

LATVIJAS UNIVERSITĀTE

BAKALaura DARBS

RĪGA 2008

UNIVERSITY OF LATVIA
FACULTY OF MODERN LANGUAGES
DEPARTMENT OF LITERATURE AND CULTURE

**REAL AND IMAGINARY WORLDS IN SCARLETT
THOMAS'S NOVEL *THE END OF Mr. Y***

**REĀLĀ UN IZTĒLOTĀ PASAULES SKARLETAS TOMASAS
ROMĀNĀ *MISTERA Y GALS***

BACHELOR THESIS

Author: **Olga Iljina**

Matriculation Card AngF 040117

Adviser: MA.Philol. lect. Aleksejs Taube

RIGA 2008

DECLARATION OF ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

I hereby declare that this study is my own and does not contain any unacknowledged material from any source.

Date:

Signed:

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the real and the imaginary worlds in Scarlett Thomas's novel *The End of Mr. Y*. This book has a lot of scientific and philosophical digressions, which invite the reader to question the structure of the world and the limits of reality. The paper provides an overview of postmodern philosophical theories relevant to the analysis of the novel and discusses its characters' real and imaginary worlds. For this purpose, it uses theoretical methods of research, which consist in the studying of the relevant literature on postmodern philosophy. The practical methods are the novel's analysis and interpretation of the characters' perception of the real and imaginary. The paper discusses the possibility of different readings of the novel according to the definition of its genre and shows that the border between the real and the imaginary in it is blurred and unstable.

Key words: real, imaginary, postmodernism, philosophy, literature, science

ANOTĀCIJA

Bakalaura darbā tiek pētīta reālā un izdomātā pasaule Skarletas Tomasas romānā „Mistera Y gals” („The End of Mr. Y”). Šajā grāmatā tiek skartas daudzas zinātniskas un filozofiskas tēmas, kas liek lasītājiem pārdomāt pasaules struktūru un realitātes robežas. Darbs sniedz īsu ieskatu romāna analīzei nepieciešamajās postmodernisma filozofijas teorijās un sniedz priekšstatu par tēlu reālo un iedomu pasauli. Lai sasniegtu šos mērķus, tiek pielietotas teorētiskās pētīšanas metodes, kas iekļauj sevī atbilstošās postmodernisma filozofiskās literatūras apskatu. Praktiskās metodes ir romāna analīze un tēlu reālās un iedomu pasaules uztveres interpretācija. Šajā darbā tiek apspriestas vairākas romāna interpretācijas atkarībā no tā žanra noteikšanas. Pētījuma rezultātā tika izdarīts secinājums, ka reālās un izdomātās pasaules robežas romānā ir neskaidras un tās viegi mainās.

Atslēgvārdi: reālais, izdomātais, postmodernisms, filozofija, literatūra, zinātne

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	1
1 Philosophy of Postmodernism.....	3
1.1 What Is Postmodernism?	3
1.2 The “Bible” of Postmodernism.....	4
1.3 Sign and Value in Postmodernity: Waving Goodbye to Saussure.....	6
1.4 Do We Live in Simulacra of Reality?	8
1.5 <i>Endism</i> - the Characteristic Trait of Postmodernism	11
1.6 Can Thought Go on Without a Body?	11
1.7 Deconstruction and Différance.....	12
1.8 Thought Experiments.....	15
2 Characters and Their Worlds.....	18
2.1 Synopsis.....	18
2.2 Ariel Manto’s Reality.....	19
2.2.1 Childhood and Adolescence.....	19
2.2.2 Masochism.....	20
2.2.3 Self-Deprecation.....	21
2.2.4 Environment and Living Conditions.....	22
2.3 Ariel’s Philosophical Investigations.....	24
2.3.1 Where Curiosity Leads.....	24
2.3.2 The Lion of God.....	25
2.4 Adam.....	27
2.4.1 Chemistry or Metaphysics?	27
2.4.2 Adam’s Reality.....	28
2.4.3 Religious Search.....	29
2.4.4 Influence of Adam’s Views on Ariel.....	30
2.5 Saul Burlem.....	31
2.5.1 Burlem’s Reality.....	31
2.5.2 The Brave Coward.....	32
2.5.3 Philosophy.....	33
2.6 Lura.....	33
2.6.1 Background Information.....	33
2.6.2 Dangerous Beauty of the Siren’s Song.....	34
3 The World of the Troposphere.....	36

3.1 Apollo Smintheus and the Wisdom of Mice.....	36
3.2 The Troposphere’s Laws and Essence.....	37
3.3 The KIDS – Creatures from the Other Side.....	38
3.4 Landscape.....	39
3.5 Weather and Time of Day	39
3.6 Sensations.....	40
4 Where Fiction Meets Reality.....	42
4.1 Real or Imaginary?	42
4.2 The Fantastic Uncanny.....	43
4.2.1 Ariel’s Insanity and Paranoia	43
4.2.2 Ariel’s Mind Reading – Only Inside Her Mind?	44
4.2.3 Mind, Media and Technology.....	45
4.2.4 A Way out Through Books.....	46
4.3 The Fantastic Marvellous.....	47
4.4 The Fantastic Proper.....	47
Conclusions.....	49
Theses.....	50
References.....	51

INTRODUCTION

The End of Mr. Y (2006) is a novel by the young British author Scarlett Thomas, who was included in the list of the UK's twenty top young writers in 2001 by the *Independent on Sunday* and has been recently referred to as the "best author you may not have heard of." (Bookslut, 2007: *Online*) She is the author of the novels *Dead Clever* (1998), *In Your Face* (1999), *Seaside* (1999), *Bright Young Things* (2001), *Going Out* (2002) and *PopCo* (2004). Being a smart, idea-driven and engaging story, *The End of Mr. Y* holds the reader's attention. It is a narrative with scientific and philosophical digressions, which invites the reader to make a journey into one's deepest self, question the structure of the world and the limits of reality and investigate contemporary philosophy.

In everyday life, we often ask ourselves what reality is and to what extent our perception of it is objective. The postmodern world is full of simulations and copies, (of artworks, household projects, machines, etc.) which make one wonder, "To what extent representations are similar to their originals?" This question can be also asked about events in people's lives. Perhaps, it is not only the material that is reproduced; perhaps, we do not live a real life but only a bad copy of what it could be. How can one understand where the real turns into the imaginary and vice versa? One may easily get lost in these questions about reality. Scarlett Thomas's *The End of Mr. Y* suggests some answers to them. My aim is to analyse the real and the imaginary worlds of the novel. In this paper, I attempt to define the limits of reality and the reasons for the characters' appeal to the imaginary.

For this purpose, it is necessary to focus on the following goals:

- to investigate the philosophy of postmodernism and provide an overview of scientific theories related to it;
- to analyse the novel's real and imaginary worlds and establish the link of the novel's ideas with postmodern philosophy;
- to suggest alternative ways of the novel's interpretation.

In the research, the enabling objectives are the following:

- to read and analyse the relevant literature related to postmodern philosophy;
- to investigate the relevant literature about Scarlett Thomas's novel *The End of Mr. Y*;
- to interpret and summarise the theoretical material;
- to analyse the novel's characters' life and its influence on their vision of the world;
- to employ postmodern philosophical ideas to interpret the novel;

- to summarise the results gained during the research.

The main hypothesis of the paper is that an exploration into the motivational aspects of an individual's perception of the real and the imaginary in the novel show that the border between fiction and reality is not fixed and easily definable.

In the course of developing the paper, the following research methods have been used:

- theoretical (the study of the relevant literature, generalising and drawing conclusions);
- practical (analysing and interpreting the novel).

The paper consists of 4 main chapters:

Chapter 1 discusses contemporary philosophy and science based on Lyotard, Baudrillard, Derrida and other thinkers' ideas on world, Man and the current condition of life, science and culture.

Chapter 2 analyses the novel's characters' real and imaginary worlds in their great diversity and shows how the environment where the characters live influences their philosophy of life.

Chapter 3 describes the imaginary world of the Troposphere in the novel and discusses its most important aspects that might help one understand how different from the physical world the Troposphere is.

Chapter 4 suggests a number of alternative interpretations of the novel according to the division of the fantastic genre into the uncanny, the marvellous and the proper.

CHAPTER I

PHILOSOPHY OF POSTMODERNISM

This chapter contains a discussion of contemporary philosophy and science. It summarises Lyotard, Baudrillard, Derrida and other thinkers' ideas on contemporary life and the new condition of the human being. The increasing influence of technology and reproduction has changed our perception of reality in many ways, giving way to pessimistic speculations and forecasts. Contemporary society inquires into the issues of truth and reality; it seeks to unmask the truth beyond the superficial by different thought experiments. Since Scarlett Thomas appeals to these issues in *The End of Mr. Y*, it would be appropriate to provide an overview of the relevant philosophical ideas of postmodernity before analysing the novel.

1.1 What Is Postmodernism?

Postmodernism is a broad term generally applied in relation to the contemporary cultural movement characterised by a sceptical attitude to many beliefs and principles that have been dominant in Western society over the last centuries. (Sim 1993: 289) Karils Racevskis, a contemporary literary and cultural critic, stresses the inevitability of the dependence of postmodern ideas on modernism, as the term *postmodernism* implies a cause and effect relationship between the two periods one arising from the other. This relation, however, has a critical character as the themes that constitute the core of postmodern critical strategy are concentrated around the dissatisfaction with the failure of modernism to fulfil its promises. (1993: 7)

The ideas underpinning modernity come from the “Enlightenment project”, the cultural movement that dates back to the eighteenth century and celebrates the role of reason, (Sim: 2001: 76) creativity in thought and arts, and rapid development in all spheres of human affairs. The cultural ethos of modernism assumes that contemporary civilisation is superior to that of the past due to its greater extent of knowledge and advanced technologies. (Sim: 2005: 289)

However, in spite of all optimistic promises, modern society failed to prevent the two World Wars, the Holocaust and political and ideological repression throughout the twentieth century. This produced a strong grip of pessimism and disillusionment on a postmodern manner of thinking. (Sim: 2001: 11–12) These events made contemporary society

reconsider the understanding of the world ‘by calling into question modernism’s commitment to progress, as well as the ideology underpinning it, and encouraging a dialogue between past and present in thought and arts.’ (Sim: 2005: 289)

Postmodernism unmasks the use of power and oppression that legitimates the discourses promising equality. It expresses incredulity toward the seemingly solid authorities of reason, progress and justice. Postmodernism undermines many of modernity’s claims and states that they are based on nothing more than the desire to establish the truth. (Racevskis: 1993: 10) Instead, postmodernism suggests an approach favouring plurality of opinions and focuses on the development of new *knowledges* (Sim: 2000: 76) that help to decrease the power of universal narratives. (ibid.)

The Postmodern Condition by the French thinker Jean-François Lyotard, commonly referred to as the “bible” of postmodernism (Robbins, 2004: *Online*) seeks to clarify the basic ideas of the movement.

1.2 The “Bible” of Postmodernism

Lyotard defines postmodernism as the state of culture marked by *incredulity toward metanarratives*¹, (2001: 482) which he sees as an inevitable consequence of scientific progress. *The Postmodern Condition* puts under question modernist ideas of legitimation of knowledge, science and system. It is critical of theories that generalise their conclusions and produce universal truths without regarding the exceptions.

In his work, Lyotard discusses the issues of truth and justice. The thinker believes that those who are in a position of power employ these concepts as tools to control society by means of education. In order to do so, they seek to establish the validity of institutions regulating “the social bond,” which is achieved by means of science and knowledge. (ibid. 483-484) Lyotard believes that science does not merely state hidden regularities and discovers the truth; it aims to develop its own rules and status, which produce a discourse of legitimation of knowledge in philosophy. (ibid.: 490)

He suggests the term *modern* (ibid.: 482) to designate any system of knowledge establishing its authority through a *metadiscourse*, (ibid.) or a *grand narrative* (ibid.: 488) and claims that this apparatus of legitimation of knowledge is obsolete, since its narrative function is being dispersed amongst prescriptive, descriptive, denotative and other elements. (ibid.;

¹ James E. Faulconer defines *metanarrative* as “a “grand theory,” a narrative about narratives. A metanarrative is a story we tell about ourselves, what we do, and what is expected; it is a story that links our smaller stories together and gives us unity, social, psychological, and intellectual.” (2004: *Online*)

482) As a result, the implementation of metanarratives goes totally astray with the initial thought. This is the case with Marxism, the metanarrative developed on principles of equality and emancipation which eventually became the engine of Stalinist totalitarianism in the Soviet Union. (ibid.: 488) Lyotard states that as a result of multiple misinterpretations metanarratives have lost their credibility in the eyes of contemporary society. (ibid.: 489)

In order to avoid imprecision in denotative and prescriptive statements, the thinker suggests that the universal language should be replaced by another principle favouring a plurality of forms and systems that would have a larger capacity to discuss the validity of statements. (ibid.: 495) Lyotard insists on *delegitimation of knowledge*, (ibid.: 492) which can be carried out through *language games*. (ibid.) Following his realization, “the social bond is linguistic, but is not woven with a single thread. It is a fabric formed by the intersection of [...] language games obeying different rules.” (ibid.)

Lyotard pays special attention to the importance of *performativity* (ibid.: 497) as one of the basic criteria of the postmodern condition, especially in connection with the rapid progress in technology. According to the thinker, technical devices are introduced in order to compensate for the deficiencies of the human perceptual apparatus. (ibid.: 495) However, the alarming aspect of the matter for Lyotard is that the development of advanced technologies increases not only people’s ability to validate scientific theories, but mainly to be just and right. Technocracy is not in need for ethics; its first concern is the legitimation of knowledge by means of power. (ibid.) According to Lyotard, it is carried out in the following way: if *reality* is the source of scientific evidence and prescriptions in the juridical, political, ethical and other spheres of life, one can take grasp of them all by altering reality with the help of technology. (ibid.) No matter what the scope of such legitimation of knowledge – be it at the level of a university research programme or the politics of an influential country – the thinker detests it, as it is imposed by terror. (ibid.) As a pluralist, Lyotard looks for another way of legitimation that will allow co-existence of multiple opinions.

The thinker is convinced that a more versatile approach to knowledge allowing a greater diversity of language games can take place not only in scientific, but also in social pragmatics. (ibid: 503) Still, he maintains that the essential condition for plurality to exist is a free public access to information needed to make knowledgeable decisions. If postmodern society prevents authorities from taking information in their total control, computerization and the creation of data banks could give us this opportunity. (ibid.: 505) Then, language games would satisfy both the need for justice and knowledge. (ibid.)

