

**POSSIBLE WORLDS SEMANTICS
AND CHARACTER IDENTITY.
HIGHLIGHTS FOR IAN MCEWAN'S ON CHESIL BEACH**

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Abstract

The paper aims at discussing the treatment of fictional characters through the theoretical apparatus of possible world semantics with clear and practical applications within postmodern fiction, more precisely in Ian McEwan's novel On Chesil Beach. First it explains the manner in which the theoretical apparatus applies to fictionality in general, to postmodern fiction and to the selected novel going through the essential theories in the field, the Kripkean perspective, David Lewis' Counterfactuals, Marie-Laure Ryan's system for understanding fiction through the possible worlds framework. Then it showcases how the identity of fictional characters appears in the fictional piece under discussion, and the manner in which it unfolds within the mindset of the possible world semantics. Finally, by blending in these perspectives within the narrative universe and observing how they render a structural matrix of fiction upon which worlds of possibility can be modally distinguished, the paper will prove that the analysis of character identity and character worlds in fiction completes the entire picture of a syntax of the narrative within the possible world determinism.

Keywords: possible worlds; possible world semantics; fictional worlds; fictional discourse; postmodern fiction.

1. Introduction

The study of fictionality constitutes a rather essential theme within postmodern logic and philosophy. Quite traditionally, fictionality is thought to engulf sets of inexistent entities, entities that need to be separated to a safe degree from reality, an equation within which reality is defined as being the opposite of fiction and the equivalent of what is sensed to be real.

Such an interpretation of fictionality does not seem prepared to provide much information about the manner in which fictional entities and objects should be treated, about their ontological status, their reference and not least the truth conditions of fictional sentences. The difficulties encountered in providing clear solutions to these dilemmas are just as much the result of the complexity of their

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nature, as the result of the constant tendency towards atomistic approaches rather than tackling with a more unified perspective. To clarify, it proves superfluous to focus separately on each philosophical matter (philosophy of language, literature, psychology) and ignore all the rest. It would be more effective to abide by a unified approach meant to provide a much wider perspective on all the elements within the wider system and ultimately obtain a better understanding of them all.

2. Interpreting fictionality through possible worlds

The treatment of possible worlds when applied upon the framework of fiction generally encounters a wide range of skepticism and such a reception is mostly due to the traditional, one-angled perspective upon fictional worlds, which focuses on the mimetic function of literary worlds. It has been common practice for decades to report to fictional worlds only by way of the representations they borrow from a pre-acknowledged reality. However, while nobody is questioning the notion of reality and while fictional worlds, at least according to this interpretation, draw their existence from the imitation of what is believed to be real, a basic notion should be reinstated: fictional worlds are imaginative constructions.

The difference in this approach of fictionality influenced by philosophical logic implies accepting a different view on fictionality, namely that fictionality is given a pragmatic position. It is no longer identified with components of the literary text in itself, but rather given a more cultural context, a note of interdisciplinarity. In this respect, it can even be said that the notion of possible worlds may be used to show the fact that the fictionality of texts is the property which derives from cultural and historical decisions. According to these interpretations, for instance, a novel such as Tolstoy's *War and Peace* is a fictional text just as much as Ian McEwan's *On Chesil Beach* for that matter. The fact that a series of historical facts identifiable in Tolstoy's novel may be traced back to a series of actual events documentable in the actual world, does not turn the novel into anything else than a fiction. To the same extent Florence or Edward or any other characters in McEwan's novel are nothing else but fictional entities.

The possible-world framework is rooted in the belief that there exist other ways things could have been, that there exist other "possible states of affairs" (Ronen, 1994: 21). And it is this particular trait of the possible-worlds framework which generates a remarkable amount of dissention and philosophical debate. Which possible world is the "right" possible world? Are there any "impossible" possible worlds? In order to clarify such ambiguities and to further reinstate the identity of the fictional entities inhabiting such possible worlds, it would primarily be of aid to analyze the specific versions of possible-worlds models. The various positions adopted with regards to possible worlds represent various views on the degree of realism to be ascribed to possible worlds.

