

The concept of possible worlds, originally introduced in philosophical logic, has recently gained interdisciplinary influence; it proves to be a productive tool when borrowed by literary theory to explain the notion of fictional worlds. In this book Ruth Ronen develops a comparative reading of the use of possible worlds in philosophy and in literary theory, and offers an analysis of the way the concept contributes to our understanding of fictionality and the structure and ontology of fictional worlds. Dr. Ronen suggests a new set of criteria for the definition of fictionality, making rigorous distinctions between fictional and possible worlds; and through specific studies of domains within fictional worlds — events, objects, time and point of view — she proposes a radical rethinking of the problem of fictionality in general and fictional narrativity in particular.



Literature, Culture, Theory 7

Possible worlds in literary theory



#### Literature, Culture, Theory

#### General editors

RICHARD MACKSEY, The Johns Hopkins University
and MICHAEL SPRINKER, State University of New York at Stony Brook

The Cambridge Literature, Culture, Theory series is dedicated to theoretical studies in the human sciences that have literature and culture as their object of enquiry. Acknowledging the contemporary expansion of cultural studies and the redefinitions of literature that this has entailed, the series includes not only original works of literary theory but also monographs and essay collections on topics and seminal figures from the long history of theoretical speculation on the arts and human communication generally. The concept of theory embraced in the series is broad, including not only the classical disciplines of poetics and rhetoric, but also those of aesthetics, psychoanalysis, semiotics, and other cognate sciences that have inflected the systematic study of literature during the past half century.

#### Titles published

Return to Freud: Jacques Lacan's dislocation of psychoanalysis

SAMUEL WEBER

(Included Control of Control of Action Latin)

(translated from the German by Michael Levine)

Wordsworth, dialogics, and the practice of criticism DON H. BIALOSTOSKY

The subject of modernity ANTHONY J. CASCARDI

Onomatopoetics: theory of language and literature JOSEPH GRAHAM

Parody: ancient, modern, and post-modern
MARGARET ROSE

The poetics of personification JAMES PAXSON

Possible worlds in literary theory RUTH RONEN



# Possible worlds in literary theory

<del>^</del>

#### **RUTH RONEN**

Senior Lecturer in Poetics and Comparative Literature Tel Aviv University





> Published by the Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, CB2 1RP 40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA 10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, Melbourne 3166, Australia

> > © Cambridge University Press 1994

First published 1994

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress cataloguing in publication data

Ronen, Ruth.

Possible worlds in literary theory / Ruth Ronen.
p. cm. – (Literature, culture, theory: 7)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 0 521 45017 9. – ISBN 0 521 45648 7 (paperback)

Fiction – Technique.
 Possibility in literature.
 Reality in literature.
 Possibility.
 Logic. I. Title. II. Series.

PN3355.R66 1994 809.3—dc20 93-8033 CIP

ISBN 0 521 45017 9 hardback ISBN 0 521 45648 7 paperback

Transferred to digital printing 2004



In memory of my beloved mother who departed too soon.



<del>\*</del>

### **Contents**

<del>\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*</del>

	Acknowledgments	page XI
	Introduction	1
	Fictionality as an interdisciplinary problem	1
	Possible worlds and fictionality	,5
	Fictionality and the pragmatics of fiction	9
	Fictionality and narrativity	12
I	Possible worlds, fictional worlds	17
	Stage I The philosophical notion of possible worlds	18
	Stage II Philosophers' approach to fiction	30
	Stage III Possible worlds in a wider context	34
2	The possibility of fictional worlds	47
	Possible worlds between the disciplines	4 <i>7</i>
	Possibility and actuality	48
	Accessibility	61
	Possible worlds between the disciplines, again	71
3	The Fictionality of fictional worlds	76
	Why is there a problem in defining fictionality?	76
	The pragmatics of fiction – its ontological, logical and	
	epistemological distinctive features	87
	The autonomy of fiction and the concept of world	96
4	Fictional entities, incomplete beings	108
	Existence and fictional existence	108
	The incompleteness of fictional entities	114
	Are fictional entities equally incomplete?	122
	Theories of naming and the completeness of entities	130
	Definitization of entities and the completeness of	
	fictional objects	136



#### Contents

5	Fictional events and the intricacies of plot	144
	Plot-models and their object of investigation	150
	Plot-models and structuralist ideology	156
	Narrative semantics – from syntactic to semantic plot-	
	models	165
	Plot as a constellation of possible worlds	167
6	Focalization and fictional perspective	175
	Is focalization specific to fiction?	175
	Focalization on the fictional world	179
	Types of organization that focalization imposes on	
	fictional domains	184
	Types of organization that narrative modalities impose	
	on fictional domains	191
7	Fictional time	197
	The analogy between time of fiction and time of	
	actuality	199
	The reliance of temporality of fiction on the modal	
	operation of temporal concepts	202
	Conclusion	229
	Bibliography	231
	Inder	2.40



<del></del>

## Acknowledgments

<del></del>

Earlier versions of parts of chapters in this book have appeared in various journals in recent years. Although these have been radically revised in the preparation of this book, I would like to express my gratitude to the following journals for permission to make further use of the relevant material. Parts of chapter 1 were published in the journal Semiotica in a paper titled "Possible Worlds in Literary Theory: A Game in Interdisciplinarity." Part of chapter 2 was published as "Possible Worlds between the Disciplines" in The British Journal of Aesthetics. Part of chapter 4 is based on a paper published in Poetics Today under the title "Completing the Incompleteness of Fictional Entities." A version of chapter 5 was published in Poetics Today, under the title "Paradigm Shift in Plot Models: An Outline of the History of Narratology." An early version of chapter 6 appeared (in French) in Poétique as "La focalisation dans les mondes fictionnels" and a version of chapter 7 appeared in Style as "The Semiotics of Fictional Time: Three Metaphors in the Study of Temporality in Fiction."

A number of people have either directly or indirectly influenced my work, and I would like to express my indebtedness and gratitude to them. I am grateful to Benjamin Harshav, who was the first to stimulate my interest in the problem of fictionality. Thanks are also due to Lubomir Doležel who introduced me to problems of logic and semantics in the study of literature; his influence on my work is indeed immeasurable. I am also grateful to Amos Funkenstein who has helped me to feel at ease when addressing philosophical problems. Yeshayahu Shen, Gerald Prince, Yael Levo and Brian McHale have been devoted readers and stringent critics of both earlier versions of this material and of chapters of the book itself; they have helped me to improve and revise my thoughts on the matters involved. I would like to thank people at the Porter Institute and in the Department of Poetics and Comparative Literature at Tel Aviv University for creating the intellectual atmosphere appropriate for research, and especially Itamar



#### Acknowledgments

Even-Zohar for making available certain financial support during the preparation of this book. In particular I would like to thank Sonja Laden for her style-editing and Sharon Himmelfarb for her less specific, yet no less valuable help. Last but not least, I would like to thank my family, and especially my daughter Dana, who has proven, beyond doubt, that anything is possible.