1.3 Sign and Value in Postmodernity: Waving Goodbye to Saussure

The progress of machinery greatly increased production possibilities in the second half of the twentieth century. It caused wholesale reconfiguration of economy and established its significance in the context of postmodernism, which became commonly referred to as *late capitalism*. This term appeared in the late 1930s, when a number of pro-Marxist European economists contended that capitalism was bound to disappear. It became especially popular in the 1970s, when the book *Late Capitalism* by the German economist Ernest Mandel appeared. As a supporter of Marxist ideas, Mandel believed that the rise of profitability after the Second World War would be followed by an inevitable decline caused by the same forces as its growth. (Mandel, 1992: 31)

To Jameson, however, *late capitalism* does not mean the ultimate obsolescence, failure or destruction of the old system. Instead, he suggests that in the word *late* the idea of change and novelty is entangled. (2003: xxi) Hence Jameson admits that the world has undergone some important transformations, but does not consider them to be dramatic. Jameson develops the concept of *late capitalism* as a confluence of culture and economy, (ibid.) which makes the two different Marxist terms of *superstructure* that represents the symbolic, i.e. culture or ideology, and *infrastructure* (economy, production) merge into one another. (ibid.) British artists and arts critics Marysia Lewandowska and Neil Cummings also note that “the new ‘cultural’ status of the economy has become a mirror reflection of the economically determined character of culture; the ‘market’ has become an aesthetic experience in and of itself.” (2004: 75)

Jean Baudrillard, another acknowledged French thinker of Postmodernism, describes in great detail the specifics of these changes in perhaps his most famous book *Symbolic Exchange and Death*. Baudrillard declares that the idea of sign and value in contemporary culture to have changed drastically, he believes that it no longer corresponds to the Saussurean model. (2001: 439)

The Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure is “the father of modern linguistics” (Lodge and Wood, 2000: 1) who played a significant part in the development of *structuralism*, the linguistic and cultural movement that emerged in the middle of the last century. He developed the theory of linguistic structuralism in *The Course in General Linguistics* first published in Paris in 1915, two years after the death of its author. Saussure’s analysis of the word as a unit of meaning established the important division between the two parts of a word, the *signifier* and the *signified*. (ibid.) Saussure establishes a clear division between the signifier and the signified, the former standing for an acoustic sound pattern or its mental projection and the

latter – for the meaning this pattern carries. In spite of such division, Saussure views these two parts connected by the link of association. (1972: 66) Saussure refers to the notion of *value* of a sign based on its relation to other signs within language. He assumes that the concept of a linguistic sign is not an independent unit of meaning, since it is determined and limited by the surrounding signs. (1972: 113) As Daniel Chandler states, “the sign is more than the sum of its parts. While *signification* – what is signified – clearly depends on the relationship between the two parts of the sign, the *value* of a sign is determined by the relationships between the sign and other signs within the system as a whole.” (2002: 24)

Baudrillard regards this Saussurean model of value in linguistics, as well as its counterpart in economy – the Marxist commodity law of equivalences, the trade of labour-power for monetary signs (that can be exchanged against other commodities) – to be outdated. (2001: 439) The thinker claims that the revolution of value has cancelled the traditional *economics of value* in contemporary world. (ibid.: 438) Baudrillard makes a variety of claims about what this revolution consists in. He is convinced that the two aspects of value announced in the Saussurean and Marxist theories, i.e. the structural dimension of the signifier and the functional dimension of the signified are not as coherent and related to each other by the mechanisms of signification as they might seem to be. (ibid.)

Following Baudrillard, referential value has no importance nowadays, and the structural dimension proves able to function autonomously from it. This brings about a new concept of value, which can be characterised by its relativity, substitutability and simulation. (ibid.: 440) Signs are no longer exchanged against the real, but only against each other. The thinker explains that this process takes place not just because it happens to, but because there is no *real*, tangible thing they could be exchanged against. If one removes the determinate equivalence of the sign, it becomes abstract, blurred and inexact in its limits. (ibid.: 438) The value of *sign* with its signification governed by means of the binary *code* no longer takes place in the sphere of production. (ibid.: 443) Baudrillard concedes that the structural change of value and the collapse of the code put an end to labour, political economy and the linear order of discourse. Thenceforth, he declares that the era of the sign and production has come to an end and the new age of total simulation has begun. (ibid.: 440)

Baudrillard states that this mutation has a global meaning. He believes it to affect every level of contemporary society, such as fashion, where the beautiful and the ugly are used together, politics, where left and right approaches are combined, public media, where the true overlaps the false, nature, culture, etc. (ibid.) For example, the merging of the opposites in literature can be seen in magic realism. In books by Sandra Cisneros, Isabel Allende, Angela

Carter, Salman Rushdie, Gabriel García Márquez and other representatives of this genre magical elements and illogical scenarios merge together with normal, realistic situations.

1.4 Do We Live in Simulacra of Reality?

Reproduction and representation of everything from iron objects to art objects go hand-in-hand in the postmodern world. Such thinkers as Walter Benjamin and Marshall McLuhan discuss simulations as substitutes for reality in their works. Even though they recognise the dominance of reproduction, their assessment of this process is different from that of Jameson and Baudrillard. McLuhan expresses a positive view on reproduction in printing press in *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man*, announcing it to be “an immediate extension of the human person.” (1962: 138) In his essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, Benjamin gives a positive evaluation of reproducibility as applied in arts. He insists that reproduction does not diminish the value of artistic pieces; on the contrary, by multiplying artworks, it becomes a testimony of their importance. Moreover, Benjamin suggests that reproduction may come to be considered itself an artwork:

With the different methods of technical reproduction of a work of art, [...]the absolute emphasis on its exhibition value the work of art becomes a creation with entirely new functions, among which the one we are conscious of, the artistic function, later may be recognized as incidental. (1969: 225)

Baudrillard claims that it is the development of hi-tech mechanisms that lead to the explosion of reproduction. (2001: 445) In accord with this view Jameson speaks of postmodernism as of the *Third Machine Age* (2003: 37) preceded by realism and modernism. He compares the exhilaration of technology manifested in futurism, especially the Italian futurist’s fascination with the motorcar and the machine gun, the use of advanced technologies in the Swiss-born modernist architect Le Corbusier’s buildings and in artworks by such famous surrealist sculptors as Marcel Duchamp and Francis Picabia, and admits that postmodern artists do not express such interest in machinery as modernists did. The reason for this change, according to Jameson, is that contemporary machines do not pursue the criterion of novelty; they are not designed in order to make groundbreaking scientific discoveries. Their main task is not to produce new products, but merely replicate the existing ones. (ibid.: 36)

Baudrillard states that as a result of the Industrial Revolution, a new sign generation – *products* appeared. Their reproduction has replaced production in contemporary society. (2001: 445) Moreover, he articulates the new status of labour power in postmodernity, which has been deprived of its traditional place in the system of reference and converted into a sign

among a variety of other labour signs that are exchanged against one another. According to the Baudrillardian theory,

labour is no longer productive but has become reproductive of the *assignation to labour* which is the general habit of a society which no longer knows whether or not it wishes to produce. [...] It remains, however, necessary than ever to reproduce labour [...] as the reality principle. The reality principle *of the code*, that is: an immense *ritual of the signs of labour* extends over society in general – since it reproduces itself, it matters little whether or not it *produces*. (ibid.: 443)

So, contemporary world, in Baudrillard's view, is composed of reproductions exclusively. The all-engulfing simulation has infiltrated the reality and converted it into what the thinker calls *simulacrum*. (ibid.: 445) This term, as defined in *The Oxford English Dictionary*, means “an image or representation of something or someone”, as well as “an unsatisfactory imitation or substitute.” (1999: 1338)

One can get a deeper understanding of the term *simulacrum* with the help of the etymologically related word *simulation*, which descends from the Latin verb *simulare* (to simulate). Simon Blackburn, the author of *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* approaches *simulation* from a positive perspective, as a “view that our understanding of others is not gained by the tacit use of a ‘theory’ [...] but by re-living the situation ‘in their shoes’ or from their point of view and thereby understanding what they experienced.” (1994: 351) Simulation as a representation of the real is commonly used in 3D cinema, for imitation of real conditions in military and astronaut training programmes, etc. *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy* stresses the exceptional role of *universal simulators*, or dynamically modelling computer systems that are used to study complex and holistic problems that cannot be solved by traditional mathematical methods, as in non-linear systems. (1999: 145)

Simulation as a troublesome social phenomenon of society was discussed long before Baudrillard, though under a different name. In *The Republic* written by Plato in 360 B.C, the term *mimesis* is used to describe the relationship between the artist and his work. Plato perceives the one who produces imitations of reality as a deceiver, since one cannot reproduce reality, but only its superficial appearances. The thinker does not believe artists to lead people to the understanding and admiration of the beautiful. On the contrary, in Plato's opinion, since things are simulations of their forms, *mimesis*, or simulation of simulations performed by artists take the humanity far away from the true nature knowledge. (Blackburn, 1994: 244)

Baudrillard also thinks that *simulacra* create a false reality and distinguishes three types of simulacra according to the degree of connection between the signifier and the initial signified. First-order simulacra deal with the *counterfeiting* of an original. At this stage, the direct connection between signifier and the signified is interrupted. The physical signified loses importance, and the signifier refers to other newly produced signifieds. (ibid.: 444) (For

instance, if an artist draws a beautiful portrait (the signifier) of a person (the signified), and the picture becomes famous, it is reproduced not because of the person painted, but because the artwork is popular.) Second-order simulacra are dominated by mass production of these pure series of counterfeits, (ibid.: 446) and third-order simulacra deal with multiple modulations of the model. (ibid.: 447) At this stage, the border between the real and the reproduced disappears, since representations are projected onto other representations and their modulations that appear in this many-stage process, so that in the long run it becomes absolutely impossible to trace representations back to what their original was. The link between the signifier and the signified appears to be gone for good. (ibid.)

Baudrillard is preoccupied with the problem that the development of advanced representational technologies is capable of mediation of physical reality, the latter being “that of which it is possible to provide an equivalent reproduction.” (ibid.: 456) Contemporary science makes exact reproduction possible, since it is able to create all necessary conditions for the process of reproducibility. Thus, the real becomes not only what *can be* reproduced, but rather what *is* reproduced infinitely. Reality eventually is metamorphosed into *hyperrealism*, (ibid.) which, in Baudrillard’s opinion, nowadays replaces the real at all levels of social life – political, social, historical, economic, etc. In this new world, arts turn into a parody, a reproductive machine that aims to satisfy public demand for aesthetic enjoyment. (ibid.) No links between origin and end can be traced, everything becomes relative. Reality is not stranger than fiction any longer, states the thinker, (ibid.: 458) as it is impossible to distinguish the imaginary and the real. Baudrillard perceives this new state of matters as the end of reality. “Through reproduction from one medium into another the real becomes volatile, it [hyperrealism] becomes the allegory of death,” he argues. (ibid.: 454)

The Italian writer and literary critic Umberto Eco went on a tour around the United States of America and described his experiences in the essay under the title *Travels in Hyperreality*. Eco takes the reader across the country and displays its fake history, art and nature. He describes a wax copy of the Mona Lisa at a wax museum and visits Disneyland and Disney World with their fake main streets and castles and with robots imitating living beings. Eco’s pilgrimage to *hyperreality* shows that imitations do not only reproduce reality, but aim to improve on it. As a result, this false reality becomes more attractive to people than the real world, and they get captured in simulacra. (Sanes, 2000: *Online*) In *White Noise* by the American novelist Don DeLillo, the border between the real and the unreal is also blurred. Jack Gladney, the narrator, lives in a reality modified by the images he sees on television and believes that “for most people there are only two places in the world- where they live and their television set.” (1985: 66) The postmodern Latvian Russian-born writers Alexander

Garros and Aleksey Evdokimov also discuss this problem in the book *Headcrusher*. Its protagonist Vadim Apletaev tries to escape into the virtuality of the video game *Headcrusher* and rejects the reality as a dead simulacrum. (2005)

1.5 *Endism* - the characteristic trait of postmodernism

Stuart Sim, the author of numerous works on philosophy and culture and professor of critical theory at the University of Sunderland, develops the concept of *endism* (2000: 12) in relation to contemporary views on the end of reality, stressing its importance as a historical phenomenon. He applies this term to a variety of attitudes expressed by thinkers who announce the end of one or another aspect of reality – be it history, modernity, ideology, philosophy, the author, “man” or the world at large. (ibid.) Sim believes that at turn of the century people tend to look at life more pessimistically. A significant chronological landmark is behind, and the humanity has to deal with the new and the unknown in its path. The fear of the unknown, he argues, provides an especially fertile soil for endist speculations. (ibid.: 11)

Liotard speculates on the end of the world in his collection of essays *The Inhuman*, which pictures the world past the moment of the heat death of the sun. Since life conditions for the humans will be intolerable, humankind will face the problem of self-evacuation. Lyotard contends that, in spite of the development of technology and sciences, humans will not be able to carry on in their physical bodies. (1991) Therefore, for the sake of prolonging human life, they are likely to program advanced computers to colonise into them what is proper to human beings. Lyotard points at one more possible way of transition of the human intellect to machines. However, he is profoundly opposed to such way of preserving human life, since it will no longer be human, but inhuman, as artificial intelligence will fail to preserve human values.

1.6 Can Thought Go on Without a Body?

In *Can Thought go on without a Body?* which in Sim’s opinion is ‘the most provocative essay of *The Inhuman*’ (2001: 31), Lyotard communicates these ideas through a dialogue between *him* and *her*. *He* recognises that something should be done to prolong human earthly existence, since with its disappearance, thought will have gone leaving the situation “unthoughtful of.” (ibid.: 9) *He* claims the human body to be a kind of machine, a hardware for the software, which is human thought (ibid: 13) and introduces the theory that in order to preserve this software, a different hardware resistible to the conditions after the death of the

sun should be produced. However, *he* does not believe that technology can acquire the most important characteristics of human thought, such as the ability to distinguish the important from the unimportant, to notice marginal aspects of a situation, discarding and recombining data selectively. Thus, the separation of thought from the body seems to be impossible. (ibid: 16) *She* is also convinced that the humanity should recognise the complexity of the process of separation and prepare an equally advanced substitute for the body to prevent the humanity from extinction. (ibid.: 23)

The idea of an inhuman society, with the thought separated from the body appears to be especially tempting to contemporary feminists. The contemporary American feminist thinker Donna Haraway in her essay *A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century* celebrates the creation of a new, *post-gender* society of *cyborgs* or hybrids of machine and the human organism. Haraway is granting that the disembodied intelligence with no discrimination or abuse of any kind, so that ‘the one can no longer be the resource for appropriation or incorporation by the other.’ (1991: 151)

Moreover, she is convinced that the society of cyborgs will rework culture and nature and become free of many concepts that bind the human society, as “the cyborg does not dream of community on the model of the organic family, this time without the oedipal project. The cyborg would not recognize the Garden of Eden; it is not made of mud and cannot dream of returning to dust,” (ibid.: 151) she argues.

The thinker believes that with the separation of thought from the human body, the idea of God will also change. There will be neither “god”, nor “goddess,” but the One – the autonomous ungendered powerful unity combining the best characteristics of men and women. (ibid.: 177) Haraway concedes that the inhuman society will be not the end of the world. It will put an end to the old concept of man and become the beginning of a new, better being.

