Theory of Mind and Possible Worlds in Tochi Onyebochi's Riot Baby

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Abstract

In November 2021, Riot Baby, written by the Nigerian American author Tochi Onyebochi, was The World Fantasy Awards winner of the best novella published in 2020. Blending fantasy with real history, the story is about two black siblings, Ella and Kevin, who are gifted with supernatural powers. Kevin, the riot baby of the title, was born at the beginning of the Los Angeles uprising in 1992. Kevin was incarcerated for no reason but his color, and his sister visited him both in person and via using her magical powers. The story mainly revolves around Kevin, his sister's endeavors to protect him and the siblings' attempts to survive in an American society that hates them for being black. The story is loaded with Black American anger, racism, grief and sibling love. A mixture between reality and sci-fi fantasy, the novella is analyzed so that the rich cosmoses of the text, its real and possible worlds and the characters' mental states can be detected. Because fiction often explores and presents important social realities, this research seeks to analyze what is communicated in Riot Baby so that the role played by this fiction in addressing racism may be illuminated. The model of analysis, inspired by the major contributions of PWT forerunners, such as Ryan, Pavel, Eco and Stockwell, is original. Being inter-disciplinary, it draws on the disciplines of psychology, via Theory of Mind (ToM), philosophy, via Possible Worlds Theory (PWT), and presumably this also counts as a stylistic analysis. The results present the characters' mental states and the rich worlds they progress through.

Keywords: Theory of Mind, Possible Worlds Theory, Riot Baby, Fantasy Fiction, racism in fiction

1. Introduction

The Theory of Mind (ToM), a prominent concept in psychology, provides a stock of tools which can be utilized to decode others' thoughts and attitudes, which is a precondition for deciphering behaviours. Possible Worlds Theory (PWT), a leading notion in philosophy, explains the ideas of necessity, possibility, impossibility and actuality in ontology and language, which is significant in discourse interpretation. In this concern, ToM and PWT are

likely to work together to reach a thorough understanding of whatever underlies discursive practices.

Narrative is constructed by the mind and "language speaks to the mind rather than to the senses" (Ryan 2012a, 226). Mapping words onto worlds is the corner stone of text interpretation (Herman 2012, 32). The actual world (AW), according to the German philosopher Leibniz, is just one of an unlimited number of possible worlds (PWs), which is the basic assumption underlying PWT (Alber and Fludernik 2010, 12; Bell and Ryan 2019, 22). This AW is actualized because it is the best (Stalnaker 2012, 65).

On reading a fictional story, readers are invited to delve into the narrative's PWs which are actual for the characters. This means that a text introduces a Textual Actual World (TAW) which is the characters' AW. Within the TAW, each character visualizes their PWs. Whenever there is a gap between their PWs and the TAW, characters try to reduce that distance even though it means they may have to go through a conflict.

On November 4-7, 2021, The World Fantasy Awards winners were announced. Tochi Onyebuchi's *Riot Baby* was named the best novella. It is the story of two siblings, Ella and Kevin, who are gifted with supernatural powers. The narrative begins in 1992 during the notorious Los Angeles riot, which broke out when four Los Angeles policemen were acquitted of all charges related to beating Rodney King, an unarmed African American citizen. The incident had been videotaped and disseminated across the country, which resulted in unrest that reached its peak when the officers were cleared. Onyebuchi, a Nigerian American author, blends science fiction with history to mirror Black pain, racism, injustice, love and fury during Rodney King riots. *Riot Baby* is a dystopian narrative about pure love, brutality and the supernatural.

The discourse of *Riot Baby* is divided into two worlds: Ella's discourse world vs. Kevin's. Ella represents Black outrage; Kevin symbolizes endurance. In the end, Kevin follows Ella in the search for freedom. Combining sci-fi and realism, the narrative produces a magical realism that structures the worlds of the text.

Fiction is about "something" reflected in the text (Pavel 2019, 316). This paper attempts to detect, analyze and discuss this "something" in *Riot Baby* through addressing the following research questions:

- How far can ToM and PWT be integrated to more likely present a deeper interpretation of *Riot Baby*?
- What does ToM tell us about the characters' inner states?
- What are the worlds created in the story?

2. Theoretical Foundations: ToM and PWT

Meaning interpretation is a process founded in the mind (Stockwell 2002, 91), which needs to delve beneath the surface level of language to access the deeper layers. These layers have to do with ToM, a psychosocial and socio-cognitive capacity to perceive the mental states and behaviors of others (Cherry 2021).

