POSSIBLE WORLD SEMANTICS AND FICTIONAL DISCOURSE. HIGHLIGHTS FOR IAN McEWAN'S «ATONEMENT»[1]

LA SEMANTIQE DES MONDES POSSIBLES ET LE DISCOURS FICTIONNEL DANS LE MILIEU PRATIQUE DU ROMAN «ATONEMENT» DE IANMcEWAN

SEMANTICA LUMILOR POSIBILE ȘI DISCURSUL FICȚIONAL CU REFERINȚE PRACTICE ÎN ROMANUL «ATONEMENT» DE IAN McEWAN

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Abstract

This paper aims at discussing the fictional discourse from the perspective of possible world modality also revealing a practical side by applying a variety of theories onto the fictional universe of Ian McEwan's Atonement. First it explains the manner in which the fictional discourse needs to be understood in relation to the possible world prerequisites. Then it identifies and analyzes the possible worlds of fiction within the practical environment of the novel Atonement.

Résumé

L'objectif de cet article est discuter le discours fictionnel en regardant la sémantique des mondes possibles et aussi de révéler un plan plus pratique en appliquant une variété des théories dans l'univers fictionnel du roman Atonement écrit par Ian McEwan. Tout d'abord,on présent comment on doit comprendre l'univers fictionnel par rapport aux prémisses des mondes possibles. Depuis, on identifie et analyse les mondes possibles de l'univers fictionnel dans le milieu pratique du roman Atonement.

Rezumat

Această lucrare își propune să analizeze discursul ficțional din perspectiva teoriei lumilor posibile cu unele aplicații practice în universul ficțional al romanului Atonement de Ian McEwan. Pentru început prezintă modul în care trebuie înțeles discursul ficțional din perspectiva teoriei lumilor posibile, apoi identifică și analizează lumile posibile ficționale așa cum apar ele în romanul Atonement.

Key-words: *possible world semantics, fictional discourse*

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[1]*Atonement* is a British family novel set in three time periods, 1935 England, World War II England and France, finally present day England, and centered on the need for atonement. BrionyTallis mistakenly accuses Robbie Turner of raping her cousin Lola. She also witnesses an encounter between her sister and Robbie. Years later she realizes that Robbie was in fact innocent, but by then it is already too late. Having become a successful novelist, BrionyTallis writes a novel in an attempt to atone for her past behavior and grant her sister and Robbie Turner the happy ending they never had in real life. The novel works with a multitude of fictional universes including one such fictional world which is considered to be "the real world", which is why it proves to be a quite suitable, practical playground for this study.

Mots-clés: *sémantique des mondes possibles, discours fictionnel*

Cuvinte cheie: *semantica lumilor posibile, discurs ficţional*

1.   Introduction

Fiction can be spoken of on several different levels, but for more specific purposes, in this particular paper, it is probably best to refer to fictional discourse and stress the fact that to be fictional implies acquiring a special ontological status. Fiction has always been so fascinatingly independent. Whole boundaries were created in order to fix the distance between what is "real" and what is fictional, unreal, untruthful.

In this respect, Marie-Laure Ryan (2004) distinguishes between two different theories of fiction, a referential and an intensional[2] one. In very short terms the former would be defined by the idea that fiction presents a different ontological way of being, specific only to a limited number of entities, while the latter refers to the fictional discourse and its constitutive intent of creating a special type of communicative act.

If we were to stop upon the referential theory of fiction, in the same sense that Marie-Laure Ryan (2004)(cf. also Currie 1990, 2010) intended it, it would probably be necessary to imagine fiction as the exact opposite of reality or, to avoid any confusion, of actuality. Whatever is true in the actual or real world is confirmed by certain facts, inherent in the actual world, by way of which we assign the truth value "true" to the propositions describing these particular situations. In those cases in which actual world facts cannot confirm the validity of the situation, we are immediately inclined to consider them as false. False statements are often referred to as being fictional, thus false statements would yield fiction. This implies our acceptance of the argument that the fictional discourse would somehow be erroneous or that it would be harboring lies presenting a distorted kind of reality. This is where the referential theory of fiction comes in, precisely because it means to indicate just how it can be possible to separate fiction from "errors" and freeing it from "lies" without resorting to the intentionality of the speaker.

