

## **Possible Worlds in Ken Kesey's *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest***

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### **ABSTRACT**

In this paper the authors apply Marie-Laure Ryan's Possible-Worlds theory to Ken Kesey's *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* to show how the characters' different conceptions of the world define and build up the narrative structure of the novel. The objective is to look into how the characters in Kesey's novel fall into different types of alternative possible worlds, namely Knowledge worlds, Prospective Extensions of Knowledge worlds, Intention worlds, Obligation worlds, Wish worlds, and Fantasy Universes. Also examined is the internal structure of the fictional worlds or, in Ryan's terminology, "the textual actual world," to explicate the internal conflicts between the actual domain and the private worlds of the different characters. The paper finally concludes with some reflections on these worlds' interactions and their conflicts, and on the way they contribute to plot development and consolidate, in Ryan's terms, its "tellability."

*Keywords:* Ken Kesey, *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, Marie-Laure Ryan, Possible Worlds Theory, Internal Structure of Fictional Worlds, tellability

"But it's the *truth* even if it didn't happen." (*One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, 13)

"In my novels and stories, evil is always the thing that seems to control. In *Cuckoo's Nest*, it is the combine."

(*Conversations with Ken Kesey*, 157)

## INTRODUCTION

Where can we draw the line between madness and sobriety? When can we say if a narrative of the world is possible or impossible? In Kesey's novel *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, portraying post-World War II American society, characters challenge one another to impose their views of the world as authentic ones. They have constructed different and sometimes opposing worlds which interact with and defy one another. Each individual builds up his own truth or definition of the world, although it seldom "objectively" materializes in the outer world.

Moreover, this interplay between various understandings of the world, it is argued, aesthetically shapes the plot and narrative structure of the novel. Employing Marie-Laure Ryan's theory or model of 'possible worlds,' in the present article we offer a reading of Kesey's novel in terms of the cognitive structuring of narrative. We first outline the concept of Possible Worlds, and then elaborate on Ryan's typology and also discuss Fantasy Universes of the war veteran character, Chief Bromden, whose perception of the world plays a major part in forming the narrative flow of the novel. This is followed by zooming in on the internal structure of the narrative universe of *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* through this theoretical lens.

## THE CONCEPT OF POSSIBLE WORLDS

The "Possible worlds" theory can be regarded as a subcategory of cognitive poetics, which as, an interdisciplinary approach, is broadly concerned with how mind and language work. "Possible worlds" constitutes the more philosophical tendency in cognitive poetics. "The origin of the theory of "possible worlds" can be traced back to the seventeenth century and Leibniz's concern with philosophical logic" (Amani *et al.* 70). Leibniz maintains that "an infinity of possible worlds [exists] as thoughts in the mind of God," and among these worlds, only one is the actual world (333-4). According to Bradley and Schwartz, the possible worlds theory was inspired by philosophers of analytical school such as Kripke, Lewis, Hintikka, Plantinga, and Rescher, developed in order to grapple with logical problems (2). Marie-Laure Ryan addresses these problems as follows:

These problems are the truth conditions of counterfactual statements ("If a couple hundred more Florida voters had voted for Gore in 2000, the Iraq war would not have happened") and of sentences modified by modal operators expressing necessity and possibility (hence the

close relationship between possible worlds theory and modal logic). Other modal systems have been built around operators expressing what is known as “propositional attitudes” such as beliefs, obligation, and desires. (“Impossible Worlds” 1)

Recently, scholars such as Lubomir Doležel, Umberto Eco, Thomas Pavel, and Marie-Laure Ryan have adapted and extended this notion to the fields of fictional worlds of narrative, literary semantics and literary theory. In his *Dictionary of Narratology*, Gerald Prince thus elaborates on the concept of “possible worlds:”

Narratives comprise temporally ordered sequences of states of affairs that are taken to be actual/factual (“what happens”) and that are linked to other states of affairs considered non-actual or counterfactual and constituted by the mental activity of various characters (their beliefs, wishes, plans, hallucinations, fantasies, etc.). (77)