ToM is based on the concept that understanding mental states is dependent on a toolbox whose components constitute a perquisite to interpreting the minds of others. Figure 1 presents the ToM toolbox (Retrieved from https://nobaproject.com/modules/theory-of-mind)
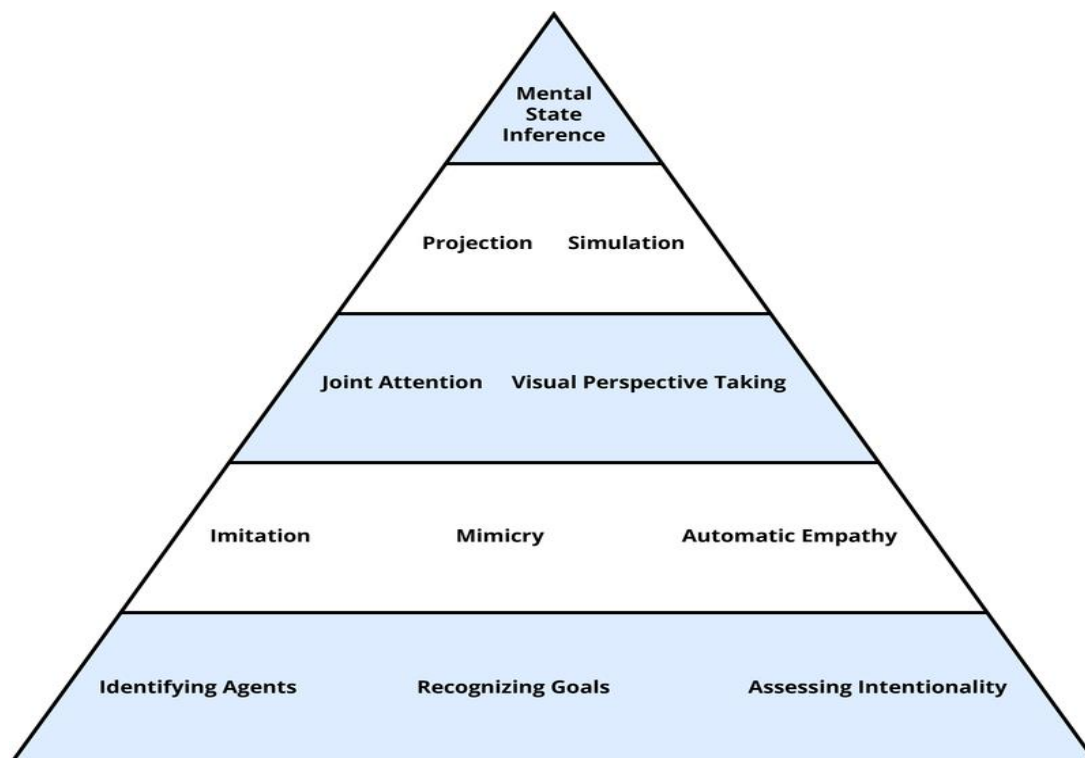
Figure 1. *ToM Toolbox*

According to Bell and Ryan (2019, 23), a PW-inspired approach explicates ToM. ToM helps us to comprehend others' hopes, wills, plans and beliefs: their PWs. This reciprocal relation between ToM and PWT endows discourse analysis with profound explanatory powers.

Bricker (1996, 225) defines reality as "the sum of whatever exists". The notion of PWs is a philosophical conception which has its origin in Leibniz's argument that there are many possible ways of forming ontological existence, of which the best choice is selected to be our world (Caro 2012, 12). Literary texts stimulate the generation of PWs which develop due to the unique capabilities of human beings (Dolezel, 1998).

Lewis (1973) believes in the existence of PWs, as "ways things could have been" (84). The people living in PWs are not identical with those in AW, as they are their counterparts (Lewis 1986, as cited in Perry 1997, 5; Lewis 1978, 37). Pavel (1975, 173-175) is mainly concerned with the relation between fictional worlds and AWs. Pavel (1986) explains that there exists a narrative in "every meaningful event" (5).

Hintikka considers the task of language is to express the world (1989, 53-54). Eco (1984, 219) defines a PW as being "a possible state of affairs" and identifies PWs as the fictional worlds created by authors. The wishes, dreams, reactions, projections, imaginations and promises pertaining to characters are another kind of PW. A third PW is generated by the reader whenever he/she builds a mental representation or reacts with his/her own wishes or hopes in response to the PWs created by the author and the characters (Eco 1984, 246-247).

PWs must be linked to AW by a "relation of accessibility" and "non-contradiction" (Ryan 2012b, 343). AW is characterized as being autonomously and ontologically existing, while PWs pertain to mental processes of "dreaming, imagining, foretelling, promising, or storytelling" (Ryan 2012b, 343; Ryan 2015, 16-17). AW in a work of literature is the domain which is considered to be real by the characters of the narrative (Ryan 1985, 720). According

to Ryan (1991, 24), a narrative is a multiple-layer universe. The main/global universe is the narrative world which contains the characters, their Textual Actual World (TAW). A TAW may be homogenous, referring to entities from one domain, or divided into natural/supernatural spheres (Ryan 1991, 114).

