may be employed to the benefit of comprehending fictional mechanisms.

3. Arguments for Possible Worlds

Contrary to dealing with the cons pervading the acceptance of possible worlds, the steps to be taken at this time are most likely to be concerned with explaining and exemplifying, first of all, how possible worlds can be accessed with respect to fiction especially, and then, how accessing possible worlds redefines and improves the general existing concept of fiction itself.

To begin with, starting this quest in more general terms means going through Kripke's (1981) own magnifying glass of understanding the essential notion of accessibility in terms of logic. Therefore, under these terms, possibility is synonymous with accessibility, meaning that "a world is possible in a system of reality, if it is accessible from the world at the center of the system" (Ryan 2004, 31). This kind of reporting oneself to the issue of possible worlds is specifically related to viewing possible worlds through the mechanisms of logic. By means of logic, any world is possible as long as it satisfies the principle of non-contradiction, that is, a proposition must be either true or false, but never both true and false at the same time. To provide an example in this sense, it is necessary to resort to a situation verifiable in the actual world, as illustrated below:

> President Kennedy was assassinated in Dealey Plaza Dallas after which he held a speech in front of an adoring crowd.

From a logical point of view a world in which president Kennedy is assassinated in Dallas and then gives a speech for the present crowd is impossible, since it implies that the subject of such an utterance was actually alive after his own assassination, a state of affairs which is illogical. Taken logically, possible worlds and how they can or cannot function, appear to be a fairly accessible and understandable linguistic tool, but applying the same framework to the realm of fiction, may prove that the system needs yet more molding in order to fit the much wider spectrum that fiction readily opens for research, meaning that much wider ranges of accessibility relations are imminently required. (Urian 2021, 248).

For such purposes Marie-Laure Ryan (2004) proposes a separate system by means of which possible worlds can be integrated in the study of the fictional genre. Ryan comes up with a possible solution which constitutes the pathway towards accessing fiction by way of the possible world theory. She points out that when it comes to fiction, there occurs a recentering. This is necessary for preventing the actual world from interfering with the fictional world or worlds, leading to a rough misinterpretation of the piece of fiction itself. Recentering, as suggested by Ryan (2004) is achieved through a structured system in which

a central world is surrounded by satellite worlds. The center of the system is represented by the actual world, while the satellite worlds are the alternative possible worlds. A further distinction is then made between the notions of actual world (AW), which is understood as the world of experience and the textual reference world (TRF) which is the textual actual world. (Polgar 2019, 257)

It is by no means uncommon that a fictional text of any type should preserve, if not a literally precise reproduction of reality, at least a close image of what reality represents, a procedure encountered in a relatively similar manner in cinematography, when the viewers are warned against the fact that any type of resemblance to actual facts and events is merely coincidental. In the exact same way, the authors of the relatively newer genre of "true fiction" may feel tempted to produce the same warning for their readers as well, leaving an utterly reduced border between what should be understood as sheer fiction and the rest, which should be perceived as nonfiction. The difference lies in the particularity that nonfiction will always claim to represent reality thoroughly, meaning there is a genuine sense of equivalence between the textual reference world (TRW) and the actual world (AW). By opposition, within the fictional text, the textual reference world will preserve distinctive marks from the actual world, despite the appearance of identity with the actual world, induced by mimetic practices.

Dealing with the notions of fiction and nonfiction, fiction and its possible worlds, as well as nonfiction, the range of worlds it creates, doesn't yet establish the exact gateways possible worlds devise in order to infiltrate themselves in the realms of fiction. Even so, Ryan (2004) identifies a set of nine possible gateways by means of which the actual world may access the textual actual world, with the important mentioning that such access is not mandatory and that there may exist numerous derogations from the initial scheme. "The magic behind these accessibility relations lies in their property of combining and rendering different types of fictional constructs" (Polgar 2018, 81).

1. The first port of access, and the most basic one is given by linguistic compatibility, namely that the TAW can be accessed from the AW, if the language in which the TAW is rendered, may be understood by the AW.