Thus, “as an interdisciplinary approach,” in Ruth Ronen’s terms (1), the notion of possible worlds helps us understand how the semantics of fictionality non-mimetically<sup>1</sup> propelled by the literary text is an “Alternative Possible World” (APW) that operates as the actual world the moment the reader is immersed in a work of fiction (Doležel, “Mimesis” 481). This is what Ryan formulates as “recentering,” a process that makes the reader immerse into “a new system of actuality and possibility.” That is, “not only one new actual world, but a variety of APWs revolving around it” exist (*Possible Worlds* 22). Thus an event or a series of affairs are possible so long as they do not contravene the laws of logic. But one needs to ask which of these deserves to be called the authentic actual world. From an absolutist viewpoint (e.g. Rescher), the central actual world is ontologically autonomous and the others are the products of imagination, dream, etc. and thus counted as “possible worlds.” This brings to mind what David Lewis has formulated as “indexical theory” which, as Ryan observes, demonstrates that the “actual’ is indexical, like ‘I’ or ‘here,’ or ‘now’: [and] it depends for its reference on the circumstances of utterance, to wit the world where the utterance is located” (*Possible Worlds* 18). In other words, in the indexical interpretation, Ryan explains, “the term ‘actual’ does not carry absolute reference but designates the world of the modal system in which the experience is located. This shifting value makes it possible for every possible world to be experienced as reality by its inhabitants” (177). However, David Lewis, in Lubomir Doležel’s words, “relativizes the concept of actual world” (*Heterocosmica* 33). To be precise, Lewis believes that possible worlds are not creations of the mind, but their existence is verifiable, a proposition which the majority of literary critics consider to be radical and hardly acceptable. The proposition can be modified by saying that

readers pretend that fictional worlds exist absolutely. This inaugurated the very predilection for the autonomy of fictional worlds. Ruth Ronen believes that "Fictional worlds are ontologically and structurally distinct: facts of the actual world have no a priori ontological privilege over facts of the fictional world" (12). Likewise, Thomas Pavel declares: "[E]ach literary work contains its own ontological perspective. In this precise sense, one can say that literary worlds are autonomous" ("Possible Worlds and Literary Semantics" 175).

## THE INTERNAL STRUCTURE OF FICTIONAL WORLDS

Once the reader is recentered into the fictional world of a literary work, Ryan proposes "the modal structure of narrative universes" wherein "the internal description of the semantic universe projected by the text" is examined (*Possible Worlds* 109). For describing the internal structure of "the textual universe as a dynamic combination of textual actual world (TAW), on the one hand, and the different types of alternative possible worlds formulated by characters, on the other hand" (Semino, *Language and World* 86-7), Ryan suggests that the possible worlds as private worlds or virtual domains exist in the thoughts or minds of the characters (110). Furthermore, Ryan discusses the characters' mental activities that are composed of two sorts of elements: "some involve truth-functional and fact-defining propositions while some others do not" (111). As for the first group of propositions, according to Ryan, we have "'thinking that p,' 'hoping that p,' and 'intending p'"; the other group of propositions include "the emotions, subjective judgments, and fleeting perceptions before they are turned into knowledge" (111). These propositions have to be integrated to constitute "the image of a world" (*ibid.*).

By modifying Lubomir Doležel's systems of modalities<sup>2</sup>, Ryan proposes that there are some alternative possible worlds (APWs) that constitute the narrative universe and "delineate the components of a reader's representation of the narrative state" (Ryan, "The Modal Structure of Narrative Universe" 719); the conflicts within these APWs engender the plot development and its tellability. Additionally, Margot Norris maintains that by modifying the fictional modalities, Marie-Laure Ryan restricts them "to the private worlds in the minds of characters rather than by treating them as operatives of world-construction" (Norris, 9). These private worlds or virtual worlds are as follows:

