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THE ONTOLOGICAL LOOP OF JOHN MIGHTON'S
POSSIBLE WORLDS

Abstract

The worlds in John Mighton's *Possible Worlds*, built upon an interplay of fictional realities and scientific theories of the multiverse, question the boundaries between the possible, impossible, fictional and real. The vanishing differences between dreams and realities, the things that could never have happened, those that have happened and those that have possibly happened in Mighton's play provoke the audience to search for the truth among the possible versions of reality that all implode into the mind of an individual whose physical existence is reduced to the brain in a vat. However, he is simultaneously both dead and alive, projecting, or gaining access to, in a state of quantum superposition, a multiverse of realities, all equally possible, realisable and real, in both the play and its film version.

Keywords

multiverse, science, fiction, adaptation, reality.

John Mighton's play *Possible Worlds* and its film adaptation directed by Robert Lepage (2000) confront the readers and the viewers with intriguing questions and dilemmas about the fabric and authenticity of reality by putting into effect the ideas that there is more than one world and that no person consists of one personality only. As weird or impossible or fantastic as these ideas (or perhaps it is better to call them possibilities) may sound, they are not a novelty, nor have they remained an unexplored field. They have already been considered, on numerous occasions. And not only in literature.

Possible worlds have been discussed by philosophers,¹ frequently and extensively. Bradley and Swartz called them counterfactual supposition and claimed they are not “mere idle speculation” because we “constantly make such suppositions in the world of real life” by thinking “about things that *might* have happened, *might* be happening and *might* be about to happen” (Bradley & Swartz 1988: 1).

This is why fiction writers usually have no problem captivating their reader’s attention, nor do they have any problems (mis)leading one to suspend one’s belief, although there is usually, in the mind of the reader, a clear line drawn between the world of fiction and the actual world. However, the realm of actual may not be so clearly discerned, as it may seem, from the fantastic, be it possible (realizable, but unrealized) or impossible (unrealizable). One reason to state this can be found in the already mentioned constant wondering about the numerous *might haves* and *might bes*. Another is the propinquity of the actual and the possible. Yet another is grounded in the claim that actuality is “surrounded by an infinite realm of possibilities”, and that “our actual world is surrounded by an infinity of other possible worlds” (Bradley & Swartz 1988: 2). However, philosophy alone is not sufficient to discuss so complex an issue. Possible worlds have “served as an interdisciplinary metaphor representing a sphere of mutual fusion and interchange between philosophical logic, philosophy of science, literary theory, aesthetics and linguistics” (Ronen 2004: 47).

Possible worlds are based on a logic of ramification determining the range of possibilities that emerge from an actual state of affairs; fictional worlds are based on a logic of parallelism that guarantees their autonomy in relation to the actual world. (Ronen 2004: 8)

Accordingly, there is a clear line dividing fictional worlds from the actual one(s) and the former should not be interpreted or related to actualized, actualisable, unactualized, or unactualizable possibilities in the actual world, but to what was actualized or actualizable *within a work of fiction*.

In spite of the above suggestion that fictional worlds are independent systems, no matter how many similarities they share with the actual reality, it stands to reason that “fictional possible worlds and the real world inevitably overlap to some extent – often to quite a large extent” (McHale, 1987, 34). Possible worlds borrow the elements from the actual world and use them as building blocks. Furthermore, they “depend on somebody’s propositional attitude; that is, in order for them to *be* possible, they must be believed in, imagined, wished for etc.,” so both fictional and actual worlds can be said to depend on “some human

¹ Owing to Mighton’s background in mathematics and philosophy, “*Possible Worlds* creates a complex layered structure within which certain theories of Descartes meet those of Wittgenstein, and where both become actualized” (Stephenson 2006: 74).

agent" (McHale 1987: 34). What is more, "possible-world approach not only complicates fiction's internal ontological structure, it also weakens its external boundary or frame" (McHale 1987: 34), suggesting that the boundaries between the real and fictional worlds, being weak as they are, might not represent an insurmountable obstacle.

According to Bradley and Swartz, what is conceivable and what is possible are not the same, although, again, there are substantial overlaps between the two (Bradley & Swartz 1988: 3). Our inability to conceive something does not necessarily mean that it is impossible, nor does our ability to conceive of something imply its possibility. Accordingly, they concluded, the ability to conceive something is neither necessary nor sufficient for something to be possible, which is why they propose the citing of the clear-cut examples, or "paradigm examples", of both possible and of impossible worlds.

