Playful Parody and Philosophical Counter-Narrative:

Douglas Adams' Science Fiction Comedy

by

Gerd Sivertsen Prestegard

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Department of Foreign Languages

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Samandrag

Denne masteroppgåva tar føre seg den parodiske science fiction-trilogien, *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* av Douglas Adams, som diverre vert diskutert svært lite i akademia. Oppgåva ser på korleis forfattaren nyttar parodi sjangeren til å kommentera på dei tomme paradigma i science fiction, samstundes som han produserer ein mot-forteljing til den eksisterande dystopiske litteraturen. Oppgåva definerer difor bøkene som *positiv dystopi*. Grunna bøkenes post-moderne parodiske natur er dei svært vanskelege å definere, trilogien er difor også definert, i denne oppgåva, som ein komedisk science fiction-parodi med element frå den pikareske tradisjonen. Dystopisk litteratur er framleis populært i det 21. hundreåret og Douglas Adams sine bøker er difor framleis aktuelle som mot-forteljingar i dag. Gjennom bøkene sin parodiske mot-forteljing vert lesaren presentert for ei ny og frigjerande filosofisk måte å sjå og forstå verda på. Bøkene til Adams utfordrar grensene for kva me tenker science fiction skal innehalda. Dei utfordrar òg vår forståing av kva ein legg i omgrepa *forteljar*, *plot* og *karakter*. For å undersøka desse elementa i bøkene tar eg i bruk teoriar om *science fiction*, *parodi*, *metafiksjon* og *narratologi*.

I kapittel ein utforskar eg konsepta *novum*, *World Building* og *Big Dumb Objects*. Dette er konsept som er direkte relatert til science fiction-sjangeren. I kapittel to vert dei narratologiske konsepta *forteljar* og *forteljing* studert med omsyn til korleis dei fungerer i ein moderne parodi og i samanheng med den pikareske tradisjonen. I kapittel tre tar eg føre meg korleis karakterane i trilogien fungerer sett i høve dei overordna parodiske elementa og i samanheng med den gjennomgåande filosofiske tankegangen i bøkene.

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Introduction

'Don't Panic!'

In this thesis, I will discuss Douglas Adams' five-part trilogy *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* as a science fiction parody that presents a counter-narrative to the bleak dystopias so often associated with the science fiction genre. I shall argue that Adams' playful approach to science fiction provides a timely critique of the genre while also offering readers a more liberating and imaginative approach both to literature and to life itself. The trilogy consists of the novels *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* (1979), *The Restaurant at the End of the Universe* (1980), *Life, the Universe and Everything* (1982), *So Long, and Thanks for All the Fish* (1984) and *Mostly Harmless* (1992), hereafter referred to by their individual titles, or collectively as *The Trilogy*.

Several books aimed at the fans have been written about *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* and Douglas Adams; such as Neil Gaiman's *Don't Panic: Douglas Adams & The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* and *You and 42: The Hitchhiker's Guide to Douglas Adams*, edited by Jessica Burke and Anthony Burdge. *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* is also clearly a popular book among academics, given the number of papers published with some version of the heading "The Hitchhiker's Guide to X." Some BA and MA theses have also been dedicated to the novels. However, *The Trilogy* does not seem to be receiving the same attention at higher levels of academia. A few scholarly works can be found, such as a collection of essays, edited by Nicholas Joll, called *Philosophy and The*

Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy. In Joll's book, the different philosophical aspects of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* are discussed, it also touches upon the literary conventions of science fiction (SF) in relation to the philosophy. While the collection has many useful discussions on philosophy and *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy,* it is written by philosophers and not by literary critics. Literary analysis is, therefore, not given much attention. *The Trilogy*, when mentioned in literary discussions, is usually done so in passing. The novels are usually mentioned in relation to parody or comedy; they are, unfortunately, rarely the focus. Brooks Landon, in his book *Science Fiction After 1900*, mentions *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* as an example of successful SF parody, while George Watson takes a slightly different approach in his book *Heresies and Heretics*, as he claims that Adams' 'big idea' was '[t]urning the science fiction of H. G. Wells and his disciples into farce' (Landon 2002, 4; Watson 2013, 191). Carl Kropf's article "Douglas Adams's 'Hitchhiker' Novels as Mock Science Fiction" is one of the few articles dedicated to *The Trilogy*. In the article, Kropf compares *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* to Alexander Pope's mock epic *Dunciad*, with its anti-hero and disordered nature. He argues that in the same way that the mock epics commented on the epic genre, *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* comments on the genre of science fiction. Significantly, Kropf also makes the point that, through the reversal of SF norms, 'Adams's novels become reflexive, commenting on the bankruptcy of the genre's paradigms and raising questions about the nature and function of the genre as it is understood in terms of the reader's response' (62).

In my discussion, I build on the observations made by Kropf and others about the parodic nature of Adams' novels. My contribution is to develop these perspectives in a more comprehensive, in-depth analysis, which draws on concepts

from science fiction theory (Darko Suvin), narratology (Mieke Bal), as well as modern parody and metafiction (Linda Hutcheon). I will focus my analysis on the novels' parodic approach to science fiction conventions related to the novum, the narrator, narrative, and the representation of characters. The inventions and surroundings (the novums) are arguably the concepts that define science fiction, and that separates it from other, similar genres. The first chapter of the thesis is dedicated to examining how the concept of novums is challenged by Adams and the parodic effect that occurs. In Chapter Two, I will discuss the unfocused and intrusive narrator of *The Trilogy*; a feature which provides another side of the parodic effect. Science fiction tends to be narrated in a characteristically logical and objective manner; the "chronicler" of *The Trilogy* exists, therefore, in stark contrast to the tradition. Finally, in Chapter Three, I will examine how the main characters are enlisted in the parody of science fiction conventions and as representatives of different attitudes towards the philosophy of the novels.

As parody, *The Trilogy* breaks with the conventions that readers of science fiction expect to find within the genre. In addition to pointing out the flaws of the genre through parody, *The Trilogy* provides a counter-narrative to the serious and dystopian science fiction of the last century. An early and famous example of the dystopian novel is H. G. Wells' *The Time Machine* (1895), where a scientist travels forward in time to find that humanity's future will be filled with terror and ignorance. The dystopian sub-genre of science fiction has been a part of SF from the onset of the genre. M. Keith Booker explains that

> After a flurry of utopian fictions at the end of the nineteenth century, dystopian fiction became particularly prominent in the twentieth century, when suspicions of utopian solutions to political and social problems became

> increasingly strong as those problems grew more and more complicated and as events such as the rise of fascism in Europe seemed to cast doubt on the whole Western Enlightenment project (Booker 2009, 65)

Another reason for the increased interest in dystopian literature in the 1900s is the moon landing and the new technology surrounding space travel that was developed during the 20th century. Up until the end of the 1960s, space travel had seemed like science fiction, then suddenly within a few years, it became a reality. As Andrew M. Butler explains 'sf had to raise its imaginative game after lunar excursions went from pipe dream to has-been' (57). A widespread shift in SF became placing stories in the future instead of merely in space, as space had become more science and less fiction. This shift further created more dystopian stories. Booker points out that dystopian narratives can be said to reflect the anxieties of the times (65). When the cold war then progressed in the mid- to late 20th century, with its space race and surveillance, dystopian SF was an outlet for the writers and readers. We can observe something similar today with the rise in dystopian eco-literature, which tackles one of the most significant crises of our time, global warming and the destruction of the eco-system.