If the notion of realism is viewed in connection to that of possible worlds, then it would be an imperative to run this realism through Kripke's (1981) own system fixed by an inaugural "baptism" or act of naming. In developing his theory, Kripke (1981) had in mind overcoming the contradictions left over by Frege (1980) and Russell (1905). These theoreticians identify entities across possible worlds by means of an associated cluster of descriptive attributes which serve to define particular items. The magic of Kripke's theory (1981) is that it provides the necessary means by which it is possible to identify entities across possible worlds by removing such ambiguous descriptions. The example which Kripke (1981) uses in this case is the one of *Julius Caesar*. Thus, Kripke (1981) renders that it is not the case that Julius Caesar is synonymous with such descriptions as the Roman general who was named Julius or the Roman general who defeated Pompey.

For Kripke (1981), Polgar (2018) such descriptions are not enough to set clear demarcations by means of which fictional entities can be identified. The reason for this is that such descriptions may be altered, for instance, if Julius Caesar hadn't been named Julius, if he had been named Cornelius or if Julius Caesar had not defeated Pompey, one could easily reach the erroneous conclusion that Julius Caesar is not Julius Caesar simply because by altering the descriptions one also alters the entire puzzle containing traits and particularities which lead to acquiring the complete image of Julius Caesar. Kripke (1981) however states precisely the opposite. Julius Caesar is Julius Caesar even in those worlds in which he doesn't defeat Pompey. Kripke (1981) obviously identifies entities differently across worlds and this is indeed the vision which seems to produce the least amount of confusion when dealing with entities inhabiting multiple worlds. Therefore, "an individual in any possible world who has the same parents as the actual Julius Caesar, and comes from the same fertilized egg is a possible Julius Caesar even if, in the possible world in question, he has a different life history than the actual Julius Caesar, is given a different name etc." (Putnam, 1983: 72)

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 the 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 world.

Kripke's claims that the idea of possible worlds has its source in modal logic which is a branch of logics concerned with matters of necessity and possibility. As such, modal logic provides some powerful argumentative resources in fields such as philosophical semantics, epistemology, metaphysics and philosophy of science and it also brings about the distinction between a priori and a posteriori truths. Probably the most important notion to be tackled with here would be that of a posteriori truths for they, unlike a priori truths, are not self-evident to reason, but yet provide,

as a matter of necessity, truths about the world. Such is the case for instance with certain scientific discoveries of which the best example would be the molecular constitution H_2O which has been the generator of much philosophical debate even within the field of modal logic.

As a mere example of how possible worlds combine in the field of modal logic, Hilary Putnam (2011) sets the basis of his own thought-experiments starting from Kripke's very example of *water* scientifically known to all under the H_2O format. Putnam (2011) starts the hypothesis of a duplicate planet, Twin Earth, where there seems to be plenty of water, with the sole essential distinction that the liquid on Twin Earth has the chemical formula XYZ. Thus, if we were to take the substance on Twin Earth as the equivalent of the water on Earth, this would simply be a wrong assumption because no list of descriptive criteria could ever suffice in order to distinguish genuine from non-genuine samples of a natural kind or to determine the truth value of sentences such as "this is water". Deciding upon the truth value of such natural kinds is strictly dependent on their molecular structure. This is also what distinguishes the substance on Earth from the one on Twin Earth. Apart from this defining distinction the water on Twin Earth may be described in the exactly same terms as the water on Earth: it falls as rain, it fills up lakes, it has cleansing properties, it boils and freezes at certain temperatures.

This example yet again indicates that sense does not determine reference as Frege (1980) and similar theoreticians would imply. Descriptions of entities (see the case of water) or individuals (see the case of Julius Caesar) are most often incomplete, may be prone to misinformation and thus may lead to false assumptions when assigning truth values. What Putnam's example (2011) actually points out is that, by taking the theory of description as guidance, one would be driven to conclude against all possible reason that "water is actually not water". Just like Kripke or Julius Caesar or John Fitzgerald Kennedy are just the same individuals across all possible worlds even in those worlds in which their lives might have taken divergent directions, so water is water (as H_2O) in any possible world physically congruent with this world as long as it abides by the particular well known formula, whatever its differences in other contingent aspects.

The essential breakthrough brought by Kripke and Putnam's theories by way of modal logic is that it promises to resolve the long debated issue of personal identity or more importantly, identity across possible worlds. What are the chief components to be taken as immanent when determining the identity of an individual? Continuing on Kripke's example of Julius Caesar, what distinguishes an individual across all possible worlds is "the fact of his having been conceived by certain parents at a certain moment in time." (Norris, 2003: 234) This, as stated before, is the landmark of Julius Caesar's identity even in those possible worlds in which he is not a great Roman emperor.