2. Having surpassed the code barrier, the next gateway can be identified in the form of analytical compatibility, namely the TAW is accessible from the AW, if they share analytical truths. This would imply the existence of objects rendered by the same worlds, which also possess the same properties in both worlds. For instance, Napoleon in the AW would be of analytical compatibility with a Napoleon pictured in a work of fiction.

3. The next level of compatibility resumes to logical compatibility, meaning that the TAW is accessible from the AW, if both worlds abide by the same logical principles of non-contradiction.

4. Taxonomy is yet another level of compatibility, which needs to be met in order for the TAW to be accessed from the AW. As the name clearly indicates, both worlds should contain the same species and these species should be met with the same range of properties.

5. The TAW is accessible from the AW, if they both share a physical compatibility or if they are governed by the same natural laws.

6. Access from the AW to the TAW can be granted only if no temporal relocation affects any of the constituents identifiable in the AW. This means that the TAW cannot be located in any other time span than the AW or that the present of the TAW is not posterior in absolute time to the AW's present.

7. All the members comprised of the AW should be completely integrated in the universe depicted by the TAW in order for the two domains to obtain a compatibility of inventory.

8. It is not enough that all the members of the AW should simply be included. The eighth gateway depicted by Ryan sets forward an identity of inventory, by means of which the objects integrated in the TAW, should also be identical to the same objects identifiable in the AW.

9. Finally, the last item on the list of accessibility relations from Marie-Laure Ryan's perspective, is represented by the identity of properties certifiable if the objects common for the AW and the TAW are proven to detain the very same properties, as the very name suggests it as well.

This spectrum of accessibility relations is far from being a sum of definitive rigid notions. This system must be perceived as undergoing continuous modeling and reformatting, in accordance with the great variety of texts of different natures. Ryan's system is thus open to multiple other accessibility relations, which might appear on the way, while at the same time, Ryan herself has identified four more candidates for an eventual expansion of the previously presented model. As such, the extended model would include notions similar to: historical coherence, psychological credibility, socio-economic compatibility and categorial compatibility.

4. A Reconstructive Approach through Possible Worlds

Possible world theory may be just as valid an application for systems of reality as it may be for those debatable areas of fiction and fictional universes, a state of facts which would be prone to indicate that the semantic universe projected by a fictional text need not be centered around the constantly pressing

element of the AW. Any fictional text, thus, opens an entirely separate world, a world of textual semantics, which can be accessed through the lens of the possible world theory, with the aid of the concepts of modal logic.

Any type of narrative concerns directed towards drawing palpable resemblances between the worlds of textual creations and what can be identified as AW, constitutes specific human behavior, embodying the necessity of constantly reencountering, at least partially, the world of actual experience, in any exterior demeanor, including when reporting oneself to fiction. Marie-Laure Ryan (2004) makes an essential breakthrough by identifying the concept of narrative semantics: "rooted in an exploration of the world making activity through which we interact with and try to shape the world we regard as actual." (2004; 110) This means that understanding sequences of events randomly represented in fictional texts, is a result of the readers' capacity to classify that particular information, and at the same time to project on it a principle of similitude with the events in the actual world.

This interiorized mechanism of processing information and thoughts is prone to demonstrate that possible worlds are altogether constructions of the mind as well and precisely due to this characteristic Marie-Laure Ryan (2004) sees it fit to link possible world theory with principles of modal logic. According to this procedure, mental activity of this nature involves the existence of two elements that are tinged with modality, in so far as they involve truth-functional and fact-defining propositions of the sort: *thinking that p, hoping that p or intending p*. Based on these premises, the whole theory implies that possible worlds are in fact constructs of the mind, constructs envisaged not as bridges across the AW, but rather on the contrary, as escapes from the actual maze of palpable experience. They are parallel universes, just as ontologically legitimate as the actual world. They reconstruct within a semantic domain, the system of reality outlined by a text of fiction.