Can Mighton's and Lepage's *Possible Worlds* be seen as clear-cut examples of possible worlds or of impossible ones? Or are they somewhere in between? Writers often induce their readers and literary theorists to lose track of the boundaries between fiction and reality in the fuzzy realms of *in-between*, filled in with entities both real and unreal, possible and impossible, dead and alive, sane and schizophrenic, existing in both authentic and illusionary worlds. Some of the worlds in *Possible Worlds* can be said to belong to the category of impossible worlds as the events described therein might be considered as those that can never happen. However, events that cannot ever happen easily slip into the domain of *in-between*.

In this paper, the conceivability and possibility of possible worlds in *Possible Worlds* will not be doubted. Moreover, they will be considered both actual and possible, even though such an opinion involves a conceivable risk of being frowned upon. Furthermore, no clear distinctions will be made between Mighton's drama and Lepage's film version. Even though there are variations, such as renaming Penfield to Dr. Kleber and many others, the film is a rather faithful adaptation of Mighton's text and the differences between the two do not affect the interpretation rooted in the belief that whatever "actually exists [...] belongs to the actual world even if it is light-years away" and that the "actual world embraces all that was, is, or will be", making it "clear that the actual world is a possible world" (Bradley & Swartz 1988: 5). To substantiate this opinion, it is necessary to make a turn towards science; however, not without looking back or, at least, casting glances to philosophy.

Scientific theories about the existence of parallel worlds, being impossible to prove, share an important feature with literature – imagination. To illustrate how important imagination in science is, Michio Kaku reminded us that the sciences have an old adage: "There's speculation, then there's more specula-

tion, and then there's cosmology" (Kaku 2004: 10). To which one could add: "And then there's literature," since there are numerous examples of the close relationship between the two.²

Cosmology offers speculation, reminding us that we "all accept the existence of things that we cannot see but could see if we moved to a different vantage point or merely waited, like people watching for ships to come over the horizon" (Tegmark 2003: 42). Obviously, cosmology does not offer clear-cut answers about the existence of multiverse because "multiverse theory can be tested and falsified even though we cannot see the other universes" (Tegmark 2003: 44). Possible worlds, thus, even those considered to be impossible, might actually exist somewhere in the infinite multiverse of innumerable realities and perhaps they could be seen if one moved to a different vantage point. For example, it could be the point of the reader or of the viewer.

In addition to four types, or levels, of multiverse explained by Max Tegmark (2003), among which level III could put a particularly interesting interpretation of *Possible Worlds*,³ cosmologist Milan Ćirković treated Lewis's model based on modal realism,⁴ or philosophical multiverse, "which holds that our world is but one among many", as the fifth type (Ćirković, 2007; Lewis, 2). This model is based on the hypothesis that each logically possible universe exists, so all possibilities one might conceive, together with the actual world, are equally and physically realized somewhere, in some logical space. Furthermore, the inhabitants of all the worlds (all existing somewhere) consider the world they live in to be actual. Possible worlds, thus, are parallel worlds, not differing in the degree of actuality, since they all *are actual*.

Unlike levels I and II, level III multiverse does not assume the existence of other worlds that are infinitely away, but right next to or around the one we live in, which brings into mind the above-mentioned observation that "our actual world is surrounded by an infinity of other possible worlds" (Bradley & Swartz 1988: 2). Owing to random quantum processes, our universe branches into multiple variants, one for each possible outcome. This multiverse type is easier to under-

² Ćirković (2009, 150–151) traced the word *multiverse* in literature to 1960s science fiction and Michael Moorcock's *Sundered World* and *Eternal Champion*, where it denotes a plurality of worlds in which one initial history of the physical reality constantly branches opening thus the way for numerous possibilities to occur, and we are aware of only one of them. Another example is *Eureka* in which Poe solved Olbers' paradox (Kaku 2004: 28).

³ Level IV, or mathematical multiverse, is not applicable here in any meaningful sense, whereas levels I and II also provide the grounds for interpretations of the play in question; however, this would lengthen the analysis significantly.

⁴ There are three approaches or views on possible worlds, depending on the degree of realism ascribed to them: anti-realist, moderate realism, and modal realism. For more details see Ronen (2004: 21–24).

stand when represented as viewing everything in two ways: one is the outside view of the physicist, which is only theoretical, like a bird views a landscape from above, and the other is the inside view of an individual, like a frog in the landscape surveyed by the bird, or the physicist (Tegmark 2003: 46–48).