The AW in the narrative contains characters who can each create relative worlds: K, O, W, M, I and F (Ryan 1985,720-727).

The epistemic system is signified as a K-World, where K stands for knowledge. The K-World indicates necessity if it contains exclusively known propositions (state of agreement). The K-World signals possibility if it points out believed/probable assumptions (state of intermediacy); it refers to impossibility/conflicts if it contains ignored issues (state of disagreement) (Ryan 1991,114-115). An O-World, the obligation world, pertains to the characters as regards their system of values. (Ryan 1991, 116). A W-World, the wish world, assigns actions and entities with the axiological features of good (desired), neutral or bad (undesired) (117-118). It forms the ideal state of TAW that is not accomplished. As a result, characters are motivated to act to fulfill their goals and wishes (Bell and Ryan 2019, 23). M-Worlds refer to worlds of moral values. Ryan (1985) distinguishes between O-Worlds, where the entity receives the value system from the group/social system, and Moral Values Worlds (M-Worlds) where the entity decides what is good and what is bad/evil (Ryan 1985, 728-729). An I-World, an intention world, refers to the character's commitment to take a particular track/path to fulfill a particular goal (Ryan 1985, 725). Wish, obligation and moral worlds are called "ideal model worlds" because they signify the world as it ought to be (Ryan 1985, 726).

Providing a way out of the AW, F-Universes or fantasy/alternate universes lay out the thoughts, hallucinations, dreams and other creations of the mind (Ryan 1991, 119; Ryan 1985, 730). Ryan considers that characters project their private possible worlds or PWs which are products of their imaginations and cognitive processes (Ryan 2001, 238). Such PWs exist in the characters' mind as propositions in their cognition (Ryan 2006, 648)

Ryan (2001) considers that for a world to be possible, it has to be connected to the AW/center by an "accessibility relation" (100). Ryan (1991, 32-33) presents a taxonomy of "accessibility relations" as: identity of properties, identity of inventory, compatibility of inventory, chronological compatibility, taxonomic compatibility, physical compatibility, logical compatibility, analytical and linguistic compatibility. Ryan (1991, 121-123) explains that a conflict takes place whenever there is a gap between the character's AW and W-World.

In Stockwell's (2002) view, a discourse world (DW), the imaginative world invoked when reading, interacts with PWs so that one can reach a better understanding of stories. Stockwell presents a Principle of Minimal Departure which echoes Ryan's accessibility relations (Stockwell 2002, 93-95).

PWT has its origins in Leibniz's philosophy. It was Kripke (1963) who first added the notion to the interpretation of necessity and possibility (Partee 1989, 93-94). Lethrer (1975) explains "can" and "could" via a PW premise, which means that there is a world with each sentence. PWT started to flourish via its forays into literature in the 1970s thanks to major proponents in the field such as David Lewis, whose explanation of PWs is also presented by Bricker (2005). Lewis (1986) believes in the spatio-temporal connections between AW, past events, and the future (70-71). Bricker (2008) takes a Lewisian approach to investigate PWs. Grebeniuk (2020) studies the fictional worlds of Hillarion Pavliuk's novel "The Madman's Dance" via a PW approach. The study focuses on the role of fear in creating the world of the

novel. Planells de la Maza's (2017) interesting book deals with video games as representatives of fictional worlds.

DeRosset (2009) explains David Lewis's views regarding PWT. The study explains how PWT is related to contemporary metaphysics, ethics, epistemology and linguistics. Mutanen (2014) examines possible-worlds semantics and fiction. Weisberg (2016) explains fictional world creations as a process that mixes real-world information and imagination.

Martinez Lorente (1996) explains PWT with a special emphasis on Marie-Laure Ryan's work (1985) in order to uncover the fictional worlds of More's Utopia. Chen (2018) explains the cognitive poetics' theory of PWs in *The Buddha of Suburbia*. The novel is about Indian-Pakistani immigrants in London. Peregrin (1993) presents a theoretical explanation of PWs with an emphasis on the Kripkean view that there are PWs, though the nature of them is not addressed.

Polgar (2018) examines the fictional universe of Ian McEwan's *Atonement* in relation to PW modality. Stadnicka (2019) analyzes Orwell's *Nighteen Eighty- Four* with reference to the PWs, impossible worlds and mental spaces created in the novel. Tyynela (2009) studies PWs in Diana Wynne's *Chrestomanci Series.* Wise (2017) employs Ryan's taxonomy of accessibility relations to address the possible worlds in Tolkein's *the Hobbit*.

This paper presents an original model drawing on the major contributions presented by Eco (1984), Pavel (1975, 1986), Stockwell (2002), Ryan (1985, 1991, 2012b) and Bell and Ryan (2019).