The readers of *The Trilogy* are provided with a new type of narrative that is mainly free of genre constrictions, and that contributes a more unrestricted imagination to the science fiction genre. *The Trilogy* offers its reader a philosophy of accepting the chaos of the Universe and encourages the reader to understand the beauty in the absurd and the random. By providing a counter-narrative to the bleak dystopia that has become a significant part of science fiction, *The Trilogy* remains relevant and continues to be read even after 40 years. I, therefore, argue that *The Trilogy* positions itself not as a utopia, but as a *positive dystopia*. Through parody

and metafiction, *The Trilogy* pushes established concepts to the edge of what is accepted within science fiction. The novels put pressure on the boundaries of SF and the established traits found within the genre. It is by examining the border examples of literature that we gain a better understanding of what we believe to be established literary norms. Further, it is by looking at these border examples that we gain new insights into how concepts of SF and genre function. Adams helped launch the comedic science fiction genre in a time when most SF narratives were serious and pessimistic. By highlighting innovation, imagination, and fun, Adams brings qualities to the genre that Michael Moorcock argues 'a lot of science fiction lacks': 'passion, subtlety, irony, original characterisation, original and good style, a sense of involvement in human affairs, colour, density, depth and, on the whole, real feeling from the writer' (Cited in Landon 2002, 151).

Darko Suvin is one of the pioneers in science fiction studies, and his theories are held in high regard within the field. In *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction* (1980), Suvin tries to define the genre of science fiction. One of the definitions he produces is: 'SF *is, then, a literary genre whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main formal device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment*' (1980, 7-8, italics in original). The *novum* is also a concept that is central in Suvin's theories.

One of the greatest science fiction authors of the last century, Octavia Butler, stated in an interview that she 'was attracted to science fiction because it was so wide open. I was able to do anything and there were no walls to hem you in and there was no human condition that you were stopped from examining' (Balagun 13.01.2006). Butler's understanding of SF paints a picture of a genre that has few or

no limits, and she expresses the freedom that comes with writing within a genre with 'no walls.' Her statement is an apt description of the thematic freedom that SF offers. The thematic freedom stems from the fact that the main criterion of SF is the novum. The manner in which the novum is used or presented is open and left to the imagination of the individual author. Consequently, a plethora of sub-genres exist within SF. Even though SF is a genre that has few "walls," there are still boundaries for what can be accepted within SF. In *The Trilogy,* there are definite border examples where the generic traits and norms of SF are tested. John Banville, discussing his novel *Nightspawn*, writes: 'I set out to subject the traditional, nineteenth-century concept [the novel] to as much pressure as I could bring to bear on it, while yet remaining within the rules' (Cited in Hutcheon 2000, 26). I view *The Trilogy* in the same light as Banville views his parodic novel. Adams pushes the boundaries to the breaking point, yet still remains within the rules. Novels that push the boundaries help renew their genres, keeping them from stagnating.

Linda Hutcheon has written several important books on parody and metafiction. I will be using her books *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms* and *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox*. Hutcheon points out that when discussing parody, it is essential to separate parody from satire. Hutcheon defines parody as 'intramural' and satire as 'extramural,' that is, parody focuses on aesthetic norms while satire's focus is on the 'social or moral' (2000, 25). This is, of course, not to say that satire cannot be included in parody and vice versa. Hutcheon describes parody as 'a form of inter-art discourse' (2000, 2), by which we are to understand that parodic novels, plays and art function in relation to, and are in a dialogue with, existing art. The discourse includes both specific works, such as novels and plays, and conventions of specific

genres and literary periods, such as the SF genre or the Renaissance; this is true for parodic works within all art forms. *The Trilogy* are, therefore, texts which can either be read on the surface, for their comedic value, or they can be read at greater depth with layers of inter-art information. *The Trilogy* is intertextual, in that it comments on science fiction as a genre, but it is also self-reflexive as it comments on itself. Hutcheon points out that '[i]mitating art more than life, parody self-consciously and self-critically recognises its own nature' (2000, 27).

