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**THE PRICE OF REALITY AND THE POSSIBLE WORLDS OF  
LITERATURE  
Conrad, Kafka, Camus**

**A DISSERTATION FOR AWARDING THE SCIENTIFIC DEGREE OF  
“DOCTOR OF SCIENCE”**

*Author’s Abstract*

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The public defense of the dissertation will take place on July 26, 2022, at 10 o’clock, INSTITUTE OF PHILOSOPHY AND SOCIOLOGY.

The dissertation consists of an Introduction, Part I with two chapters and Part II with four chapters, a Conclusion and a list of information resources used, and its total volume is 411 standard pages.

The list of quoted sources contains a total of 271 titles of which 193 are scientific, and 78 are literary ones.

There are 7 publications on the topic of the dissertation of which 2 studies, 3 articles, 1 paper and 1 monograph on the topic of the dissertation that has already been published.



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## **I. RESEARCH FRAMEWORK**

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### **1. FIELD OF RESEARCH**

In contemporary reality the media's swelling banalizes the worldmaking that stimulate the senses and experiences. The perception of present-day people has gotten accustomed to reproducing remote, historically ruined or projecting utopian possibilities as real ones. The immersive experience relies on technological innovations to maintain the imagination. The question of the limits of worldmaking and of the aesthetic practice as a generator of imaginary worlds stands contrary to that consumption of possibilities of imagination that are pre-framed in the technological product.

The proposed research sets off by pushing itself back from that oversupply of experiences in order to draw anew some connections between the autonomy of aesthetic works and the socio-historical reality. Instead of the "experience" it places "empathy" in the focus of its interest. And it is not only the supply of new content and emotions that stands behind the enticement of global media but also a well-calculated commercial interest.

### **2. OBJECT, PURPOSE AND TASKS OF RESEARCH**

One specific objective of the research is to make sense of the imaginary worlds created in the aesthetic activity through the logico-semantic concept of possible worlds. Aesthetic creation is conceptualized as creating a possible world and the vicarious experience of it – as reconstructing the possible world recognized in the work. The object of examination is the category of a "possible world" as an intermediary for the interpretation of the aesthetic creative work.

The set of arguments for the meaning of the possible worlds proceeds from the theoretical development of the concept towards its specification in one of the aesthetic practices: literature. The study defends the hypothesis that the literature's role of a medium of socio-ethical and humanitarian values is due precisely to the perception of fictional narratives as constructing of a possible world. By going beyond the genre-formal side of the narrative

microstructures the aesthetic empathy opens up towards the reflection on the socio-historic reality.

The objectives are reached by a series of analytical tasks gradually developed in the research. The first step is to trace out the genesis of the concept of possible world as its conceptualization in the 18th century runs simultaneously with the discovery and appropriation of the remote geographical space. Social speculation follows in the tracks of remote seafaring. What stands out in that doubling is the significance of the aesthetic dimension for getting the new nearer and empathizing (Part I). Construction of possible worlds as an aesthetic practice is examined through three writers of the 20th-century world literature whose work enjoys both the readers' wide-spread interest and detailed specialized analyses that go far beyond literary criticism, and also in philosophy, sociology and publicism. The relation of the possible worlds of artistic works to the socio-historical reality and their positioning in terms of the topical debates will be examined by approaching each of three writers (Part II).

### **3. PRINCIPAL THESIS**

Worldmaking is a universal human ability that is manifested by creating aesthetic works and their perception. The concept of possible world simultaneously conceptualizes both the author's creative effort and the reception whereupon the recipients (re)construct a world on the basis of the work. The careful analysis of the works reveals the numerous connections such possible worlds maintain with the social and historical reality. In the structure of social consciousness the aesthetic works play, via the (re)constructed possible worlds, the role of an intermediary in the broad popularization of the socio-political content and reflection.

The study aims to deduct the concept of possible world as an aesthetic concept and as a general conceptual frame for perception of heterogeneous texts from different fields and to show how the concept of possible world is integrated into the specific features of the aesthetic work.

### **4. RESEARCH APPROACHES AND METHODS**

The open semantical connection between the logico-semantic category of possible world and the aesthetic practices makes mandatory the interdisciplinary approach. The clarification of the social content draws in a

variety of cultural-historical and political contexts. An important point in the arguments for the social significance of the possible worlds of the literature is the history of translations and the sociology of reception. Some research approaches of the sociology of literature are widely used to outline the authors' social status and their public recognition, deterritorialization and post-colonial thematics. The conclusions lean on the interpretation of artistic and formal characteristics and the minimalism of linguistic means by making use of different analytical approaches in literary theory and criticism as the analysis has a conceptual philosophical and aesthetic perspective and does not remain enclosed into the "understanding" of literary hermeneutics. A starting point is that the concept of possible world has a supralinguistic status and refers to different fields of knowledge and art as far as the very cognitive characteristic of human thinking.

A balance between the logico-semantic stringency of the uses of the concept and its social efficiency for heterogeneous audiences is sought by the exposition in the mode of non-theoretical style that is isomorphous with the one of the authors under consideration.

## **5. TOPICALITY AND SCIENTIFIC & APPLIED PERSPECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

This elaboration comes after a series of scientific contributions on the modality and categories of possibility and contingency by some leading representatives of the Bulgarian philosophical community who, due to the coincidence in time, have given it theoretical topicality and prestige that were not intended by design.

In modern science the concept of possible world which is being developed in detail in modal logic enters a number of fields such as art, philosophy of science, linguistics, etc. An attempt has been made in the study to systematically present it as a tool for understanding the aesthetic creation and the work's opening towards social reflection and values.

The elaboration serves as a mainstay of patterns of reading and understanding of the aesthetic work that cut loose from the close formal reading, and reinstate, in a new account, its socio-political significance in the debate on realia and values of the present.

## **6. DISSERTATION'S VOLUME AND STRUCTURE**

The proposed dissertation consists of 411 standard pages, with 271 bibliographical sources divided into proper fiction (78) and scientific and publicistic sources (193) given alphabetically after each chapter and described by genre-thematic sections in the end of the work. Bulgarian and foreign-language, printed and paper sources are homogenized in the single model of bibliographic description as far as they are on an equal footing when read as information resources. Many of the books and articles are accessible via open electronic libraries.