Historians often resort to the possible-worlds game in order to explain how things might have happened if it hadn't been for one particular moment in time. For instance, what if Caesar hadn't defeated Pompey? What if he had not been killed by his son Brutus? Thus, historians in their attempt to portray history as it actually happened are in need of the element of contrast, deploying possible world scenarios to show how things would have turned out as a consequence of various antecedents in the sequence of events. In this case, the problem of character identity does not stand, since it is primarily assumed by both the historians and the possible receivers that the Julius Caesar who defeated Pompey has to be identical to the Julius Caesar who, in a possible world, does not defeat Pompey. Simply admitting that there is no identity correspondence between the two instances of the same character would render such demonstrations void of meaning.

Kripke and his notions of fixed reference (1981), as is the case of proper nouns, assigned through the process of "naming" which creates the "necessity" of establishing individual identity across all possible worlds, manages to neutralize the chief issue of the descriptivist theories which is based on correctly assigning the appropriate descriptions to match a particular individual. How these descriptions fall into place, however, is a quite indefinite process due to the fact that individual speakers may often lack the adequately informed conceptual-descriptive notions related to the referent they are trying to pick out. In this respect, individual speakers may refer successfully to Aristotle while being completely ignorant of the fact that he was also the philosopher who tutored Alexander the Great or of what he had written.

Nevertheless, even if Kripke's causal theory (1981) succeeds in resolving the chief ambiguities consistent with the descriptivist theories of the sort "Aristotle is not Aristotle" or "Water is not water", there would be slight modifications to be operated on the causal system. Theorists such as Putnam (2011), Quine (1969), Burge (2005) that based their own theories on Kripke's causal system (1981) reveal that some of the descriptivist notions need to be incorporated within the Kripkean method. Taking yet again the example of Aristotle, and reviewing it as depicted above it would result that "the fact that any extra information acquired – say through our reading the latest scholarship – will impinge upon the process of reference transmission to a point where it may quite radically affect our grasp of what counts as truth-apt statement about Aristotle" (Norris, 2010: 241).

Concluding in the debate between causal and descriptivist, the causal theory does avoid the illogical statements that result from the purely descriptivist accounts, but at the same time the descriptivist theories would best explain how to make sufficient allowance for the corrective input of expert knowledge and the reference modifying role of newly acquired scientific or other information.

Of course, the application in fiction of the mixed causal and descriptivist accounts may not offer the necessary arguments that such a combination of the two theories

may offer for real world scenarios. Yet, Kripke's accounts (1981) were not meant to be restricted merely to the philosophical or linguistic level. His approach via modal logic was meant to touch crucial topics in epistemology, the philosophies of science and a range of other disciplines where issues of truth are bound up with issues of sense and reference. This is also why literary studies accept possible worlds as "a guide to ontological issues in the theory of fictive reference – by way of a promising alternative to post-structuralist approaches or postmodernist ideas with regard to the textual character (discursively constructed) of "truth" and "reality" (Norris, 2003: 241).

2.1 A possible worlds system for fiction

Marie Laure Ryan (2004) proposes a whole separate system by means of which possible worlds can be integrated in the study of the fictional genre. Ryan comes up with an entire system which constitutes the pathway towards accessing fiction by way of the possible world theory. Ryan (2004) starts from a modally structured system of reality comprising a central world surrounded by satellite worlds. The center of such a modal system is its actual world, while the satellites are alternative possible worlds. In order to diminish the notion of logic generality embodied by this system of reality, Ryan (2004) sets forward a textual universe which emerges as the system of reality projected by the text. The textual universe is a modal system if one of its worlds is designated as an actual world and opposed to the rest of the worlds of the system.

Moving yet deeper within the textual system, Ryan (2004) identifies a semantic domain defined as a concept of a more general nature than the textual universe, a domain which actually comprises different sets of concepts evoked by the text. Within this broader system which Ryan (2004) designed for appliance upon fictional texts, a most necessary distinction is made between the actual world (AW) a term which is the correspondent of the more scientific notion of the world of experience, and the textual reference world (TRF) as well as the textual actual world (TAW). What these notions are bound to indicate is one absolutely essential step made towards confining the whole possible world system to the fictional text only. This would mean that the text to be viewed through the linguistic lens of the possible world scenario is isolated from what any individual would understand as the external actual world, namely any individual's world of experience. Any relations of accessibility attempted within this system are to be made within the boundaries of the fictional universe and the worlds of possibilities it uncovers.