- (1) *Textual Actual World (TAW)*: what is presented as true and real in the story;
- (2) *Knowledge World (K-World)*: what the characters know

or believe to be the case with the T/AW; (3) *Prospective Extension of K-World*: what characters expect or hold to be future developments in TAW; (4) *Obligation World (O-World)*: the commitments and prohibitions constituted by the social rules and moral principles which the characters are subject to; (5) *Wish World (W-World)*: the wishes and desires of the characters; (6) *Intention World (I-World)*: the plans and goals of the characters; (7) *Fantasy Universes (F-Universes)*: the dreams and fantasies of the characters and the fictions they construct. (Ryan, 113-123)

In knowledge world or K-world, the reader copes with knowledge, belief, and ignorance of the characters within the fictional universe. Ryan suggests that a possible K-world is “an incomplete representation,” and an impossible K-world “involves contrary-to-fact propositions.” She enumerates four epistemic categories: the first one is correspondence and knowledge (+) that in (“x holds p firmly for true”); the second proposition is composed of conflict and misbelief (-) (“x holds p firmly for false, while p is true”); the third one contains absence and ignorance (0) (“p is unknown to x”); and the last one draws the reader’s attention to indeterminacy, uncertainty, and question (i) (“x is either uncommitted to the truth of p or leans to some degree toward the truth, i.e. considers p possible, probable, unlikely, etc.”) (115). The point is that the reference world of a character’s K-world could be not just TAW but any of the private worlds of the narrative universe (Ryan 116). Similarly, Prospective extension of Knowledge-World corresponds to Todorov’s predictive mode<sup>3</sup> in that “the K-world of characters includes a prospective domain, representing their apprehension of the tree of possible developments out of the present situation” (116).

Obligation world or O-world is a “system of commitment and prohibition defined by social rules and moral principles” on the grounds that authorial power always exists (Ryan 116). A character’s or person’s O-world is fulfilled and satisfied in T/AW if all the obligations have been fulfilled and none of the “interdictions transgressed” (ibid). Ryan divides the actions in O-world into: “credits (acquisition of merit), debts (acquisition of demerit), and neutral” (117). Obviously, the acquisition of merit “makes characters rewardable” and acquisition of demerit “makes characters punishable” and there would be no credit (ibid.). In regard with the relationships and conflicts in O-world, Ryan touches on Todorov’s conditional mode, “if you do p, I will do q” (ibid). Threats, for instance, according to Ryan, offer an interesting conflict: “[B]y issuing a threat, characters create an obligation, and if the precondition obtains they will be in ‘debt’ until they execute the threat” (ibid). In Wish World or W-world,

the key word is “desire”; also, it is known as “the axiological system” that occupies personal values or desires or, in other words, what is deemed as good, bad, neutral, or desirable by a character.

The other virtual domain is fantasy universes or F-universes. In this type of private sphere within the narrative universe, the reader deals with what the characters in the story create within their minds such as dreams, hallucinations, fantasies, and fictional stories (Ryan, 119). The notion of “recentering” in this case occurs for the character as well as the reader since F-Universes itself has a new system with a new TAW at the center and the APWs or F-worlds surrounding it. Ryan states that “[F]or the duration of a dream, the dreamer believes in the reality of the events he or she experiences, and the actual world of the dream takes the place of T/AW” (119). It aims to sort out the ontological realms present within the narration.

In addition to the above-mentioned private worlds, Ryan holds that “the private domain of characters is not exhausted by sincere beliefs and desires, or genuine obligations;” yet, the purpose becomes a sort of deception (*Possible Worlds* 119). Hence, she introduces Mock K-World, Mock O-World, Mock W-World, and Mock I- World as pretended worlds (123). That is, characters sometimes pretend to believe in something, pretend to be under an obligation and pretend that they wish something or have a specific goal (Amani et al. 72).

In what follows, drawing on Ryan's theorizations about the possible worlds, we attempt to illustrate the modality of the possible worlds as projected in Ken Kesey's *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*.

## **DISCUSSION**

The American Postwar era, especially the 1950s and 1960s, witnessed the emergence of “countercultures” which tried to challenge the mainstream culture. The Counterculture aspired to create, or at least to envision, an alternative to the American way of life, which was believed to have been fundamentally inflected by capitalist hegemony. Despite the economic boom, the United States was involved in the Cold War, the fear of atomic bomb cast its shadow upon the country, and materialism and capitalism had a stranglehold on society. This is how Philip. R. Yannella describes the era's atmosphere: “There were also assertions about the ‘sickness’ of American society. The ‘rat race’ of making money and more money to buy more and more useless things made people crazy, it was said, by defining them down to robotic consumers with no inner lives” (57).