The dissertation consists of an Introduction, Part I with two chapters and Part II with four chapters. Part I presents the history of the concept of “possible world” which is basic for the research, and its specification as a theoretical construct in philosophical logic towards its uses in terms of aesthetic practices. The second chapter of Part I the concept unfolds through the social speculation and the aesthetic appropriation of some actually newly-discovered worlds. Some social and axiological projects for the isolated space of the island, where knowledge of the real is duplicated with the social project and the affirmation of values, are articulated through the concept. Part II examines some specific aesthetic concepts of building a possible world. This part consists of three chapters as each reconstructs some sides of the aesthetic concept of an author: Joseph Conrad, Franz Kafka and Albert Camus. The closing chapter of that Part offers a comparative examination of the common anthropological themes in the three authors. The semantic cores that unite their possible worlds and show the relevance of those possible worlds for the understanding of a number of problems that are critical for the actual historical society (justice and the institution of the court; the stranger, etc.) which are also topical for the present-day situation are deducted. The Conclusion brings together the results of the specific analyses in order to upturn the perspective by pointing out the value of the possible worlds for making sense of reality. The thesis of the social significance of literature for communicating ideas is developed on the basis of the “cultural philosophy” of Karl Manheim for the democratizing modern society.

## **7. DISSERTATION'S SCIENTIFIC CONTRIBUTION**

1) The concept of possible world is introduced in the set of tools of the aesthetic analysis. By it a connection is made between the constructive effort

of design in the creative mind and its reconstruction in the consciousness of the recipients.

2) The thesis of the aesthetic creation as an autonomous act of constructing a possible world is defended. The examination of the aesthetic in relation to the constructive faculty that is immanent for the imagination reveals its non-mimetic nature.

3) The concept of possible world is an intermediary between the creative act and the social impact of the literary text by realizing the transfer of philosophical and political ideas to the broad public of readers.

4) The efficiency of the concept of possible world is supported by arguments in the analysis of aesthetic practices and, in particular, of literature by applying it to specific works by the writers Joseph Conrad, Franz Kafka and Albert Camus. In the aspect of comparative literary studies a parallel reading of three important European authors, who are commented on through their Bulgarian translations and reception, is proposed. Their semantic relation to the artistic world of F. M. Dostoevsky is supported by quotation references.

5) The world-constructing potential of the aesthetic work, which, by building a possible world, affirms individual and collective values and rejects skepticism and criticism as one-sided has been motivated.

## **II. CONTENTS OF THE DISSERTATION**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

How does literature speak of reality? How, by preserving its inaccessibility, is it more sincere and more truthful than all spells of the public speakers? What is its power to transform and give a new meaning to the obvious? The point from which the intersection of the socio-real and purely fictional fields will be observed is the examination of aesthetic creation by the example of literature as a generator of possible worlds by which the aesthetic values finds their way to the minds of their readers transformed as concepts and ideas.

The work offers the concept of possible world – a term of strictly outlined field of use, which is an attempt for a logico-semantic formalization of a human ability, namely the ability to create and perceive imaginary worlds – as an approach to the understanding of the bilateral connection between reality in the work's genesis and its impact on (the reality of) collective

notions. Worldmaking is a subjective experience of the mind, and a universal cultural phenomenon. At the same time it is accessible for the everyday experience. The completed possible world constructed through the work is perceived as a manifestation of common characteristics and universal truths that activate personal experience and evaluations of the perceiving mind as regards the actual world. This is the stake of both the popularity of the aesthetic work and its intellectual value.

The research aims to examine the possible worlds as an aesthetic concept. Works unfold as embodiments of the author's concept of a possible world whose recreation is underlying for their perception. By introducing the logico-semantic perspective into the interpretation of the aesthetic forms they are grasped as an embodiment of a possible world built inside the author's mind thus overcoming the mimetic principle in their origination. The elements of the socio-economic reality are given a new meaning and updated as constituents of the author's aesthetic concept of a possible world having been manifested by the work, which, in turn, engenders various possible worlds upon reception.

The possible world is constructed in the creative act and is also reconstructed in the perception on the basis of knowledge and attitude towards the actual world. Literary works are one of the points where the aesthetics' power to transform social reality into ideas of the spirit is revealed, and the key by which I will attempt to "translate" the relation between the historic reality and the artistic work gives the logico-semantic relation between an actual and a possible world. I will cross what an aesthetic work is, on the one hand, with the concept of an actual world, also referred to as "real", "actual", "present-day", which we believe that is attested in our knowledge of the world and in documentary accounts, and, on the other hand, with the concept of a possible world and the imaginary world constructed through the literary accounts: a subjective, unique, an individual creative insight and elaboration. Aesthetic works also create reality – a possible reality through which the historic and social reality that is considered obvious is reconsidered and reexamined.

Imaginary and fictional worlds are one of the sub-types of possible worlds in which the heuristic force is manifested. These worlds are non-topical and non-actual, they appear through texts but by bringing out a model for a world they take aim at the core of the most topical problems. In this relation their "accessibility" to the actual world is emphasizing and

summarizing. In this sense the possible worlds are hyper-topical and impacting the real world.

The conceptual meaning of the possible worlds is outlined in different types of texts and historical cuts. The documentary-real and the fictional relate into the image of the individualized space of the island and the Leibniz's theodicy as the "best world". Secondly, the possible world as an aesthetic concept is examined in the 20th-century modern literature in Conrad, Kafka and Camus. All three of them are indisputable authorities not only as names of 20th century's art of literature but, first and foremost, for the social messages of their works. Being non-avant-garde and non-conditional at the same time the prose of the three writers is generally accessible and does not put a sharp boundary with the real world but each of its plotlines sets out from an "otherwise", from some imaginary situation such as the one that the game or the mental experiment starts with. They all create their own worlds having their own unique names as markers: Costaguana, the far-away Oran, the anonymous K. These narratives seem referentially dense, workday-like – and they unload unexpected "non-workday-like" turns on personal and collective fate. However, their fictionality is also gifted by conceptual weight which makes them possible worlds of the human. Conrad creates a complete world in his novel *Nostramo* but he also densely builds up a social reality by his Malayan stories. Camus constructs a closed world both in his novel *The Plague* and by the space of the "sunny land" – in his essays but also as a background of his novels. Kafka is most obviously towards that imaginary nature of the worlds – and most closely to the core of the truth about the absurdity of the world. Each of his novels, woven by so many details of the imaginary reality, is radically different than what happens in the actual world. But it does so in order to be a revelation of the actual world and the actual human, suddenly laid bare their original powerlessness as "some ominous game", a grotesque and an anti-utopia.