The great advantage of Ryan's system (2004) is represented by the wide range of permissibility engendered within the whole mechanism in what the ranges of accessibility are concerned. Depending on the nature of the text some of the accessibility relations will prove to be looser, while others may prove to be more rigid. For instance, Ryan's model (2004) for historical texts allows for the

harboring of much closer relations to the actual world (AW), since historical texts are much more related to the certifiable events recorded in the fixed world of experience.

Applying this model onto the textual universe of the novel *On Chesil Beach*, it would first of all be necessary to identify and understand how the set of worlds designed by Ryan's system apply in the textual universe of the novel under discussion. The text helps in this respect as it is visible from the introductory paragraph below:

They had just sat down to supper in a tiny sitting room on the first floor of a Georgian inn. In the next room, visible through the open door, was a four-poster bed, rather narrow, whose bedcover was pure white and stretched startlingly smooth, as though by no human hand. Edward did not mention that he had never stayed in a hotel before, whereas Florence, after many trips as child with her father, was an old hand. (McEwan, 2008: 3)

Thus, from the quoted sequence we understand that we are dealing with two fictional entities, we are placing them in a hotel at the end of their wedding ceremony, we are attributing character-like qualities to each of them as well as a set of actions and motivations and we are placing them in a series of events which are to be unfolded within the fiction and in relation to other just as fictional entities. This setting needs to be understood as being the TAW of the novel and the rest of the events unfolding within the plot need to be understood as satellite worlds revolving around this central universe which functions as the actual world for this particular piece of fiction. What we can acknowledge at this point is the fact that fictional characters are indeed artifacts, the result of human creations generated by an authorial demeanor.

Also, fictional characters whole being abstract are given a set of properties which are similar to individuals in the actual world. For instance, an abstract individual would not be able to sit in a hotel room and have dinner as is the case with Florence and Edward in the novel which makes the object of this analysis. We know that they are indeed having dinner, because the story tells us so. Nonetheless, neither Edward nor Florence has an actual existence.

David Lewis' (2001) theoretical endeavor proves to be just as useful at this stage of the analysis as it blends rather well with the new coordinates suggested by Marie-Laure Ryan (2004). Lewis (2001) works with counterfactuals, namely according to his theories, an entity cannot be identical with itself across various possible worlds, an entity has counterparts at different possible worlds. By way of counterfactuals, what they mean for Lewis and the manner in which he considers the notion of similarity between possible worlds, we can consider that fictional statements have similar natures to Lewis' counterfactuals. What makes counterfactuals so appealing

here is the fact that their acceptance or rejection comes from evaluating their truth value and, all the more, from the fact that what they represent globally in terms of truth value cannot be established on the basis of the AW truth value “of their antecedent and consequent” (Ryan, 2004: 48).

If we referred to a statement which included some sort of reference to fictional entities, like: “*Florence is not a regular young woman*”, this might suggest that we are enacting an AW within which we have such a Florence who does not possess the necessary properties the most common women of her age would embody. Since it is possible that such statements actually do exist in the actual world and they are also regarded as being true, Marie-Laure Ryan (2004) suggests that it is compulsory to also accept the fact that: “In the fiction f , p is non-vacuously true if and only if some world where f is told a s known fact and p is true differs less from our actual world, on balance, than does any world where f is told as known fact and p is not true” (Ryan, 2004: 49).

Even so, this particular theory is not complete in itself. One of the counterarguments would be that the terminology for fiction is quite ambiguous. In this case, we have a contradiction between the worlds where “ p is told as known fact” which would have to be the TAW and a world where p is valued, which would be the Textual Reference World (TRW). This automatically means that such an algorithm is not entirely complete and there would be some other elements to consider when handling fiction even further, for instance, considering the idea of accessibility which would require always picking out the closest universe, meaning that systems of reality are formed on the basis of assessing the distance between alternative universes and their respective centers. The same relationship would have to be responsible for interpreting fictional statements as counterfactual statements. The notion of distance needs to be evaluated by taking into consideration not just the propositions themselves, but the entire logical context consistent with the environment specific for the said propositions.