Also, in the post-World War II era, as Yannella observes, there was an increase in the number of people who were mentally ill in America, that is, “one-seventeenth” of the nation, about eight millions, were allegedly psychotic (62). Ironically, however, according to Leslie A. Fiedler, it was also a revolutionary period in which “all hierarchal institutions, not least the hospital, had come to be despised, and all professions, specialties—especially, perhaps, medical ones, and most especially psychiatry—were regarded with hostility and suspicion” (89). This is reflected in many literary works of the period, especially by writers associated with the Counterculture (although examples of such works by other important writers such as Bellow, Salinger and Mailer are not infrequent either).

A good example of such works is Ken Kesey’s *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, first published in 1962. It is an anti-establishment and iconoclastic novel in which an attempt is made to uncover and critique ‘sick’ American society. The novel augurs, in the words of Gair, “the counterculture’s fragmentation around the end of the 1960s” (136). Entering the fictional world of Kesey’s novel, one encounters the “textual actual world” (TAW), a psychiatric hospital whose organization is exemplified in an authoritative and repressive figure (Nurse Ratched). This mental institution metonymically or microcosmically illustrates the Actual World. Within the hospital, the inmates try to project and hold on to distinct private worlds or Alternative Possible Worlds (APWs) as a way of resisting the hegemonic TAW.

One of the inmates is Chief Bromden, a veteran of World War II, who is often lost in his dreams or hallucinations which contribute to F-Universes. Narratologically speaking, he is the homodiegetic narrator of the novel conceived of as a “personal narrator” whose discourse is the content of his mind which ironically reflects the external textual reality of the hospital (TAW). “It is the dispossessed Indian spirit,” Kesey believes, “that’s trying to reconnect with the white male spirit” (*One Flew* 155). Tom Wolfe in his well-known documentary account *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* (1968), which is an account of the experiences of Ken Kesey and his group of followers, his band of Merry Pranksters, reports the course of the formation of an Indian as the narrator of *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest*:

Kesey starts getting eyelid movies of faces, whole galleries of weird faces, churning up behind the eyelids, faces from out of nowhere. He knows nothing about Indians and has never met an Indian, but suddenly here is a full-blown Indian—Chief Broom—the solution, the whole mothering key, to the novel [...] From the point of view of craft, Chief Broom was his great inspiration. If he had told the story through McMurphy’s eyes, he would have had to end up with the big bruiser delivering a lot of homilies about his downhome theory of mental

therapy. Instead, he told the story through the Indian. This way he could present a schizophrenic state the way the schizophrenic himself, Chief Broom, feels it and at the same time report the McMurphy method more subtly. (42-43)

In Wolfe's account, the choice of an Indian as a narrator by Kesey is of paramount importance to the narrative modality of the novel. Arguably, this choice is also cognitively significant, since an Indian implies a whole gamut of historical/socio-political/cultural differences with White American Society (metonymically and symbolically represented in the psychiatric hospital).<sup>4</sup> That is, this very choice in itself is intriguing in the potential it has in terms of projection of worlds.