The role of the physicist, or the bird, could be assumed by the reader of the text or the viewer of its adaptation. The role of the frog could be given to the protagonists of the play. The landscape in which they exist, as surveyed by the reader/frog/physicist, could be the story of *Possible Worlds*.

The story is already weird even without such exotic division of roles to protagonists, physicists, birds and frogs. *Possible Worlds* explores the theories of possible worlds and multiverse within the framework of the detective story in which two detectives try to solve a bizarre case of homicide. The victim's head has been incised, his brain has been stolen and possibly put in a vat. Parallel to the investigation, there are the scenes of relationships between George and Joyce, or perhaps it would be better to say between Georges and Joyces, or perhaps even better, between different variants of George and Joyce in different realities. To connect all threads into a meaningful weft the readers need to figure out what to do with the clues: the vat with a rat brain, the vase observed by George, the man without an arm, the corpse of the old man in the freezer, the light that Joyce sees from the beach, and perhaps the biggest dilemma – whether the man whose brain has been stolen is dead, still alive, or perhaps both dead and alive at the same time. As in Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*, “[e]verything is some kind of plot” and all the clues and realities are connected; however, “the arrows are pointing all different ways” (Pynchon 2000: 714). Particularly if observed from a frog's perspective, within the landscape of the story. What further complicates things is one character's ability, as it seems, to survey the landscape from both the bird and the frog perspectives.

According to the quantum theory, when an observer has a choice, for example, whether to do something or not, the quantum effects in the brain of the observer lead to a superposition of outcomes. From the bird perspective, the person splits into multiple copies, one for each possible outcome and, as a result, reality also splits into multiple realities. From the frog perspective, copies are not aware of the process of splitting and the creation of other copies and the only thing each copy notices is a probability of doing something or not. The newly created universes are not spatially distant and each copy exists in a different quantum branch, i.e. a variant of the same story with a different outcome. The “key idea is that parallel universes, of whatever type, embody different ways that events could have unfolded” (Tegmark 2003: 47).

In Scene Two, Joyce wonders about other possibilities, other outcomes. However, she is sceptical of their existence.

When people see their lives as being different they always make the most trivial changes: if only I'd gone to that party, or taken that job. They never say: if only I'd had two brains or been able to photosynthesize my food. It's as if they think the smaller variations are more likely to have occurred, that God might have overlooked them, but that's just superstition. How could anything be different from what it is? (Mighton 2000: 16)

The answer can be looked for in Scene Four, in the conversation that begins to take a weird turn when George says "I *am* everybody" and "I know everything" (Mighton 2000: 22).

JOYCE What's my name?
 GEORGE Joyce.
 Pause.
 JOYCE That's easy. Everyone here knows me. You were staring at me the other night. You spend a lot of time here.
 GEORGE D'you believe in other lives?
 JOYCE Past lives?
 GEORGE No, I mean lives going on right now.
 JOYCE Like being in two places at once?
 GEORGE More than two. A lot more.
 JOYCE You must be a great broker, being in hundreds of places at once.
 GEORGE I'm talking about possible worlds. Each of us exists in an infinite number of possible worlds. In one world I'm talking to you right now but your arm is a little to the left, in another world you're interested in that man over there with the glasses, in another you stood me up two days ago – and that's how I know your name.
 Pause.
 JOYCE When did you first realize you were more than one person?
 GEORGE In another life.
 JOYCE Oh?
 GEORGE Seventh grade. (Mighton 2000: 22–23)

George is talking about differences among realities, with different outcomes, often far greater than trivial. Moreover, the differences also arise from the existence of *Possible Worlds* in different media: the play in the written form, its rather faithful film adaptation and its theatrical performances on stage. Fidelity, long abandoned as the prime criterion for evaluation of the success of adaptation, is significant here as it becomes another mechanism of pluralisation of reality. In one theatrical performance, the arm is little to the right, in another the actor is standing on a different spot on the stage while saying the same text, in the film version an actor has changed the order of the words in a sentence. Moreover,

when listing the characters at the beginning of the play, the author noted that the minor roles such as the “doctor, business people, and other small roles can be doubled. The doubling need not be heavily disguised” (Mighton 2000: 9). This allows the directors to create numerous other splits and possibilities, as branches in which other outcomes have led to different possibilities, or different branches of reality. Therefore, the existence of the story versions in different media, and its performances, add more possible worlds to *Possible Worlds*.