Continuing with the analysis of the sequence quoted and referring to the setting itself, there isn't nor has there been a time or a space that has seen them having dinner, but independently of this, the story of the novel says that they have and this makes sense through Ryan's system of worlds (2004) for the fictional universe. This is also part of the paradox of viewing fictional characters through the focal point of artifact theory. Similarly, to the rest of the perspectives considered when having in mind an analysis of fictional characters within the modality of possible world theory, none of the systems offer in fact the perfect solution within this quest. The level of abstractness of fiction and, the level of ambiguity of such notions as existence, identity, trans-world problematic, are far too complex to be encompassed by one view alone

3. How to approach fictional entities

The characters in these novels are inventions and bear no resemblance to the people living or dead. Edward and Florence's hotel—just over a mile south of Abbotsbury, Dorset, occupying an elevated position in the field behind the beach car park—does not exist. (Ian McEwan, special end note for the novel On Chesil Beach)

The greatest problem of the possible world mechanism, when it comes to the worlds of fiction, is perhaps the direct result of the ambiguity surrounding the appropriate way to perceive fictional entities. If, for a moment, we stopped and wondered about what type of entities Florence or Edward were, it might seem rather difficult to come up with the precise desiderata to account for the existence of a set of individuals which do not belong to the actual world of existence. After all, Kripke himself in *Naming and Necessity* (1981), while referring to Arthur Conan Doyle's stories about Sherlock Holmes, remorselessly postulated that "Holmes does not exist", prefiguring the very same cruel fate for all fictional entities. As such, if we were to also consider the quotation inserted as the motto of this sub-chapter, we would legitimately conclude that fiction in general is inevitably preceded by an agreement of sorts between receiver and creator on the grounds of the sheer acceptance that whatever is fictional needs to remain as such.

This does not indicate in any way that it is impossible to refer to the said fictions within the actual world of existence, but rather limits the fictional individuals to a pre-imposed and somewhat particular set of worlds. It is impossible to take fictions ad litteram and embark on a blind search meant to find perfect matches for fictional characters like Anna Karenina or Scarlet O'Hara or Edward or Florence in the actual world of existence. Most unexperienced readers will understand that while statements such as: "*Anna Karenina was one of the most exceptional characters in Tolstoy's novels*" might have some sort of validity in the actual world, other statements such as: "*Anna Karenina liked chocolate*" wouldn't probably mean anything to anyone. Statements such as the latter are generally considered to be void of meaning, since it is impossible for anyone to specifically assign a truth value to them. Indeed, we might have a possible world in which Anna Karenina embodies whatever Tolstoy intended her to embody and additionally likes chocolate, but in the end, fiction does not mean to create inconsistent worlds, such worlds which are not alimented with a set of actual possibilities stemming from the framework of the narrative. Those statements which are uttered in the actual world of existence, but somehow maintain the support of the narrative framework tend to also be considered legitimate. This is also the reason why "*Anna Karenina was one of the most exceptional characters in Tolstoy's novels*" is accepted over "*Anna Karenina liked chocolate*".

The Kripkean view would argue that it is absolutely impossible to think that fictional names name a particular non-actual possible individual. It would result that fictional entities such as Edward or Florence or Anna Karenina for that matter were not possible. Of course, Kripke later on returned to this idea and contradicted it, placing two different views within the entire mechanism which are worth exploring with the purpose of further distinguishing if any bits and pieces could be salvaged for the formation of a better system.

Before directly referring to fictional characters through the very famous demonstration applied on the character of Sherlock Holmes, Kripke stops upon the nature of such mythical creatures as unicorns, in a just as renowned demonstrative attempt. With respect to unicorns there are quite a few inconsistencies identified related to their ontological status such as: that there is insufficient descriptive information related to the name, that accordingly there is no world in which such a species could ever have existed, that the properties mythically ascribed to the species do not indicate that the myth is actually about such an inexistent species. Yagisawa (2010) distinguishes two separate arguments in the Kripkean view on unicorns and divides each argument into several smaller pieces for a better understanding of the entire perspective. The first argument identified by Yagisawa (2010), who also militates against the metaphysical nature of fictional entities, is divided into five different postulations which seem to be the result of the “5 whys” argumentative endeavor.