1.7 Deconstruction and Différance

In his book *Of Grammatology*, Derrida opposes the concept of *sameness* or *presence* to the metaphysics of *otherness* and *absence* in order to demonstrate that reality should be perceived not with the help of self-identity based on what is present, but on the contrary – in terms of constant deferral. The idea of *différance* is central to his mode of argumentation. (Sim 2000: 33) *Différance* is a neologism coined by the thinker from the French word *différence*, which combines both the meaning of *difference* and *deferral*. Since these nuances cannot be distinguished in speech, but just in writing, the term itself demonstrates that

meaning is unstable, as it is always altered and postponed. (ibid.) The American theologian and thinker John D. Caputo in the book *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: a Conversation with Jacques Derrida* exemplifies this deferral in the following way:

The 'meaning' and 'reference' of a word in a dictionary is set in terms of *other words* with which it is internally related. [...] The meaning of a word is defined differentially, relative to the meaning of other words. What you will never find in the dictionary is a word that detaches itself from these internal relationships and sends you sailing "outside" of language, wistfully called the "transcendental signified²." (1997: 100)

According to Derrida, the written word is marked by uncertainty and instability of meaning. He rejects the structuralist idea proposed by Saussure that the signifier and the signified can be distinguished simply as two faces of the same leaf and claims this approach to be *logocentric*. (Caputo, 1997: 101) Derrida holds that there is no one-to-one and self-evident relation between the word and the concept it serves to evoke. (Norris, 1998:24) He contends that this relation is much more complex and extends beyond the network of language, where not only a binary relationship of the *signifier* and the *signified*, but also *the signifier of the signifier* exists. To Derrida,

"signifier of the signifier" describes on the contrary the movement of language: in its origin, to be sure, but one can already suspect that an origin whose structure can be expressed as "signifier of the signifier" conceals and erases itself in its own production. There the signified always functions as a signifier. [...] This, strictly speaking, amounts to destroying the concept of "sign" and its entire logic. (2001: 337)

Derrida understands the concept of writing in a broad sense and claims that writing exceeds and comprehends language. He believes that it serves to extend phonography and conserve spoken language without the presence of the speaker. The thinker defines writing as anything that gives rise to any kind of *inscription* – be it literal or not. This pansemiotic view of writing makes him extend the notion of text and language to all systems of knowledge. Derrida mentions cinema, music, painting, sculpture and even politics and athletics as types of writing. (ibid.: 340)

With the help of writing, people try to conserve their ideas of soul, life, value, choice, etc. However, the written word appears to be technical and representational, and it does not have any constitutive meaning, Derrida argues. (ibid.: 342) He reinforces this idea by the argument that there is a rupture between the initial thought of the author and the words he uses to formulate it. Following Derrida's thought, once a concept is put into written words, it

² As in *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* (Blackburn, 2005: 1402) the term *transcendental signified* is defined as a 'derogatory term used in some post-structuralist writing to denote an external, objective, language-independent point that fixes reference or meaning. These points, it is alleged, cannot play any role in the interpretation of texts. Thus, for example, if an author's intentions, or a legislator's intentions, are invoked in order to interpret a text or a statute, we face the problem that their intentions could only be known, even to themselves, in the guise of more saying. There is no stepping outside of the domain of texts: every decoding is another encoding.'

is forever gone, for a reader will perceive it as something different from what it was meant to signify. To Derrida, the process of writing therefore is “that forgetting of the self, that exteriorization [...] that opens the history of the spirit. [...]: writing is at once mnemotechnique and the power of forgetting.” (ibid.: 355)

Derrida attacks the idea that meaning is structured into the so-called *idea of the book*, since it implies totality and generalization, which narrows the interpretation restricting it to one single variant. (ibid.: 345) He insists that a text should be *deconstructed* in order to denude its surface and explore the multitude of interpretations in various contexts. (ibid.: 341) This hermeneutical approach to literature and philosophy became popular with such contemporary philosophers as Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, and Julia Kristeva, who criticise structuralism for its one-sided perception of things. As Christopher Norris (1998: 3) states, deconstruction is “avowedly “post-structuralist” in its refusal to accept the idea of structure as in any sense given or objectively “there” in a text.”

Reading, according to Derrida, is also writing, since in this process a person decodes the signifiers of the text in one’s own way depending on one’s beliefs and life experience. By deconstructing a text, one reaches out beyond its limits and finds a way to its better understanding. Yet, however carefully might a reader deconstruct the text, one will never uncover the initial message as it was before it was put down. The thinker highlights the secondariness of human writing and reading, stating that they are *preceded* by a truth, and the signifier can never be equal to the signified. (2001: 342)

In the words of Derrida, the concept of *an absolute logos* (ibid.: 344) that bears no difference between the signifier and the signified is an important issue of discussion. The unity of the sensible and the intelligible, when the difference between being and entity, and the signified and signifier is *nothing*, (ibid.: 353) in Derrida’s perception, is associated with the word and the face of God. The thinker contrasts human “laborious, finite and artificial inscription” and God’s divine natural writing. (ibid.: 346) He agrees with Galileo, Descartes, Bonnet and other philosophers whom he cites that our earth and nature should be perceived as a book of God. (ibid.: 347)

When speaking about God and creation, Derrida employs the term *khôra* described in Plato’s *Timaeus* as “neither being nor nonbeing but an interval between in which the “forms” were originally held.” (Neuhaus, 2001: *Online*) For Derrida, *khôra* has both conditions of being and non-being inscribed in it. (1993: 15) Derrida views the concept of *khôra* in a religious context and claims that this gap of play of difference prevents anything but God, “be present in and of itself, referring only to itself.” (1981: 76) That is, God, according to Derrida, at the same time *is* and *is not*, as His existence is not bound by such binary oppositions.

As Gabriel Vahanian puts, for deconstruction, God and the kingdom of God, or death of God – is the same phenomenon existing in the “World without end. Word without end.” (ibid: 163,165) That is, the sphere of God is the sphere of words, and, in order to understand it better, one should deconstruct them. Yet, the process of deconstruction does not have a final point, as their full and complete meaning can never be grasped. Consequently, truth and God are always deferred, which makes one’s search for them a never ending process. (ibid: 163)

1.8 Thought Experiments

According to the Canadian science fiction and film critic Wendy Pearson, every postmodern writer and reader should deconstruct contemporary culture “in the process of unravelling and comprehending the thought experiment that underlies the creation of any truly science fictional world.” (2001: *Online*) *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* defines *thought experiment* as a device of imagination used to investigate the nature of things. (Brown, 2007: *Online*) The English term *thought experiment* came into the English language as a calque from the German word *Gedankenexperiment* invented by the Bohemian-Austrian physicist and thinker Ernst Mach at the end of the nineteenth century.

Thought experiments can be classified in many ways: scientific vs. philosophical, moral vs. factual, etc. *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* provides a classification of thought experiments according to their approach: either they are *constructive* (used positively to confirm a theory) or *destructive* (used negatively to refute it). (Brown: 2007, *Online*)

Destructive thought experiments can be applied in several ways: in order to find a contradiction in the existing theory or show that the questioned theory does not accord with other accepted dogmas. *Schrödinger's cat*, the experiment by the Austrian - Irish physicist Erwin Schrödinger proposed in 1935 exemplifies this approach. The scientist deduces that if a cat is trapped in a box with radioactive material, and a special mechanism is rigged to release radioactive particles when the animal moves, its life and death will depend on the mechanism. According to the *Copenhagen interpretation* of quantum mechanics, it will exist parallelly in two states: alive and dead, which is impossible. The experiment proves that some quantum concepts prove inconsistent at nonquantum scales. (Lorge, 2007: *Online*)

As to Brown, constructive thought experiments that support a theory can be also carried out in different ways, one of them is a heuristic search for examples when it evidently works. Brown exemplifies this way of thinking with the help of Newton’s experiment of faking the moon landing on the earth. The physician provided an illustration to the theory that the moon is kept on its orbit in the same way an object falls to the earth. For this purpose, he shot a

cannon ball curving away in its fall because of the peculiarities of the gravitational force of the planet. Eventually, the ball would return to the same place where it was fired and go around again, if not impeded. The moon went around the earth in the same way. One could arrive at this conclusion through calculation; however, Newton's thought experiment provides illusive understanding of the theory. (2007: *Online*)

Yet, not every thought experiment can be carried out. Einstein's thought experiment of riding astride a beam of light, which led to the theory of special relativity, can never be performed. Nevertheless, it led to a successful theory supported by other empirical means. According to *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, Einstein's special theory of relativity (1905) depends on the assumptions that "all internal frameworks are equivalent for the description of all physical phenomena" and that "the speed of light in empty space is constant for every observer, regardless of the motion of the observer or the light source." (1994: 326) From the second postulate, it follows that no matter how fast a person travels, one cannot ever overtake a sunbeam and see it beside oneself as a stationary object. What is more, as the observer's speed approaches the speed of light, light will not decrease the velocity. Consequently, as the relative speed of the systems approaches the speed of light, time, space and mass appear to be relative to the observer. Time goes slower, lengths are contracted and masses become heavier. As events measured regarded as simultaneous within one system will no longer be simultaneous within the other, time and space lose their separate identity and become parts of the single space-time dimension. The English thinker Simon Blackburn considers the theory of relativity "the most radical challenge to the "common-sense" view of space and time as fundamentally distinct from each other, with time as an absolute linear flow in which events are fixed in objective relationships." (1994: 372)

Thought experiments are important not only to the sciences and philosophy, but to contemporary literature as well. In the preface to his book *The Role of the Reader* the Italian philosopher, literary critic and novelist Umberto Eco encourages the reader to experiment when reading and says, "open and overfill (by further research) all the boxes that my essays have necessarily left inviolate." (1984: viii) Many postmodern writers, such as Scarlett Thomas, Thomas Pynchon, John Barth, Italo Calvino, Tom Robbins, Ursula Le Guin, William Gibson, Joanna Russ and others reconsider social values, which is also a kind of a thought experiment carried out in literature.

The End of MR. Y by Scarlett Thomas is a science fiction novel that meditates on various themes in contemporary philosophy and science. Their discussion in this chapter is helpful in the novel's interpretation in Chapter II. Postmodern incredulity toward generic statements and

the endist discourse explains the novel's characters' disappointment in life and religion. The discussion of simulacra and hyperreality helps one to assess the characters' perception of reality. The theories on thought experiments and on separation of human body and thought help one to understand the characters' experience in a parallel world. The ideas of deconstruction are useful for a deeper understanding of their religious search, and the discussion of the influence of technology on postmodern society helps to evaluate the role of the media in the novel.

CHAPTER II

ANALYSIS OF THE NOVEL

THE END OF MR. Y BY SCARLETT THOMAS

This chapter contains a detailed analysis of the novel's characters' real and imaginary worlds and displays their great diversity. The environment where the characters live influences their understanding of basic values and moulds their life philosophy. Each character has a specific understanding of reality, and the collision and mutual mediation of the characters' values leads to significant changes in their referential systems.

2.1 Synopsis

The novel tells about a lonely PhD student Ariel Manto, who decides to do postgraduate research on thought experiments under Saul Burlem's supervision. Ariel shares his interest in the nineteenth century writer Thomas E. Lumas and wants to write a chapter about him in her paper. However, as soon as Ariel arrives at the university, Saul disappears. On her way back from the university, Ariel occasionally enters a second-hand bookshop and finds there a very rare novel by Lumas, *The End of Mr. Y*, which was first published in 1893. There is a rumour that the book is cursed, as anyone who has ever read it has died not long afterwards. Nevertheless, Ariel decides to read it and eventually finds detailed instructions on how to enter the Troposphere³, an alternative human thought-made world where one can travel through time and space, surf other people's minds and get access to their memories.

Ariel realises that Troposphere attracts her more than the real world, which is full of pain and suffering, and becomes heavily addicted to her mind travels. She would prefer fiction to reality, which means just poverty and bad sex. Yet, she discovers that this new world is not safe either. Two former Central Intelligence Agency of the United States (CIA) agents attack her there in order to get the book with the instructions and destroy her memories. However, the mouse-god Apollo Smintheus and Adam, an ex-priest whom she seems to start falling in love with, defend and guide Ariel on her journeys through consciousness.

³ The word 'troposphere' in *The End of Mr. Y* is not used in its usual sense. In the novel, it is derived "by taking the word 'atmosphere' – a combination of the Greek words for 'vapour' and 'ball' – and replacing the unknown vapours with something more solid: the Greek word for character, *tropos*." (Thomas, 2006: 68-69) Thus, in *The End of Mr. Y*, the world of the Troposphere is made of language characters that the human thought consists of.

Ariel finds Saul Burllem who read the book and entered the Troposphere before her. She wants to share the experience with him and his girlfriend Lura, and hopes that he will save her from the ex-CIA men. As Saul, Lura and Ariel talk, they come to a conclusion that the book should be destroyed, as if it had never been written. In order to do so, Ariel has to travel back in time and persuade Lumas not to write it. Ariel recognises the risk of going that deep into the Troposphere. She already knows that if she stays there too long, her physical body may die, and she will never come back. In spite of this, she undertakes the mission. Adam helps her to complete it; they stay in the Troposphere together, enter the Garden of Eden and become the first men on the Earth.

In her thought experiments Ariel asks questions about language, being and time. She explores the very limits of fiction and reality, and finds out that they are not just blurred. Reality sometimes appears to be not more than fiction made of grand narratives that appear to be all lies; and the imaginary world suddenly becomes much more “real” and saturated with adventures than her physical existence. Ariel gives thought to the ideas of the real suggested by her favourite thinkers, such as Derrida and Baudrillard, and wonders to what extent reality and fiction can be viewed as separate.

2.2 Ariel Manto's Reality

2.2.1 Childhood and Adolescence

Based on Ariel's memories about her childhood and adolescence, one may conclude that these periods of her life were quite dramatic. From time to time, Ariel wakes up in the morning with a strong sense of disappointment because of bad dreams about her childhood. She thinks that nightmares and her early memories quite fit together. When looking back at her family, Ariel does not even mention the names of its members – so unpleasant and painful the memories seem to be.

When Ariel studies at school, the Mantos live in a poor area, where children cannot afford to buy toys, so they search other ways of having fun. The adults pay no attention to their children, and kids from about eight years old have sex for money with each other. (ibid.: 41) Ariel's perpetually drunken paranoid father makes her pick up aluminium benches in the park and write graffiti in the subway. He takes pictures of her doing that in order to send them to the newspaper as a proof that the local council should take measures against hooliganism. (ibid.) The adult Ariel does not communicate with her father any more, the only thing she knows about him is that he lives alone in a hostel.