3. Methodology

This research incorporates ToM and PWT in order to analyze the discourse in Tochi Onyebuchi's *Riot Baby* (2020). The novella was downloaded and examined manually. The method of analysis is bi-disciplinary. The ToM-based analysis utilizes the toolbox described in Section 2. The PWT-inspired analysis considers the TAW to be divided into a natural and a supernatural layer.

The components of the AW/PWs are identified and first, following the Principle of Minimal Departure, the accessibility relations in the natural layer are detected so that the AW-PW spaces can be designated. Conflict in the plot is explained as being between W-Worlds and AW, W-World and O/M-Worlds, whether those of the hero or the villains' or among the characters' worlds as a whole. Then the previous steps are repeated to analyze events pertaining to the supernatural sphere. The analysis is divided into four parts according to the narrative's spatial division.

4. Analysis

Riot Baby is a mixture of fantasy and realism, which means that its author-created/fictional world referring to real-world individuals (Rodney King, Sean Bell, Oscar Grant) and places (Los Angeles, Harlem, Rickers Island, Watts District) is imaginatively enriched with Ella and Kevin's superpowers.

Riot Baby is set in four spaces of the AW: Los Angeles/South Central, Harlem, Rickers Island and Watts, where Kevin is pursued from birth till release. Time jumps between each space. Regarding temporal worlds, the study involves six temporal spaces. The first is the

reader's present time at any moment since the novella's publication in 2020, which places the narrative act in the chronological past. The second is the narrator's world (1992-), which is the period from Kevin's birth and the Los Angeles riot till the end of the story. The third world is that of South-Central LA (1992-2006). The fourth is that of Harlem (2006-), followed by the fifth and sixth spaces of Rickers and Watts respectively.

4.1 Part I: Los Angeles/ South Central

At the opening, ToM tells readers that Ella has not yet become a goal-directed agent. Readers meet a child living amidst street gangs and having fearful visions she is unable to explain. Till now, Ella has been a passive recipient of her visions.

The narrator makes a time-shift into the past when he recites the atmosphere before Kevin's birth in 1992: "Before her Thing begins" (p.7). The initial sentence splits TAW into two divisions: the fantasy realm where Ella has a supernatural gift called "Thing", and a realistic realm. This realistic sphere/AW is filled with gangs and street disorder. The narrator moves to present the seeds of the fantasy sphere when he describes Ella's condition that appears just before her gift materialized: "the boy named Jelani, … staring up at the too-bright sun for the last, longest two minutes of his life." (p.9). This is Ella's AW in the fantasy realm. Her Thing" or astral projection gift makes her see the unpleasant future.

Seeing Jelani's death is not a sort of hallucination or imagined event; it is a premonition, a vision of the reality yet to come. The narrator introduces Ella's AW as being divided between the natural and the supernatural. Being a child, she has not yet recognized her magical powers. Ella's visions, at this early stage, are thought, by her and the reader, to be "daydreaming, imagining" (p.11). Ella can't explain why she knows that her mother is going to have a baby boy, neither can she explain why "LaTonya's baby's (Jelani) gonna get shot… soon" (p.14).

A historical realist sphere is manifest when Ella inquiries about the reasons for people's anger: "Does it have to do with Rodney King?'' (p.15). Historical realism enriches Ella's AW with facts that mark Black people's struggle for their due rights. In Ella's AW, as well as in ours, King is a real character whose mistreatment triggers the 1992 Los Angeles riots. At this very moment, the fantasy realm interferes with the real when Ella says: "Grandma, something bad's gonna happen." (p.15), which stands for Ella's power to foresee the panic to come. Ella's magical power is still in her PW, this is because she has not yet recognized that she is super-powered with amorphous abilities in her AW. Ella begins to show the seeds of activity and agency. In spite of her youth, she investigates topics in and of the adult world which seem to be complicated.

The storyline moves to give evidence of Ella's supernatural power, which transmits Ella's visions from being PW imaginations to being part of her AW. The Los Angeles riot takes place: "The smash of glass bottles breaking ..." (p.17). Ella's fearful visions become incarnated in the AW. In this AW, Kevin is born while "Everything has been burned down" (p.18). The first part of *Riot Baby* starts with Ella's "Thing" and ends with a manifestation of the power of Ella's "Thing". Apart from her activity, Ella does not show any relation to the ToM toolbox.

The first part presents AW as overwhelming. TAW rarely presents PWs in any sphere. Ella knows the future, inquires about the present and wishes not to see more bad visions.

4.2. Part II: Harlem

Ella, her mother and Kevin move to Harlem, where they face similar racial

discrimination in a different community. Kevin has now become a school-age child and Ella has grown up. About 14 years have passed since Kevin's birth and this phase takes place in 2006. Kevin, the narrator, explains that one aspect of Ella's "Thing" is to make animals' heads explode without touching" (p.20).

