

UNIVERSITATEA „BABEȘ-BOLYAI”
CLUJ-NAPOCA
FACULTATEA DE LITERE
ȘCOALA DOCTORALĂ DE STUDII LINGVISTICE ȘI LITERARE

*Possible Worlds and Postmodernist Fiction. A Case Study of Ian
McEwan's Atonement, On Chesil Beach, The Child in Time*

Conducător de doctorat:
Prof. univ. dr. Oltean Ștefan

Student-doctorand:
Polgar Adriana Diana

2015

Table of Contents

I. INTRODUCTION

1. One World Semantics, One World Ontology, Possible-Worlds Semantics
2. Possible Worlds
 - 2.1. Arguments against Possible Worlds
 - 2.2. Possible Worlds: Access Denied...Access Granted
3. “Brave New World”: A Reconstructive Approach through Possible Worlds
 - 3.1. The “Whos” “Hows” and “Wheres” of the Narrative Actual World
4. Where to Go From Here?
5. Characters and Possible Worlds, the Twilight Zone of Representation
 - 5.1. Fictional Characters and Fictional existence
 - 5.3. The Necessity of Naming
 - 5.4. Fictional characters, possible individuals, non-actual scenarios
 - 5.5. Creationism versus Platonism

II. Plot Dynamics and Fictional Recentering in Ian McEwan’s Atonement

1. Summary
2. A Few Theoretical Approaches
3. Recentering
4. The Textual Universe and Its Contents
 - 4.2. Plot and Possible World Determinism
5. The plot and its Representations
6. Narrative Voices and Possible Worlds
7. Necessity, Possible Worlds and the Narrative
 - 7.1. The Existence of Fictional Characters Revisited
 - 7.2. A Modally Structured Universe
8. Space, Time and Possible Worlds
9. Conclusions

III. Possible World and Character Identity in On Chesil Beach

1. Summary
2. Possible Worlds and Fictionality
3. Interpreting Fictionality through Possible Worlds

4. Assigning Truth Values in Fiction
5. Autonomy in Fiction and the Concept of World
6. The “One Word-Frame” and the “Possible-Worlds Frame”
7. Existence versus Non-Existence
 - 7.1. A Type of “Florence”
 - 7.2. Of Unicorns - How to Approach Fictional Entities
8. Fictional Worlds and Their Actuality
 - 8.1. Meaning Functions in Fictional Language and Otherwise
 - 8.3. The Proper Names of Fiction
9. Focalizing Possible Worlds, Focalizing Fictional Entities
 - 9.1. Types of Focalization
10. Conclusions

IV.Narrative Language and Possible Worlds

1. Summary
2. A New Approach
3. Narrative Content Revisited
 - 3.1. Narrative Hierarchies
 - 3.2. Towards a Macrostructure
4. Within the Story: Modalizing Entities, Space, Time
 - 4.1. Fictional Entities from Traits to Worlds
5. A Different Kind of Discourse
 - 5.1. Methodological Outlines
 - 5.2. The Text as Speech and Thought Acts
6. Free Indirect Discourse and the Worlds of Possibility
 - 6.1. Free Indirect Discourse and Character World
7. Narrative Voices and Narrative Worlds

V.CONCLUSIONS

VI.BIBLIOGRAPHY

Key Words

Possible worlds, possible world theory, possible world semantics, one-world semantics, modal logic, postmodern fiction, fictionality, proper names, fictional names, fictional universe, counterfactuals, character identity, identity across possible worlds, actual world, fictional autonomy, taxonomy, accessibility, possibility, necessity, ontology, literary truth.

Summary

The paper under discussion tackles the idea of applying the theory of possible worlds onto the very intricate field of postmodern fiction. Aside from the Introduction and the Conclusions, each of the four main chapters of the thesis focuses on a different problematic related to the manner in which postmodern fiction can be rendered by way of applying onto it the possible world framework. The subject of choice comprises a broad field of research, therefore, in order to narrow it down and grant it a more palpable notion of practicality, the paper under discussion chose for analysis three postmodern novels belonging to Ian McEwan *Atonement*, *On Chesil Beach* and *The Child in Time*.

As such, the Introduction sets the pathway to be followed in the intricate field of developing a clear cut system meant to bring about new ways of understanding postmodern fiction by accessing it through modality and logics. The purpose of this thesis, also underlined in the Introduction consists of a unifying attempt of combining quintessential elements from the different perspectives described, studying their strengths and weaknesses and then stitching them together in a wholly mechanism meant to hopefully bring more light rather than even more ambiguity into the matter. The general tendency is towards an eclectic approach aiming to include possible world modality within the fictional universe, the results of which were elaborated upon along the thesis leading to the formation of a clearer picture on how the language of fiction speaks through a system of modal logic.

Chapter II has as main focus the problematic of plot dynamics and fictional recentering, the analysis of which will be followed along the lines of the novel *Atonement*. One of the main theories discussed at this level refers to Marie-Laure Ryan who proposes a fully structured environment for grasping fiction and fictional works within the system of modality inherent the possible world theories. What this kind of environment presupposes is a

trichotomy of model systems centered on three different types of actual worlds: the actual world (AW), the textual actual world (TAW) and the textual reference world (TRW). The phenomenon of recentering within fiction can be conceptualized here by accepting an actual possible world (APW) as the main world of reference. Following this lead, the universe produced by the text may be different from the AW, but it will be legitimately dependent of the textual world of reference, the TRW, which cannot exist independently. The two terminologies TAW and TRW appear to be almost interchangeable, but they stress the necessity of seeing fiction as self-referential, as independent from the prerequisites of the AW and, as such, meaningful in its very own way. Fictional events and worlds are modeled according to an internal logical system which makes it possible for fiction to recreate events from the actuality of the real world or to portray a time equally identifiable within actuality with the key remark that once fictionalized these elements cannot be considered as non-actualized fictional events or as actual events tinged with a sense of fictionality. Yet another point of view taken into account at this stage of the analysis is that of Ruth Ronen (1994) who also grants a sense of autonomy to the world of fiction and supports the idea that fiction creates its own internal system of reality. Ronen pictures the narrative as a highly complex construction within which the time line is divided into a foreground and a background, or into a narrative present and a non-present, rising the very interesting problematic of whether the alternation between foreground and background of the general sequence of events operates as a mechanism or as a temporally related division meant to occur only within the fictional environment.