For a text to function as parody, the reader must recognise what the text is referring to. João Duarte explains this as '*communicative overdetermination,* meaning that for the connection between addresser and addressee to take place effectively parody demands ontologically, so to speak, the competence of both participants in the communicative act' (72, italics in original). The mutual competence of both parties is important whether the source of the parody is a specific text or, as with *The Trilogy*, a genre. The author needs to trust that the reader will recognise the references to the source of the parody. If the text depends too heavily on the parodied source material, the text becomes an imitation; if the text is too vague, it becomes a stand-alone text, not referring to anything external. The reader of *The Trilogy*, therefore, needs to have knowledge of the SF genre in order to understand the novels fully. When discussing *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* as 'Mock SF,' Kropf argues that Adams reverses 'the paradigmatic expectations readers have *learned* to bring to the genre' (61, italics added). The reader learns these paradigmatic expectations through immersion in the genre and discussions with fellow readers. These learned paradigmatic expectations are the reasons readers understand the references in the parodic novels.

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The Trilogy is a form of parody as the novels, among other things, reference the conventions of science fiction. The novels are also metafictional as they comment on themselves. The narrator of *The Trilogy* is self-conscious in their[1] role as a deliverer of information; continually commenting subjectively on the story and editing it as they narrate. One of the novels' goals is to illuminate the 'bankruptcy of the genre's paradigms' (Kropf 1988, 62). Using metafiction to "teach" the reader about these flaws is a smart decision, as metafiction is, as Hutcheon describes it, 'a most didactic form' (1985, xi). In addition to parodying SF, *The Trilogy* also contains parodic elements of guidebooks, both fictive and factual, as well as elements of the picaresque. *The Trilogy* is a modern parody that does not limit itself to only parodying one element. Hutcheon clarifies modern parody as an 'ironic playing with multiple conventions, this extended repetition with critical difference' (2000, 7). Additionally, Duarte explains that parody does not have precise characteristics that can be summed up and applied to all parodic texts, it 'refuses to be captured once and for all by any watertight, fixed, ontological set of descriptive characteristics' (71). Parody is in itself hard to define, and *The Trilogy*, drawing on several different literary traditions, has been notoriously difficult to place within one genre. However, the main parodic elements are from science fiction.

As parodic elements tend to be more understated in order not to become imitations, the satiric parts of *The Trilogy* are more prominent and more distinctly stated than the parodic parts. Besides, the parodic elements require knowledge of the conventions of SF, which also make them harder to comprehend than the satiric elements. In addition, given that *The Trilogy* parodies the conventions of the SF

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[1] I will be using the gender neutral "they" in this thesis.

genre, it requires, not just knowledge of specific texts but an understanding of the genre as a whole. A specific parodic element that will be examine in this thesis is the narratological features. In order to examine the narratological features, I will rely on Mieke Bal's *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, where she systematically works through different aspects of narratology and gives thorough explanations and definitions. The aspects of narratology that I am interested in examining are *narrator* and *character*. The narrator is an exciting element of *The Trilogy*, as it exemplifies one of the most evident breaks with our expectations of science fiction. The narrator is overtly manipulative, and it is within the language of the narration that much of the parody and humour is created. The characters are also interesting because they serve as symbols of different attitudes toward the overarching philosophy that we find in *The Trilogy*. This is an aspect of the novels which, to my knowledge, has not been examined in detail. In addition, characters are often regarded as the most important elements of a novel, and it is, therefore, essential to examine them in order to understand the novels.

My objective through these examinations is to understand in what ways *The Trilogy* breaks with narratological norms related to science fiction. Further, I wish to understand what effect this breakage has. Bal defines the concept of a *narrator* as a 'fictitious spokesperson' for the author, alternatively, in more technical terms, 'the agent which utters the (linguistic or other) signs that constitute the text' (8, 62). In other words, the narrator is a speaker who relates the story to a receiver. The use of the word "speaker" here does not indicate that the narrator necessarily speaks these signs out loud, as in a monologue; nevertheless, the signs are communicated to the reader in some way. In *The Trilogy,* the narrator is an external narrator. Bal explains that an external narrator occurs '[w]hen in a text the narrator never refers explicitly

to itself as a character' (13). However, the narrator in *The Trilogy* is not merely an observer or 'witness,' as external narrators tend to be (Bal 2017, 20). The narrator in *The Trilogy* openly manipulates the story. The information expressed by the narrator goes beyond the information we have come to expect from a narrator in SF. Narrators in science fiction are often character bound narrators or external narrators; both types usually narrate rather objectively.