Also, Ariel tries to avoid looking back and remembering her mother, who was keen on astrology, telepathy, aliens and signals from outer space, and who eventually ran away from the family in a company of suspicious people. Ariel does not miss her mother much, though, as she did not pay much attention to Ariel. (The girl's second-hand uniform had grubby collars and was not ironed in weeks. When her grammar school teachers suggested that her mother should look to it, Ariel could not help but wonder, "My mother? You could communicate with her, in theory, but only if you had a CB radio and could do a convincing impression of something from outer space." (ibid.: 42) In her old and untidy clothes, Ariel gained the reputation of a 'difficult' schoolchild and felt like an outcast.)

2.2.2 Masochism

Ariel feels lonely and abandoned both at school and at home; subconsciously the girl grows guilty for the world's ignorance of her, and she starts to punish herself for that:

I started plucking my eyebrows [...] but that I found it was so cathartic that I couldn't stop. [...] I realised that if I kept on plucking, I'd end with no eyebrows, but I hadn't given myself enough pain, not enough catharsis. So I took Dad's razor and stuck it in my leg. 'Not now, Ariel,' she [the girl's mother] said, settling down with her CB radio. 'The world does not revolve around you, you know.' (ibid.: 237)

The cutting does not help Ariel to gain love and attention she seeks, but the girl keeps on doing it until her gym teacher sees the scars and sends her to a therapist, whom Ariel tells that it is amazing to be able to get pleasure through pain. When the doctor refuses to help her and leaves, the girl finds an ashtray and tries smoking, which eventually becomes a substitute for cutting. (ibid.: 123)

One might suppose that Ariel starts to smoke not only for the sake of pleasure; the habit replaces the cutting in the sense of doing harm to her organism commensurable with that of the cutting. The frightening inscriptions on cigarette packs constantly remind one about the harm nicotine does to the human body. It is known that smoking is associated with more than fifty different diseases and disorders – many of them, such as lung cancer and heart disease – are fatal. When Ariel grows up, she does not quit smoking; nor does she free herself from the necessity of self-inflicted physical pain as a proof that her life is indeed meaningful. She sometimes thinks "I want to smoke a lot, [...] find the sharpest knife, and then I want to spend a few hours alone convincing myself that I'm real and I'm human and I mean something." (Thomas 2006: 405)

The adult Ariel is even more addicted to masochism. Not only does she get pleasure through physical pain, but from psychological suffering as well. One can exemplify this statement by considering her relationship with Patrick, a married professor of linguistics in his

fifties. He does not seem particularly attractive to Ariel. As they are tête-à-tête at a hotel, she thinks, “he doesn’t look bad in jeans, but I preferred Burlem’s look [...] But Burlem’s not here, and Patrick is.” (ibid.; 55) When thinking about the reasons for seeing him, she first thinks, ‘he’ll buy me a dinner.’ (ibid.: 49) Then, Ariel states that this affair does not make her depend on her partner, as they are just having “good sex; intense sex; the sort of sex you can only really get with an older man who isn’t worried about whether or not you will eventually get married.” (ibid.) One may see that there is no affection between them, and Ariel’s reasons do not sound convincing enough for going on with the relationship, which is all reduced to sex and is apparently way too far from the romance that a lonely woman of her age would long for.

What is more, when Patrick’s wife decides to leave him, he turns his anger against Ariel by hurting her wrists during the violent sex they have at the study bedrooms on the campus. Even though Ariel feels pain, something prevents her from stopping him. Later, Ariel thinks, “maybe I need darkness and violence like food, like cigarettes,” (ibid.: 103) which suggests that she seeks pain consciously.

2.2.3 Self-Deprecation

After the violent sex with Patrick, Ariel watches the grazed areas of her body, which hurt badly and decides not to see him any more. Nevertheless, the following day

instead of talking about how it wasn’t a good idea, I [Ariel] allow him [Patrick] to remove my jumper and pull down my jeans and knickers and then bend me over the glass table, holding my hair. My breasts press against the cold glass, and, while Patrick fucks me, I wonder what they look like from underneath. (ibid.: 125)

One may conclude from this excerpt that sex with Patrick does not give her any physical or emotional satisfaction. Probably, she keeps on having it simply in order to punish herself for being not good enough for the better, as Ariel has strong appearance anxiety. She takes to heart any remark on her looks, and remembers seemingly unimportant comments about it for a long time. She reports that, “people [...] say I look "dodgy," or "odd." One of my ex-housemates said he wouldn't like to be stuck on a desert island with me but didn't say why.” (ibid.: 5) This is why when Adam, a young (in his early thirties) handsome colleague who moves into her office from the Newton building takes an interest in her, Ariel cannot believe it. In spite of the fact that she is approximately his age, Ariel thinks, “it’s ridiculous – he’s way too young for me,” (ibid.: 131) which points at her low self-esteem.

From Ariel’s self-description, one might assume that she is quite good-looking, “my tits [...] have not (yet) sagged. I don’t have cellulite.” (ibid.: 169) However, she does not believe

that young men can fall for her. Ariel lacks self-confidence and thinks, “I’ve got millions in the offshore account called ‘Older Men’, but I think I’d get turned down for an account anywhere else.” (ibid.)

Along with the shame for her appearance, Ariel has the problem of social anxiety that she cannot overcome. The episode after the conference in Greenwich where she meets Burlem and they have a conversation in the hall with tables laid for the participants illustrates how self-punishing she sometimes is. Even though Ariel is hungry and dreaming about chocolate, she does not dare leave her corner and mingle, thinking, “I’m not very good at it and often offend people by accident.” (ibid.: 18) She also wonders why Burlem keeps talking to her and makes the following guess, “maybe he just hadn’t been offended by me yet.” (ibid.)

The awareness of how wrong it is to sleep with old men whom she is not actually interested in also lowers Ariel’s self-esteem, leading her into self-depreciation. Ariel feels *gross* (ibid.: 132) and guilty for her *sordid past* (ibid.: 131) and considers that she is not the right woman for smooth young men like Adam. Ariel thinks, “I fuck old men and become obsessed with curses and rare books. He needs someone more sensible than me to talk to.” (ibid.: 168) When he insists on sleeping together in a priory, she answers sarcastically that if he wants to be as *unnice* (ibid.: 262) and *dirty* (ibid. 163, 262) as she is, then she does not object.

In general, Ariel is disappointed in love. She seems to believe that this feeling exists not for everyone, at least not for dirty women like her who do not deserve it. Ariel cynically remarks that she would rather have “infrequent sex and companionship without the complications of love and commitment.” (ibid.: 49) Also, she affirms that when men say things like, «*I’m tired. I’m cold. Come here, I want to show you something.*’ It always ends in fucking.» (ibid.: 149) Thus, Ariel reduces her relations with men to sex, and she does not believe that sincere love and affection beyond it can take place in her life. She says, “when attractive guys offer me something, they always take it away pretty soon afterwards,” (ibid.: 169) leaving Ariel all alone.

2.2.4 Environment and Living Conditions

The environment Ariel lives in does not seem to be particularly safe. The novel begins with an earthquake that scares Ariel and provokes the collapse of the Newton Building, which is opposite to the university building where she works. (ibid.: 3–4) The only thing Ariel likes about being at the Department is the big office all of her own since her supervisor’s

mysterious disappearance. Yet, as the secretary tells her, she will have to provide temporary office accommodation for the staff members from the Newton Building. Ariel feels that she is going to stay without even an office. (ibid.: 142)

The university brings Ariel down. When Ariel leaves her office, she walks past the Health and Safety notice board with pictures of injured people on it. (ibid.: 4) In the description of the environment where Ariel works grey colours dominate: the steps of the Russell Building are grey, (ibid.) the sky is also grey, with a “thin TV-static drizzle” (ibid.) and “pale.” (ibid.: 84) The intensity of the grey colour changes together with the heroine’s mood. As the Newton Building collapses, the grey sky gets darker, and it starts to rain heavily. (ibid.: 6)

Ariel does not like the city where she lives and works: the closest bus stop is “depressing” (ibid.: 7), and the nearby “sad-looking charity shop” (ibid.: 8) is shut. It is winter, and when she walks home, the cold stings her eyes. (ibid.: 12) The concrete passage leading to Ariel’s front door is also “cold, as usual, and dark.” (ibid.: 13)

Ariel’s house has intolerable living conditions. There is no central heating, as “the landlord won’t put it.” (ibid.: 14) It is always freezing, (ibid.: 48) so she switches all the gas rings on in order to get some warmth. (ibid.: 75) The whole place is ugly, it has a “thick grey dust on the top of the frame” (ibid.: 166) and plenty of mice. Everything in the house is old and broken. There are “burn marks on the old kitchen surfaces” (ibid. 166) and “peeling green lino.” (ibid.)

Ariel has little work for small money, and she lives on the edge of poverty. After buying *The End of Mr. Y* Ariel stays with almost no money and has to walk to the university because she cannot afford petrol. (ibid.: 84) She thinks, “I still have to try to work out how to survive for the next three weeks on five pounds.” (ibid. 48)

Ariel’s food is terrible. As she jokes, it is either “gourmet” (very cheap) or “very gourmet,” (costs almost nothing) (ibid.: 33) Her usual “gourmet” dishes are lentils, as she cannot afford vegetables when she has little money. (ibid.: 50) Ariel thinks,

if I am happy to live on porridge, tinned soup and noodles, I can do so for roughly one week. Can five pounds therefore stretch to cover the remaining two weeks? I could buy a big bottle of soy sauce for about fifty pence at the market and, say, fourteen bags of slightly out-of-date noodles at twenty pence each. (ibid.: 50)

Alongside with poverty, loneliness is one of Ariel’s most important problems. Even though Ariel refuses to accept it and says, “I don’t care my mother ran away with a bunch of freaks,” (ibid.: 39) and “I don’t care my ex-housemates all got married and left me on my own.” (ibid.) Ariel understands that Patrick is only interested in her as a sexual object; her flat mate Wolf is unreliable and he can steal her most precious book. (ibid.: 206) Ariel feels the

attitude of quiet hostility against her at; the English and American department where she works think that she is too ambitious (ibid.: 5) and want to kick her out; (ibid.: 129) She feels the indifference of her colleagues and thinks, “my being here is of importance to nobody” (ibid.: 85)

2.3 Ariel’s Philosophical Investigations

2.3.1 Where Curiosity Leads

Ariel is a person who can go far in order to satisfy her curiosity. She is so keen on thought experiments, such as Schrödinger’s cat, relativity and quantum mechanics that she even wants to study theoretical physics in order to get a deeper understanding of the nature of things. (ibid.: 25) When Burlem asks her what she would like to research, Ariel answers that she is interested in everything and admits that the desire to know everything is her problem. (ibid.: 26)

She sees her search for truth as a thorny but encouraging mission that gives meaning to her life. Without it, there would be nothing worth living, for there is nothing special to look forward to. Even during the pleasant night walk with Adam, she thinks, “another night of that isn’t bad, although, [...] I wish I had something dangerous to do later on.” (ibid.: 146) Then, as Ariel explores the Troposphere and becomes aware of its numerous threats, she still does not lament having discovered it. She says that if she could return into the past, she would read the book again, regardless of the curse (ibid.: 372 –373) and, probably, even because of it.

Ariel applies Baudrillardian terms⁴ *simulacrum* and *hyperreality* to describe her life. She sometimes views it as a *simulacrum* made of copies of copies with no original. (ibid.: 255) Ariel thinks that she is “living in a black-and-white photocopy.” (ibid.: 289) Ariel describes her reality as *hyperreal* (ibid.: 257) and says, “what if we’ve created a world in which even that shadowy level of reality isn’t the final copy? One in which anything that was ever “real” is now gone [...], the signs – don’t refer to anything any more? What if our stupid pictures and signs don’t make reality at all?” (ibid.: 257 – 258) Later, Ariel discovers that the Troposphere is also a simulacrum, a system of signifiers with no signifieds where everything functions by means of language is not more reliable than the physical world. (ibid.: 336) She needs truth outside these two narrow realities to head for.

⁴ Baudrillard discusses *simulacra* and *hyperreality* in *Symbolic Exchange and Death. (Modernism to Postmodernism: an Anthology. (2001) (pp. 437-458))*

2.3.2 The Lion of God

Ariel's search for truth is manifested in her name which in translation from Hebrew means "Lion of God." (Baby Names World (u.d.): *Online*) It is generally regarded as masculine, with the feminine forms *Ariela* and *Arielle*. In the Bible Ariel appears as a name for the city of Jerusalem and represents Israel's lion-like strength. Ariel is also a minor character of the leader of slaves coming back from Babylon. Thus, the name Ariel is associated with fighting, rebellion and the search for God. Probably, Scarlett Thomas's choice of the masculine forms aims at highlighting Ariel's warrior's qualities and the "masculine" persistency in her attempts to understand the structure of the world by surfing the Troposphere. Ariel perceives all the hindrances as a natural challenge on her way to explore this new world, which offers the opportunity to see that "life isn't matrix of good and bad, happy and sad; joy and failure to achieve joy. Failure and sadness have to be examined." (Thomas, 2006: 360)

Like a lion, Ariel prefers to fight alone. When Adam offers his help, she spurns it and runs away from the priory lest the ex-CIA agents should harm him and other people who support her. Instead of risking with other people's safety, Ariel has the courage to leave the most dangerous tasks for herself. When she warns her flatmate Wolf about the curse of the book, he says that she should not worry too much about protecting him. (ibid.: 37) Also, when Saul Burem, Lura and Ariel come to an agreement that *The End of Mr. Y* should be destroyed as if it has been never written, (ibid.: 401, 402-403) Ariel decides to travel back to the nineteenth century and prevent Lumas from writing it, even though she is aware of the risk that she may never come back.

The second part of the translation of Ariel's name ("Lion of *God*") provides additional clues to her investigations. Ariel's quest for truth can be regarded in the context of religion. When Ariel has dinner with Heather and Adam, who move into her office until the reconstruction of Newton building, Ariel discusses her religious beliefs with her colleagues. She thinks that "the logic takes you to a situation where we're either living in a multiverse, or a universe created by God." (ibid.: 154)

When speaking about the essence of *multiverse* Ariel refers to the Russian Physicist George Gamov. When the scientist lost all his money in a casino, he said that some other version of him in a parallel universe won it. (ibid.: 33) Ariel relates the notion of *multiverse* to one of the latest developments in quantum physics – the so-called Copenhagen interpretation. It suggests that subatomic particles exist in a "smear-out state of all possible positions in the

atom” (ibid.: 157) until they are observed. Derrida’s notion of *khôra*⁵ that includes both absence and presence at the same time might help one to understand the nowhere-and-everywhere position of particles in quantum physics. The thinker claims that there must be something underlying everything. There are no polarities at this more profound level, and things exist in all probable states.⁶ Ariel explains that all their probable locations exist as a wavefunction and says that

unless an external observer showed up and observed the exact state of the particle, its wavefunction would not collapse. In other words, it would exist in a state of different probabilities at once. It would be both fast and slow, moving left and right, here and over there all at once. An observer external to the universe must be God. In other words, out of all probabilities God collapsed the original particle into one universe, in which we now live. (ibid.: 158-159)

When Heather asks whether Ariel would prefer to believe in God or in muliverse, Ariel answers that, even though she is not happy with either of them, she would prefer God, “whatever that actually means.” (ibid. 159) These words display Ariel’s doubts about the essence of God. She does not take the metadiscourse favouring the view that there is a “Daddy up there who’s going to approve of you because you got the puzzle right;” (ibid.: 403) she mocks the idea of a supreme being who “is going to clap and give you a special place in heaven because you understood some of Heidegger.” (ibid.)