Since the notion of semantic domain has already been introduced in this system of reconstruction, it would be advisable to differentiate between the meaning, the purposes and the utility of what is understood through narrative universe and what is understood through semantic domain. Beginning with the former, the narrative universe is perceivable through the text's unquestionable property of bringing brand-new worlds to life, of enriching them with equally multiple individuals, places. As such, the entire world-like attire is thought fit to meet the purposes of the text itself. Once the narrative universe has been endowed with the formation of one such world, the text will further on enact this narrative act of birth, by conveying an increased insight of actuality, an artifice also meant to oppose the world of actuality to a set of merely possible alternatives.

If the narrative universe establishes precise facts with regards to the system of worlds in the text, the semantic domain is a collection of all the possible meanings, which may inhabit this system of worlds. Such meanings may fall under: "statements of fact", "generalizations", "symbolic interpretations", "subjective judgments expressed by the narrator" or "formed by the reader", as Marie-Laure Ryan (2004) describes them. Thus, if a reader freely interprets, for instance, the symbolic meaning of a particular concrete element existing within the narrative universe and, if all the more, the reader makes a proposition regarding this particular element, by virtue of this statement, such a symbolic interpretation reaches the semantic domain.

When using the same model for the novel *Atonement*, it is required to settle on an element upon which symbolic interpretation may be bestowed, one of the numerous such elements present not only in the case of this particular textual universe, but quite randomly in any fictional creation. Therefore, the chosen image would be that of the vase, that particular vase which achieves the great propriety of bringing Cecilia and Robbie together, after their return home as adults. In the narrative universe of the text the precise facts known about the vase reveals that it belonged to Mr. Tallis' brother, who had received it as a present during World War I. The Tallis family decided to keep it in order to honor the memory of the departed. Still, following the thread prepared in the narrative universe, the vase later on brings Cecilia and Robbie together as they both have a fight about the vase in front of the fountain, break it inadvertently and Cecilia boldly and purposely takes off her clothes and jumps into the water. This somewhat awkward situation causes Robbie to write that dooming apologetic note (in both its variants) igniting the abnormal flow of the events to follow. Later on, Briony mentions the breaking of the vase, an event which immediately alerts Cecilia.

Because of the extensive amount of information in the textual world relating to this particular vase, any reader would be able to create a proposition such as: *Cecilia parallels the fortunes of her relationship with Robbie with the vase-related mishap*. Since such a parallel is, after all, suggested by the text itself, being also part of the actual world of the narrative universe, by means of this statement, the symbolic value of the empirical vase transcends the narrative universe and reaches the next level of the semantic domain. The relevance of the modality of the possible world system lies in "providing a convenient method for assigning truth value to sentences in fiction and interpreting the fictional universe accordingly" (Polgar 2018, 81). It is also a theory formulated by David Lewis (1988) and Currie (1990, 2010).

4.1. The Textual Actual World and Its Representatives

The inner structure of TAW reveals a fairly complex system of worlds and possibilities which are not necessarily displayed by a chaotic or random ruling, but rather appear to be settled by a logic and precise prerequisite. Primarily to all its other properties, the TAW must be seen as cumulating various states and events which combined, will result in a history as well as a set of general laws meant to retain the wider range for future developments within the plot, based on the present situation. As such, it would mean that the TAW is divided into several main domains among which: a factual domain and an actualizable domain, the latter constituting a possible world in itself. What makes this possible world different from the rest is that unlike the other alternative possible worlds (APWs) present in a narrative universe its existence is unconditional, namely it exists irrespective of any mental act of a fictional character.

If by means of various mental acts, similar to any mental act in the AW, fictional characters can themselves create and access an extremely broad range of alternative possible worlds, this would normally lead to the conclusion that a specific set of worlds populates the TAW and that one must also be able to distinguish between them. Marie-Laure Ryan (2004) identifies three main types of such worlds and she classifies them under the following denominations: K-World (for definitively known propositions), O-World (for obligations, social norms, moral principles) and W-World (formulated wishes and desires of the characters).

Yet, it seems quite difficult to objectify the manner in which such fictional entities as Fitzwilliam Darcy, Briony, Andrei Bolkonski or even Red Riding Hood for that matter, impact the imaginative representations of readers across the globe. This is mostly due to the fact that their existence does not have a certifiable belonging to the actual world of reality, a significant theoretical aspect which has never prevented such entities from being acknowledged, recognized and to some extent even revered outside the boundaries of their fictional appearance.