Within the Chief Bromden narrative universe, the reader grapples with what the characters in the story create within their minds such as dreams, hallucinations, fantasies, and fictional stories—F-Universes, in short (Ryan, *Possible Worlds* 119). The notion of “recentering” in this case takes place for the character as well as the reader<sup>5</sup> since F-Universes themselves have a new system, with a new TAW at the center and the APWs or F-worlds around it. Ryan states that “[f]or the duration of a dream, the dreamer believes in the reality of the events he or she experiences, and the actual world of the dream takes the place of T/AW” (119). Recentering entails sorting out the ontological realms present within the narration, which is like, in Ryan's words, “crashing through the wall to enter another room” (119). Throughout the novel Chief Bromden immerses himself in dreams, or hallucinations, caused by the traumatic experiences of the war, and often recounts memories of his family, especially his father. He talks of a fog machine in connection with his hallucinations. “They start the fog machine,” he says, “again and it's snowing down cold and white all over me like skim milk, so thick I might even be able to hide in it if they didn't have a hold on me. I can't see six inches in front of me through the fog” (*One Flew* 7). Terence Martin states that “as part of the Chief's mode of perception, the fog machine is a metaphor for tyranny, fear, and hiding which becomes literalized in his narrative” (6). The fog he is lost in is similar to the power of figures like Big Nurse, because whenever she comes into view, the machine would produce a thick fog and he would be incapable of seeing. In other words, the fog of the power and tyranny obscures his vision. When McMurphy shows up and boasts of his resistance, freedom, and confidence, the fog gradually disappears and the Chief seems to regain his sanity. In this case, then, the F-universe is not an all-inclusive escape from the primary TAW; it “may fulfill metaphorically the function of” his K-world or W-world. (Ryan, *Possible Worlds* 119)



As Ryan maintains, “a character’s knowledge is often made to expand into the future or into a sacred layer of reality by a dream sent from these other regions” (ibid.). The same occurs for the Chief when he dreams that a worker in the hospital “goes to the bed and with one hand grabs the old Vegetable Blastic [...] lifts him straight up[...] drives the hook through the tendon back of the heel and the old guy’s hanging there upside down,” and splits him open with a scalpel (*One Flew* 88). The next morning, when Bromden wakes up, a Black boy lets the reader know that “This ol’ fart Blastic, he’s comin’ to pieces befo’ my very eyes” (33). This implies that Bromden’s dream has been realized and expanded into the “sacred layer of reality.”

Likewise, the fictional stories that the Chief recounts take the reader to another narrative universe with its own exclusive central TAW. The Chief eagerly wants to sign up to go to the fishing trip planned by McMurphy so that the patients could see the world outside the hospital and enjoy life away from it. But if he does so, it will be revealed that he is not deaf. He reveals that “it wasn’t me that started acting deaf; it was people that first started acting like I was too dumb to hear or see or say anything at all” (*One Flew* 210). Then, he draws on his memory, or in Genette’s formulation, gives the reader a flashback or “analepsis” (40). He tells the story of his childhood in Columbia, when two men and an old woman arrived in the village, called Bromden’s family’s house a “hovel”, and started insulting the family (“Can you imagine people wanting to live this way? Tell me, John, can you?”) (*One Flew* 211). What pertains to the primary narrative of the novel is that those people hardly cared about the Chief who stood beside them and acted as if he was deaf.

Additionally, Chief Bromden, as mentioned above, feigns deafness—a pretense that creates a “Mock Knowledge World”—to deceive the people surrounding him so as to learn the secrets freely. He tells us: “They don’t bother not talking out loud about their hate secrets when I’m nearby because they think I’m deaf and dumb. Every-body thinks so. I’m cagey enough to fool them that much” (*OneFlew*, 3). Yet, later he changes his Knowledge-World and Intention-World and decides to speak to McMurphy for the first time after many years. Chief Bromden, feeling castrated and no longer powerful, tells McMurphy that he is “lot bigger tougher’n” Chief. He draws the attention of McMurphy and the reader to his father’s story: “[M]y Papa was a full Chief and his name was Tee Ah Millatoona. That means The-Pine-That- Stands-Tallest-on-the-Mountain, and we didn’t live on a mountain. He was real big when I was a kid” (*One Flew*, 219).