- (1) *If unicorns are metaphysically possible, then they are a particular species.*
- (2) *If unicorns are a particular species, then they have a common internal structure which determines a unique species.*
- (3) *The myth does not give enough information about the internal structure of unicorns to determine a unique species.*
- (4) *If the myth does not give enough information about the internal structure of unicorns to determine a unique species, then unicorns do not have a common internal structure which determines a unique species.*
- (5) *Unicorns are not metaphysically possible.* (Yagisawa, 2010: 260)

Following this pattern, the Kripkean argumentation is easily dismantled. Accordingly, it would appear that the first deduction (1) is not full grounded, while (2) seems to be ignoring at least a few principles of evolution, (3) might be legitimate if a more complex set of properties were considered, (4) remains comfortably justified as unicorns don't actually exist. If we think of Kripke's argumentation (1981) against unicorns as being quite too bold in delivering presumptions, we would then need to engage into a whole game of imagining that, if Kripke's statement (1981) is in fact false, one could in fact imagine a myth which specifically states that unicorns are some sort of animal species and as such Kripke's argument (1981) would be addressed to imagined myth. Within this game, the imagined myth might as well refer to the actual myth. Since the

argument is mostly centered of the myth's failing to establish the unicorn as a specifically distinct species, a second way to escape Kripke's argumentation (1981) would be to assume that even though the myth may have intended to depict the unicorn as a distinctive species, it has simply failed to achieve its goal. And if indeed we have reached this particular area, sub-argument (4) comes to mind regarding the internal structure of unicorns. Yagisawa (2010) would argue that the core argument proving that unicorns are metaphysically impossible needs to be read here. The myth does provide sufficient information for establishing what a unicorn is, namely a winged horse with a horn, a type of description which almost genetically marks the internal structure of all mythical entities which would fall under these characteristics, prefiguring, as such, their metaphysical incongruity.

Yagisawa's second argument (2010) derived from Kripke's theory (1981) on unicorns is similarly divided into four other postulations which will be numbered in continuation of the previous ones, just as the theorist himself had intended them:

- (6) *Metaphysically possible animals are unicorns only if the myth is about them.*
- (7) *The myth is about certain animals only if there is a historical connection (of the right kind) between the myth and these animals.*
- (8) *There is no historical connection (of the right kind) between the myth and any metaphysically possible animals, even those metaphysically possible animals which possess the properties the myth attributes to unicorns.*
- (9) *No metaphysically possible animals are unicorns.*" (Yagisawa, 2010: 262)

In order to accept (6) it is necessary to adhere to the intuitive impulse which suggests that the myth must refer to the ambiguous creatures identified by the name of unicorns. The reference to historical connection in (7) needs to be seen in connection to the proper name-rigid designation principle, within the boundaries of which unicorns could never be comprised because in that case the whole concept of myth would fall apart. What Kripke (1981) tries to establish is precisely what this myth is *actually* about. Due to the fact that the mythical denomination of unicorns does not rigidly designate across all possible worlds and therefore it does not pinpoint any palpable entity in the actual world, this implies that unicorns are metaphysically inconsistent. The only way unicorns can be defined is by resorting to the information made available in the myth. Fictional characters fall into a similar paradigm. Not only do they lack an actual representative in the actual world, but they appear to be intentionally built on the prerequisite that their existence in the actual world is not only unnecessary for their fictional status, but, in a way, even harmful. Arguments (6) and (7) are in a slight degree of contradiction. On the one hand we need to imagine unicorns because we find information about them in the myth; ergo the myth is about unicorns, but then (7) dismisses this possibility by asserting that a myth about such entities cannot be accepted unless the historical chain relation is accepted.

It would seem altogether pointless to judge fictional characters by what individuals they would represent in the actual world. Indeed, it is theoretically possible that Ian McEwan had created a faithful representation of an actual Florence in his novel *On Chesil Beach*, but then identifying which particular individual would perfectly match Florence will give way to an unstoppable chain of incongruities.

4. The proper names of fiction

In order for such incongruities to be avoided it is essential to directly discuss the nature of fictional characters and fictional character identity through the significance of their proper names. The ground has been paved by siding with Kripke's notions in *Naming and Necessity* (1981), Oltean (2015), yet it cannot be denied that it has always been quite a controversial debate on the matter of how proper names function within fiction with respect to the manner in which character identity is mirrored within the fiction and across the possible worlds assigned to it.