The general conclusion to be drawn here firmly suggests that fiction and its temporality are modally individuated into a universe completely independent ontologically from any intrusions from the actual world of existence.

In Chapter III the analysis touches the sensitive subject of character identity across possible worlds. Here, the analysis is applied onto Ian McEwan's novel *On Chesil Beach*. The basis to start from here is of course Saul Kripke and his ideas mentioned in *Naming and Necessity* (1981). Kripke's theory of possibility identifies individuals across possible worlds on the basis of origin and history. Identity is thus fixed once any individual is named as a matter of transworld necessary truth and his name will at all times pick out the same individual irrespective of the range of experimentally varying descriptions which can be devised so as to invent alternative lives and careers in a ramble through any accessible possible worlds. Then

David Lewis needs to be mentioned in relation to the notion of identity across possible worlds. Lewis operates the distinction between fiction as told as fact and a world in which whatever is fictional takes place in order to delimitate the world of fiction F from the actual world. Thus, a fiction is a story told by a particular person on a particular occasion, and storytelling is pretense, enacted by the teller who is relating a story which he knows to be true. There is yet another way of looking at a fiction according to Lewis, namely fictions are told and received against a “background”, an analysis which will suggest that there is more truth in the fiction than its explicit content. There are according to this pattern two possible analyses of what can be understood by “background” and a third category of the so named impossible fictions. Still, there were a number of inconsistencies in this analysis, which is why Lewis comes up with a second type of analysis, mentioned in Chapter III, an analysis which treats background as the set of overt beliefs. An overt belief is a belief that is shared by the great majority of the members in a community of which also the author of the fiction is a part of.

The worlds where all the overt beliefs are true are understood as the collective belief worlds of that community. Thus, according to Analysis 2, truth in fiction is what would have been true according to overt belief: “In fiction f , Φ is non-vacuously true iff, wherever w is one of the collective belief worlds of the community of origin of f , then some world where f is told as known fact and Φ is true differs less from the world w , on balance, than does any world where f is told as known fact and Φ is not true.” (Lewis 1983, 273). Despite the importance of both Lewis’ and Kripke’s theories in understanding the way in which the identity of the fictional characters should be treated, the system of possible worlds and character identity in fiction still presented a series of inconsistencies, which a brand new system, that belonging to Yagisawa, promised to resolve. As such, the prerequisites that Yagisawa proposes have been accepted as valid means of analysis within Chapter III leading to the conclusion that the proper names of fiction imitate the same type of rigid designation which is specific for the actual world, but they are at the same time limiting their designation to the worlds the fictional entities belong to. Yes, we can refer to fictional entities in actual world circumstances, but this kind of statements will be valid in a very well defined context, namely that of understanding the limitations imposed by the fictional world status these fictional entities have.

The final subject matter to be tackled with is that of narrative language and it makes the main theme of chapter IV which extends its focus onto the novel *The Child in Time*. The previous

two chapters have drafted quite essentially the issues of transworld identity and plot organization within the possible world system, revealing that the internal structure of the fictional universe is an ever more complex mechanism of possibility and modality with an even stronger sense of autonomy. This final chapter focuses on clarifying a few aspects which might have been left unexplained so far and it provides shape and consistency to the demonstration as a whole. The two major theoretical inputs considered at this stage have taken into account, on the one hand, Chatman's rhetoric of narrative in fiction and on the other hand Monika Fludernik's analysis of the free indirect discourse, with practical application upon the third novel which made the subject of this thesis, namely Ian McEwan's *The Child in Time*. While Chatman takes us through the technicalities of the narrative, establishing the various identities of the author, narrator and narrative voice and the manner in which these instances create the various worlds of the narrative, it is Fludernik's input which actually formulates the main point of this last chapter, namely that the narrative should be understood as a speech and thought act. Thus, the notion of free indirect discourse functions as the appropriate linguistic tool to render character voice as a very palpable notion within the world of the narrative. This enables us to conclude 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 within the possible world determinism. Monika Fludernik suggests an approach of the literary discourse which constitutes itself as all the more theoretical rather than utterly applicative. The premises of this discussion are set in a more or less traditional range of distinction between the overtly rejected notion of mimesis and the corresponding one of diegesis. Both notions go as far back as Plato, but their importance for the current line of study does not lie within the initial stages of their appearance, but much rather in their later interpretations and reinterpretations. When assessing the value of the free indirect discourse, Fludernik concludes that it also identifies two cognitive levels, one aligned to a narrator persona, indexed by narrative knowledge, while the other to the ruling, figural consciousness.

From the point of view of the possible world system, the free indirect discourse presents a clear account of the manner in which fictional language functions in order to render the manner in which narrative worlds are formed. In addition to this, the free indirect discourse not only indicates how voices and perspectives are distributed within the narrative, but it also distinguishes the intermingling of character worlds within the narrative universe. Together with Chatman's perspectives on narrative theory and the disposition of plot, the analysis of the

free indirect discourse completes the entire picture of a syntax of the narrative within the possible world determinism.