Though the Chief blames his mother, “Chief blames his mother Dalleses his “got bigger all the time,” analogous with Big Nurse, for debilitating his father, it is implied that it is mainstream society itself which is really guilty. Also implied is that the Chief tries to warn McMurphy of the consequences of being headstrong and rebellious by describing the fate of his father:

Everybody worked on him just the way they're working on you...The Combine. It worked on him for years. He was big enough to fight it for a while. It wanted us to live in inspected houses. It wanted to take the falls. It was even in the tribe, and they worked on him. In the town they beat him up in the alleys and cut his hair short once. Oh, the Combine's big—big. He fought it a long time till my mother made him too little to fight anymore and he gave up. (220)

### **INTERNAL CONFLICTS OF THE FICTIONAL WORLDS: CONFLICTS BETWEEN TEXTUAL ACTUAL WORLD (TAW) AND ALTERNATIVE POSSIBLE WORLDS (APWS)**

As Ryan notes, “for a move to occur and a plot to be started, there must be some sort of *conflict* in the textual universe” (*Possible Worlds* 120, emphasis in original). One of the primary and frequent conflicts involves TAW and the private worlds of the characters. In what follows we look into this conflict in Kesey's novel.

Big Nurse has established some “ward policies” in the hospital that the inmates are supposed to observe; in other words, she has created an Obligation-World that paradoxically becomes “the staff policy which is engineered for [their] cure” (*One Flew* 18). If the inmates fail to comply with these procrustean rules (“policies”), it will be considered “acquisition of demerits” causing the discontent of those in authority. As a result, the inmates should pay the price for the demerits, as “debts,” by being punished (electro-shocking is the favored option). In the novel, one of the Acutes (patients who according to officials can still be cured), Dale Harding, explains:

The Shock Shop, is jargon for the EST machine, the Electro Shock Therapy. A device that might be said to do the work of the sleeping pill, the electric chair, and the torture. It's a clever little procedure, simple, quick, nearly painless it happens so fast, but no one ever wants another one. Ever. (69)

As Harding also perceives, the shock therapy punishes the patients but works as a sleeping pill. It could be said that this “theory of the Therapeutic Community” developed by the staff manifests “a mock Intention World,” as Chief Bromden tells us. It shows “how a guy has to learn to get along in a group before he’ll be able to function in a normal society,” and aspire “to make this as much like [his or her] own democratic, free neighborhoods as possible” (*One Flew*, 49, 50).

Sifting through the explanations given by Chief Bromden, we see that the system engages in instructing the inmates to report to the staff what they hear in their conversations with each other. In effect, this becomes tantamount to the atmosphere of suspicion and espionage that dominated the “Actual World” during the Cold War in America. Such a condition consolidates the established mainstream community and suppresses freedom and true democracy resulting in a fake compliance with society; rebellion, the novel intimates, is bound to happen. Remarkably, the inmates’ Knowledge Worlds become attuned to the system and engender equilibrium. However, the arrival of McMurphy occasions a big change and the hospital/system is agitated.

McMurphy is an inmate transferred from a prison (doing time for battery and gambling) to the hospital. We realize in the course of the novel that he has faked insanity to serve out his sentence in the hospital which is supposed to be a much more comfortable place. Ironically, however, the hospital turns out to be even more oppressive than the prison. And, to a temperamentally rebellious and anti-authoritarian character, this proves more than a bit difficult. In Mahala Yates Stripling’s words, McMurphy “personifies the counterculture Beat Generation” (110). Kesey describes him as “a particular American cowboy hero, almost two-dimensional.” “He gains dimension,” Kesey continues, “from being viewed through the lens of Chief Bromden’s Indian consciousness” (*One Flew* 153). McMurphy refrains from adhering to social norms, epitomized in the hospital’s “policies,” and through his Wish Worlds aspires to change the attitude of the other inmates towards these so-called policies too. His Wish-Worlds are utterly discordant with these norms. He presents himself to the inmates as a gambler; for a bet, he disturbs the harsh disciplinary order or the Obligation World established by Nurse Ratched.