George described something that resembles a quantum event, the branching of the reality, and himself along with it, into variants of the same event.

GEORGE I was writing a math test in the seventh grade. I was stuck on the last problem. I could see two ways of doing it, but I wasn't sure which would work. Half way through my calculations I suddenly saw myself doing the problem the other way. Only I wasn't just *seeing* myself. For a moment I was actually doing the problem the other way. I looked at my hand and saw a scar. I remembered how I had gotten it. I remembered the dog that had bitten me. Only I'd never been bitten by a dog. (Mighton 2000: 24)

Actually, George did not witness the actual branching but had an insight into the variations of his life *after* the branching took place. He had an insight into the reality in which he was doing the math problem the other way and the reality in which he had a scar on his hand. The quantum event must have taken place earlier, before the dog bit him. Although he was not “just *seeing*” himself, what he saw brings him close to surveying the landscape of realities from above, from the bird perspective, only he was surveying it *from the frog perspective*. Since he was aware of more than one reality, then he must have somehow gained an insight into quantum branches which, according to scientists, is only theoretically possible as one can be aware of the reality in only one branch at a time.

The quantum theory says there is a probability that all possible outcomes might occur, no matter how trivial, silly, or fantastic they may be. For example, the probability of meeting your own copy is so small that “[y]ou will probably never see your other selves” (Tegmark 2003: 41). The focus here should not be on the word *never* but on the word *probably*. To “slip between these worlds *is* within the laws of physics. But it is extremely unlikely; the probability of it happening is astronomically small” (Kaku 2004: 149). *Small is more probable* than *never*. Therefore, *Possible Worlds* could be interpreted as a story about something that is highly unlikely to happen – about the man who somehow manages to slip between realities, who sees other quantum branches and other outcomes of the events. If so, George was not lying when he told Joyce that he had had billions of lovers that he could remember.

When Berkley asks the Scientist whether the brain of the rat in the vat is alive, the Scientist answers that it is and that every time the light on the vat flashes they “send an electrical impulse to make it think it’s been rewarded” (Mighton 2000: 26). What a brain in a vat thinks is happening could only be an illusion, an electrical impulse sent by someone to make it/him/her think of something. According to the Scientist the rat’s imagination is limited by the structure of its brain, whereas the human brain is able to anticipate possible futures and contingency plans, which is “an evolutionary advantage” and that it would be “foolish not to use our imaginations, not to investigate every possible fact” (Mighton 2000: 27). Hence, it would also be foolish not to investigate every imaginable possibility. The fact that the scientist can control the rat’s brain alludes to the possibility that he can also send impulses to the human brain in the vat to make it think what the electric impulse tells it to think. This is suggested by Joyce, who in Scene Six says that neurology can give people what they want and that one day “we’ll be able to dial and focus our nervous systems the way we adjust our TVs” (Mighton 2000: 29).

Detective Williams, considered to be rather dull by his superior detective Berkley, sees the rat’s brain in the vat and wonders if we all were stolen brains in a tank, because maybe “someone’s already stolen ours” (Mighton 2000: 34). Berkley’s response is rather harsh.

BERKLEY Why would they want your brain Williams? What d’you normally think about in the course of a day? Your wife? Your house? Hockey? Why would they want to steal your brain and make you think about hockey all the time? What’s the motivation? (Mighton 2000: 34)

The motivation is what the readers and viewers need to uncover, like detectives following the clue, because the story “illustrates the subject’s search for objective truth, for stability of perception, and thereby for the key question – confirmation of ontological status” (Stephenson 2006: 76). Williams cannot imagine things listed by the voice on the recorded “Consciousness Revolution” course aimed at teaching people to use their brains “in an entirely new way” (Mighton 2000: 36). He is not capable of imagining a real candle, which is why he should use a real one. It is a bitter irony that he could be the only character to actually get to the point. The use in a “new way” might be required if the brain is already in a vat, when real candles and other real objects are inaccessible.

That “[a]ll possible states exist at every instant, so the passage of time may be in the eye of the beholder” is an idea developed by physicists David Deutsch of the University of Oxford, independent physicist Julian Barbour, and others so the “multiverse framework may thus prove essential to understanding the nature of time” (Tegmark 2003: 48–49). If linear time is only an illusion all attempts

to reveal the sequence of events, and which copy of which person belongs to which universe, might not be necessary after all. They all coincide and it is *observation* that makes a person or an event (seem to) exist at a certain point in time. Accordingly, the viewers of the film adaptation may be particularly important for actualization of the realities in *Possible Worlds*.