At this stage, it might be of greater interest to introduce Peter Lamarque's distinction between the concept of "literature" and the concept of "fiction" (1997). As such, fiction is a linguistic concept of neutral value, applying to names, sentences, discourses. Literature, however, has a more complex definition, as it extends to the manner in which imaginative and creative writing results in a sense of value. So, in other words, in order to elevate a work of fiction to a work of value, in the literary sense of value, the fictional piece should acquire a particular level of complexity, be it by way of discourse, by way of characters or by an intermingling of both.

Nevertheless, the fact that a literary piece is considered to be the bearer of an indisputable sense of artistic significance, from the point of view of the

actual world-possible worlds balance, its characters, as well represented as they may be, are still the inhabitants of a fictionally based reality. And yet, at this ontological crossroad in fictional character identity, Lamarque (1997) establishes "The Character Identity Principle", namely that: in literary works, character identity is intrinsically connected to character description. There is one necessary truth of utmost importance which needs to be sought within Lamarque's principle of identity, and that is the fact that fictional characters cannot exist in the absence of the narrative itself. The narrative is the source of character description, offering all the necessary pieces to build up the nature of a fictional character.

This kind of approach would readily solve the identity issues related to fictional characters whose appearance is repeated across various different fictional universes. The example Lamarque offers in this respect is that of the mythological figure Faust, heartily portrayed in literature by several authors. Every representation of Faust starts from the mythological premise of the savant who sells his soul to the devil. Nonetheless, Marlowe's fictional Faust will differ from Goethe's, just as the two authors' narrative is in itself different. The same goes for any fictional character, Briony, Florence, Stephen, in McEwan's fiction, for instance. If the author recreated them in a different fictional work, then there would be a new Briony or a new Florence or a new Stephen developing in a new narrative. Still, the same premise would remain valid, namely that an essential feature is preserved, that particular feature which would make these characters recognizable across different fictional worlds.

Still, none of these characters are actual entities. They have never been proven to have existed in real life, their actions and behavioral prototypes are the result of authorial creation, and yet their existence is somewhat justifiable in actual world existence. According to Daniel D. Hutto (2007: 2) in his article, *Narrative and Understanding Persons*, the characters pertaining to narrative worlds, even though fictional, bear certain roles outside their fictional destinies by: "(a) enabling us to exercise our imaginations in unique ways; (b) developing our everyday understanding of actions performed for reasons; and (c) external reflection, evaluation and orientation in our understanding of situations of ourselves and others."

Narrative worlds, just like any other independent universes of existence, are structurally endowed with their very own set of representations meant to recreate a self-sufficient network of universal truths. In the very same manner, a universal system of beliefs would reverberate in actual life situations, sustaining the meaningfulness of the story and justifying the permanence of its characters. Gregory Currie (2010) similarly refers to it as *the framework* of a narrative. As such, a narrative functions as self-sufficiently as the world of experience.

Their structures are utterly similar, they create threads of story, introduce real life acting figures, empowered by a textual universe whose complexity is paralleled solely by what can be understood as the world of reality itself.

Both theorists view narrative as an artefact. It is just as much an act of making by its creator, as an act of grasping authorial intentionality by the audience. The same process applies to fictional characters. The fact that they are carefully placed in isolation, in a universe of more or less artificial origin, does not suffice at all. The reader has to plunge in and blend the framework with the authorial intentionality, for the entirety of the narrative artefact to have fulfilled its mission.

Similarly, in McEwan's *Atonement*, or *On Chesil Beach* or *The Child in time*, the framework unfolds steadily with the characters. Every inquest into Briony's mind and actions or Florence's thought process, or Stephen's constant revisiting of the moment he loses his daughter in the supermarket, has the single purpose of pinpointing essential pieces of information about the characters. According to Currie (2010), the framework and the story are very much interdependent and they cannot occur separately. Both elements, equally essential to the structure of the narrative, represent the prerequisites for how the narrative is, in the end, perceived. Framework and story are, therefore, strongly intermingled. They constitute a unanimous corpus, we read the story, but assign meaningfulness to its facts, based on its framework.