Ariel questions the existence of the true God who is beyond all narratives, and who, as Derrida argues, cannot be expressed or explained by words.⁷ She often wonders whether people make God out of the energy gathered from prayers, or it is the reverse and we are His materialised thoughts. (ibid.: 53, 363) Ariel does not accept the common Christian view on the world’s creation. She refuses to accept that “there’s a beginning, a middle and an end. And the middle only is there because the beginning is; the end is only there because the middle is. And in the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God.” (ibid.: 404)

Ariel wants to know what ordinary people think about religion and God, so she asks the waitress at a café what her God is like. (ibid.: 361) Yet, Ariel realises that myths about God and creation are but the legitimization of other people’s knowledge and experience. She is eager to carry out her own thought experiment that could allow her explore God directly and verify the information.

⁵ Derrida discusses this term in detail in his book *Khôra*. (1993) Paris : Galilée.

⁶ *Khôra* (pp. 16-17)

⁷ Derrida expresses this view on God in *The End of the Book and the Beginning of Writing*. Modernism to Postmodernism: an Anthology. (2001) (pp. 346))

However, as Ariel travels around the Troposphere in order to obtain her own understanding of God, she comes to the sad conclusion that there is no God as a single entity separate from a human being and superior to her. Ariel finds out that all people are God, as they create everything by the power of thought as it happens in the Troposphere. (ibid.; 403) She thinks disappointedly, “God might be up there in the Troposphere, but the Troposphere is simply our thought. And there really is nothing outside of that.” (ibid.) Even though Ariel protests against the commonly accepted view of God as an all-mighty entity separate from people, she cannot take the uncertainty and instability of the world “made only of language and nothing else.” (ibid.: 404) Later, as Ariel keeps on exploring the Troposphere, she gets to know that there is a God who, as Adam says, “may not have created everything, but He’s good as a manager” (ibid.: 414) responsible for keeping the universe in order.

Thus, Ariel’s search for truth leads her to the conclusion that both the power to create and destroy things and events belongs to people. However, this does not put an end to her religious searches. Ariel wonders, “Who made me God?” (ibid.: 444) This question evokes the possibility that something exists outside the Troposphere and encourages her to keep on searching. Yet, if one considers the idea of *Deconstruction* that the Supreme Being in the end is unknowable⁸, one may deduce that Ariel’s searches are doomed to failure, since the supreme is perpetually deferred. One mystery has been solved: Ariel knows that human beings are God, and that she is God. (ibid.: 345) Still, Ariel does not know who gave her this power, which means that there might be a Superior Being higher than God and people, and every superior being may have something above it.

2.4 Adam

2.4.1 Chemistry or Metaphysics?

The young lapsed Catholic priest whom Ariel falls in love with is one of the main characters of the novel. She sees Adam for the first time when he and Heather move into her office until the Newton building where they work is reconstructed after the earthquake. As he comes in, Ariel has a strange sensation when looking at him. This young (in his early thirties), thin and *angular-looking* (ibid.) man with a pointed nose, long hair and prominent cheekbones produces a magnetic effect on Ariel, making her feel the necessity to come across the room and *merge* (ibid. :) with this man.

1) ⁸ See pp. 163 in Vahanian, G. (2007) *The Death of God: An Afterword*.

Ariel notices that “his brown-black eyes look millions of years old” (ibid.) and his voice is so mesmerising that she cannot help but listen to him speaking about planning MA seminars for the following term – a topic she would normally find uninteresting. Ariel thinks that if he had a shower and put on more attractive clothes, no woman in the world could turn him down. (ibid.: 169) Even when she meets Adam in the church and sees that he has a blue eye, she thinks that “he’s still the most attractive human being I’ve ever seen.” (ibid.: 259) Ariel thinks that there is something unusual about him, “like there’s so much more to him than flesh, so much more than just atoms.” (ibid.)

When Adam sees Ariel for the first time, he also feels something strange, as if he had a déjà vu experience, so he asks her whether they knew each other before. Ariel answers that she thinks the same thing. She says, “perhaps we did meet and forgot.” (ibid.: 162) If one considers the ending of the novel when it turns out that Adam and Ariel actually are the first people in the Garden of Eden, one may grasp the idea that the young people feel attracted by each other not only due to the chemistry of love; there is a story that connects them – a story as old as Adam’s million-year-old eyes.

2.4.2 Adam’s Reality

When Ariel enters Adam’s mind in the Troposphere (ibid.: 424), she finds out how painful his childhood memories are.

As a child, Adam often suffers humiliation from his father who is never proud of him, not even when Adam joins the church. For Adam there is nothing more impressive he can do to gain praise, as his father says that men should do nothing other than work and pray. (ibid.) Yet, “the excessive alcohol consumption somehow never factored his philosophy of life.” (ibid.) When Adam’s father is cruel with him, the boy’s mother never says a word to protect Adam.

The Christian religion plays an important role in the formation of Adam’s personality. It becomes his shelter from the threats he faces in life. Violence in the Bible is on a scale so large that it makes his father’s actions seem smaller. (ibid.) Adam deliberately inverts his life, so that the real “became unreal, and everything that was said in church was the truth and everything else was a lie.” (ibid.) Since Adam’s parents never praise him for his good behaviour and he needs approval, the boy starts to assess his and other people’s actions based on biblical criteria of good and bad. He tries to be good and opposes himself to his cousins who will “all go to hell.” (ibid.: 425) Thus, appealing to religious *metanarratives* of goodness and evil, the boy seeks to become an authority in his and in other people’s eyes.

The negative effect of Christian morality on Adam is that its strict norms of behaviour he cannot hold to lower Adam's self-esteem. In his adult life Adam tries to hold to Christian morality and help everyone. However, his religious activity as a priest does not distract him from the desire for sex. Adam looks at women and tries masturbation, which contradicts his understanding of what a virtuous priest should be like. Adam feels so desperate and culpable, that he, just like Ariel, turns to self-torturing. The priest resorts to self-flagellation in order to punish himself for sinful thoughts. Yet, it does not help him to overcome them, but only makes Adam feel even more aroused. (ibid.)

2.4.3 Religious Search

To free his mind from thoughts about sex and the feeling of guilt that go hand-in-hand with each other, Adam tries to eliminate all desire from his life. He discovers the *Tao Te Ching*⁹ and decides to follow The Way¹⁰ along with his priesthood. He needs to tranquilise his mind and prevent himself from desiring anything. So, he joins a silent order for a couple of years and tries to think about nothing. (ibid.) However, Adam's search for the void appears to be a trap. His wish to want nothing eventually turns into something that he desires most of all. This obsession almost drives him mad, and, as the priest realises its secret threat, he stops looking for emptiness.

Disillusioned by both the Christian religion and Taoism, Adam starts his search for truth from the scratch. He does not believe in grand narratives about the genesis of the world, such as that when God said light to be and there it suddenly was, and calls them *creation myths*. (ibid.: 151) Adam despises religion as a system of knowledge and considers such issues as the essence of God and the origin of the world to be totally unknowable. He believes that creation myths, religion and science are just an illusion and says, "science itself is just a collection of words." (ibid.: 152)

The priest does not take at face value generic statements of what is "true" imposed by society; he wants to find out the truth on his own. Adam believes that for this purpose people should not believe in what they are told, as blind faith results in pain of delusion. Therefore, "you can't base anything on faith. Nothing based on faith is true. [...]" (ibid.: 259) Such critical approach marked by incredulity to metanarratives echoes Lyotard's idea about

⁹ *Tao Te Ching* is the fundamental text from the Taoist inheritance of Chinese philosophy written by Lao Tzu. It is traditionally believed to have originated in the fourth century BC. (Tao Te Ching (The Book of Tao and Its Characteristics), 2007: *Online*)

¹⁰ According to the Online Encyclopaedia Britannica, (2008: *Online*) the word *tao* can be translated as *road* or *way*, and in Chinese philosophy it is used to designate *the correct way* or *Heaven's way* leading to Emptiness. The goal of the Taoist philosophy is to become one with Emptiness, by inwardly returning to the origin of all.

delegitimation of knowledge by means of *linguistic games*¹¹. Lyotard believes that in order to find the truth, one should ask whether what is commonly considered “truth” is what it is announces to be. This is what Adam does in his religious search.

Like Ariel, Adam inquires into the nature of reality. He believes it to be something relative and exemplifies this view by the following statement, “yesterday only exists because we made it up: it’s not real. You can’t prove to me that yesterday ever happened. Everything we tell ourselves to believe is simply a fiction, a story.” (ibid.: 153) Since reality is something vague and unstable, Adam suggests that one should look for truth outside it and by non-scientific means of research like drinking or meditation. (ibid.)

Aware of the relativity and instability of the real world that is merely an illusion or *simulacrum*, Adam believes that truth should be looked for outside it. (ibid.: 258) He states that “the truth exists beyond language, [and consequently, beyond the Troposphere that is made of language – O.I.] and what we call “reality”. It must do.” (ibid.) Adam concedes that “the illusion covers something up” (ibid.) and wants to know what the essence of this truth is.

Still, Adam says that he would like to believe in God, as “it does make sense: the idea of an external consciousness.” (ibid.: 159) Perhaps, Adam is in need of faith in a supreme being, which could help him to resolve an infinite number of questions about the true essence of the world that he cannot answer. Like Derrida who recognises that truth and God are always deferred, Adam knows that it is impossible to reach God; but he does not give up his search, as he believes that it will lead him to a deeper understanding of things.

2.4.4 Influence of Adam’s Views on Ariel

Adam’s name translated as *man* and *earth* highlights his exceptional role in Ariel’s life. In the Hebrew language this word is used as a generic word for *man*, which suggests that Adam becomes the synonym of man for Ariel, and she can be happy only with him. This name is also associated with *adama* (earth), (Baby Names World (u.d.): *Online*) from which God is believed to have made the first humans – Adam and Eve, who lived in the Garden of Eden before the original sin. Therefore, Adam’s name can be linked with the real and the earthly, which might mean that the novel’s character holds truly important values. When Ariel tells Adam that she is a self-destructive person, he answers that self-destruction is positive, as when a person destroys the self, one gets rid of the ego. (Thomas, 2006: 250) Thus, he encourages Ariel not to be afraid of self-destruction on her way to the truth, which, following

¹¹ Lyotard discusses *language games* as a means of *delegitimation of knowledge* in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge. (Modernism to Postmodernism: an Anthology. (2001) (pp. 481-505)*

his course of thought, exists both outside reality and language. (and, therefore, outside the Troposphere) (ibid.: 258)

Ariel's life was dull and senseless before Adam appeared in it. Suddenly, as they start kissing in her flat for the first time, Ariel is astonished by the difference it makes from her previous disappointing and meaningless love affairs. She thinks, "This feels different. There's something real about this that I'd forgotten." (ibid.: 169) Also, Ariel, who used to reject the possibility of marriage, quite unexpectedly starts to visualise "a life so normal that I [Ariel – O.I.] could be with someone like him, perhaps, sharing a house [...] and have such a mundane, but somehow amazing, thought: is he in the shop or is he at work?" (ibid.: 157)

Later, she understands that it is love that causes miraculous changes in life, fulfilling Ariel and Adam's lives with meaning. Their love becomes the most important thing worth living and dying for. As Adam understands how much Ariel means to him, he sacrifices his life to protect her from the ex-CIA agents. His body dies, but his mind goes on in the Troposphere. Adam's devotion to Ariel and the sincerity of feelings delight her and change her understanding of things. Adam's courage motivates Ariel to sacrifice herself and stay with him in the Troposphere and let her body die in the physical world.

This reminds one of the Christian tradition of martyrdom: Jesus died for the human race, and his followers died for His ideas, thus proving their love and loyalty to Him. One's readiness for self-sacrifice in the name of love leads to eternal life. After His death, Jesus Christ rose from the dead and appeared to His disciples; those who prefer death to betrayal are believed to go to heaven to rejoice with Him. Likewise, when Ariel and Adam die and stay in the Troposphere, they obtain *infinite choice*, (ibid.: 452) which also includes immortality.

2.5 Saul Burlem

2.5.1 Burlem's Reality

Professor Saul Burlem is Ariel's supervisor who disappears without a trace. Ariel suspects that the reason for his disappearance could be the curse of *The End of Mr. Y*. (ibid.: 104) She decides to carry out her own thought experiment and find Burlem, using the Troposphere. In his documents, she finds an unfinished autobiographical novel telling about Burlem's uneasy life. He

has an affair with a colleague who then gets pregnant by him. His wife finds out about the affair (but not about the child) and divorces him, but the colleague's husband believes the child to be his. When he dies, the child is told the truth about her parentage and begins a tentative relationship with her biological father. (ibid.: 273)

The translation of the masculine name *Saul* from Hebrew as “responded; prayed for” (Baby Names World (u.d.): *Online*) has a link with the novel’s action. Ariel tries to find Burlem throughout the novel, her desire to find him can be interpreted as a prayer, which, according to the novel, is a kind of thought that is capable of influencing matter. (Thomas, 2006: 194) Thus, by hoping to find her supervisor, Ariel makes her desire come true, and Burlem eventually “responds.”