Kaku gave credit to philosophers and the 18th century solipsistic theory that objects exist only because there are humans to observe them, so if a tree falls and there is no one to see that, then it has not actually fallen.

Before an observation is made, you don't know whether it has fallen or not. In fact, the tree exists in all possible states simultaneously: it might be burnt, fallen, firewood, sawdust, and so on. Once an observation is made, then the tree suddenly springs into a definite state, and we see that it has fallen, for instance. (Kaku 2004: 157)

Perhaps George might be having the privilege, along with the film viewers, to see some of the states the protagonists of *Possible Worlds* exist in, whereas the readers can only imagine the worlds George perceives. If we rely on the postulates of the Copenhagen interpretation of quantum mechanics that “[b]efore an observation is made, an object exists in all possible states simultaneously” (Kaku 2004: 153), *Possible Worlds* could be a story consisting of several probabilities *before* an observation is made by someone. If so, the viewers see the copies of George observing different realities that spring into existence for each copy in case. This implies that the viewers, while watching *Possible Worlds*, make observations that allow for all the observed probabilities to spring into definite states. Viewers, unlike readers who only *imagine* the described characters and events, actually *see* them. They see George in the process of observing more than one possibility, and they see these other possibilities. Or, perhaps they see several copies of George observing each other due to an astronomically small chance that he may be slipping between realities, and the act of seeing them makes them spring into existence. Film adaptation, in this case, can be said to serve as the *actualizer* of the previously imagined, fictional possibilities.

George's ability to actualize possibilities by observing them is debatable not only because there is no evidence that the Copenhagen interpretation is true, but also because there is a chance he is not able to *actually observe* them. In Scene Sixteen, George realises he is in a vat and in the conversation with the doctor who says that “there are so many worlds” he comes to the conclusion that “there's only one world. I've been dreaming” (Mighton 2000: 67). George's brain has been found “in a cupboard... hooked up to a life-support system” and “floating in an aquarium supported by wires” (Mighton 2000: 69). According to Dr. Penfield who put it in there the brain can survive for a few weeks. During the period spent in this state, what George “sees” is actually what he imagines.

So, there is a dilemma – is actualizing something by observing it possible only if one sees something with one's eyes, or is seeing something in the mind, by actually thinking or imagining that one sees something, also the act of observing, and as such sufficient to actualize the imagined?

Within this mind-boggling knot of possibilities and realities, there lurks another dilemma: Is George dead or alive? Observation by a person who is dead would additionally complicate the act of observing and its actualizing effects. However, once again, science comes up with the solution.

Erwin Schrödinger, a Nobel prize winning Austrian physicist, proposed an interesting thought experiment with a cat sealed in a box with some uranium and poison gas, connected to a hammer, which is connected to a Geiger counter. The radioactive decay of the uranium atom is a quantum event that cannot be predicted, so there is a 50 percent chance the atom will decay the next second and activate the Geiger counter, which will set off the hammer, which will break the glass with the poison gas, which will kill the cat. Before the box is opened, no one can know whether it is dead or alive and “in order to describe the cat, physicists add the wave function of the live cat and the dead cat – that is, we put the cat in a nether world of being 50 percent dead and 50 percent alive simultaneously” (Kaku 2004: 158).

If this interpretation is correct, concludes Kaku, then at this very moment our bodies coexists with the dinosaurs, a world in which the Germans won World War II, a world with aliens from outer space, or a world in which we were never born. However, there is no interaction with these worlds since they have decohered. Decoherence, thus, offers one possible explanation. Namely, according to H. Dieter Zeh, “the wave function of the dead cat and the wave function of the live cat must be vibrating in almost exact synchronisation, a state called coherence” (Kaku 2004: 167). In reality, interaction with the outside world disturbs the two wave functions and they decohere, or fall out of synchronization, and as a result they separate. The final state of the cat, however, cannot be chosen before observation. Hugh Everett III proposed that the cat is both dead and alive at the same time, but in two different universes because the universe has split into two and in one it is dead, whereas in another it is alive. Actually, “at each quantum juncture, the universe splits in half, in a never-ending sequence of splitting universes. All universes are possible in this scenario, each as real as the other” (Kaku 2004: 168).