The very thin border between framework and story will leave room for indeterminacies of interpretations. Framing is a natural feature of communication. It appears in the simple narratives of early childhood and it is somewhat subconsciously imitated within the narrative process. This is also why the audience is quite easily able to pick up the pieces of information carefully placed in the framework and direct the reading on the path toward which it has already been intended.

Narrative framing as opposed to its counterpart in communication is a limited technique. The processes of framing and understanding exactly which possible world in fiction to assign to a particular piece of writing, doesn't seem enough to justify the completeness of fictional characters. Completeness needs to be understood as legitimacy to exist across all possible worlds. Within the issue of completeness of fictional characters and their fictional existence, Ingarden (1973) distinguishes three different facets. The first aspect would be that fictional entities will never be fully determined; the second one states that fictional beings will always present spots of indeterminacy and stemming from here, the last one implies that, when dealing with a work of fiction, the audience is hardly ever aware of the existence of these intrinsic fictional gaps.

Fictional entities pose an issue of maximal complexity upon the validity of the possible world philosophy in fiction. Their existence is limited to the

narrative process that puts them out there, into the indeterminacy of fictional imagination. One cannot speak of Florence outside the fictional world of the novel *On Chesil Beach*, for instance. Florence, just like any other fictional persona, cannot be pragmatically defined. As such, Florence, in contrast with any other entity in the actual world, is an incomplete entity. It has been established that fictional characters cannot be understood outside of the narrative of its framework.

Still, before drawing further conclusions about the status of completeness or incompleteness of fictional characters, a good starting point would be to define the very notion of ontological incompleteness and only then to further analyze whether it is just to label fictional characters as such. A good approach is offered by Ruth Ronen, who sees incompleteness as the feature distinguishing between types of existents (1994, 122). Therefore, the distinction between fictional and non-fictional entities lies mainly in deciding which entity can be awarded a maximal set of properties and which entity presents a limited set of properties, in the same category. Non-fictional figures will always be maximal, while fictional figures will always be lacking. The status of incompleteness is also given by way of logical and semantic principles. Fictional entities will, thus, be logically incomplete because any statements related to these characters outside their world of fiction, are indistinguishable, meaning that we cannot assign any truth value to them.

For instance, statements of the sort *Briony was an overthinker* or *Florence was overinterpreting her feelings*, have no value outside the fictional world they belong to. The reason for this is that there is no actual referent. There is no real Briony or Florence in the actual world of existence to justify the validity of these statements. Even in those cases in which both the narrative and the framework of a fictional work provide all the necessary information, the fictional character will still maintain a certain degree of incompleteness. There will always exist a particular set of features, which a fictional character will not abide by. Just like there will always be a great ontological gap between the actual world and the various possible worlds of fiction.

The treatment of fictional characters, even across possible worlds, should be approached differently, a perspective that handles the issue of incompleteness diversely and move it closer towards a semantics for literary texts. Such approaches that combine the principles of possible world theory for logics and semantics, with the rather ambiguous notoriety of fictional characters might offer more light into the matter. One such approach is Margolin's (1996) theory of characters. Margolin names the necessity of four intrinsic conditions for the validity of a fictional character: existence, individuality, uniqueness, and the unity of features under a given category, all of which need to pertain to the fictional discourse. The novelty brought about by this type of view, lies in the fact that the distinguishing mark of fiction is its complete dependence on the world-constructing act of the narrative and its framework. An ontological choice upon the nature of

incompleteness opens up at this stage. We can choose to either view incompleteness as a permanent obstacle in the attempt to integrate fiction in a system of logic, or we can choose to accept it as an inherent feature of fictional texts and build on from here.