One way to go about this kind of argument is to assume that even within these erroneous situations one would still be referring to objectively existing entities. This means that the reference to the object is still successful, but the propositional act could be considered erroneous. It becomes quite easy to explain how such a concept would be acceptable. When considering non-actual facts, it is possible to refer objectively to existent entities precisely because the reference to that particular object picks out and identifies a certain member of the world. It is in this sense that reference is successful even if the proposition in itself may not depict actual world facts. In the very same way it could be possible to determine what are considered to be "errors" within fiction as well, while avoiding the tricky territory of authorial intent, which is not an area of interest here. Discerning between the "errors" and "lies" of fiction by way of reference is possible by adopting a Fregean point of view according to which fiction is a logical issue, and by association all fictional statements which are statements about imaginary entities do not have any valid point of reference; thus we would have to conclude that fictional statements need to be excluded from the set of true statements. The grounds for this exclusion need to be found in the failure of reference, in stark contrast with "lies" and "errors", for instance, which are merely cases of faulty predication.

In *On Sense and Reference* (1980), Frege[3] lists three different axioms: (a) reference can only be made to that which exists; (b) to exist is synonymous with being in the real world; and (c) only one world exists, the one we regard as real.

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[2] Intensional in semantics refers to giving the meaning of a term by specifying all the properties of the things to which the term applies.
[3] Similar ideas are illustrated by Carl (1994)

Starting from here, deciding how the process of reference can be successful will depend on determining whether the entity denoted by a proper name inhabits this unique and only existing world irrespective of the proposition being true or untrue in reality. It all goes fairly well with proper names whose referents existed in the actual world, e.g. Hitler, Napoleon, Virginia Woolf etc., but it does not even seem as remotely straightforward with fictional names, such as Briony, Anna Karenina, Red Riding Hood (see also Oltean 2013, for a semantic account of fictional names). Marie-Laure Ryan (2004) suggests an interesting scenario at this stage, related to yet another quite popular fictional entity, Santa Claus. For children who still believe in the myth, Santa Claus stands for the jolly, red-clad individual who dives through chimneys and brings presents. This entire description is considered actual fact. When looking from the perspective of the adults who tell this story, the very same Santa Claus is a fictional product and the main character of a series of fictional events. What this proves is the fact that there is a gap in how fictionality might be perceived by sender and receiver.

Frege's three principles of reference, being as strict as they are, will encounter quite a few dead ends in explaining how sentences containing fictional references could be accepted as valid forms of language. If we take for instance:

(1) Jane is like Briony, she always makes too much of what she sees.

Assigning a truth value to this sentence would be impossible when taking Frege's principles as the main point of reference. The sentence above would probably have been denied the right to logical existence according to Frege because the fictional entity Briony, a character in *Atonement*, a novel written by Ian McEwan, does not belong to that unique, real world of existence. Still, such sentences are in fact possible and individuals in the actual world regularly use them, without being accused of or suspected of using language in an inacceptable manner. By extension, if all statements containing fictional entities are pointless, then the entire endeavor of literary criticism would definitely have to be completely aimless and barren of meaning. That is also an unacceptable position.

Marie-Laure Ryan (2004) suggests that such an incongruous conclusion might be avoided by understanding that not all our objects of reference need to have a strict existence in the actual world. Individuals are legitimately allowed to refer to fictional entities and to postulate statements about them which need to be understood as potentially true. Thus, when referring to Ian McEwan's Briony or Cecilia, the justification behind these types of references must be searched in the fiction they belong to and not in the actual world of existence. Fictional texts are collections of propositional functions with no necessary connection with the actual world. Moreover, the actual world should not even have any interference here, as the realities presented by fictional worlds need to be granted a certain degree of autonomy, an aspect which is also conveyed through these theories of reference.

In strict continuation of this thought Marie-Laure Ryan(2004)(cf. also Doležel, 1989) Pavel (1986) rejects the referential theories of fiction and embraces a different path, that of a phenomenological approach. In accordance with it a universe is fictional, not so much because of its inherent properties, but rather as a result of the basic intent which generates its coming into being. As such, *Atonement* is a work of fiction because it was intentionally meant to be so, it was created in this purpose and it is after all this purpose which is essential in defining the ontological status of the fictional universe. Considering this a fresh starting point, we will further on see how it is possible to consider a re-centering of fiction within the possible worlds model and moreover to identify those elements which Marie-Laure Ryan (2004) brings into the system, all for a better understanding on how to picture postmodern fiction through the magnifying glass of the possible world perspective.