Being an active agent, Ella helps look after Kevin and never allows him to come home alone from school. The narrative starts to focus on Kevin's smartness at school and his street life among his peers, which means that Kevin is an active agent with objectives and intentions different from Ella's, as Kevin aspires to education. In the fantasy AW, Ella's third sign of magical power appears. Kevin narrates that Ella has a telekinetic power.

In the Harlem AW, the same racial discrimination as in LA is communicated as Kevin says: "I hear the click of handcuffs closing around wrists and cries of protest …" (p.23). Hard living is a feature in Ella and Kevin's AW. Kevin describes their AW conditions saying: "Hot outside becomes suffocating inside…" (p.25). The AW storyline has a supernatural sphere which goes step by step with the realistic one. That is why Kevin reminds readers of Ella's magical powers: "…she balances a ball of light on her palm" (p.25).

Ella's superpowers, AW in the fantasy realm, become both immense and unimpeded. Kevin's first sign of developing a superpower appear at this moment "I glimpse it… Kids getting handcuffed and tossed into the backs of police vans…" (p.29). Kevin's vision is part of his AW at this stage, though his powers are still quiescent. His first vision symbolizes his deep anger at Blacks being unjustly treated in every area.

ToM denotes that Kevin is obsessed with his identification with Black grief. His visions illustrate his physical and psychological identification with his race. He develops more ToM tools so that we may understand his developing ideas.

Because realism is mixed with fantasy, Kevin mentions the news about "Fifty shots fired into a man's car. Sean Bell" (p.30). In November 2006, Bell, a black American citizen, was shot to death when the NYPD fired a hail of 50 bullets at him. At this very moment, Kevin's telepathic ability to read minds comes to the fore. Once he puts his hand on Ella's shoulder, he sees "fire" (p.30). Kevin's gift begins to materialize he also has extrasensory perception. He is endowed with thought transference, his AW in the fantasy realm.

Ella predicts that "Something bad is gonna happen." (p.31). After that she disappears. This is Ella's second report about bad things yet to come. Her first was just before Kevin's birth amidst the Los Angeles riot in 1992. Readers begin to build PWs about the future event that has scared Ella. ToM indicates Ella's concern for Black inequality. Like Kevin, she identifies physically and psychologically with the traumas Blacks suffer from. The siblings develop their sympathy and identification with other Black people. They focus their attention jointly on the social discrimination manifest in their AW. ToM paves the way for the siblings' coming path in life.

The narrative begins to focus on Kevin. His W-Worlds are introduced in a manner that makes readers sympathize with him. Kevin hopes to help Ella, support his mother and get a college degree. Readers are invited to join Kevin's W-Worlds when he says: "I want to tell Mama that we're healing… and that nothing's been broken beyond repair" (p.31). The storyline shifts readers from Kevin's W-Worlds to a terrible AW: "I'm on the ground with a police boot on my cheek" (p.33). Kevin lets readers into his K- and W-Worlds (knowledge and wishes) in a manner that is very effective when he explains his fear and loss of protection after his sister's

disappearance "My body thrills to it…Like she took the forcefield protecting me with her" (p.33). Then Kevin shifts readers to his AW in a very touching description of his AW: "I got snow in one eye and dirt from the cop's Nike boot in the other." (p.33). Kevin describes his AW in detail saying: "The cop cracks me across the face, right on the cheekbone, …spitting blood into the snow" (p.34).

It is noticeable that the fantasy sphere spreads more than in Part one. It is also noticeable that conflicts in the plot increase. Both Ella and Kevin's wishes clash with their AW. PWs are hardly noticed. The novella seems to be about the AW regarding what exists, what is known and what is anticipated.

The ToM-inspired analysis suggests that both Ella and Kevin have become active agents with definite goals. Ella disappears so that she may find a way to control her superpowers. Kevin aims to go to college, support his mother, back his sister and stick close to his family. Ella and Kevin's acts are intentional. They both focus on protecting each other. That is why Ella asks Malik, a friend, to accompany Kevin to and from school. When being attacked by the police, Kevin expresses his sense of vulnerability after Ella's vanishing. Simulation and projection are two abilities shared between Kevin and Ella, due to their gifts. ToM motivates the idea that Ella and Kevin understand each other, negotiate with each other and know each other's mental states. Both identify and sympathize with each other and with the Black cause and direct their attention towards each other and jointly to the Black cause.

Readers, by the accurate descriptions of the siblings' AW and PWs, are invited to sympathize and identify with Ella and Kevin. The siblings' amorphous powers may, or may not, help them change their fortune. At this point, the readers feel the siblings' state of conflict between a disappointing AW and an inspiring PW.

4.3. Part III: Rickers Island
This part takes places at Rickers where Kevin is incarcerated for no reason but the color of his skin. The fantasy sphere overwhelms this part. Ella can fly, control the surroundings and penetrate into minds. Ella has access to other people's PWs. The ToM–inspired analysis illustrates that she has protecting Kevin as the goal of her supernatural activities. The question is: how can Ella's immense powers shelter and help Kevin get his freedom?