Ruth Ronen settles the indecision over the issue of incompleteness stating that: "for literary theorists, the incompleteness of fictional entities is transformed from a problem of a *logical* order into a problem of *rhetorical* order" (1994, 112). It is thus clearly established that within the philosophy of language, the focus will constantly be placed upon the logical aspects of fictional existence, while literary theorists will always choose to focus on how fictional characters are constructed by way of language. Incompleteness is in its entirety a philosophical dilemma. If we were to go back to Margolin's principles (1996) of character identity and scrutinize them from a philosophical point of view, it would readily result that the problematic incompleteness of fictional characters is related to how the status of incompleteness affects the uniqueness of the fictional entities. Furthermore, it is related to whether the status of incompleteness is fictionally inflicted. Either way we may look at it, fictional entities will never lose their status of incompleteness, if their ontologically different world is constantly linked or compared to the actual world.

Fictional characters are not entities of the actual world, they are the entities existing in the actual world of a narrative, which sets a framework and an actual mode of existence for its fictional characters. It might be of more ontological use to view fictional characters in the sense of their completeness within the textual actual world or to reach a purposeful compromise, perhaps a new manner of justifying their ontological existence.

4.2 The Necessity of Naming

The necessity of naming and its importance for fictional entities is justified under the following terms. Primarily, if the procedure of naming establishes a clear connection between what is being named and the world the named entity is placed into. Secondarily, if the act of naming attaches meaning defining descriptions. Finally, if the act of naming is freely employed, without triggering any descriptions or any particular referents.

With respect to naming, Searle (1958) claims that a proper name also includes a set of identifying descriptions, meant to ascertain its particular meaning. Proper names would then be constitutionally linked with the set of descriptions they embody and they would also contain the property of defining the individual they refer to, be that individual fictional or not. Quite the extreme approach, if we were to apply Searle's naming theory to one of McEwan's novels, like *The*

Child in Time, and we were to focus on the character of Stephen and pick out any random feature of his character, clearly depicted in the novel, such as "the father of the lost child", we would then have laid out a proper name and a descriptive notion attached to it. In Searle's terms, the descriptive notion "the father of the lost child", should be able to replace Stephen in determining the very same referent.

Proper names have the indisputable property of naming the very same referent across different worlds and across different situations. While the descriptive patches attached to any character in particular might change, proper names are fixed notions. They will still refer to the very same entity across different worlds and possibilities. Stephen or Briony or Florence will still refer to the very same entities, whatever additional descriptions might be assigned to them.

In order for the entire idea of possible worlds to apply to fiction, it would be necessary to unwind the system of referential functions. One step in this direction has been made by Kripke (1981), whose approach distinguishes between rigid and non-rigid designators and furthermore by Putnam's (2011) twin earth theory. Even though both approaches are centered on the self-sufficiency of the actual world and greatly condition their justification within the ontological maze of fictional possible worlds, they have still managed to ensure the referential function of names and set the basis for a more stable system of establishing identity across possible worlds.

The applicability of Kripke's or Putnam's naming theories upon fiction has limited applicability for fiction, because they assign the feature of non-rigidity to fictional entities. As such, fictional characters cannot designate rigidly across possible worlds, a postulation which finds its roots within the prerequisites of logic. It is obvious that neither Cecilia nor Stephen nor Florence would mean anything outside the narrative and its framework, but this also doesn't imply that references made to them within the actual world of existence need to be completely meaningless. Ruth Ronen concludes that: "names can function as rigid designators in non-actual contexts, because they satisfy the existence condition, which guarantees the fixity of identity of the object concerned despite movements across world boundaries and into counterfactual states of affairs" (1994, 135). It would be at least interesting to think of fictional characters as rigid designators in the Textual Actual World of the narrative, as Marie-Laure Ryan (2004) suggests. This would allow a trace of legitimacy to the fictional characters within the universe of their existence. Certainly, possible worlds of fiction are just as endless as the possible worlds stemming from the actual world of existence, with the mentioning that the zones of indeterminacy will always be far greater, whenever the fictional universe is at stake.