In the specific analyses the roads for "accessibility" between a real a possible world are sketched. These worlds are correlative with the social and are being smoothly appropriated and recognized in other historical contexts: *The Plague*, an allegory of the impending threat of the Second World War, has become a book which the present-day mankind isolated by the coronavirus identifies with; *Heart of Darkness* can be adapted into a script for the Vietnam War; every face-off with the institutions is experienced as entering the labyrinth-like Kafkaesque logic of the anonymous court that will result in a merciless verdict.

Through the works of these three authors we will recreate the very process of constructing possible worlds, we will relate their ontological grounds to the possibility of prescribed denouements, we will look for the points of contact between the constructed world as a text construct with different social ideas and the possible or impossible u-/dis-topia. By the unraveling of the plot, i.e. by purely artistic means, the fictional narrative puts the limit of the imaginary world transforming the aesthetic into a way of thinking the social and the values of the real world.

Fiction presents non-actual, non-real states but by virtue of its aesthetic impact it is hyper-active, rhetorically pragmatic, discussing the reality and calling to take a stand and to act. Fiction affirms values. Thus the ontological status of the possible worlds is manifested as constructs which are textually attested in the aesthetic work, and which are, however, important in terms of their uses and spread onto the social notions. In the history of these imaginary worlds the driving force is the understanding of truth –not as a logical category but in relation to the readers’ convictions and with a social effect. They adhere to the truth: in the realistic descriptions of the remote Malayan islands or in the invention of the vaccine against the plague they are spotless. However, it is all about the truth of the whole. About the truth of literature that creates a reality – more real and active than the one of the senses and the one the media inform us. About the ability of the imagination to create, via language and narrative, possible worlds and about literature speaking of and impacting the reality. About the miracle of the human creating imaginary worlds in order to understand their thrownness among the social reality.

## I. THEORETICAL SCOPE AND SPECIFICATIONS OF THE CONCEPT OF “POSSIBLE WORLD”

### 1. The Possible Worlds: Referential and Constructed

*Historical notes to the concept of possible worlds and the contexts of its use. – Logical semantics: Truthfulness and ontological status of the worlds of the present and of the possible. – The aesthetic – “a universe of possibilities”. – Interdisciplinarity and metaphorical uses of the concept of possible worlds. – Possible worlds, fiction and theory of literature. – Building a possible world by means of the fictional narrative. – Literary fiction and Mainongian imagination. – The possible worlds of fiction: immersion into the reading and analytic distance. – Scope and characteristics of the concept of a possible world. – Worldmaking in the concept and in reception (who is the author of the possible world?). – A possible world: knowledge of the world, an analytical key and/or a metaphor.*

The concept of possible worlds enters the philosophical reflection as a notion of the worlds in the late of the age that launched the Enlightenment, with the name of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz and his treatise *Essais de Théodicée sur la bonté de Dieu, la liberté de l'homme et l'origine du mal* (*Essays of Theodicy on the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man and the Origin of Evil*) (1710). It was soon commented – and ridiculed – in Voltaire’s philosophical prose, and was also illustrated in earlier or contemporary fictional journeys to other worlds such as *Mundus Alter et Idem*, by Joseph Hall (1605) (translated from Latin into English in 1608-09 as *A Discovery of a New World or a Description of South Indies*), *Entretiens à la pluralité des mondes* (*Conversations on the Plurality of Worlds*), by Bernard le Bovier de Fontenelle (1686); bishop Francis Godwin with the book *The Man on the Moone* (1620–1638); *The Discovery of a World in the Moone*, by bishop John Wilkins (1638); astronomer Johannes Kepler in the posthumously published *Somnium* (1734); Cyrano de Bergerac with his *L’Autre monde: ou les états et les empires de la Lune* (*The Other World: Comical History of the States and Empires of the Moon*) (1657), as well as with *Les États et Empires du Soleil* (*The States and Empires of the Sun*) (1660); used as a libretto of opera performances.

On a new account the concept of possible worlds enters the humanities of the 20th century in the seemingly visible space of language, introduced by the logic of analytical philosophy in the context of the debates on reference in

modal logic with contributions by David Lewis, Saul Kripke, Jaakko Hintikka, Robert Adams and others. The modal logic enables one to make sense of the speech data outside the two-component division of word – real object (fact) in the strictly philosophical context, and extends towards the concept of non-existent objects. Speech allows for objects that belong to non-actual, unreal worlds which are, however, possible to be uttered without having any existence in reality.

Since the 1970s some literary theoreticians (Umberto Eco) have taken an interest in the concept by studying the nature of imaginary worlds in literature and art through the logical semantics (Thomas Pavel, Lubomír Doležel, Marie-Laure Ryan, Ruth Ronen).

On the basis of the processing of the concept in different philosophical and logical and literary theory models in the study “possible world” is taken as an analytical tool with the following characteristics:

1. The possible world is a textual construct. Possible worlds are constructed not by pushing away from the actual worlds but along the inside text – outside the text division. The inside text also determines the standard by which the truthfulness of the possible text is determined.

2. The possible world is a conceptual construct, a plan of a kind, an outlined “draft”. This attempt at an overall encompassing contains heuristic potential and, as Thomas Pavel puts it in his 1986 pioneering book in the field of literary theory on the possible worlds the underestimated fiction is now beginning to serve as a means in order to check the explanatory force of logical hypotheses and models.

3. The possible world is a cultural construct. Creating a fiction is a cultural activity dissolved into other cultural practices. In literature the possible world is revealed by narrativity which is also a universal anthropological and cultural ability.