Ella's first step in her plan to assist Kevin is to permeate the prison walls to visit him supernaturally. Endowed with psychic power, they can communicate without moving their lips. Now the fantasy realm fully manifests itself in the siblings' supernatural powers. The sci-fi element is denoted when Kevin mentions the chip implanted in his finger. Kevin, via thought transference, says to Ella, referring to the prison, "*you could burn it down…*" (p.40). She wishes to go back in time to find a way to protect Kevin in the past so that the present may change "I'd stop time for you, Kev" (p.40).

In Ella's magical visit, "their minds bleed into each other and they trade images of apocalyptic landscapes" (p.41). They mentally travel to Mason Dixon, Florida, the Gulf of Mexico, Arkansas, Tennessee and Mississippi, where they report on the state of decay everywhere. Mixing the names of real places with their mind travels aims to convince readers of the fantasy part of the story.

The storyline shifts back to Ella's visit to Kevin as she announces her fear of Kevin's release as "she has Oscar Grant's murder in Oakland playing in her head" (p.43). Oscar Grant, a 22-year-old African American, was shot to death by a police officer in 2009. This is their

AW in actuality. Once Kevin touches Ella it seems "as though a cord were connecting his mind to hers" (p.46). In Ella and Kevin's AW, in the fantasy realm, their minds blend so that they do not need the ToM toolbox to understand each other's mentality. ToM tools are beneficial to readers to delve into the siblings' psychological state.

Ella expresses her denial that people can face their troubles by mere prayers or supplications: "She remembers reading about that kid who killed those churchgoers, and she remembers praying for revenge" (p.53). Ella's PW activates the Charleston church shooting in 2015 when African American people praying were killed during their Bible study. She starts to cry for the first time, this shows the conflict between her wish for revenge and her moral stance against violence. She identifies with Black anger that has captured her attention. ToM tells us that readers can understand Ella's intention to trigger change if she is able to do so. Yet, she waits for Kevin to join her.

Ella's PWs begin to activate as she remembers incidents of violence against Blacks: Six shots into the back of a man…or two shots ringing out and cops standing over the prone bleeding body of a young man" (p.53). First, Ella activates PWs when she remembers the history of anti-Black violence. Then, she travels to every spot to live the moment in her AW. The question is: why does Ella do so?

Ella answers that question. She thinks, in her PW, that she may be the One savior: What if I'm the answer? What if I'm the one we've been praying for?" (p.54). In this PW, Ella considers herself a kind of God, a superhuman with power over nature and an avatar endowed with immeasurable powers to fix justice. Ella, in her PW, believes that she may be the divine being created so that righteousness can be enforced.

Ella, via "Her Thing" (p.54), visits Kevin to tell him about their mother's death. Kevin's inner grief causes the ground to shift, the books to shuffle and "Chairs scrape along the floor" (p.54), manifestations of his AW telekinetic power. Kevin's wish to see his mother clashes with the AW in which he is incarcerated "maybe if this place is erased" (p.54). Kevin activates PWs where he uses his power to ruin the walls so that he may get closer to his mother. Kevin tells us that the Blacks are prejudicially discriminated against: "A story that makes you ask what's the point of a neo-Nazi learning to treat a black person as a human" (p.56). The Whites are likened to neo-Nazis. If Ella and Kevin can demolish this Nazi society, so what will they do?

Kevin has spent eight years in Rickers Island. His parole hearing approaches. In a vision, Kevin whispers "Mama" and he is so affected that his tears "blur the vision" (p.59). A sudden shift happens during the vision as the storyline turns to Kevin's parole hearing where Ella uses "her Thing" to make the officers release Kevin (p.60). This incident is so confusing as we wonder: does the parole hearing and Kevin's release belong to the AW in the natural sphere or is it part of their vision?

ToM-based analysis indicates Ella and Kevin's agency. They have intentional purposes. Ella and Kevin's connection has developed to the extent that their minds merge. Kevin's physical symptoms of being exposed to violence arouse sympathy for this black young man who is imprisoned, beaten, deprived of his family and learning. Ella's refusal to consider prayers as the only way out shows her powerful character. Readers are invited to sympathize with the siblings, identify with them and wait for their next step. Every reader will position himself in Ella or Kevin's place and starts to build PWs for the expected scenarios.

4.4. Part IV: Watts

The Watts District is the Black ghetto community selected for Kevin to reside in after being released on parole. We tend to consider Watts an extension of the siblings' vision/fantasy that occurs at the end of Rickers episode. The reason for this choice is that during the mind travel sequence in the Rickers episode, Kevin calls "Mama" and his tears flow and obscure the vision. At this very moment, the narrative shifts to Kevin's hearing while "Tears still pool in his eyes" (p.59). If Kevin's hearing had been a separate episode in a separate time, his tears would not have still been pooling in his eyes.