The initial act of baptism establishes the identity of a rigid designator permanently across all possible worlds, including those possible worlds in which the said designator isn't named in the same way. For instance: Madonna will always be Madonna even in those possible worlds in which she chooses a different stage name. As such, we could acknowledge a similar act of baptism for fictional characters. The narrative by way of authorial voice performs such an act when introducing a character for the very first time within the cosmological universe of the fiction. So, when in McEwan's *On Chesil Beach,* the narrative states: "Edward did not mention that he had never stayed in a hotel before, whereas Florence, after many trips as a child with her father, was an old hand" (2008, 3), introducing the two main characters for the first time, a fictional act of naming and baptizing is performed. Thus, an act of baptism is already performed when the characters are first presented, an act which doesn't necessarily need to come from the part of the author or the narrator. The act of baptism comes through with the character's first appearance within the fictional world.

The process of fictional baptism is not unique to fictional characters. It is followed by a more descriptive process of assigning certain attributes and features to the blank individual, that has only just been brought to light by way of naming. The descriptive process which may be extended to the length of the entire narrative is thoroughly individuating and what theorists might call defining. As it also appears in the introductory statements presenting Edward and Florence, the act of baptism in McEwan's novel was immediately assisted by a few lines of meaningful, individual description. The situation is similar also with Stephen in *The Child in Time*: "Stephen stepped quickly through the crowds, through layers of in-car audio blather-jingles, high-energy breakfast DJs, news-flashes, traffic 'alerts'" (McEwan 1992, 1). The characters are fictionally baptized and traces of their individuality are laid out by a tiny piece of description. The defining process that follows the baptism and which is supported by the narrative descriptions, is also endorsed by the narrative framework. Characters are formed by descriptions and framework, the descriptions may offer definitions of character, but the framework indicates how these descriptions need to be understood.

Descriptions, identity, naming, all these terms acquire an uncommon degree of ambiguity within fiction. Fiction can hardly meet the demand of completeness. This is one of the most crucial areas of ambiguity revealed by the application of the possible world framework upon fiction. With fictional worlds, it is difficult to establish which level or standard indicates that the descriptive processes have been completely saturated. In the actual world, areas of discrepancy, vagueness or incompleteness are easily dissipated when referring to a concrete object as the standard of reference. Fiction doesn't have this feature and the

next check point would be: is such a feature imperative for fiction as well? Across the literary worlds, different authorial voices have imposed different narrative styles which then incorporated different fictional universes, but none of these have ever become 'a standard'. Especially with postmodern literature, there's no telling the authors how to conduct their own fictional world, how to enhance their descriptive processes, how to baptize or define their characters. The framework holds the key to how fictional entities need to be understood and how they need to function within the textual worlds of the narrative and within this framework, the completeness becomes an overall accepted condition.

More interestingly, there are theorists who are ready to support the idea that "being creatures of fiction and constructs of language, fictional entities suspend the logic of actuals" (Ronen 1994, 154). This automatically has the function of excluding the demand for completeness, at least in the same manner in which it is applied to actual world entities. Fiction is notwithstanding conceived as a parallel universe, which can recreate bits and pieces available in the actual world or it can create a brand-new world completely free of any actual world elements. Legitimately, fiction needs to be granted a good sense of independence from the actual world of existence. It is also the direction Marie-Laure Ryan (2004) was pointing to, with the TAW. Fiction has long been accepted to be ontologically different from the actual world. This is furthermore the reason why fictional entities do not derive their actuality or substantiality from within their ontological status.

There is nothing wrong with acknowledging the self-sufficiency of fiction in a similar way in which acceptance is given for the self-sufficiency of the actual world. Fictions have invariably been labeled as universes ever uncommitted to actual world existence and audiences have long comprehended and consented to their ontological independence. Fictional entities, the rightful inhabitants of these possible worlds of fiction, are complete between the narrative world and its framework. Cecilia, Briony or Stephen may not require a further degree of completeness than precisely that degree which derives from what is narratively known about them and what is implied by way of framework. The fact that fictional entities, as the ones mentioned, may be referred to within language, is the result of the processes of naming which originated within the narrative.