4. The possible world is a construct of mind – as Nicholas Rescher puts it: as the dreams, hypotheses, suggestions and predictions are. Or to quote the psychologist Jerome Bruner: “The artist creates possible worlds through metaphoric transformation of the ordinary and the conventionally “given””. In the reverse order, reading fiction reveals the underlying concept of a world.

The possible world and fictions belong to the universal imaginative mode that gives knowledge by way of narratives or metaphors in contrast to the mode of reason: the “logico-scientific mode” with stringent research and exposition with terms, according to the division of the psychologist Jerome Bruner. The stories tell the world and about the world but in contrast to the

logico-scientific knowledge they do not have to be verified and tested, nor are they subject to the discriminating rules of the truth. Fictional narratives offer hypotheses of a world whose effect is seen in their reading and assessing because they set in motion both the recipient's imagination and interpretative capacity.

An irrevocable property of the possible worlds is authorship because in their primary source stands the creative effort of their author – the possible worlds are born in the mind of the creator but they reproduce in the perception of the readers through their interpretations as the recreated worlds could radically differ from the ones intended by the author. In whatever relations we place the fictional world described in the text the possible world is positioned in that text (be it verbal, visual, interactive) and derived out of the perceiving mind as its identity cannot be attested as far as upon reception every time a possible world of a kind is being deciphered which might not coincide with the one conceived by the author. The only secure support of all those worlds is the completed text in which the possible world is inserted. The text is one and permanent – the worlds are born with the different readings of the text. The multiplicity of the worlds is literally engendered by the multiplicity of the readings of a text.

The objective of this study is not in the least to clarify the theoretical models, or to get to a non-controversial understanding of the possible worlds and their textual support. While the theoretical studies swirl different texts around the concept the optics of this study is the opposite: how can one understand specific texts through the literary and theoretical concept of a possible world. According to a preliminary research plan the concept is emancipated from the theoretical models and is taken as an analytical tool.

It is precisely because of its non-formalized nature that the concept enables an opening towards the social efficiency of the literary text and of the aesthetic work as a whole. It is all-accessible, every reading give birth to a possible world in the reader's imagination. It is the universal anthropological ability, predilection and will to create a world of which Wolfgang Iser speaks.

## **2. THE HIEROGLYPH OF THE ISLAND. SOCIAL AND AXIOLOGICAL PROJECTS FOR THE ISOLATED SPACE OF THE REAL/POSSIBLE ISLAND**

The first specification of the concept of possible world is in terms of the spatial individuation of the island. Taking into account the broader

understanding of the possible worlds outside the strictly genre practice of literary fiction we will examine the construction of that space in heterogeneous texts: from the novel to scientific descriptions, crossing the strictly literary field with documentary testimony and publicism. By the unified depicted space we illustrate the thesis of the theoreticians of the possible worlds in the fiction of their non-mimetic nature. In terms of the clearly delineated localization of the upgrading logico-conceptual effort stands out more distinctively. In the sensual forms of the image of the island are put in notions, ideals, or preceding quotations. Social ideas and axiological consciousness find a spatial real form in the outlines of those possible worlds of the island.

*From the mythical pre-image to the contemporary metaphorical and conceptual uses*

*Mystical-allegorical voyage through the islands*

The following works have been examined: *The Island of the Day Before*, by Umberto Eco (1994), *The Invention of Morel*, by Adolfo Bioy Casares (1940), *In the South Seas*, by Robert Louis Stevenson (1889), *Mardi*, by Herman Melville (1849), *Gargantua and of Pantagruel*, by François Rabelais (1534–1564), *A Voyage to Arcturus*, by David Lindsay (1920); the island spaces in Michel Houellebecq's *Atomised* (1998), *Platform* (2001) or *The Possibility of an Island* (2005).

*The Galápagos Islands: natural historical knowledge and the sailor's story*

The following works have been examined: *The Enchanted Islands*, by Simeon Idakiev, *The Voyage of the Beagle*, by Charles Darwin; *The Encantadas, or Enchanted Isles*, by Herman Melville, *Galápagos*, by Kurt Vonnegut.

*Tahiti and the islands of happiness*

The following works have been examined: *The Voyage of the Beagle*, by Charles Darwin; *Voyage autour du monde*, by Louis Antoine de Bougainville, *Omoo*, by Herman Melville.

*Utopian islands of the tropics: possible and real*

The Ancient tradition of the Fortunate Islands of eternal life after death is parallelized with the utopian images of the island space in Daniel Defoe or Jonathan Swift created during the age of the Enlightenment, inspired by the geographical voyages and discoveries of the New Age; Leibniz's idea of the "best of all possible worlds" – with the philosophical prose of Voltaire, also fed by the plots of journeys in the newly-found continent, juxtaposed with the

documentary accounts of Bougainville and Darwin and having found its further developments in the literary narratives of the decline of island worlds (*Typee*, by Herman Melville, *In the South Seas*, by Robert Louis Stevenson).

*The statics of island worlds*

In terms of the stereotype of the young infant world, “so new and so infantile” (Michel de Montaigne), or the discoveries of natural history, the island worlds are interpreted as “static hypotheses” (A. Toynbee) in which a prediction of the decay of civilization is deciphered (Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*). The anthropological analysis is criss-crossed with images from fictional worlds *The Time Machine*, by H. G. Wells (1896); *Aelita*, by A. Tolstoy (1924); *Brave New World*, by Aldous Huxley (1932) and others). Contrary to the optimistic expectation of a coming progress the infantile state gives birth to the figure of the “child-old man” who extends his silent predictions to his discoverers.

The reflection of anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, similarly to some time machine from Herbert Wells’s novel takes the man who has left the “best world” forward in time and backward in the evolution of organic life to the simplest and least changeable species, back to the first elements of the world. In today’s globalized world fastened into communication flows, where the “Odyssey and Robinson have become unthinkable” (Ulrich Beck), some of the most global writers create imaginary worlds of the future of emptiness, a triumph of the vegetable kingdom and isolation: Victor Pelevin – with *Chapaev and Void* or *Love for three Zuckerbrins*, or Michel Houellebecq with *The Possibility of an Island* or *The Map and the Territory*.