McMurphy starts his rebellious acts upon arriving at the institution. The first instance occurs one early morning when, after taking a bath, he is singing and is wearing only a towel. He looks for a toothpaste to brush his teeth, but, the Black Boys (aides in the psychiatric ward) declare that the toothpaste is locked in the cabinet and they will only open the cabinet after six forty-five, for “it’s a policy” (*One Flew* 76). That is, there is an “Obligation World” that McMurphy

must observe. Nevertheless, he has his own Wish-World and chooses to use a can with soap powder inside it to brush his teeth. This he does in front of the Black Boys to mock the so-called rule: "Well, I generally use paste, but"—McMurphy runs his toothbrush down in the powder and swishes it around and pulls it out and taps it on the side of the can—"but this will do fine for me. I thank you. We'll look into that ward policy business later" (94). When Nurse Ratched arrives, "her nostrils flare open, and every breath she draws she gets bigger" (*One Flew* 96). She is infuriated because McMurphy transgresses her Obligation World in favor of his own Wish World. According to Semino and Swindlehurst: "the repeated use of the adjective 'big' in reference to Miss Ratched reflects Bromden's fearful perception of her power rather than her actual size. Conversely, loss of power and strength is described as a decrease in 'size'" (159). Apparently, in this initial state of conflict we see the triumph of McMurphy's Wish World over the Obligation World of the ward who holds authority over the TAW. In another instance, McMurphy complains about the loud sound of the music in the day room, a noise which "hinders the conversation and reading" of young men (*One Flew* 110). Big Nurse claims that there are some old men here whose only joy is to listen to the music and thus they cannot see to any resolution regarding this issue. However, with the help of Doctor Spivey, McMurphy manages to partly realize another W-World by suggesting that the old tub room be used as the second day room. Summing up the circumstance, Chief Bromden postulates:

She's lost a little battle here today, but it's a minor battle in a big war that she's been winning and that she'll go on winning. We mustn't let McMurphy get our hopes up any different, lure us into making some kind of dumb play. She'll go on winning, just like the Combine, because she has all the power of the Combine behind her. (113)

By using the word "Combine," Chief Bromden metaphorically posits that a mechanical society regulates people in the hospital "far worse than the criminal system he has left behind" (Dodgson, 136). As Ruth Sullivan notes, "Americans particularly have reason to feel oppressed by Big Government, Big Business, and Big Industry and to be convinced that the individual alone can do little to influence them to his benefit or to prevent their harming him" (23).

Of course, considering the conflict between Textual Actual World (TAW) and Alternative Possible Worlds (APWs) in the novel, equilibrium should also be taken into account. That is, the Knowledge-Worlds of the characters become associated with and affected by the leading character's Knowledge-World. *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* conforms to this model. By the time McMurphy enters the hospital, his K-World, as well as his W-Worlds, gradually take over the other

inmates who are induced to follow him. Cheswick is one of the first inmates to endorse McMurphy's K-World as well as his I-World. He displays an attitude similar to McMurphy's towards Big Nurse's policies; yet, because he believes that they are unable to transform the system single-handedly, he avoids any overt support of McMurphy. He, we are told by Harding, voices the complaints "very quietly and took them all back later" (*One Flew* 65). However, incessantly in any meeting, he is the first to promptly raise his hand and incite other inmates to follow McMurphy. Kelsey writes: "yeah, get on with the godblessed meeting." He nods stiffly, then settles his chin down on his chest, scowling. He's pleased to be sitting next to McMurphy, feeling brave like this. It's the first time Cheswick ever had somebody along with him on his lost causes (119). Billy Bibbit is another character involved in the internal conflict as well as in equilibrium in this textual universe. He appears to be submissive and stuttering for the most part. Big Nurse, as a friend of his mother, is aware that his weak point is his mother's love for him. She tries accordingly to impose her K-World on him by threatening him with telling his mother about the goings-on in the ward. However, as the novel progresses, one realizes some changes in Billy's attitude. He grows to think highly of McMurphy's W-Worlds and I-Worlds; hence, unfettered by the O-Worlds which are imposed upon him either by his mother or Big Nurse—to demonstrate his defiance of the system—near the end of the novel he has an affair with Candy, a prostitute smuggled into the ward by McMurphy.

The most important resistance to the Actual World, however, takes place when McMurphy insists on watching the World Series in the morning which is against the rules of the ward. But at the end of the first part of the novel, McMurphy 'mocks' – in both senses of the word – the actual world by pretending to be watching his favorite program while the TV has been turned off ("Nothing is left on the screen but a little eye of light beading right down on McMurphy sitting there" (*One Flew* 143)). Unexpectedly, the inmates gather around him to watch "the TV picture swirls back into the grey" (*Ibid*). This make-believe/fantasy act is supposed to counter the coercive actual world.