2. Fictional Worlds and Fictional Discourse

Marie-Laure Ryan (2004) proposes a fully structured environment for understanding fiction and fictional works within the modality of the possible world theories. What this 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) (2004, 24). The AW is discernibly what Ryan calls "our native system" (2004, 24), in other words what we may come to identify as the world of our existence or what can be referred to as the real world. The element of innovation becomes more obvious with the following two distinctions. Ryan identifies a textual universe which comprises the entire sum of the possible worlds projected by the text, and then a textual reference universe, which stems from the TAW and is defined as "an accurate representation of an entity external to itself" (2004, 24) and refers to the implied speaker of the narrative, who is always located in the TRW.

There is a set of conditions which need to be met for the system to work as it was intended. To begin with, there will always be only one AW under all circumstances and the author of the fictional work will be located here. Secondly, the text itself projects its own universe at the center of which we will always find the TAW, which appears as the accurate image of what is then understood as TRW that needs to exist independently of the TAW. This opens a wide range of possibilities and provides solutions for a series of problems which have long since remained without an answer. The TAW provides enough autonomy for the fictional narrative allowing it to create a universe completely independent from the actual world, a universe which might recreate the actual world purely imitatively or it might just as well create a completely different, an almost unimagined version of it. 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.

By disseminating that whatever is non-fictional belongs to the AW, while all that is fictional is included in the TAW, there is the danger of falling back into the very same problematic of the referential theories. Nevertheless, there is a very essential difference between what was being tackled within the referential systems, and Ryan's own system of representation and recentering. Within the old referential theory system, reference meant identifying counterparts of fictional expressions in the AW. As shown in the previous example featuring Santa Claus, proper names were regarded as propositional functions, this means that, since Santa Claus has no extension in AW- which is basic to referential theories -, then a statement like: "There is an old man named Santa Claus" is irrevocably false and has a fictional nature. This is where the difference in Ryan's new system starts to show quite vividly because we no longer seek reference in the actual world as reference is regarded as an act allowing for propositions to refer to states of affairs without them being true in the actual world. Abiding by this principle, such a proposition as (2) is meaningful not when it is verified by external references to the AW, but rather when it is verified by the reference world of the text, the textual world of *Atonement*:

(2) The Island temple built in the style of Nicholas Revett in the late 1780s was intended as a point of interest (…) (pg. 72)

So far we have established that the fictional discourse needs to be granted the freedom of having its own world of reference and that it is not necessarily meaningful that we seek any extensional meaning of fiction within the actual world. We need to keep in mind that whenever we refer to a fictional text and we make propositions about fictional entities and objects in the actual world, this is logically possible by evoking an alternative possible world (APW).

This new alternative universe functions quite like a satellite for the AW and does not mean to replace it. This is particularly important for understanding how Ryan's system attempts to incorporate possible worlds into fiction by resorting to the accessibility principle, a principle which we can also find in Kripke (1981) and according to which "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). Also in addition to this, Ryan provides a very good justification for how the system of possible worlds could validly function for fiction by avoiding the trivialization that possibility is a far too great a challenge for fiction since imaginative processes have the endless capacity of generating worlds. This is exactly why the accessibility principle is so essential for Ryan's system, as it avoids trivialization by exploring the various types of possibility through the accessibility relations that help link the APWs to the AW.

The notion of possibility stems from a very basic logical principle of non-contradiction and of excluded middle which states that a proposition needs to be either true or false and that it cannot be both at the same time. Of course, this is merely a starting point. The complexity of the fictional universe and the wide amount of possibilities engendered within it pose the demand for an entire set of relations meant to limit the manner in which fictional possibility functions. This is why Marie-Laure Ryan comes up with nine types of accessibility relations from the AW, which are meant to build the TAW. These accessibility relations are: identity of properties, identity of inventory, compatibility of inventory, chronological compatibility, physical compatibility, taxonomic compatibility, logical compatibility, analytical compatibility and linguistic compatibility.

The magic behind these accessibility relations lies in their property of combining and rendering different types of fictional constructs. Different types of principles combined will obviously render different texts. Sometimes only one type of accessibility relations might not be sufficient to build the actual world of some textual universes. It is the case of fictional universes that present a dual ontology. At other times, different types of fictional universes might make use of all accessibility principles together and incorporate the entire multitude of all possible worlds within the TAW. The importance of Ryan's system for fictionality lies in maintaining accessibility relations between the TAW and the AW, while at the same time preserving a legitimate sense of independence for the textual universe. What is being established here is a fairly good and reliable picture of how fictionality might be working, without imposing a strict criterion. Fictionality, the nature of it, is not provided by a textual or semantic organization of plot and fictional objects, but it is engendered in the preset expectations, in an interior model which is bound to predict its fictional nature.