## **II. BUILDING POSSIBLE WORLDS AS AN AESTHETIC CONCEPT.**

### **PHILOSOPHICAL AND ANTHROPOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL DIMENSIONS OF THE IMAGINARY WORLDS OF LITERATURE**

#### **1. CONRAD, OR OF LITERATURE’S SOCIAL DIMENSIONS**

## 1.1. Imaginary Islands' Social Impact and Reception

*Joseph Conrad's topical and long-term literary success. – Biography of Success. – Aesthetic measure and authority of successors. – Literary and Critical Recognition. – Literature and social prognostics. – The hidden stakes of success: narrative technique and symbol. – The success that turns the high and the low into aesthetic categories.*

We will proceed to the possible worlds of Joseph Conrad from his popularity. From the socially visible point of view of sociology of literature we shall look for the correlation between aesthetic conceptuality stated in the thematics and artistic approaches, and the social effects. Conrad's entry into the career of literature can be described from the distance of time as a skillfully conducted operation, by pushing the keys triggering public popularity and critical recognition that crowned his work in the long run.

The stake of social analytics of literary production is to reveal the social efficiency of the creative signature and the social reverberation of the aesthetic concept. Quite specifically, that is the question of what those artistic cores which were identified as significant and whose potency has unfolded in readers' readings are: satisfying both the expectations of mass reading and publishing industry and the exigency of the specialized critics.

At the peak of today's recognition Ian Watt speaks of the "prophetic nature of Conrad's ideas". His narrative reveals the versatile influence of his aesthetic predecessors and preserves the cultural memory of the 19th century with the realism and Victorian novel alongside the reflections of the Romanticism fed especially by the Polish tradition, Impressionism – the strictly objectivist and hyper-subjective art of the moment and the impression, the Symbolism. In addition the writer spitefully and mockingly reproduces the intellectual ideas and debates of his time. Conrad's contemporaneous intellectual landscape is filled with media polemics thanks to which Darwinism, Scienticism, Phrenology and other scientific concepts pass from a scientific into a mass sociocultural status. Positivism as an attitude is manifested in the changed senses for perception of nature. Darwin's struggle of the species has become an element of the description of the lush tropical jungle.

By his approach that combines the cosmic incredibility of the symbols with the daily scales of moral resistance Conrad forged a code of the human that is simultaneously daily accessible in practice and transcends the humdrum. By the grandiose symbols the ethical questions acquire an ontological and existential status that universalizes human worries and

queries. The writer feeds both the quests of his contemporaneous readers and fixes his eyes on the authentic literary values and gives his voice in the dispute over the foundations of the modern world by recreating the moral entirety of man and mankind.

## 1.2. SOCIAL HISTORY AND LITERARY NARRATIVE. JOSEPH CONRAD'S SOCIAL WORLDS: POSSIBLE AND REAL

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### *Building worlds. – Costaguana*

The persuasiveness of the possible worlds of literature comes from the consistent construction of the possible reality by laying the central topoi of the world and by motivating the interrelations between the individual details. Alongside the connections with the socio-historic reality are intensified due to a series of analogies between the constructed world and the knowledge of the real one and also by the incessant references to trustworthy facts and events.

In Conrad's cosmogony the social – with its actors, structures and happenings – is laid in the broader space of nature which stands out as some silent and unattainable primal force. Conrad sees society as a “living organism”. That organicist metaphor reflects the positivist reflection from the late 19th century and early 20th century but the positivist specifics does not grow into utopian plans but in deep mistrust and skepticism. The providence in worldmaking stops faced with the impossibility of deducing its rational grounds.

Conrad's possible worlds are distinct from the utopian ones, they are not a fruit of imagination but are real prototypes given a new meaning and invented on the basis of his specific experience. Building an imaginary world unfolds as a narrative model for the political novel where the plot follows the social transformations, and the characters are bearers and speakers of political ideas. The events in the collective life develop in parallel with a series of intrigues of love and separations so the political line intertwines with the romance that is used for quite different readers' expectations. Thus Conrad develops a hybrid and reader-accessible genre form through which one can transfer political content and make popular the intellectual novel of ideas.

## 2. KAFKA, OR OF THE IMAGINATION

### 2.1. LOGICALLY POSSIBLE AND SOCIALLY IMPOSSIBLE WORLDS IN FRANZ KAFKA'S ANTI-STORIES

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*Chronology and contexts of reception. – “The possible impossibility” of Kafka’s fictional worlds. – The language. – Spaces and time of Kafka’s (im)possible worlds. – Intertextualiyt and narrative kernels. – The access to the (im)possible world: logical justification of the imaginary reality. – Generative matrix: the rusty unusable machine for punishment. – The impossible world of K.: an ontological alternative and/or an “evil fabrication” (Whether K. gets into a world or builds one?). – Looking for the exit / the possibility: interpretative hypotheses (1). – The language laid bare which, however, does not utter the truth: interpretative hypotheses (2). – The humanly impossible world. “Becoming-animal” and “becoming-human”: interpretative hypotheses (3). — Intertextual grounds of Kafka’s possible world in the world of F. M. Dostoevsky: interpretative hypotheses (4). – Truth is the illogical.*

Kafka’s worlds are totally different than what is socially possible: they are unrealistic and even are quite different from the actually existing social forms. Critical and readers’ reception, however, have raised them as a true understanding of the deep mechanisms of reality. Through Kafka’s work we can study how the category of “possibility” operates as a characteristic of the imaginary world. We borrow the paradoxical combination of a “possible impossibility” from Darko Suvin who uses it to differentiate utopia from satire which is defined as the “impossible possibility”, i.e. what is actually possible and axiologically unacceptable while utopia shows the possible realization of the impossible. Lubomír Doležel’s interpretative position on Kafka’s aesthetic combines the “physically possible and physically impossible” fictional entities in a peculiar “hybrid world” that holds them together.

Although in terms of its aesthetic nature Kafka’s artistic work belongs to the fictional narrative and not to the sub-type of utopia the analytic apparatus used for that specific type of narrative provides a key to the understanding of the special artistic conditionality in his works. The examination of Kafka’s work through the semantics of the possible worlds makes visible the transition from specific literary imagery and form towards a socially important symbol. Secondly, we will examine the specifics of the aesthetic creation in order to see how, by using what technical means, the “impossible” possible worlds born in the creative imagination are being constructed.