4.3. Fictional Characters, Possible Individuals, Non-actual Scenarios

As resulting from the previous subchapter, fictional characters acquire enough ontological justification. The debate about fictional characters across possible worlds might be a case of overly forced reductions. According to the modality of possible worlds, as David Lewis (2004) would put it, possible worlds

are actual worlds in which real possibilities are made actual. It is absolutely necessary here to clearly distinguish between the notions of "reality" and "actuality" and furthermore to try and incorporate fiction into the mix.

Thus, with David Lewis (2004), reality comprises a far too large number of options. It includes all the possibilities and the totality of possible worlds. Actuality, however, refers strictly to that particular world inhabited at the moment, a distinction which may prove to be extremely useful for the future treatment of fictional worlds and their comprising entities. Actuality pinpoints which world, from the maze of possibilities, is the world matching the current state of facts, so, while all possible worlds available within the boundaries of reality are in fact possible, actuality decides which one of them is the one currently inhabited. The maze of all the other possible worlds, which manifested themselves as valid possibilities to the state of actuality are, therefore, non-actual. They are valid possible, but non actual realities.

Fiction is by definition a non-actual ontological universe. It would be legitimate to refer to fictional worlds as non-actual possibilities, a status which would be extending to all the built in fictional entities. If we allow fictional worlds to be considered as non-actual, this perspective would also account for why it is impossible to find a counterpart for fictional characters in the actual world of existence. It would explain what Cecilia Tallis is according to what the narrative of *Atonement* tells us, and why an actual Cecilia Tallis may not have physically existed.

Quine (1980) would readily argue that possible entities lack the criteria of identity. Quine of course refers to the bald man/fat man analogy, which he used as an example: "Take, for instance, the possible fat man in the doorway; and again, the possible bald man in that doorway. Are they the same possible man or two possible men? How do we decide? How many possible men are there in that doorway?" (1980, 4) What results from here, is the impossibility of providing any answers to whether Quine's man is bald or fat or whether it is both, or whether there are two different individuals or a single one. In the very same manner, we wouldn't be able to provide any commonsensical statements about fictional entities. Narrative and framework apart, any other accounts on Briony, Stephen or Florence will lack the necessary support for being considered meaningful. And, also, what about those fictions which relate impossible happenings?

The ambiguity of fictional characters within the modal system of possible worlds is yet to be solved. Nevertheless, it would be useful to analyze the most important features, so as to look at these fictional entities through the magnifying glass of several different types of approaches, for a better understanding of how they can modally function, when the question of their identity is utterly contradicted.

5. Conclusions

The present paper has been an attempt to demonstrate that fictionality is pervaded by a very strong modal structure, a feature which is best brought out by the theory of possible worlds. The proposed method was to apply theories of modal realism, such as Saul Kripke's naming and necessity theory, David Lewis' theory on counterfactuals and combine them with more specific perspectives, literary in nature, such as Marie-Laure Ryan's recentering system or Ruth Ronen's reinterpretation of fictionality through possible worlds.

What resulted from Marie-Laure Ryan's system of textual worlds in combination with Ronen's approach, which was situated closer to the literary field, was the emergence of a quasi-logical, yet at the same time quasi-literary system meant to describe the manner in which the fictional universe of the three novels might be viewed as a conglomerate of worlds and possibilities, centered around a core universe of reality. This justifies both the ontic independence of the fictional universe from the actual world and the necessity for perceiving it under the prerequisites of a sense of modal logic.

Approaches supporting the one world semantics perspective have a limiting effect on understanding the manner in which language functions, even more so, the language of fiction. Possible world theory which is a valid application for systems of reality, can offer a reconstructive approach of the way we understand fiction. This is possible because any fictional text opens a world of textual semantics, which can be accessed through modal logic.

Nonetheless, devising a possible world system for fiction appears to be a complicated endeavor. The captivating hypotheses set forward by Kripke and Lewis through the possible world framework, were not intended for the study of fiction. Applying the possible world framework on fiction, reveals a complex manner of understanding fictional entities, but it is necessary to operate with the understanding that the treatment of fictional entities needs to acknowledge that they are non-actual entities and that the actual world does not determine their existence.

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