3. *Fictional Discourse and Fictional Entities*

Probably the most important element of easiness the modality of the possible worlds system brings to the fictional field is providing a convenient method for assigning truth value to sentences in fiction and interpreting the fictional universe accordingly. This goes as far behind as David Lewis (1988); (cf. also Currie 1990, 2010) whose theoretical endeavors prove to be just as useful at this stage of the analysis as they blend rather well with the new coordinates suggested by Marie-Laure Ryan. If we go back to counterfactuals and what they mean for Lewis (2001) and the manner in which he considers the notion of similarity between possible worlds, then we could imagine that fictional statements might have similar natures to Lewis' counterfactuals. What makes counterfactuals so appealing at this point 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:
(3) BrionyTallis is not a regular thirteen year old,

this might suggest that we enact an AW within which we have such a BrionyTallis who does not possess the necessary properties the most common thirteen-year-olds 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, 49) suggests that it is compulsory to also accept the fact that:

> (4) In the fiction f, p is nonvacuously true if and only if some world where f is told as 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.

Even so, this particular theory is not complete in itself. One of the counterarguments would be that the terminology for fiction is quite ambiguous, then we have a contradiction between the worlds where "p is told as known fact" which would have to be the TAW and world where p is valued, which would be the 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. If we go back to 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 alterative 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.

It is in a very similar way that we understand the distance between fiction and reality when dealing with a fictional work. So when starting to read such a novel as *Atonement*, and we are presented with the fictional constituents of the fictional worlds such as the fictional characters, then we might encounter elements which are not specified within the fiction, but which we necessarily accept as being true. When BrionyTallis is introduced as a thirteen year old girl, we automatically assume that she has two arms, two legs and the rest of the humanly possible attributes of a thirteen year old. Nowhere in the novel will we find this specified at all, which means that even in the case of fiction and fictional worlds we work with some preset scenarios which enable us to have a full perspective upon the fictional environment. Irrevocably, we are working with our own system of reality which borrows essential pieces of information from something we would refer to as "the real world". This "real world" is always the realm of the ordinary and a system of reference for fictional occurrences, whatever does not fit this pattern is then considered to be an intentional attempt to distance the fictional discourse from the whole system of reality.

Keeping this premise in mind, Ryan introduces the notion of minimal departure. This is the process which allows us to build the textual actual universe in the exact same way we would construct the alternative possible worlds when dealing with nonfactual statements. Therefore when we say: "Kennedy wouldn't have been shot, if he had chosen a bullet proof car", we are aware of the reality of the events in the actual world, but we are also able to construct an alternative universe in which Kennedy chooses a different kind of car and is not shot. The procedure is exactly the same when it comes to fiction. So if we were to read a novel telling the story of a fictional character named Kennedy who is shot to death during a presidential visit to Dallas, we would be operating with exactly the same mechanisms as the ones presented above. In those situations in which fictional universes create worlds which are not as compatible with the system of normality preformatted within our minds, it is still the process of minimal departure which makes it possible to relate to and understand these sets of foreign worlds despite the incongruity of their incompleteness.

Accepting the process of minimal departure as necessary for a more accurate approach to fictionality and its inner structures also triggers a different type of distinction which might result in being quite revealing for the manner in which fictional worlds should be perceived. This distinction

is based on working with alternative possible worlds in fiction, as indicated by the procedure of minimal departure, or, at the other end of the line, the more limiting option is also available, namely narrowing fiction down to a mere set of textual propositions.

A more interesting purpose at this point would be explaining the relationship between this process of minimal departure and fictional texts in general. Ryan suggests that there are two such ways in which minimal departure can be related to fictional works, one such way being general and the other one being particular. Textual experiences in general are at times meant to enrich the general knowledge of the world. The principle of minimal departure goes a bit further and gains a certain degree of intertextuality as it comprises not only what is contained within our own "system of reality", our notions of normality and what is considered to be real, but also a more general knowledge of the world and what the texts transmit culturally. This allows enough freedom to argue that, by way of the principle of minimal departure, not only actual world textual experiences should be considered as knowledge enriching, but fictional works as well should be granted the exact same treatment. The great resemblance between what we understand here under the notion of minimal departure and what is understood under the more traditional concept of intertextuality, arises from the belief that fictional texts cannot have appeared out of nothing, that they cannot have been created by grouping a set of similar entities from the actual world and mingling them into a fictional story. The justification for fictional creation consists of quite the opposite. We need to understand then that the fictional universe of the TAW must be filled with a set of generic entities, placed there a priori form a generic landscape, and as such the fictional act would be an act of acknowledging their presence and including them into a narrative structure.