Kevin's AW in Watts begins with a sci-fi dimension: the implanted chip used to monitor Kevin. Kevin makes a comparison between life inside Watts and life outside Watts: "Nazis in the streets killing black folk. Folks getting locked up for whatever again" (p.63). AW is depicted in its worst aspects: the Whites are Nazis detaining and killing the Blacks. ToM-founded analysis suggests that Kevin's goals become more mature as they focus on justice for the Blacks. His identification and sympathy with the cause of justice reveal his mental state to readers: Kevin suffers from social oppression and prepares himself to act and find a way out.

Kevin's new AW is introduced by "algorithms and machines" (p.64). In this new AW, Kevin is completely under the chip's control. At Rickers, prisoners can see visitors. In Watts, this is not allowed. So, his AW in Watts, which is supposed to be the first sign of freedom, offers no freedom. Kevin mentions the worst side of Watts, which is that prisoners' feelings and reactions are controlled by the chip: "they pump that chemical from your chip into your brains" (p.74). This automatic biochemical control of humans transforms them into robots. Outside Watts, Kevin is deprived of his human rights; inside Watts, he is stripped of his humanity. This creates a clash between his W-World and AW.

Two AWs are compared. Outside Watts, Kevin describes "the black grief" of the black families who "stand behind microphones and declare their black anger" (p.75). Inside Watts, Kevin has to work, see the doctor and accept being remotely controlled by the implanted chip. Outside Watts, there is neither peace nor justice as "the bodies pile higher and higher and higher, and so does the frustration with the impunity" (p.75). Inside Watts, humans are turned into machines. The "dead black kids" are outside; the dead humanity is inside. Ella and Kevin are so endowed with superpowers that they can turn their black anger/grief into black victory. The AW outside Watts is as bad as the AW inside Watts. Kevin is trapped between two AWs which are equally invalid for humans.

Kevin becomes interested in the noble cause pertaining to the Black struggle for emancipation. His deep comparison between the Blacks' misfortunes inside and outside Watts appeals to the readers' identification, joint attention and sympathy with the Black ordeal.

The narrative moves to Ella's visiting a church. She talks to the Pastor who continues to defend his passive attitude towards Black anger. She mentions that there are reasons that forced the government to "let O.J. off… Same reason the housing laws got passed in 1968. Same reason we got civil rights in '64." (p.79). Ella has a revolutionary thought: "They freed the slaves at gunpoint, Pastor." (p.80).

ToM indicates that Ella's AW is about Black suffering that needs force to be heard aloud. When the Pastor expresses the idea that violence did not create Kevin, Ella says: "But it will get him back." (p.80). Being a super Avatar in her AW, Ella believes that she has waited long enough and it is time to change the AW. She uses her power to spread the thought in other's minds/PWs: "I am the locusts and the frogs and the rivers of blood." (p.80).

Time jumps to the past as Kevin witnesses his birth during the 1992 riot. He experiences the AW in all its details. Kevin sees the miserable conditions in hospitals because of the riot. Then he sees a man whose "bones still twisted in the memory of a beating." (p.83), Rodney King.

This is what made you." (p.84) is Ella's reason for taking Kevin back in this time travel to 1992. Ella believes in using forceful powers to create change. She wants Kevin to follow her. Ella shows Kevin that he was born out of anger. Kevin struggles against her wish he follows her: "I can't afford to be angry anymore." (p.84). Ella and Kevin's, I, W and M-Worlds clash at this point. She wishes to fight, and Kevin wishes to be patient until he gets his complete release. ToM signals that though Kevin is identified with Black anguish, he is still irresolute to fight.

Kevin, after suffering from severe pain in his thumb, cuts his finger and takes the chip out. Though Kevin begins to submit to Ella's will, he is not as determined as she is. So, she takes him on another time travel into the past to show him the way doctors "looked down on Mama… with such disdain. With such disgust. Feeding her the wrong medicine. They didn't care whether she lived or died. Whether her child lived or died. Our sister." (p.85). Ella declares her W, I, O, M-Worlds in one sentence "God is a loving God, but he's also the architect of our revenge." (p.85). It is revenge that Ella wishes for, seeks, intends to get and believes in.

I'd wanted it (revenge)" (p.85) is Kevin's PW which is reflected for the first time, but I'm convinced we're too small." (p.85). Kevin's W-World in which he seeks revenge clashes with his AW where he feels too weak to take revenge. Ella takes them on a time travel into the future where she shows him "Fire and blood and screaming and singing… Apocalypse sweeps the South. Vengeance visits the North." (p.86). This is the awful AW that may come.