When Ariel finally finds Burlem and enters his mind, she gets to know the details about his mysterious disappearance. As he discovered the recipe of the concoction one could use to get into the Troposphere and read minds, two Americans from a cancelled CIA project on human mind wanted him to give them the formula of the concoction. Since Burlem knew that the Troposphere could become a dangerous weapon in wrong hands, he did not want to give away the information to these suspicious Americans who, speaking in Lyotardian terms would use this technology only for the sake of its *performativity*¹² and take control of society with the help of the recipe. So, Burlem removed the page with instructions and hid it. (ibid.: 325) Then, he escaped from the city and came to live detached from the rest of the world with Lura, the elderly scientist from Germany who had given him *The End of Mr. Y.* (ibid.: 377)

2.5.2 The Brave Coward

Saul Burlem’s life and the influence of his experience on Ariel could be interpreted in relation to the biblical connotations of his name. According to the Bible, Saul was appointed the first king of Israel by the prophet Samuel. He was forcefully replaced by his enemy David who had defeated Goliath. The apostle Paul, who had betrayed Jesus but later repented for his sins, also had the name Saul before conversion (Baby Names World (u.d.): *Online*)

Burlem’s life could be viewed similar to the king’s and the apostle’s paths. On the one hand, one may suggest that the name Saul could imply the king’s descent from power to cowardice, (Burlem manages to escape from the Americans, yet, he has no freedom because of his fear of death. The man misses his daughter whom he cannot see, (Thomas, 2006: 273) and he has to live with a woman who was much older than he and whom he has “a sad kind of sex” (ibid.: 315) with.) On the other hand, there are parallels with the prophet’s way from cowardice and betrayal to penitence. When Ariel finds Saul, he regrets having had insufficient determination to destroy the book, and, in spite of the danger of being detected, he lets Ariel, who read the book because of his fault, stay at his house. (ibid.: 373- 375)

¹² Lyotard discusses *performativity* in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge. (Modernism to Postmodernism: an Anthology.* (2001) (pp. 497)

2.5.3 Philosophy

Saul Burlem is perpetually under stress, waiting for danger and thinking that “nothing awful has happened yet.” (ibid.: 309) He is tired of the constant control of things, and when he walks his dog, he just goes where it wants to go, because it is easier to follow somebody without thinking. Burlem feels pleased that he can give up control and enjoy thinking about nothing. (ibid.: 308)

His life is unhappy and full of complications, and there is no wonder that he seeks alienation from it and wants the void to come to him and “let it slowly envelop” (ibid.: 309) him when he is thinking about nothing. To let the void in, he should be nothing on himself, (ibid.: 308), Burlem thinks.

When Ariel, Lura and Burlem discuss the Troposphere, Ariel notes that “Burlem seems uncertain about me lumping Buddhism in with everything else.” (ibid.: 381) For him Zen and the Tao are superior to other philosophies. Like Adam, Saul seeks for emptiness and he tries to find it in everything. He believes that people should celebrate absence. (ibid.: 310) As he comes to the place in the street where the walls meet the pavement, he sees a lot of signs there and thinks that “It was better before the signs went up. An empty space, enclosed by walls: a house with no rooms and no roof [...] I like that.” (ibid.) He takes pleasure in contemplating this fenced empty space that keeps *nothingness*. (ibid.)

However, Burlem’s curiosity that pushed him to read *The End of Mr. Y* does not leave him in his desire for emptiness. Knowing that people make objects by means of thought, he wonders who then invented absence and made the spaces. (ibid. 310) Thus, he does not exclude the possibility of existence of a supreme being, which did it.

2.6 Lura

2.6.1 Background Information

Lura is a retired physician whose extravagant ideas make an impact on Ariel’s view of the world. In the novel, there is not much information about the reality she lives in. It is known that Burlem meets her for the first in Greenwich where he delivers a speech on his paper *Curse of Mr. Y*. (ibid.: 312) Lura owns a copy of *The End of Mr. Y*, which she has inherited from her father, one of the pioneer scientists in quantum physics. He left a note about the book shortly before he was sent to a concentration camp. Lura hates the book and gives it to Burlem. (ibid.: 314 – 315) Saul wants to possess *The End of Mr. Y* more than

anything he has ever desired, and when she gives it to him, he plans to go away with the book and never see Lura again. (ibid.: 315) However, when the ex-CIA agents start to follow him, she turns out to be the only person in the world whom he can trust with the book's secret.

2.6.2 Dangerous Beauty of the Siren's Song

When Ariel asks Lura to tell her about her book called *Poststructuralist¹³ Physics*, Lura explains her ideas about religion and the structure of the world as a self-run simulation, (ibid.: 392) which reminds one of Baudrillard's view that we live in a simulacrum of reality made of copies without an original¹⁴.

Lura encourages Ariel to carry out a thought experiment with a programme like a computer simulation game with characters and locations written in a binary code. She makes Ariel imagine that in the programme an error occurs and the characters become conscious and start thinking in their binary language. Their thoughts are stored on the hard drive that is expanding in the sense that the amount of information written on it increases. (ibid.: 390 – 392)

Lura compares the universe to the computer world and puts forward the idea that just like a programme made of zeroes and ones, the universe is made of quarks and electrons combined into different things by the power of human thought. (ibid.: 393–394) However, following Lura, there are different kinds of thought that she compares to different computer codes, (the machine code that gives instructions to the software code (ibid.: 397)) and not any thought can create things. (ibid.: 395) Lura is not sure what exactly the machine-code thinking that enables human beings to create is. (ibid.: 396) The code she talks about is not based on the Saussurean opposition of the signifier and the signified, as it already combines the two. Lura's code is something like Derrida's *absolute logos*¹⁵ that bears no difference between the word and its meaning. To, Derrida, only God has the power of creation by means of language. Lura, however, believes that people have this capacity. She says that fire was found because someone thought it out. The sun, according to Lura, revolved around the Earth as long as people believed it to, and it became the centre of the solar system only after someone re-programmed it in the machine code. (ibid.)

¹³ By calling her book *poststructuralist*, Lura stresses its opposition to the hierarchic view of the world as a referential system where the value of a sign is determined by its connection with other signs.

¹⁴ Baudrillard discusses *simulacra* in *Symbolic Exchange and Death*. (*Modernism to Postmodernism: an Anthology*. (2001) (pp. 437-458))

¹⁵ Derrida, *The End of the Book and the Beginning of Writing*. *Modernism to Postmodernism: an Anthology*. (2001) (pp.344))

Lura believes that, since “there’s nothing in there that isn’t written in code because [...] you just can’t have something on a computer that isn’t written in code. Anything outside the system by definition could not exist within it.” (ibid. 396) Therefore, according to Lura’s theory, there is no God outside the system, and the only creators are scientists who come up with revolutionary ideas and program the world. (ibid.: 407)

The origin of Lura’s name suggests a curious interpretation of her ideas. The name Lura or Lorelei was derived from Lurlei, the name of the rock *ambush cliff*, which comes from the Middle High German *luren* (to watch) and *lei* (a cliff, a rock). The name was altered to Lorelei by Clemens Brentano, a German poet. In Germanic legend, Lorelei was a beautiful siren who sat upon a rock in the Rhine River and lured sailors to shipwreck and death. (Baby Names World (u.d.): *Online*)

In the light of this information, it would be necessary to pay attention to Ariel’s reaction to the scientist’s creation theory. Ariel thinks, “I have the bizarre sensation that if I get any of these questions wrong, things will start melting around me: that the existence of everything depends on this.” (Thomas, 2006: 395) In other words, Lura’s ideas make Ariel feel scared that the world is run by the humans only, and it can disappear just because of some careless thought. Closer to the end of the novel, when Ariel asks who has enabled the humans to create it all, this question undermines Lura’s theory, releasing Ariel from the trap of her seemingly spotless and logically organised theory.

Burlem seems to be another victim of the siren. It was her who gives him the book that starts his troubles eventually converting him into her lover and refugee in her house. Burlem feels deeply disappointed by his life situation. If earlier he had desires, such as to be with his daughter or to obtain the book, disappointed by himself and the course of life, he now starts to head for the void with desperation instead. If one considers that Adam’s experience in the search for emptiness lead to a deeper disillusionment, one may see that Burlem is likely to get lost into the same labyrinth as Adam.

The analysis of the novel’s characters lives and philosophies helps one see how much their visions of things vary. In spite of all disappointments, Ariel and Adam persistently keep on searching truth beyond the reality where they live; Lura believes that there is nothing outside the simulacrum; and Burlem prefers to leave aside all speculations about the world’s structure. For him, the desire for the void is the only thing that makes sense in life.

CHAPTER III

THE WORLD OF THE TROPOSPHERE

This chapter describes the Troposphere, an alternative world made by the human thought. The discussion of its unusual structure and laws, its environment and inhabitants helps one to understand what the Troposphere is like and how different from the physical reality the characters live in it is.

3.1 Apollo Smintheus and the Wisdom of Mice

In one of her first times in the Troposphere, Ariel gets into a trapped mouse's mind. She feels sorry for it and later releases the animal. She finds a business card with an unfamiliar name *Apollo Smintheus* written on it. (ibid.: 189) When the Americans with their KIDS attack Ariel in the Troposphere, she has no choice but 'play the Apollo Smintheus card' for self-protection. (ibid.: 215)

Suddenly, Ariel realises that *a thing* (ibid.: 217) wearing a long red robe and black boots is standing next to her. She notices that it is an about eight feet tall mouse-hybrid standing on its hind legs covered in fur. It has a pointed mouse-face covered in fur with whiskers. There is a quiver with arrows slung across Apollo's shoulder. Ariel thinks that he is the most bizarre creature she has ever seen. (ibid.) When she meets him the next time, she thinks that Apollo looks very authoritative 'like a very distinguished professor.' (ibid.: 333)

The name of this god has a historical link with mice. The story of Apollo Smintheus dates about three thousand years back. The god's temple mentioned in Homer's *Iliad* is connected with the legends of the Trojan War between the Achaeans and the Trojans. The god sent mice to spoil the leather straps shields of the enemies of Anatolians. To express their gratitude to him, the people built him a temple on the island of Tenedos and established the cult of the Mouse God. (Webmaster ASSOS, 2000: *Online*) There were white mice living unmolested in it and helping people to predict the future. (The Sminthophile, 2007: *Online*)

Apollo Smintheus tells Ariel that he is an *upgraded* (Thomas, 2006: 222) incarnation of the god Apollo. He is the son of the god Zeus and Leto, daughter of a Titan in Greek mythology. Apollo was believed to have many functions. He was a prophet, musician, athlete and the god of agriculture, light and reason. (Webmaster ASSOS, 2000: *Online*)

The two central principles of Greek culture related to Apollo and Dionysus are often opposed in literary contexts. In *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche associates Apollo with the basis of all analytic distinctions. He believes that the structured and rational thought able to make distinctions is Apollonian, whereas his brother Dionysus represents drunkenness and madness and stands for chaotic emotions. (Drolet, 2004: 14)

In the novel, this character becomes Ariel's source of knowledge about the Troposphere. He writes a booklet called *A Guide to the Troposphere* (Thomas, 2006: 265) and explains her the essential rules of this new world. Ariel relates Apollo Smintheus to media and technology. As he fires arrows into the Americans, it reminds her of cinema and video games. (ibid.: 218) Later, when Apollo brings her to his house, it looks like "the mouse-hole from Tom and Jerry cartoons." (ibid.: 218) As Ariel gets lost in the Troposphere, he shows her on TV that she is in a coma in the real world. Also, he guides her to the Troposphere trains that bring her back to the physical world. Ariel's association of the god of knowledge with technology exemplifies the postmodern idea that representational technologies deeply influence the postmodern way of thinking.

3.2 The Troposphere's Laws and Essence

Apollo Smintheus clarifies to Ariel the basic principles the Troposphere works on. He tells her that this is a world made by humans by the power of thought. (ibid.: 223) The god says, "your whole world is a paradox. Officially it has no beginning and no end. Nothing about it makes any sense, but it's what you seem to have created." (ibid.: 343) He tells her that gods are made from people's prayers, too, and they survive if people appeal to them. Apollo Smintheus has a group of six boys from Illinois (ibid.: 225) who celebrate his cult and "keep him going." (ibid.: 224) If people stop praying, gods "go to sleep" and "can't do anything impressive." (ibid.) It is not death, he says, because "you can't kill things in here" (ibid.: 220) and if you're in the Troposphere, "you're already dead." (ibid.: 334)

Apollo Smintheus explains the peculiarities of the Troposphere in more detail in his *Guide to the Troposphere* (ibid.: 265) From this booklet, Ariel gets to know that the Troposphere is not particularly a place. One could rather think of it as "a world of metaphor", (ibid.: 267) or a text. (ibid.) It is made by thinking and is expanding all the time. (ibid.: 265) The thought is not separate, all thoughts are connected, and all minds are the one.

The Mouse God explains to Ariel that there are more than three directions and more than one "time." (ibid.265) One can use *Pedesis*, the leaping from mind to mind in the Troposphere (ibid.: 144) via geographical proximity in the physical world; *Tropography* (the

possibility to access people and things in the real world through their representations in the Troposphere. (Ariel gets into Thomas E. Lumas's mind after she finds the manuscript of *The End of Mr. Y* on the table in an imaginary coffee shop.); and *Ancestry* – the possibility to access other people's minds through their blood relatives. (ibid.: 266)

Time and space in the Troposphere work differently. Time in the Troposphere goes 1.6 times faster than in the physical world. (ibid. 267) Therefore, one cannot stay in the Troposphere too long. Sometimes it is better to travel in Troposphere, but sometimes in the real world in order to save time. In the Troposphere, distance is time (thus, the longer way you make, the more astronomic time it will take), matter is thought, (one is able to create things by thinking them) and distance – being. (ibid.)

3.3 The KIDS – Creatures from the Other Side

Apollo Smintheus explains to Ariel that the Troposphere is different for every human being. (ibid.: 222, 267) This information helps Ariel to understand why the Americans missed the steel bar she threw at them until it hit the agents. (ibid.: 225) The ex-CIA agents use the KIDS, who, unlike them, are not projections from the physical world and can see what Ariel sees. Apollo says that they are “attached [...] to those men.” (ibid.: 223) The KIDS, therefore, cannot enter her mind on their own, as they only go together with the agents. (ibid.)

Project Starlight increased the capacity of CIA agents to surf the Troposphere by the new technology – the KIDS. (the acronym standing for “Karmic Interface Delineation System” (ibid.: 282)) It turned out that when autistic children entered the *Mind-Agents'* (ibid.: 281) minds, and the agents went to the Troposphere, the KIDS were able to change reality and manipulate people's thoughts. Their physical bodies were destroyed, but the minds kept on living in the minds of agents. (ibid.: 283)

The Central Intelligence Agency is a real independent US Government agency responsible for national security intelligence that deals with Iraqi issues. The use of the KIDS by the CIA displays Scarlett Thomas's appeal to Lyotard's idea that technocracy in contemporary world is no longer in need of ethics; it is more interested in forceful legitimation of knowledge. The negative image of the CIA in the novel was probably provoked by the aggressive international politics involving the use of advanced weapon technologies the United States is often accused of.

3.4 Landscape

Following Apollo Smintheus, it depends on one's imagination how the Troposphere will look. (ibid.: 222) When Ariel and Adam compare their vision of it, the priest says that his Troposphere looks like a city with more parks but it had a graffiti problem that Ariel's does not have. (ibid.: 427)

Ariel discovers that the Troposphere differs not only from person to person, but it changes every time she gets there. When Ariel enters the Troposphere for the first time, it is an empty street in a grubby tower block with a bus stop and many coffee shops. There are fire escapes everywhere and with plenty of broken neon signs that she cannot read. (ibid.: 179 – 180) However, after she gets into the mind of a mouse, a new sign with the inscription *Mouse I* appears. (ibid.: 196) When Ariel comes back to the Troposphere next time, there is no street but “a cluttered town square with grey cobbles” (ibid.: 263) with a statue of Apollo Smintheus that looks like a copy of Rodin's *Le Penseur*. There are many huge mansions and castles around the square, and everything is “like a bunch of landscape photographs overlapping on a crowded wall.” (ibid.: 264) Then, as Ariel gets into the Troposphere after visiting Burlem's mind, the area looks like a dusty petrol station. (ibid.: 331) Considering Ariel's statement that the Troposphere is made by the human mind, one can deduce that the way it looks changes together with Ariel's thoughts, which replace one another.