The first step in the study of the modal inclusiveness of the possible and the impossible in Kafka’s fictional worlds is to delineate their boundaries which are incessantly being rejected and moved. According to Frederic

Jameson's interpretation the writers is attracted to the very flow of *fancy* and the missing denouement follows from that peculiarity of the creative thinking. All those text-critical uncertainties are latently present in what is being examined and because of them none of the conclusions can pretend to be complete. The object of examination is the text that has reached public reception – the text as a social fact, and not as a concept or creative process.

Another approach to revealing the relation between a real and an imaginary world is through the micro-analyses of specific images and their hermeneutics. Thus a generative principle can be outlined, which however also remains outside the examination undertaken as far as it presupposes actualization of historic material by recreating the biographical facts, realia and literary parallels.

Literary critics for whom it is a priority to reveal the poetics and specific forms does not see the impossible in the individual figures, they do so as late as they get to a syntagmatic level and narrative episodes. The narrative, on the contrary, flows smoothly, contrary to the tearing and fragmentation of the world which would become an aesthetic norm in Kafka's literary contemporaries with the start of the avant-gardes. c Later, some avant-garde groups will incorporate, in retrospect, Kafka's writing to their aesthetic genealogies (e.g. the surrealists and Breton, in particular).

How does this dialogue between the dense realistic picture of the world and the impossible tracing based on several constructive elements of the narrative unfold: language and style; homogeneous isolated spaces and chronotope; permanent characteristics and recurrent narrative kernels.

## 2.2. OF THE DIFFICULT ART OF THE SPECTACLE, OR WHEN JOSEPHINE THE SINGER'S COLORATURAS ARE HEARD

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The objective of this part is to examine the specific space of the circus and the image of circus play by which an ambivalent attitude towards the aesthetic creation is embodied in Kafka's work. It is profanely stated: from the circus arena it overtly states its essence of a spectacle. At the same time that nakedness makes the artist's impulse and self-devotion even more mysterious since by abandoning his own life he attests his devotedness to art.

### 3. ALBERT CAMUS, OR OF WRINGING THE WORLD OF ABSURDITY OUT OF THE NIHILISM

#### 3.1. MEDIA POPULARITY: AN OPPOSITE OR A CATALYZING PHILOSOPHICAL REFLECTION?

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*A reception of ideas and texts or an intellectual fashion? – Images and symbols of the philosophical questions.*

Albert Camus's media popularity in his lifetime, and even today, poses the question of creative work's efficiency in influencing the collective notions. In addition to the fact that the culture of post-war France has in his person a globally recognizable representative Albert Camus is the author of two of the most widely published novels of the 20th century: *The Stranger* and *The Plague*.

His name is associated with existentialism but he denies that he belongs to the philosophical movement. However, the non-philosophical literary form corresponds to what is the thinker's own project. It was already formulated in his earliest years and was written down in the *Notebooks* in 1936: "People can think only in images. If you want to be a philosopher, write novels." (*On ne pense que par images. Si tu veux être philosophe, écris des romans*). In one of his early notes he also formulated the relation between image and reflection by also adding to them his understanding of the aesthetic as worldmaking: "A great writer always carries his own world and his own sermon."

"Thinking in images" and "world" are points of departure for the reflection on the aesthetic dimension, in the centre of which is the question of how the transfer of philosophical ideas into a literary narrative happens.

According to the research hypothesis the philosophical level of literary narrative in the texts of Camus is reached on the basis of two mutually related main approaches. The first one is the unfolding of writing as development of conceptual circles where each of them is centered around a mythological figure and a main concept and it appears via different genres: novel (novelette); in treatise form (essay); play. The second one is through conceptualization of historical time in symbols and mythological images.

#### 3.2. THE POSSIBILITY OF CREATION AS A "CORRECTION" OF REALITY

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*The closed spaces of absurdity. – The cherished unity of the world. – The possible self-organization of the world. – "Non-topical" essays. – Language and ethics.*

The first perspective in which we shall examine the philosophy of Camus is one of his conclusions that creation can be wrested out of the

destructive revolt – a widely developed topic in his researchers as far as it is explicitly stated in the texts of the writer himself.

In his literary narratives Camus unfolds a modality for the world as an absurd one. We could say that he inscribes that new modality into getting to know the possible, by setting absurdity against the category of the (im)possible, at that. We shall proceed to Camus's philosophical reflection of a world and a possibility through the metaphors of the island and closed space of separation, but also of human solidarity. The fictional space and the imaginary plots refer to actual events but they also generate aesthetic images of symbolic and metaphysical potential. In *The Plague* an imaginary situation – the epidemic – rearranges the social space in order to become an “illustration” of the possible consequences for the individual and the society. In this sense the imaginary world of the novel is a duplication of the real world but it is shown in a threshold situation of an ordeal: the imaginary world is a hypothesis for the crisis and the plot shows a possible state of the world.

The possible to which Camus's thought is directed and which is suggested by the characters in their silent gestures is the world here and now, the topicality. One could say that also in his publicistic texts Camus builds an entire world with a “correction” of reality, a world that is simultaneously an immediate reverberation of the real but which sketches possibilities for its transformation. As a horizon the publicistic texts and the novel (the literary as a whole) works overlap as far as for the author the present day is marked precisely by the public speaking of the press (“our period is rather the period of journalism than of the work of art,” he says in *The Rebel*).

Camus shows the merger of writing with the discussion of socially important topics in philosophical perspective. So to say he returns literature to the philosophical topics and vice versa, by the literary form he makes philosophizing as accessible as engaged with the principal problems of man. At the same time that writing (*écriture*), called „zero” or “white” by Barthes soon after it appeared, has a moral dimension. The zero degree of writing clears out the space for re-building the world anew, and also for the moral foundations of the common living.