If observation is vital for existence, i.e. for actualisation of one probability among many others, then George exists in all imaginable states, including the one in which he is dead with his brain stolen from his body, the one in which he is a risk analyst and still alive, the one in which his brain has been stolen yet fully functioning in a vat. He could be both dead and alive at the same time and

remain so until someone observes him in one of the states, or, he could be both dead and alive in separate universes, all equally real and created as a result of numerous splits. The variant or world in which his brain has been stolen and still alive, with his consciousness separated from his body, is an *in-between* possibility, because the worlds we read about and see in the adaptation are within George's mind and there is actually no way of observing them other than while watching the film. The viewers, as observers, bring these probabilities into existence. All of them.

Thus, George is both dead and alive at the same time, whether 50 percent dead and 50 percent alive simultaneously, or in different quantum junctures that constantly split into other universes that create more universes, indefinitely. Whichever be the case, all the probabilities, all the worlds he dreams about, or thinks about, or believes he lives in, or actually experiences, exist owing to observation: by other characters in the play, by the actors in the film, or by the viewers. George exists in all these states that exist at all points in time.

No matter how many universes and versions of George we read about or see on film, we can never know what George's ultimate fate is. All the copies of George *are* George.

If there are indeed many identical copies of you, the traditional notion of determinism evaporates. You could not compute your own future even if you had complete knowledge of the entire state of the multiverse, because there is no way for you to determine which of these copies is you (they all feel they are). (Tegmark 2003: 49)

Not only do all George's copies and their worlds coexist one with another, they also coexist with the worlds of the readers and the viewers who might even be responsible for their actualization. They exist with them, wherever they are and whenever they are, yet they may never reach and see one another, or any other possible world for that matter, because they have decohered.

American theoretical physicist and Nobel laureate Nobel Steven Weinberg compared multiverses to radio waves – each is broadcast from distant stations and only one frequency can be listened to at a time. There are an infinite number of universes; however, like radios, individuals can be tuned to only one broadcast, one universe at a time (Kaku 2004: 170). The readers and the viewers of *Possible Worlds* have the privilege to witness the changing of the broadcast, which allows them to tune into several universes. This is not unusual since they have the privilege of the bird perspective.

George, somehow, has the ability to tune into more than one universe even though he is within the observed landscape. And, somehow, he is in contact with other worlds in which his copies exist. Perhaps he has not decohered, or

the wave function failed to collapse and he has not fallen into one definite state, which allows him to be both the bird and the frog – both above and within the ontological landscape of *Possible Worlds*.

Joyce, however, is not tuned to other probabilities, to other universes, as George is. This partially explains why she does not recognize him at the beach near the end. She does not believe in other possibilities and each copy of her is firmly rooted into her own branch of reality. Joyce, unlike George, is “a fatalist” who thinks “it’s pretty silly to wish things were different from what they are” (Mighton 2000: 16).

If seen as fantasy, the play and its adaptation inverts the elements of this world, as Rosemary Jackson noticed that fantasy does, by “re-combining its constitutive features in new relations to produce something strange, unfamiliar and *apparently* ‘new’, absolutely ‘other’ and different” (Jackson 1981: 8). In *Possible Worlds*, this *apparently* new, other and different is the multiverse of realities existing as imperfect reflections of one another, probabilities and possibilities actualized somewhere and sometime in the fabric of spacetime or, actually, happening at this very moment. This means that these, as well as all other possible and imaginable worlds are as real as the reality that the readers and viewers perceive as their worlds.

In an insightful analysis of the play, Elizabeth Klever applied Eco’s and Lewis’s theories to “consider how the theory of possible worlds is transferable to a narratology of drama and performance” (Klever 2006: 45). She enumerated six possible worlds and selected one, “number *four*” as “the ‘right one’”, the one together with the detective story “that is *actualized* as the virtual or global ontological ground” (Klever 2006: 60). However, there is no need to try and establish their reality hierarchy – they are all equally real and *right*.