Ella asks Kevin about what he sees. "I see the After." (p.86) is Kevin's answer which is the final step in the growth of his powers. Kevin sees a future where the Blacks have become the powerful group "They'll feel us in every corner of this country." (p.86). This is the new AW Ella and Kevin will witness, where their powers are used to fulfil one goal: to secure Black safety and rights. Kevin watches what living in freedom looks like as a result of using his superpower gift "I see freedom." (p.86). Freedom is the new component in the coming AW.

The narrative ends with an optimistic AW based on the powers endowed to Blacks so that justice may be established. Ella and Kevin's powers now belong to every Black citizen. ToM-based analysis shows the difference between Ella and Kevin at the beginning. Finally, Ella helps Kevin see the future as he becomes as powerful as she is. He shares the same interest regarding the Black cause.

5. Discussion

Ella has telekinetic powers, she can see the future, destroy anything without a touch, control her surroundings, fly, read thoughts, be invisible and penetrate walls and minds. Kevin is a thought reader and can see the After. Both have telepathic powers. Both belong to an unjust society that has already victimized Rodney King, fired 50 bullets at Sean Bell, shot Oscar Grant to death, caused the Watts riots of the 1960s,1990s and 2010s and committed the Charleston church massacre. Racism is addressed within a hybrid TAW in which actuality and fantasy sci-fi collaborate. The fantasy-reality interweaving TAW is significant as it negotiates a message about the Blacks' dormant power embodied by Ella and Kevin and held by every Black citizen in a persuasive and delightful manner. Had TAW been fully realistic, it would have been less

effective and more monotonous. Had TAW been fully supernatural, it would have been far removed from readers' conceptions.

Ella's sole concern is Kevin, but she begins to realize that she can't protect him as long as racism is in control. She stands for the Black wrath that is endowed with enormous power, yet keeps itself hidden. Ella sees the past, understands the present and knows the apocalyptic future accompanying social injustices. ToM-based analysis signifies Ella's powerful thinking and potency. She equates herself with a super Avatar sent to create salvation.

Kevin is the story center. Readers follow Kevin from his birth on the West Coast, to his growth in Harlem, then his detention at Rickers and his release in Watts. Kevin's first concern is his education and life. He stands for patience and tolerance. Thanks to Ella, he changes and begins to summon his power to anticipate the future freedom. Kevin's birth amidst racism-triggered chaos indicates that he is part of the social Black anger.

Riot Baby is a dystopian narrative of contemporary America that jumps across many places and times to show the feature that is common in the past, present and future across America: social discrimination. The factual element depends on the abundance of details and reference to real events.

It is noticeable that the supernatural dimension evolves gradually, until in the Rickers section it begins to predominate. In Watts, fantasy is the governing rule. This means that Ella and Kevin's revenge is kept in the fantasy sphere so as not to misinterpret the siblings' motive or consider them threatening the world. Freedom lies in the fantasy realm, which means that there is still racism.

It is noticeable that the narrative is mainly about the AW. PWs scarcely exist. This means that the story is mainly about AW, its features and its desired states. It is noticeable that K-Worlds of possibility and impossibility are not visible. Incidents are presented as being clearly known by the characters. Impossibility is absent in the natural and supernatural domains of the characters' AW. This denotes that the events are known and can be transferred to the readers' AW. To convince readers of the events' closeness to their AW, the narrative employs real incidents and figures so that the cry against racism may be heard.

6. Conclusion

ToM is about moving from discourse to the mental states underlying word choices. PWT is about the line between what exists in an ontological shape in contrast to what results from mind creations. Incorporating ToM and PWT helps in interpreting the cognitive generations and the designation around linguistic selections.

ToM-inspired analysis presents Ella as an energetic agent since her childhood. She seeks answers and grows up to identify with the Black cause. Ella uses all the ToM toolbox to reflect her inner ideology about enforcing equity and equality. Being endowed with super-powers, she believes herself to be the One chosen to redeem the Blacks from their suffering. PWT allows a detailed description of Ella's construction of AWs. AW is her target, that is why PWs are rare in Ella's discourse. The clash between her W-World and her frustrating AW is solved when she convinces Kevin to follow her path. The clash between her O, M I- Worlds and her AW ends after her contention that she has waited long enough before using her massive power to compel the required change.

ToM-based analysis explains Kevin's individual objectives at the beginning. As the story advances, Kevin develops identification and sympathy with the Blacks' deserved, yet ignored, rights. His comparison between the adversity Blacks face both inside and outside prison shows his new ideology: Kevin will follow Ella on her revolutionary path to revenge and fix justice. Kevin frequently updates AW about the current frustrating conditions. The conflict between his W-Worlds and the AW is finally resolved when he sees that the injustices of the AW have killed his mother and younger sister. Ella and Kevin's AW where they see the future apocalypse is a warning against all forms of oppression. This is the role of literary discourse: to reflect unequal practices and voice the unvoiced in an attempt to challenge and fix the status quo.

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