### 3.3. ALGERIA'S SUN. THE COUNTRY OF THE IMPOSSIBLE RETURN

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*Algeria's sun. – The measure of Mediterranean philosophy. – Is there a future for that nation without a part? – The epic narrative of the migration. – Philosophical, anthropological and social dimensions of the possible worlds. Conrad and Camus.*

This part is an attempt to reconstruct *Midi-Méditerranée* as an anti-thesis of nihilism. Secondly, we correlate the topographical metaphor to the social-historical and personal-biographical content put in by the author. In addition to a metaphor in the philosophical reflection, for Camus the Mediterranean is a cultural-historical range. During his life the writer literally loses his native Algeria, recreating the missing land in his literary work. The change in the status of the “native land” by laying bare its artificial colonial structure put the philosophy of absurdity to the test, facing it with one of the unsolvable cases in the historical reality when it is impossible to find the measure and to uphold justice. The Mediterranean is one of the worlds built by Camus as a “correction” of the real, of the political present, and of injustices. We are tracing those duplications between reality and (metaphysical) entirety.

The image of Algeria created by the texts of Camus is seen out of the context of colonial debates as a unique individual experience.

#### 4. BETWEEN DARKNESS AND LIGHT: THE WORLDS OF CONRAD, KAFKA AND CAMUS IN THE DOUBLE OPTICS OF SOCIAL AND METAPHORICAL SENSE (PARALLEL READINGS)

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*Comparative characteristic: social roles, genre models and authenticity of author's voice. – Aesthetic innovation – out of the canon and out of the avant-garde. – Thematic encounters: the court and the guilt. – Thematic encounters: suicide. – Beyond nihilism: universalization of the pan-human. – The ethics of pan-reception.*

As a conclusion to Part II a comparative overview is made of the topics in the three authors who are examined in detail in the articles for the three writers. Thus is outlined the shared aesthetics of creating possible worlds by which they state and make sense of social and philosophical questions, “rendering” them into forms accessible to the senses by which they translate their messages into a wide social context.

## CONCLUSION

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The aesthetic significance of the creation of possible worlds in the three authors under examination is in the transfer of social and philosophical questions into the forms of literary narrative that are accessible to the senses, thus reaching heterogeneous audiences and being discussed in a wide social context. We shall relate the social resonance of that aesthetics with the context of the modern society as a conclusive summarization.

By the artistic practice of the three authors and their public success literature and the aesthetic demonstrate their cultural value as a consolidating factor that affirms values and begins debates, however without imperatively imposing them. Bring out some principal questions and values by means of artistic images and narrative opens up space for an understanding of the non-univocal. At the same time the works of the three authors, bringing together popular and academic reception, generalizing symbolism and absorbing intrigue, show that it is possible to find a single aesthetic model that is accessible for the socially heterogeneous groups of modern society and through it to articulate both philosophical and topical political questions. The aesthetic concepts for building possible worlds by the artistic work are the intermediary for the attainment of that social impact.

All three authors are totally devoted to their work and at the same time the questions related to their artistic techniques do not determine their approach. Their writing is made sense of as an untearable whole of choice of language, typology of the character and thematic content. They stand up to their artistic will with unflinching energy. Their work includes quite a few works of different genres but each one of them is aesthetically measured depending on their criterion and idiosyncratically makes the synthesis of philosophical, anthropological and social thematics with the language. It is precisely by their aesthetic approach of the measure among content, form and accessibility that they stand in some key points of the aesthetic turn in the course of development of literature in the 20th century, without belonging to the avant-garde and some individual (transitory) aesthetic projects – the actual aesthetic consciousness and aesthetic norm of the modern times pass through their works. Pushing themselves away from their topicality they create classical samples.

On the other hand, by their wide-spread reception their work does not remain enclosed into the pure literature and in a rigid aesthetic field but shows the social functionality and the effect of their fictional worlds. All three of them are well-known, recognizable, but not mass-market authors. Their

popularity does not exceed the threshold of mass-media circulation and is an indicator of how unfit for getting included in an advertisement they would be. The name of Kafka who seems the most enclosed and incomprehensible is most likely perceived as the most iconic one: an embodiment of the mysterious imagination that gives birth to paradoxical worlds. These authors create popular literature, which is widely known and re-published, without being sensationally loud, which brings together serious and mass art into the author's design itself. And if the trust the witness-type of their narratives as a confession is a starting point in entering a pact with the reader, then the impact of their works in the long run as a source of philosophical reflection is rooted in the unity of specific density, realistic trustworthiness and a second, generalized mythological and symbolic plan. This two-sectionality of the narrative is clearly formulated by Camus: "The meaning of *The Plague* is divided into social and metaphysical ones which are one and the same. The same duality is also in *The Stranger*."

In strictly literary terms, with their specific creative approach or with their literary innovations the three writers influence the aesthetic mind and introduce new artistic forms that acquire special value on the edge of the transition from realistic to avant-garde creative work (Conrad: between the classical popular novel and the modern novel with different points of view; Kafka: to the avant-garde poetics and aesthetics of the absurdity; he has been pointed as one of the inspirations for the wave of science fiction of the second half of the 20th century; Camus carries out the transition to the aesthetics of the "new novel", explicitly elaborate the subject of absurdity that has become a stand-alone aesthetic norm in the theatre of absurdity). In addition their works merge into some important contemporary debates and thus influence the history of 20th-century ideas. They are references in the studies of some authoritative thinkers such as Theodore Adorno, Frederic Jameson, Giorgio Agamben, Slavoj Zizek, Eduard Said, Joseph Hillis Miller, and others. The three writers create images that have become contemporary literary myths and have gained extreme popularity, which demonstrates the social action of literature and in the topicality and ability of the literary narrative to emanate semantic kernels concentrating the topical moral and philosophical questions.

This aesthetic project of the three authors that is successful in its reception coincides in the chronology of the modern society with the process of popularization and democratization in which ideas become portable by means other than the closed knowledge of educated elites as outlined by Karl Manheim's "sociology of spirit" for the age of the cultural hegemony of the

masses and the media. The pivotal significance of the concept of creating possible worlds via the creative work in order to make sense of reality is also outlined against that background.

Karl Manheim deduces two characteristics of his contemporary age which set different directions: on the one hand, this is a period of “increasing self-rationalization”, with “atomization” of the individual torn away from the collective, and with the “recognition of individual’s autonomy” being brought to a leading position. On the other hand, there is a radical change by the transition from “aristocratic” to “democratic” culture with setting all individuals on an equal footing and equalization. And the entry of the masses and the active collaboration of all individuals set off huge vital energy. The culture of democratizing society has new social imperatives following from the democratic ideal of knowledge: “unlimited accessibility” and “communicability”.