The world we live in is a very inclusive thing. Every stick and every stone you have ever seen is part of it. And so are you and I. And so are the planet Earth, the solar system, the entire Milky Way, the remote galaxies we see through telescopes, and (if there are such things) all the bits of empty space between the stars and galaxies. There is nothing so far away from us as not to be part of our world. Anything at any distance at all is to be included. Likewise the world is inclusive in time. No long-gone ancient Romans, no long-gone pterodactyls, no long-gone primordial clouds of plasma are too far in the past, nor are the dead dark stars too far in the future, to be part of this same world. (Lewis 1986: 1)

The probability that everything imaginable and imagined exists somewhere in the infinite universe, or multiverse, erases the boundaries between reality and fantasy. As Brian Attebery (2012: 83) wrote, “[o]ne difference between fantasy and the genres of realism and naturalism is that fantasy typically displays and even celebrates its structure. If it were a shirt, the seams would be on the out-

side.” In *Possible Worlds* the theories of possible worlds and multiverse can be used to turn the fabric of the story inside out and identify these seams that connect the variants of George’s existence and highlight the shift from epistemology to ontology, showing that both the play and its adaptation background epistemological questions and, at the same time, foreground ontological ones such as “Which world is this? What is to be done in it? Which of my selves is to do it?”⁵, as well as “What happens when different kinds of world are placed in confrontation, or when boundaries between worlds are violated?” (McHale 2007: 33; McHale 1987: 59)

The attempts to try and connect the clues left in *Possible Worlds* into a meaningful explanation offer us an opportunity to see ourselves not as we think we are, due to our limited perception of reality we live in, lost in the forest of possibilities of which we see only one tree, in one definite form, but as we really are, each a plurality of identities, beings who are more than *one*, existing in more than one reality. However, unlike a fairy tale, it fails to bring the consolation of the happy ending, as there is no real ending to the story. George, like Schrödinger’s cat, is stuck inside the box that will remain forever unopened. Despite this, *Possible Worlds* is, in a way, a *eucatastrophic* tale, “the true form of fairy-tale” in Tolkien’s sense, which brings “the sudden joyous ‘turn’ (for there is no true end to any fairy-tale)” (Tolkien 2006: 153). It provides the escape from death, from wrong choices, from unwanted people and undesired outcomes, in other worlds, be they quantum branches or infinitely distant universes containing copies that are also originals.

All the possibilities in the play and its film adaptation can be interpreted from a paranoid point of view – that everything is connected and that there is a pattern, a common thread that connects all the parts into a meaningful whole. However, it can also be seen from an anti-paranoid point of view, that nothing is connected and that it is all only a random mix of episodes. It is easy to get lost in the multitude of universes in both the many-worlds theory and *Possible Worlds*. Although the story, at the end, tends to leave the readers and viewers linger and hesitate in Todorovian uncertainty, “anti-paranoia, where nothing is connected to anything” is “a condition not many of us can bear for too long”, and there is “something – religious, if you want – about paranoia” (Pynchon 2000: 515). Unfortunately, as Kaku (2004: 101) noticed, “the possibility of testing the multiverse theory, involving multiple universes with different sets of physical laws, is at present impossible.”

As Hume noticed, “[r]ealism no longer imparts an adequate sense of meaning to our experience with reality” (Hume 1984: 39). At one point George comes

⁵ McHale quoted Dick Higgins, *A Dialectic of Centuries: Notes towards a Theory of the New Arts*.

to the conclusion that there is “only one world. I’ve been dreaming. (Pause.) I’m in a case” (Mighton 2000: 67). Even if *Possible Worlds* is a story about dreamed up worlds, even if everything George experiences is only a fantasy on a par with the one experienced by Peyton Farquar in Bierce’s “An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge”, it still tells a story about the known reality, because “[l]iterature relying on dreams can remind us of this loophole in our rationality, and challenge our casual assurance, particularly if the dream world asserts its own substantiality” (Hume 1984: 127).

If fictional worlds are mirrors of our actual(ized) reality, then multiverses could be the result of breaking it into numerous pieces, each reflecting the world in a different way, from a different angle. Yet, no matter how big or small a piece may be, it remains a mirror, which can contain the reflection in its entirety. *Possible Worlds* reflects real fears felt by real people living in reality that is in-between, both actual and conceived as real. It also reflects how reality could easily slip from under everyone’s feet, with a warning that no one is slippery-proof and that there is no real protection from slippage. Imagination is infinite, so why not imagine other worlds, the ones we can never actually observe, since they are all as real as ours, they are all part of the world we know.

The ways out of the dilemmas whether the possible worlds in *Possible Worlds* are actually possible and real, whether George is alive or not and whether everything he sees and perceives is real, remain somewhere *in-between* or, to borrow a line from *Gravity’s Rainbow*, another conglomerate of in-between realities, “Of course it happened. Of course it didn’t happen” (Pynchon 2000: 790).

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