Therefore, the analysis proceeding from here will try to indicate just how proper names designate within fiction. In situations in which we are not dealing with fictional names, the situation is somewhat clear as we are given the possibility to side with Kripke's notion of rigid designation (1981) without giving way to any logical paradoxes. The situation becomes a bit more complicated with fictional characters and their proper names, which have long been the source for much controversial debate.

Fictional proper names seem to go against all theories related, both descriptionist and non-descriptionist regarding proper names in the actual world. The reason behind this impression of contradiction when referring to the proper names of fiction lies in the fact that there is no specific denotation assigned to such names as Edward or Florence in the actual world to support their full identity. This is why when dealing with such statements in which fictional names occur: "*Florence was in love with Edward*" we are quite puzzled with respect to what it might signify. Indeed, within the fiction of the novel *On Chesil Beach*, there is such an entity bearing the name of Florence who is said to nurture certain feelings for yet another fictional entity bearing the name of Edward, but a certain degree of indeterminacy will still derive from here particularly because such characters cannot be identified by ostension, namely we lack the possibility of physically pinpointing who these individuals are. As such, names as "Edward" or "Florence" are most likely considered to be "empty proper names" as Currie (2010) would refer to them, for instance.

What can be understood from such an example as the one above is the fact that the notion of "Florence" is meaningful because it contributes to the meaning of the predicate in that particular sentence. This would necessarily imply that the fictional name in the proposition above has a particular property which signifies that there is

only one thing with this particular property. Thus, "Florence" presents itself as a unique entity that has the property of "being in love with Edward". Problems occur when determining the truth value of those propositions which refer to fictional entities and postulate statements about them. When we think about the same train of thought for a sentence with a proper name with reference in the actual world such as "*Bill Clinton was an American president*", there is no problem whatsoever in determining the truth value of the statement as being true. What makes it possible is the fact that the proper name Bill Clinton denotes an actual world person that can be identified with the specific property of having been an American president, whereas in the case of the previous statement which contains fictional entities, the proposition either cannot be given any truth value whatsoever or it needs to be considered false, since there is no element in the actual world which indicates otherwise.

Accepting that proper names contain this much indeterminacy is not a satisfying position. There have been approaches which have tried to reconcile the differences between logic and fictional proper names or at least come up with some sort of compromise for relinquishing this problem. A ray of unexpected hope comes from David Lewis (1986) who has made a point of understanding non-existing objects and whose argumentation presents a great improvement in how the possible world perspective should be treating non-actual entities and by extension fictional entities. Lewis' view (1986), considered to be pertaining to the realm of radical actualism, separates between two very different notions he clearly disseminates, namely what exists and what is actual. For David Lewis (1986), the terms referred to as "non-actual existents" are entities which exist in other worlds than the actual world. Following this argumentative line, fictional characters such as Edward or Florence gain the right to exist in a different world from the actual one, they gain the right to be non-actual existents and assume their place not in the actual world, but in the textual world described by the fiction they belong to. The issue of ostension would also be solved, since it would be enough to identify the characters solely in the world of the fiction, no reference to the actual world needed.

There are objections against Lewis' kind of compromise. One of the strongest ones comes from Currie (2010) who still seems to treat fictional proper names almost in the same way as one would treat rigid designators, arguing that there might be different individuals in the different worlds of fiction with the same name, resulting in the discontinuity of a fictional character to be one and the same across the different possible worlds of fiction. If we consider the following example "*Florence is a musician*", we might be thinking about a possible world pertaining to the fictional universe of the novel in which an entity Florence possesses that particular property. However, since we are dealing with fictional possible worlds and proper names cannot designate rigidly and identify the very same individual over various possible worlds, even in those worlds in which Florence does not possess the property of being a musician, then we would reach the incongruence

that the entity “Florence” is not identical with herself. This is obviously an inconsistency.

Nonetheless, we have mentioned before that fictional names cannot function as rigid designators, that they are to a certain extent non-rigid designators and, as such, are not real proper names. This is why such a statement as, “*Florence is a musician*”, does not designate anything at the actual world, and it is thus not meaningful enough to be given the truth value true. It is not enough to stop at this verdict. The sentence under discussion is fictionally based, it is not based in the actual world and therefore its meaning needs not be searched there. When a reader comes across the sentence “*Florence is a musician*” in the fiction of *On Chesil Beach*, the reader does not question the veracity of the statement, but treats it as if it were true at some particular world in the story. If at another world in the story, the statement changed to “*Florence is a nurse*”, the reader would also take this sentence as true as well and will also come up with an explanation for why the fictional entity Florence first appears as a musician and then as a nurse. Currie (2010) suggests that this make-belief being, just like truth, is yet another property of propositions, not in the actual world, but in those worlds in which the propositions occur, in this case in the worlds of fiction.