It is precisely to that collective spirit that the creative worlds of Conrad, Kafka and Camus respond to. No matter how unanimous and at the same time of various formats the prestige gained by all three of them is, it has preserved unchanged its magnitude in the long run demonstrating a surprising stability of the debates launched by their works. Thus, in the cultural memory they themselves are three literary myths seizing the collective imagination at times when the masses, similarly to the people of Algeria, start living without myths, i.e. “without consolation” as Camus wrote in “Summer in Algeria”.

By building the imaginary worlds the narrative of all three of them individualize the line of individual human action. Even in the more integral forms of the novel that render in a greater extent the elements of a possible world, the artistic purpose pursued is to make man and his/her moral values stand out by comparing them with the surroundings of the others. At the same time, the big narrative about the ratio of forces of separation and devastation and the one about hope and human solidarity is built via the individual story in a reverse order. In an utmost cleared form that all-embracing “humanity” is embodied in the mythological figures through which the line of absurdity or of revolt, which unfolds in history, is drawn. In the beginning of the two essays of Camus Sisyphus and Prometheus stand as such generalizations. He sees the absurd man as well as the revolted man as emanations of the modern age but they are contained in the primal myth – and in human nature that is beyond history.

No matter how trustworthy and specific in historical terms the worlds recreated by Conrad, Kafka or Camus are, now matter how much the

individual human trajectories are determined by the structures of a modern society and of a specific historic conditions, the stories strive for that core of the primary that appears in the non-articulated whole of the mythical image. The mythical as a horizon also stands in front of the revelation of the human in its primal impulses, and, firstly, in the instinctive impulse towards entirety and getting built into the world. The return to the primary and the realization of its omnipotence takes off the feeling of the broken fragmented development of modern society torn by abrupt turns, crystallized into institutionally imposed relations of dominance and rejecting the individual. These authors reveal what connects the individual human experience of the world with the primal principle of life beyond and through the specifics of the present day or the human surroundings. That primal wordless unchangeable being, pre-human and trans-human is symbolized in Conrad by the sea, in Kafka by the animal, and in Camus by the stone. All three of them set against nihilism the worlds they build on the basis of their hope in the pre-logical entirety of the myth in relation to which the ego is determined and self-realized.

This is neither an explicitly drawn lesson, nor an optimistically announced decision. However, the aesthetic opens the perspectives for making sense of both the individual loneliness and the collective dilemmas. By its sensitivity to the modern situation of man the three authors introduce the topic of loneliness and alienation, of the difficulty of being on good terms with the societal norms and with the other man. But they are contemporary to the point of journalism by making a background of their stories some big historical plots through which they mark some key stages of the modern age and reveal its social structure, e.g. the colonial expansion of the European civilization, the specific economic forms, the mechanics of the bureaucratic apparatus and institutions.

At the same time all three of them go beyond the perimeter of the present day as by their possible worlds they pose moral questions projecting the experience and making sense of the actual world beyond and above temporality. All three of them are untimely because they offer neither ready theses, nor utopias but call for making sense of values and situations that are fundamental for the human. Through their possible worlds the aesthetic acquires value as one of the refuges of the reflection on the values and the understanding of man. Fictional worlds are possible worlds of the real, and not a skilful imitation of reality. They zoom in individual situations in order to reveal the underlying foundations of the very reality and values. Inspired by the real the possible worlds return to the real pushing for a reconsideration of

its foundations. Contrary to absurdity, alienation and dead-lock the patiently built possible worlds are a way to overcome nihilism as the constructive creative will is a guarantee for it.

### III. PUBLICATIONS RELATED TO THE TOPIC OF THE DISSERTATION

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1. Албер Камю. Възможните светове на литературата. Научен редактор: проф. дфн Владимир Сабоурин. София: Авангард прима, 2022 (145 pages). ISBN 978-619-239-667-1
2. Фикционални спрямо действителни and възможни светове: истинност и онтологически статут. Философски алтернативи. Бр. 6, 2021, 35–42. ISSN 0861–7899.  
(Тема на броя: Феноменология, онтология, критика. Водещи: Силвия Борисова, Кристиан Енчев).
3. Утопичните острови на тропиците – възможни и реални. – Литературна мисъл, бр. 2, 2021, 63-79. ISSN (print) 0324-0495; ISSN (online) 1314-9237.
4. Властта на въображаемите светове. Актуалният и дългосрочният литературен успех на Джоузеф Конрад. – Автори, Авторитети, Авторитаризъм. Серия „Обществени комуникации“, 10. ШУ, Катедра по журналистика и масови комуникации. Ред. колегия: проф. д-р Пламен Шуликов, проф. д.ф.н. Елка Добрева, проф. д-р Евдокия Борисова, доц. д-р Юрий Проданов, доц. д-р Десислава Иванова. Шумен, 2020, 77-105. ISSN 2603-4506 (Print); ISSN 2603-4514 (Online)
5. Новата класика на „Двойник“ на Ф. М. Достоевски: Машини, поети и насекоми. – Литературата: Образи и контексти. Юбилеен сборник, посветен на 60-годишнината на професор Цветан Раковски. Велико Търново: Фабер, 2019, 441–452. Print-ISBN-13: 978-619-00-1066-1.
6. Кога се чуват колоратурите на певицата Жозефина, или за трудното изкуство на зрелището в прозата на Franz Франц Кафка. – Кръстовища на литературата. Годишник Академичен кръг по сравнително литературознание. Научна конференция „Портрет на една непозната“, 2014. ISSN 2603-5332  
<http://calic.balkansbg.eu/conferens/portrait-of-an-unkown-woman/123-when-are-audible-the-coloraturas-of-josefine-the-singer.html>

7. Възможните светове при Джоузеф Конрад. – Литература, етнос, култура. Сборник с научни текстове от Юбилейната международна научна конференция „Филологията – традиция и предизвикателства в новата реалност“, 7-9. 10. 2021. Благоевград, 2021, с. 7–15. ISBN 978-619-7442-65-6

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