3.5 Weather and Time of Day

It is not only the landscape but also the weather and the time of day that change in the Troposphere. Usually, when Ariel gets there, it is night time with “a black, starless sky.” (ibid.: 210) Sometimes there is a moon (ibid.: 263, 419) that looks “like a big digital button.” (ibid.: 429) She finds night romantic, (ibid.: 427) this is why in her Troposphere, it is almost always night time.

Weather conditions alter from time to time. Ariel does not describe them during her first journey to the Troposphere. Then, as the Americans attack her during one of her next visits, Ariel wonders, “back out in the Troposphere it started to rain. That's odd. There's never been weather in here before.” (ibid.: 225) Later, when Ariel makes a long and exhausting Troposphere journey to find Burlem, she sees that there was no sun in the sky, and there is a lightening in the sky. (ibid.: 331) As Apollo tells her that her body is in a coma in the physical world and she goes to the underground station to get back to life, she notices that the sky is still dark and there is another lightening when she runs down the steps. (ibid.: 343) When

Adam meets Ariel in the Troposphere, he explains to her that when she gets weather in the Troposphere, it is a sign that her life is in danger. As Ariel decides to stay in the Troposphere with Adam, the weather gets worse and worse, which metaphorically reflects Ariel's death,

'The night sky looks smeared, as if it were a windscreen with all the night and all the rain happening behind it. [...] The rain is bouncing off the pavement like tears on a table. [...] There's a crack of thunder in the sky, I think this may be the end of me.[...] The thunder stamps all over the made-up sky [...] I can feel the rain on my face and dipping in my hair. [...] I black out. But when I wake up, the sun is shining.' (ibid.: 448 – 449)

3.6 Sensations

The first time Ariel gets into the Troposphere, she notices that the sensations she experiences there are different what she feels in the physical world. At first, Ariel is astonished at how strange it feels, "I don't feel particularly alive. I don't feel hot or cold, alive or dead, drunk or sober... I don't feel anything. It's actually pleasant, not feeling anything, although of course it doesn't directly feel 'pleasant'. It doesn't feel like anything. [...] It's amazing." (ibid.: 180) Ariel wonders how one can feel and not feel anything in the Troposphere at the same time, "I walk onwards afraid but not actually feeling fear, like I'm watching myself in a film." (ibid.: 189)

She thinks that the sensations she has in the Troposphere are not real, as "there's no quickened heartbeat; no sweat. I'm watching myself in a film again. I'm playing myself in a video game." (ibid.: 196) When Ariel and Apollo Smintheus drink coffee, it feels unusual: the drink is hot and delicious, but the warmth doesn't travel into Ariel's hands. (ibid.: 221) Also, when Adam and Ariel sit on a wooden Troposphere bench, she feels that it "isn't cold. Like everything else in here, it doesn't seem to have a temperature. Tiny drops of rain still fall from the sky, but they don't feel wet." (ibid.: 419)

Still, there are things that arouse strong sensations and emotions in this mind-made world. When the Americans attack Ariel here, she feels a sharp pain in the head, and she thinks that it is the worst headache she has ever had. (ibid.: 216) Ariel wonders, "I was so wrong about the Troposphere. I thought you couldn't feel anything here, but the pain here is more intense than in the real world." (ibid.) When she drinks Troposphere vodka with Adam, it makes her feel relaxed, (ibid.: 443) and when it turns out that Adam is bound to stay in there as he is already dead, Ariel notices that "sadness feels here like a warm flannel. But it's still sadness; the warm flannel is over my face, and I can't breathe properly." (ibid.: 419)

Sensual emotions in the Troposphere become much more intense than in the real world. When Adam starts kissing Ariel, she feels that,

This kiss is a million kisses. This kiss is every kiss. Our lips press together with the force of ten thousand hurricanes, and when his tongue meets mine it feels like the softest electricity: a million-volt shock happening in slow motion, one electron at a time, where each electron is the size of the sun. [...] And when he enters me, it's as if I'm being turned inside out, and the whole world is penetrating me; and that means I contain everything.' (ibid.: 420 – 421)

As one may see, the world of the Troposphere is very different from the physical world. The laws of the Troposphere make one experience different physical sensations and witness unusual weather, landscape and time paradoxes. Even though one cannot die in this world, it is still full of dangerous but fascinating adventures that make the novel's characters like it so much that they finally stay in the Troposphere instead of going back to the physical world.

CHAPTER IV

WHERE FICTION MEETS REALITY

This chapter discusses a number of alternative interpretations of the novel according to the division of the fantastic genre into the uncanny, the marvellous and the proper and discusses to what extent the events of the novel may be perceived as “real” or “imaginary”.

4.1 Real or Imaginary?

The question what is *real* and what – *imaginary* is typical of postmodernity. In his essay *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, Baudrillard argues that nowadays, with no difference between the real and the reproduced, it is difficult to trace the place where simulation starts and reality ends.¹⁶ The border between fiction and reality is an important issue of discussion in postmodern literature, where, as the American literary theorist Brian McHale claims, “fictional possible worlds and the real world inevitably overlap to some extent – often to quite a large extent.” (1996: 36)

Ariel often asks whether everything happening to her is real or not. When she meets Apollo Smintheus in the Troposphere, she inquires, “You are here. I’m not just seeing things?” (ibid.: 332) and the god answers, ‘Of course you’re just seeing things. But that doesn’t mean I’m not here.’” (ibid.)

The border between fiction and reality for her gets blurred. Ariel identifies herself with the fictional Mr. Y and when she reaches the place where he eventually gets the recipe of the concoction enabling people to get into the Troposphere and read minds, she realises that the border between the real and the imaginary has become blurred. Ariel wonders, “Am I Mr. Y?” (ibid.: 51) and feels as if she really were him. She is scared for Mr. Y/her, she wonders, ‘How does his/my/our life change as a result of drinking this potion?’” (ibid.) Ariel gets lost between the real and the imaginary. She goes to church and prays, “I pray for meaning. I pray for the limits of reality to become clear. For a world – and a type of being – that makes sense, I pray for a life after death that is not like this life. I pray for the end of mystery.” (ibid.: 236)

Ariel wants to know what the moment of transition from non-fiction to fiction is, and she suggests that it might be the moment when “the thought experiment becomes a physical

¹⁶ See *Symbolic Exchange and Death. (Modernism to Postmodernism: an Anthology. (2001) (pp. 447))*

experiment.” (ibid: 172) Thus, in spite of the common view that thought experiments are used in purely theoretical investigations and they need to be proved by empirical means, Ariel ascribes special importance to them and perceives her Troposphere surfing as an example of thought experiments becoming real.

The merging of fiction and reality in Ariel’s life could be explained according to one’s reading of the novel and the interpretation of its genre. The contemporary Franco-Bulgarian thinker Tzvetan Todorov distinguishes three types of the fantastic genre – the uncanny, the marvellous and the proper. The former focuses on events that are just an illusion with laws of reality intact and providing a rational explanation for the supernatural. (drugs, dreams, sensory illusions, madness, etc.) The latter views supernatural events as real. They actually take place in spite of the accepted rules of reality, and therefore alter it. The thinker suggests that if a reader hesitates between the two options of interpretation, the text should be perceived as the fantastic proper. (Hottell, 1994: *Online*) The discussion of the possible readings of *The End of Mr. Y* casts light on the events of the novel and explains the motivation of Ariel’s behaviour.

4.2 The Fantastic Uncanny

4.2.1 Ariel’s Insanity and Paranoia

Ariel’s frequent questioning of her sanity together with her paranoid ideas give ground to the fantastic uncanny interpretation of the novel. Her paranoid fear that the department wants to dismiss her and lest the CIA agents should harm her dwells upon Ariel’s preoccupation with the absence of choice in her life. As Ariel travels back to reality on the emotion of fear she sees the following,

I see Adam dying a million different ways. Then I’m killing Adam [...] and I’m killing everyone else, too. I’m in prison, and I’ll never escape. I have no choice. I have no choice. I have no choice. (Thomas, 2006: 352)

Ariel’s fears also take the form of overexaggerated self-accusation. She thinks that all horrors of the world, e.g., that someone is “fisted by his own father”, (ibid.; 353) “abducted by an alien and strapped to a table in a white lab, of nuclear war, [...] of hundreds of children drowning,” (ibid.) etc. are all her fault. (ibid.)

Ariel seeks help from a therapist, (ibid.: 122) which also suggests that she has serious psychological problems she cannot overcome on her own. Ariel suspects that the strange world of the Troposphere may be just a product of her imagination. She remarks, “I really must be going mad. But in here, in the Troposphere, going mad doesn’t seem something that

should worry me.” (ibid.: 196) This remark hints that since Ariel has hallucinations, she does not have to worry about going mad, as she already seems to be. When Ariel cannot find an exit from the Troposphere, she makes the following exclamation, “I can’t believe I’ve been this stupid. I can’t believe I’m lost in my own mind” (ibid.: 333) which can be interpreted not only literally, but also figuratively – as indicative of her insanity.

Ariel’s unmotivated actions sometimes scare her. When Ariel is in the priory hiding from the Americans, she decides to have a huge meal before letting her mind surf the Troposphere. She is stunned by the thought, “I’m going to travel to another world on Marmite sandwiches, bananas and lemonade,” (ibid.: 272) which seems to be totally lacking sense, especially considering the possibility that the Troposphere only exists in her imagination.

Her desire to eliminate painful moments of life might also display her insanity. Thus, when she travels back in time thus ‘deleting’ an unpleasant episode of having sex for money in a toilet with Patrick, she wonders whether it was déjà vu or it really happened. The erasure of this event seems to be her psychological defence mechanism of denial¹⁷ that reduces her anxiety, making Ariel think, “I’m not a whore after all.” (ibid.: 356)

Ariel’s frequent emphases on her exceptionality and unusual giftedness might also reveal a deviation in her logic of judgment. Ariel notices that in the Troposphere, she has the ability to do what other people cannot. She enters people’s minds and even alters them, (ibid.: 289, 376) which is something that only such Troposphere inhabitants as the KIDS can do. (ibid.: 289) When Ariel tells her supervisor that she entered one of the ex-CIA agents’ mind, Burlen is deeply impressed. (ibid.: 373) Also, when Ariel asks who the creator of the Troposphere is, she comes to the conclusion, “*I did*. I invented everything here” (ibid.: 345) and comes to think that she is God. (ibid.: 444)

4.2.2 Ariel’s Mind Reading – Only Inside Her Mind?

Also, there is a possibility that Ariel’s thought reading is something that happens only in her imagination. This is why some characters express practically identical viewpoints and have similar experiences. For instance, when Ariel enters Adam’s mind, she finds out that his father was a heavy drinker and his mother did not care about him – just like Ariel’s parents.

¹⁷ According to the American psychologist Kendra Van Wagner, (2005: Online) ‘denial is probably one of the best known defense mechanisms, used often to describe those who seem unable to face reality or admit and obvious truth (i.e. "He's in denial.>"). Denial is an outright refusal to admit or recognize that something has occurred or is currently occurring.’ The mechanism of denial is incorporated in the comprehensive list of defense mechanisms developed by Anna Freud in her book *Ego and the Mechanisms of Defense* (1936) (ibid.)

Then, if one considers Ariel and Lura's ideas about the world's structure, one may see how similar they are. Ariel says, "everything in the whole world is made up of exactly the same quarks and electrons [...] therefore, the urinal [Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* – O.I] could, in a very real way, be the same as, say, the *Mona Lisa*." (ibid.: 253 – 254) Lura's thought that "quarks and electrons can be combined to form anything you like in the physical world: a seed, a tree, carbon. And then rot and get made again, out of the same stuff." (ibid.: 393) expresses an identical point of view, which suggests that they are expressed by the same person. Likewise, both Adam and Saul Burlem share an interest in Zen Buddhism and Taoism, and both feel a necessity for the void.

Besides, when Ariel gets into Burlem's daughter Molly's and her classmates' heads, it turns out that the girls have problems similar to Ariel's. Like her, they feel anxiety about their looks and follow diets (ibid.: 301) and feel shame for the smell of their bodies. (ibid.: 300) They also have relations with wrong men, (ibid.: 307) just like Ariel does. Also, when Ariel enters Molly's mind, it turns out that the girl feels that she is cursed (ibid.: 306), and Ariel thinks the same thing about herself. (ibid.: 113)

4.2.3 Mind, Media and Technology

Ariel's vision of the Troposphere can be also seen as a hallucination produced as the result of a destructive effect of media and technology on her mind. She seems to watch television a lot, (ibid.: 122, 194) which, like in Don DeLillo's *White Noise*¹⁸, becomes an important part of her daily life and strongly affects her manner of thinking. There are many television and video game-related images in Ariel's descriptions of the environment: both in the physical world and in the Troposphere. She says that the sky in the real world has a "thin TV-static drizzle." (ibid.: 4) When Ariel spends a lot of time in the Troposphere, Apollo Smintheus shows her on TV that her body is in a coma (ibid.: 335) Also, when Ariel remembers her drug-taking experience, (which can also be an explanation for the strange events happening in the story) she sees herself inside the TV-set, "at one point the TV towered over me, as if I could walk inside the screen." (ibid.: 173) When she watches a TV-show, one of its participants says "What if the success of the prayer actually reveals something about the power of thought. Can thought actually influence matter?" (ibid.: 194) Ariel starts to consider this problem, and her reflections on the issue eventually take a shape of visionary hallucinations.

¹⁸ The novel's protagonist Jack Gladney lives in a reality modelled by the images he sees on television. (DeLillo, 1985)

Ariel recognises that many things that happen to her “must be the effect of TV and cinema and – not that I’ve played them often – video games on my weak mind.” (ibid.: 218) She sees that Apollo Smintheus’s mouse-hole looks like the hole in Tom and Jerry cartoons (ibid.: 219) and says, “I’m playing myself in a video game.” (ibid.: 196) Ariel uses *the console*, (“something like a city plan on a computer screen” (ibid.: 181)) which helps her to navigate the Troposphere. It points to the influence of video games on Ariel, suggesting that, like the protagonist of Alexander Garros and Aleksey Evdokimov’s *Headcrusher*, Ariel seeks to escape into the virtuality of video games favouring them over the cruel reality of the physical world.