Understanding how to deal with the truth value of sentences with fictional proper names as subjects is just one tiny part of the entire problem, what still needs to be clarified is what kind of meaning these sentences actually have. The idea that the reader might imagine fictional characters to belong to the actual world and as such imagine fictional characters as actual people has been mentioned before within this analysis, but according to Currie (2010), the procedure is rather different. He suggests that the audiences much rather pick out those alternative worlds from the set of possible worlds in which there is someone who is and does those things that Florence is supposed to do in the fictional work under discussion. In this case, there is one individual Florence, who is a young woman that lives in post war London and is a musician, but that is different in each distinct world she appears in. The procedure is rather simple and makes a lot of sense. Since we do not have a clear cut individual to match Florence with in the actual world, as we would for a regularly existing entity, such as Napoleon for example, we take whatever the fiction is giving us, and we place it in different sets of worlds which could be inhabited by such a fictional character according to the fiction. The only difference is that, unlike regularly existing individuals who are identical with themselves across all possible worlds, Florence will be different in each of the alternative worlds she is being recreated in.

It would appear that since the name Florence is an empty identifier in the actual world, identification at the other worlds is performed by descriptions, an individual who is Florence does and says all the things Florence is described to do within the fiction of the novel. What this says about fictional names is the fact that they are

indeed non-rigid designators when reported to the actual world and that when considering identifying fictional entities by their descriptions, all descriptions associated with that particular story need to be considered. Fictional names are as such not individuals, but variables mostly due to the fact that they are non-rigid descriptive terms which give the readers the possibility to engage in the make-believe of keeping up with the descriptions of the stories.

There are still several traces of indeterminacy when it comes to fictional characters. So far, according to the theories related to the notions of proper names from the external perspective of the actual world, fictional individuals appear to be a sum of descriptions which are absorbed by the individuals in the fictions. There is also the perspective of the worlds of fiction themselves, within which fictional proper names denote individuals inherent in those fictions. The only issue at hand here, is the fact that from the perspective of the fictional worlds it is quite unclear how exactly one needs to identify these fictional individuals, since they don't seem to be designating any real person. Lewis' argument (1986) would still prove to be the most interesting one and the one to be remembered for future reference within this analysis as well.

5. Conclusions

Fictional characters need to be treated as non-actual existents, it should be understood as such that fictional proper names designate someone in the fictional world, irrespective of the actual world conditions. Why would we then be able to read such a novel as *On Chesil Beach* and make sense of it? The reasoning behind this question must lie in the idea that the make-believe of fiction ensures the treatment of fictional characters and their stories as developing in a world adjacent to the actual one.

It appears to be fairly complicated to devise a system appropriate enough to succeed in explaining the intricate ways in which possible world theory is revealing from the perspective of fiction and fictional entities. Starting from the premises set forward by Kripke (1981) and Lewis (1986 and 2001) it becomes more than obvious that the modality introduced by the possible world schemata promises a captivating, yet complex mode of perceiving fictional entities revealing a brand new perspective on how literature and fiction all together should be understood. Of course, the possible world system had not been intended as a tool for understanding fiction as it came into existence attempting to contextualize a philosophy of language in its entirety. Fiction, however, is also a part of language and consequently would only benefit from this type of analysis. It has been more than revealing to see Yagisawa's structural attempt (2010) at devising a system for possible worlds for fiction. It became quite clear at that point that the treatment of fictional entities needs to focus on their non-actual status and on the fact that their existence is independent of any actual world determinations.

The proper names of fiction imitate the same type of rigid designation which is specific for the actual world, but at the same time they limit 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 which these fictional entities have. This is also confirmed by desideratum (3) in Yagisawa's system (2010) which is inclined to allow predications of story-specified properties of fictional individuals to be literally true.

Acknowledging these lines of demarcation and the manner in which they intermingle leads to a more thorough understanding of both the actual and the fictional realms which casts a completely new perspective on the fictional universe creating a syntax of the narrative within the possible world determinism.

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