On another occasion McMurphy persists in taking the Acutes, confined indoors, to a fishing excursion, which could be regarded as yet another instance of resisting the Actual World. This is despite Big Nurse's opposition and her attempts to frighten "the rest with her stories of how rough the sea'd been lately and how many boats'd sunk," that is, her attempt to affect the inmates' K-World. However, the Acutes and even Doctor Spivey give credence to McMurphy's K-World as well as his W-World and launch the expedition (*One Flew* 227). In this case, the inmates once more demonstrate their propensity to take issue with Big

Nurse and degrade/decrown her authority to inaugurate, in Mikhail Bakhtin's formulation, "a second life, a second world" or the "carnival" atmosphere where one comes across a celebration of the liberation from the "established orders" of a serious culture with social domination and restraints (10-11).

## CONCLUSION

Textual universe, in general, must incorporate a conflict in order to push the plot forward and get into tellability. And this is realized when there is a complex relationship between the APWs or private worlds of different characters in the story on the one hand, and the "textual actual world" (TAW) on the other. This conflict between the worlds boosts the plot development and gives rise to the diversification of the narrative universe that enhances the "tellability" of the plots. In Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, the presence of the conflict between the virtual narratives and their equal voices in defiance of the authoritative mainstream helps the plot move forward. Nevertheless, the marginal group becomes frustrated as there is always friction between their W-Worlds and power, between their W-Worlds and Big Nurse's O-Worlds. Cheswick commits suicide by drowning himself in the pool; Billy cuts his throat after his affair with Candy; Vegetable Blastic is brutally murdered and, eventually, McMurphy, as a punishment, is lobotomized by the system. The disturbance in the asylum is (re-)presented through Chief Bromden's consciousness, through the lens of a character who is supposedly suffering from schizophrenia. Chief Bromden's narrative is convoluted and "befogged" by the Big Nurse's/System's overarching power but he gradually straightens and is "defogged" when McMurphy enters the asylum and starts challenging its Actual World.

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## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> By "non-mimetic," Doležel indicates that fictional worlds are not necessarily "the imitations/ representations of actually existing entities" ("Mimesis" 475).

- <sup>2</sup> Lubomir Doležel enumerates four systems or constraints of modalities in his *Heterocosmica: Fiction and Possible Worlds*: (1) “[T]he alethic modalities of possibility, impossibility, and necessity [that] determine the fundamental conditions of fictional world” (115); (2) The modalities of deontic system consisting of permission, prohibition, and obligation (See 120-123); (3) Axiological modalities that are specially prone to goodness, badness, and indifference (See 123-125) and (4) Epistemic constraints of knowledge, ignorance, and belief (See 126-128).
- <sup>3</sup> Ryan alludes to Tzvetan Todorov’s *Grammaire de Décameron (Possible Worlds 110)*. In this book, Todorov distinguishes four modal operators for narrative propositions presented by Ryan as follows: “the obligatory mode, for events dictated by the laws of a society; the optative mode, for states and actions desired by the characters; the conditional mode, expressing action to which characters commit themselves if certain other events happen; and the predictive mode for anticipated events”.
- <sup>4</sup> Jarmila Mildorf takes into consideration the social sciences such as sociology, anthropology, psychology, etc. and their long time interest in narrative “as a human cognitive and discursive device for senses making and for ordering one’s life experiences (234). Similarly, Steph Lawler defines narratives as “*social products* produced by people within the context of specific social, historical and cultural locations. They are related to the experience that people have of their lives, but they are not transparent carriers of that experience. Rather, they are interpretive devices, through which people represent themselves, both to themselves and to others” (242, emphasis in original).
- <sup>5</sup> Ryan proposes that this recentering again “pushes the reader into a new system of actuality and possibility. As a traveler to this system, the reader of fiction discovers not only a new actual world, but a variety of APWs revolving around it” (22).

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