4.2.4 A Way Out Through Books

Disappointed in her real life, Ariel looks for an escape from it into the world of fiction. Ariel values books over her real life. When Ariel reads about the concoction from *The End of Mr. Y* that enables people to get into the text-made space of the Troposphere, she sees it as a chance to get out of the real worlds. Ariel believes that fiction is available to any person and sees fiction as a better world where life “isn’t matrix of good and bad, happy and sad; joy and failure to achieve joy.” (ibid.: 360) When considering the deficiencies of the physical reality as compared to fiction, Ariel says,

Real life is letting men fuck you over their desks (and enjoying it, which is somehow the worst thing. Real life is regularly running out of money, and then food. Real life is having no proper heating. Real life is physical. Give me books instead: give me the invisibility of the contents of books, the thoughts, the ideas, the images. Let me become part of a book; I’d give anything for that. Being cursed by *The End of Mr. Y* must mean becoming part of the book; an intertextual being: a book-cyborg, or; [...] a biblorg. (ibid.: 134)

In order to escape into the imaginary world from her problems, Ariel would opt to become a different creature – something like a cyborg the feminist thinker Donna Haraway talks about. In her essay *The Cyborg Manifesto*, Haraway points out that a cyborg is imaginary; it is but “a creature of fiction,” (1991: 149) and it is fiction that Ariel needs. She feels the necessity to merge with books, as they are immaculate and free of the dirt Ariel comes across in real life. (ibid.: 134)

She wants the curse of *The End of Mr. Y* to work on her and change the world where she already feels cursed and lonely. Ariel says, “the biggest curse in my life is me” (ibid.: 173) and she is determined to find out what the book’s curse is like. Moreover, Ariel feels that since there is a missing page in the novel and she decides to find it, she thus becomes involved in the story. When thinking about the danger of death from the curse *The End of Mr. Y* is associated with, Ariel wonders, “If I thought this was real, some survival instinct would

make me stop doing it, surely? But if it's not real, why am I bothering?" (ibid.: 135) Her greatest fear is that the recipe how to get into the Troposphere will not take her away from the real world and thinks, "when the concoction fails to have any effect, then what? Then it's back to real life and real work without even an office to myself any more." (ibid.: 142)

4.3 The Fantastic Marvellous

On the one hand, one may take the events described in the book as a "stirring up" of Ariel's imagination. On the other hand, however, they can be perceived as real, as the book's open ending does not warrant any determinate interpretation. Ariel sometimes finds explanation to the supernatural things happening to her and thinks that they really take place. For instance, when Ariel comes to her office and Heather tells her that the Americans who came for her were also looking for her supervisor. (ibid.: 230) It makes Ariel conclude, "And it looks as if I'm not mad. Not only is this happening to me: it happened to Burlem as well." (ibid.: 231) Also, after erasing the incident with having sex with Patrick in a toilet, Ariel thinks, "for the first time since I first went into the T-re, I don't feel at all mad. I feel absolutely fine about what just happened." (ibid.: 356) In order to make sure that she really prevented this event from happening, Ariel checks her purse to see if she still has the money he paid her, and it turns out that she does not, (ibid.) which means that she has managed to alter reality in spite of the natural laws not allowing it.

Also, when she comes to visit Burlem and share the experience, in the course of their conversation she understands, "as I speak, I finally realise that I didn't imagine any of this." (ibid.: 375) At first, when strange things start to happen, it is difficult for Ariel to believe that they are real, so there is no wonder she fears lest it should be her insanity.

4.4 The Fantastic Proper

When speaking about *The End of Mr. Y*, Scarlett Thomas refrains from giving a single interpretation of its genre, which suggests several variants of the novel's reading. One may perceive the events described in *The End of Mr. Y* as either really taking place or imagined by Ariel. Yet, there is a clue to the novel's interpretation that Thomas agrees to give. She says,

'You will see from the final scenes in Mr. Y that I have set myself the modest task of combining tragedy and comedy in one improbable, mind-blowing ending. Seriously, though, I read Mr. Y as a tragedy through and through. That isn't a happy ending, not if you really think about it.' (Mondor, 2007: *Online*)

The writer's view of the novel as a tragedy can be understood in several ways. The dramatism of *The End of Mr. Y* can be seen in Ariel's insanity; in the heroes' inability to get out of the simulacra; or in the perpetual deferral of God that makes the protagonists' search for truth bound to fail. Thomas gives her readers plenty of room for the novel's interpretation, allowing them decode it in the best traditions of deconstruction,¹⁹ which favours plurality of readings.

The different readings of *The End of Mr. Y* let the reader see the relativity of the border between the real and the imaginary – according to the division of the fantastic genre into the uncanny, the marvellous and the proper. Their discussion might prevent the reader from taking a one-sided approach to its interpretation and see the variety of readings the book offers.

¹⁹ Derrida discusses deconstruction and plurality of text interpretations in *The End of the Book and the Beginning of Writing*. *Modernism to Postmodernism: an Anthology*. (2001)

CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this research was to discuss the real and the imaginary worlds of Scarlett Thomas's novel *The End of Mr. Y*, and the hypothesis was that an exploration into the motivational aspects of an individual's perception of the real and the imaginary in the novel showed that the border between fiction and reality was not fixed and easily definable. In order to prove the hypothesis, both theoretical and practical methods were used. The former pursued the goals to discuss the relevant philosophical and scientific theories of postmodernity and provide their overview; the latter – to investigate the characters' perception of the real and the imaginary; to link their ideas with postmodern philosophy; and to discuss the possibility of different interpretations of the novel.

Contemporary philosophy is not satisfied with the current position of an individual, who has a limited capacity to resist being programmed by society. It sees the altering of reality by means of industrial reproduction and technology as an alarming aspect of technological progress. In order to prevent the world from getting under the totalitarian control of a powerful minority, as well as to be able to differentiate the true from the imaginary and unreal, postmodern thinkers encourage us to carry out thought experiments and inquire into the nature of things – be it by means of Lyotardian *linguistic games* or Derridean *deconstruction* of reality.

The main characters of Scarlett Thomas's novel *The End of Mr. Y* refuse to accept universal truths and put them under question. They search for truth and God, inquire into the limits of the real and the imaginary. The characters ask whether their reality depends on how much they want something to be real. They discover that the great creative power of the human thought can change things around them. However, one should not fully rely on what the characters believe to be real, as their view of reality is always subjective. "Reality" for them is what they think is real, or what they want it to be. Consequently, the border between the real and the imaginary in the novel gets blurred.

Scarlett Thomas leaves her reader plenty of room for imagination, letting one see how differently (depending on the interpretation of the novel) the real and the imaginary may be perceived. The collision of the characters' viewpoints makes the reader think about the issues of being and reality, and encourages one to develop one's own viewpoint on them.

The End of Mr. Y with its numerous allusions to philosophical and religious texts is an interesting book worth researching. The current paper does not exhaust the possibilities of its interpretation, and there is still a broad field for further investigation.

THESES

1. *The End of Mr. Y* has allusions and digressions into philosophical and religious texts, and their discussion gives clues for the novel's interpretation.
2. Postmodernity is marked by scepticism in its approach to the concepts of "man," truth and God.
3. Contemporary thinkers express disappointment in the current position of an individual with one's limited capacity to resist being programmed by society.
4. A detailed analysis of the novel's characters' real and imaginary worlds displays their diversity and shows how the reality the characters live in influences their beliefs and values.
5. Proper names in the novel convey important information about the characters, as well as help to interpret the nature of their relationships.
6. The characters' reflections about each other's views of reality help them to develop their own understanding of the world around them.
7. In their search for truth, the characters discover that they can influence reality and make real events become unreal and vice versa; "reality" for them is what they believe to be real, or what they want it to be.
8. The Troposphere is very different from the physical world where the novel's characters live.
9. The border between the real and the imaginary gets blurred; the reader's perception of this border depends on one's vision of the novel's genre – the fantastic uncanny, the fantastic marvellous, or the fantastic proper.
10. The novel's characters' religious searches show completely different ideas about the essence of God.
11. *The End of Mr. Y* makes the reader think about the issues of being and reality, and invites one to re-consider one's understanding of these issues.

REFERENCES

- 1) Baudrillard, J. (2001). Symbolic Exchange and Death. In Cahoone, L. (ed.) *Modernism to Postmodernism: an Anthology*. (pp. 437-458) Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd.
- 2) Benjamin, W. (1969). The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction. In Arendt, H. (ed.), (1969). *Illuminations: Walter Benjamin Essays and Reflections*. (pp. 217 – 251) New York: Schocken Books.
- 3) Blackburn, S. (2005) *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- 4) Caputo, J. D. (ed.), (1997). *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: a Conversation with Jacques Derrida*. New York: Fordham University Press.
- 5) Chandler, D. (2007). *Semiotics: the Basics*. New York: Routledge
- 6) Cummings, N. and Lewandowska, M. (2004) An Economy of Love. In Cox, G. et al. (eds.) *Economising Culture: on the Digital Culture Industry*. (pp. 75-85) New York: Autonomedia.
- 7) Derrida, J. (1993). *Khôra*. Paris : Galilée.
- 8) Derrida, J. (1981). *Positions*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- 9) Derrida, J. (2001). The End of the Book and the Beginning of Writing. In Cahoone, L. (ed.) *Modernism to Postmodernism: an Anthology*. (pp. 336-357) Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd.
- 10) DeLillo, D. (1985). *White Noise*. London: Picador.
- 11) Drolet, M. (ed.), (2004). *The Postmodernism Reader: Foundational Texts*. London, New York: Routledge,
- 12) Eco, U. (1979). *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts*. London: Indiana University Press.
- 13) Evdokimov, A. and Garros, A. (2005) *Headcrusher*. London: Chatto and Windus.
- 14) Haraway, D. (1991). A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century. In *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. (pp.149-181) New York: Routledge.
- 15) Jameson, F. (1991) *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- 16) Lodge, D. (1993). *The Art of Fiction: Illustrated from Classic and Modern Texts*. New York: Viking.

- 17) Lyotard, J. F. (2001). *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. In Cahoone, L. (ed.) *Modernism to Postmodernism: an Anthology*. (pp. 481-505) Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd.
- 18) Lyotard, J. F. (1991). *The Inhuman : Reflections on Time*. Cambridge : Polity Press.
- 19) Mandel, E. (1992). Introduction. In McCohen, J. (ed.), *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*. (pp. 9-90) London: Penguin Classics.
- 20) McHale, B. (1996). *Postmodernist Fiction*. London and New York: Routledge.
- 21) McLuhan, M. (1962). *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- 22) Norris, Ch. (ed.), (1998). *Deconstruction: Theory and Practice*. London: Routledge.
- 23) Racevskis, K. (1993). *Postmodernism and the Search for Enlightenment*. Virginia: University Press of Virginia.
- 24) Saussure, F. (1972). *Course in General Linguistics*. Open Court Publishing Company. LaSalle, Illinois.
- 25) Sim, S. (2000). *Derrida and the End of History*. Cambridge: Icon Books.
- 26) Sim, S. (2002). *Irony and Crisis: a Critical History of Postmodern Culture*. Cambridge: Icon Books.
- 27) Sim, S. (2002). *Lyotard and the Inhuman*. Cambridge: Icon Books.
- 28) Sim, S. (ed.) (2005). *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism*. London and New York: Routledge.
- 29) Vahanian, G. (2007). The Death of God: An Afterword. In Caputo, J. D. and Vattimo, G, and Robbins J.W. (ed.), *After the Death of God*. (pp. 163-171) New York : Columbia University Press.
- 30) *The Oxford English Dictionary* (1999). New York: Oxford University Press.

Online Sources

- 1) Bennie, A. (2007). *A reality stranger than fiction*. Sydney: The Sydney Morning Herald. Available from <http://www.smh.com.au/news/books/a-reality-stranger-than-fiction/2007/09/06/1188783376158.html?page=fullpage> [Accessed May 14, 2008]
- 2) Brown, R. J. (2007). *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. The Metaphysics Research Lab, Center for the Study of Language and Information, Stanford University. Available from <http://plato.stanford.edu/> [Accessed May 14, 2008]
- 3) Faulconer, J. (2004). *"Definitions" of Some Terms*. Brigham Young University. Available from <http://jamesfaulconer.byu.edu/definitions.htm> [Accessed May 14, 2008]

- 4) Hottell, R. (1994). *The delusory denouement and other strategies in Maupassant's fantastic tales*. Questia. Available from <http://www.questia.com/googleScholar.qst;jsessionid=LqDFpsGvgG5XsJJxJVbVnnlKvGWKIJT81vpsM8jQ24Ry2pgGjjJs!739888349?docId=5000304901> [Accessed May 14, 2008]
- 5) Lorge, G. (2007) *The Best Thought Experiments: Schrödinger's Cat, Borel's Monkeys*. Wired Magazine. Available from http://www.wired.com/science/discoveries/magazine/15-06/st_best [Accessed May 14, 2008]
- 6) Mondor, C. (2007) *An Interview with Scarlett Thomas*. Bookslut. Available from http://www.bookslut.com/features/2007_03_010799.php [Accessed May 14, 2008]
- 7) Neuhaus, R. J. (2001). *The End of Endings*. First Things. Available from http://www.firstthings.com/article.php3?id_article=2222 [Accessed May 14, 2008]
- 8) Pearson, W. (2001). *Taking Apart SF: Gwyneth Jones's Deconstructing the Starships: Science, Fiction and Reality*. Strange Horizons. Available from http://www.strangehorizons.com/2001/20010910/taking_apart_SF.shtml [Accessed May 14, 2008]
- 9) Robbins, D. (ed.) (2004). *Online Jean-Francois Lyotard*. Wydawca: SAGE Publications Ltd. Available from www.sagepub.com/refbooksProdDesc.nav?prodId=Book225006 [Accessed May 14, 2008]
- 10) Sanes, K. (2000). *Traveling Through Hyperreality With Umberto Eco*. Transparency. Available from <http://www.transparencynow.com/eco.htm> [Accessed May 14, 2008]
- 11) Van Wagner, K. (2005). *Defense Mechanisms*. The New York Times Company. Available from http://psychology.about.com/od/theoriesofpersonality/ss/defensemech_3.htm [Accessed May 14, 2008]
- 12) Apollo Smintheus—The Mouse God. (2007). The Sminthophile. Available from <http://sminthophile.blogspot.com/2007/07/apollo-smintheusthe-mouse-god.html> [Accessed May 14, 2008]
- 13) Baby Names World. (no date). Available from <http://www.babynamesworld.com> [Accessed May 14, 2008]
- 14) *Tao Te Ching (The Book of Tao and Its Characteristics)*. (2007). Way of Perfect Emptiness. Available from http://www.taopage.org/laotzu/tao_te_ching.html [Accessed May 14, 2008]
- 15) *Temple of Apollo Smintheus and Museum at Gülpınar*. (2000). Webmaster ASSOS. Available from <http://www.assos.de/apollo/> [Accessed May 14, 2008]

16) Encyclopædia Britannica. (2008). Available from www.britannica.com [Accessed May 14, 2008]