Since we refer to the notion of a generic landscape, we also need to accept the fact that in such situations we deal with a corpus within which we gather specific elements also contained in other similar fictional universes, which in their own turn must have been processed by making use of the same principle of minimal departure. There are however a couple of fictional elements which escape this principle of minimal departure, leaving the impression that certain fictional entities are indeed incomplete. This is more easily observable in those types of fiction which share the same sort of generic landscapes and are expected to produce a particular kind of fictional entities which also share some common features. It would be the case of fairy tales for instance, where certain fictional characters are intentionally left incomplete. If we think about princes and princesses in the most common style fairy tales, there is only so little information we are being given about these entities. They obviously have a noble descent of some sort and generally possess a set of special features either morally or physically, but this is all that is given. Other pieces of information which might seem relevant for building the character of such types of extraordinary entities are left unmentioned. This makes it very easy for instance, for one princess in a certain fairy tale to replace another princess from a different fairy tale. Such a substitution would minimally affect the narrative line of the story as a whole.

When thinking about novels and other more complex works of literature, generic landscapes and generic elements will not be so evidently represented as in the previous examples referring to fairy tales. If we think of the fictional character Briony in *Atonement*, there's actually very little information we can gather about her, especially when it comes down to her physical description. We are told that she is a thirteen year old girl and then we find a mentioning in passing that Briony's hair is as dark as Arabella's, the fictional character she had created in her play. Beyond this, other features both physical and of a deeper nature are left untold and might appear to unfold as the novel progresses. This might present a more generic manner of introducing fictional characters which is quite specific for some novels altogether. Of course, there might be a bit of a difference between what we identify as generic landscape and generic entities in fairy tales and what we might call generic in novels, but the main idea at this point is the fact that reading a story does not need to be exclusively conditioned by what is happening in the "real world" in other words, conditioned by the minimal departure from the AW. If it were, then probably all fictional

worlds would be nothing else than mere imitations of the actual world, AW=TAW, which is not such an attractive prospect to begin with.

There are, however, a couple of objections against this principle of minimal departure which should also probably be drafted at this time of the analysis. First of all, the most poignant counterargument in this area would start from the assumption that the principle of minimal departure does not allow sufficient distance for fiction from the AW. In this manner, everything that is so specific for fiction, intentionally indeterminate, at times even strange or uncanny, might be forcefully translated into something plainly usual and devoured of any deeper meaning from the world of our existence. The objections against the principle of minimal departure refer, at this point, to exceeding the boundaries of the ontological status of the fictional worlds and its entities. In addition, if we also claim that the minimal departure is also tinged with a sense of intertextuality, then we would have to assume that such characters as Briony or Cecilia or Robbie have a lot in common with the much discussed princes and princesses in the fairy tales previously discussed.

Nevertheless, this does not seem like a good course of action for either fictional work. *Atonement* is most likely to be included in the category of those novels which keep the idea of normality close, a normality which is not necessarily fictionally engendered, but which is rather drawn from the readers' "systems of reality" which are after all embodiments of interpretations specific to the AW. It does seem difficult to imagine that Briony would have any princess-like features within her, not to mention Cecilia. Thus, we would have to agree that such a mode of reading could not help in understanding the fiction of *Atonement*. Still, Marie-Laure Ryan brings an astounding argument in favor of the principle of minimal departure which rejects such objections as the ones mentioned before and allows a broader perspective over the notion. What she claims is that: "every text is placed under the authority of the principle of minimal departure, but (…) it is textually feasible to challenge this authority by either frustrating or subverting this principle" (2004, 57). It would be natural to infer from here, that despite the fact that the principle of minimal departure is preformatted within the texts of fiction, it does not necessarily mean that fictions should always be read under the suppression of actual world coordinates, nor does it mean that we should blindly have to search for generic resemblances between fictions. The principle of minimal departure is there to provide a sense of normality, but also to allow just enough freedom for fiction to still be "fictional" enough on its very own.

This becomes all the more difficult to understand when we deal with fictional texts which pose a greater distance between what we might like to call "normality" and what is actually presented within the fiction. These are the cases when the TAW is somehow divided into or representing two almost ontologically different universes, a fictional organization which would be expected to appear in the fictions of Kafka. Still, when referring strictly to the fictional universe of *Atonement*, things are not so roughly complicated. We are not dealing at any time with fictional entities which are meant to challenge our view of normality. Aside from Briony's peculiarity, which would still fit within the boundaries of one or other AW representation, the novel would work pretty well with Ryan's principle of minimal departure. There are no space and time contradictions, for a brief moment we have the possible world of Briony's imaginative universe according to which the events between Cecilia and Robbie are grossly misinterpreted, but even within this scenario there is no limit cross from what might be expected within similar, real world situations. Similar departure works quite well with Ian McEwan's novel as it allows a certain amount of normality for the TAW, a normality which in this particular case serves for a better understanding of the fiction.

If minimal departure is inherent within language and can be applied in several other situations, including fiction, which has to be seen as a form of discourse and ergo a form of linguistic representation, it might be necessary to investigate if this principle is also able to differentiate the fictional structural outlook from the bulk of discourse scenarios which are built up on the same criterion of projecting APW. This kind of differentiation should take us back to comparing the manner in which counterfactuals are treated outside fiction and how they are treated within it. Thus, when in a regular and random language situation we come across such a statement as (5), the

identity of the speaker is reconstructed by projecting a completely new feature into the construction of this alternative personality, namely that of having been twins. So while we create a brand new individuality that has a twin, we are still referring to the very same person with an extra attributed feature.

(5) "If I had been twins, I would have been much happier" (Emmon Bach 1989, 32)

The process is quite similar when the counterfactual situation projects features over a different type of individuality, in such cases as: "If I had been Putin, I wouldn't have attacked the Ukraine". Here, the alternative identity works only like a disguise as the same individual as the one indicated by the personal pronoun "I" is projected into a world situation in which that very same individual assumes a set of attributes which would normally belong to somebody else. Still, we are thinking about the same individual "I" and not so much about the alternative individual Putin.

These kinds of examples focus mainly on how the minimal departure principle focuses on first and second person personal pronouns in counterfactual situations within real language scenarios. At this stage, it would be all the more purposeful to observe if the very same principle can be applied within fiction when dealing with second and first person pronouns. Normally when the narrative is in first person singular, the most common deduction made is that the "I" is none other than the authorial voice and therefore the "I" is the counterpart of the author. The trick with fiction is that, while we automatically assume that only the first person pronoun is the representation of an authorial counterpart, the fact is that the author can project authorial identity in any of the characters inherent within the fiction. This proves to be a great point especially for *Atonement*, mostly because here there is no "I" for the most part of the story. The narrative seems to be the result of an omniscient author, present everywhere, knowing everything about the on goings of Briony's mind. In the end it is actually revealed that Briony was the authorial voice all along and there is also a shift from third-person pronoun "she" to the first-person pronoun "I".

In the end, the difference between sheer counterfactual situations and fictional contexts lies in their diverging status. It is all a matter of how transworld identity[4] is perceived. When dealing with regular counterfactual situations, a sense of transworld identity is automatically assumed to exist between the individual in the actual world and the individual in the APW.

4. Conclusions

The dynamic relations between the different worlds of the fictional discourse and their impact upon the manner in which the fictional universes create their own sense of modality are bound to prove the revealing nature of the possible world system within the study and analysis of the novel *Atonement*. The fact that fictional characters and fictional discourse are linked together by way of a complex set of worlds which determine their actions, their set of beliefs and their aspirations is also a vivid indicative that a narrative semantics is necessary for computing a possible world system with an effective applicability for fictional worlds.

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[4]Transworld identity – "identity across possible worlds" is an essential concept within the possible world framework and refers to the idea that the same object or entity which exists in more than one possible world is identical with itself across all the possible worlds it inhabits (Kripke, 1981). It has been the topic of many theoretical debates regarding whether the identity of possible world entities should be accepted as such. David Lewis sets forward the theory of "counterfactuals", meaning that possible world entities are not completely identical with themselves across all possible worlds, but rather have counterparts at these worlds, namely close representatives which suffer slight alterations in each possible world they inhabit. As Lewis' theories impose several essential limitations, this particular study reinforces the Kripkean perspective on transworld identity.

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