Similarly to the narrator, the characters in *The Trilogy* do not follow the patterns and characteristics that we are used to observing in science fiction. Some characters even challenge our understanding of what a literary character can or should be. Bal specifies that a character is 'the effect that occurs when a figure is presented with distinctive, mostly human characteristics' (104). Further, she separates the character from the actor by explaining that 'an actor in the fabula is a structural position, while a character is a complex semantic unit' (ibid). Bal points out that 'referential characters' (characters that exist outside of the literary text and stem from a collective 'frame of reference') 'act according to the pattern that we are familiar with from other sources. Or not.' (109). I argue that Bal's argument about referential characters also holds true for the expectations readers have of character found in different genres. The reader's prior knowledge of, and expectations surrounding literary characters leads, as Bal presents it, to a 'confrontation between, on the one hand, our previous knowledge and the expectations it produces, and on the other, the realisation of the character in the narrative' (ibid). In *The Trilogy* this confrontation can be found in the anti-hero, Arthur; the reckless and ignorant president of the Galaxy, Zaphod; and the paranoid android, Marvin, to name a few.

When I began this project, I had some hesitations about the legitimacy of writing my thesis about a novel that could be defined as "lightweight" or "not-

serious" literature. Further, science fiction has earlier been looked down upon and called *Trivialliteratur*, popular literature or pulp fiction. It has been deemed an unworthy subject for so-called serious literary criticism. To some extent, this is also true for parody and comedy. *The Hitchhiker's Guide to The Galaxy,* then, falls into several categories that have a history of not being taken seriously by academics. However, as Margaret A. Rose points out, 'Even unambiguously comic works such as Aristophanes' *Frogs* have shown how the use of parody may be aimed both at a comic effect and at the transmission of both complex and serious messages' (29). My fears were, nevertheless, amplified when I read the first chapter of *Kinds of Literature* by Alastair Fowler. Fowler places SF in the same group as pornography, thrillers, and advertisements, categorizing it as *Trivialliteratur* (10). He then proceeds to claim that *Trivialliteratur* is 'hardly worth studying' and that it has no place in literary criticism (ibid). *Kinds of Literature* was published in 1982, and the view of SF has fortunately improved since then. The University of Liverpool, for example, offers an MA in Science Fiction. I believe that *The Trilogy* are novels worthy of not only popular acclaim, but also academic attention. The absurd story of the novels comes with a surprisingly authentic and empowering philosophical message to its readers concerning our perspective on the universe. They are novels steeped in humour and silly events; at the same time, *The Trilogy* presents a carefully constructed narrative worth studying. In addition to the absurdity and humour, Adams shows a mastery of the English language that is truly awe-inspiring. Stephen Hatcher explains that '[a]bove all, Adam's use of the English language was sublime. Subverting expectations, he demanded careful listening to every sentence. You never knew how each one would end' (Burke and Burdge 2018, 49).

Several versions of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* exist, some created by Adams and some created after his death. For "die-hard" fans of *The Trilogy*, the most authentic version is the radio series produced by the BBC, as it predates the first novel. Several stage adaptations and a tv series based on the story have also been produced. The movie version, which Adams consulted on before his death, covers the first novel with some adjustments. The story has even become a video game and a sort of musical. A sixth *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* novel entitled *And Another thing…* was written by Eoin Colfer after Douglas' death, with the permission of his estate. I have elected to base my thesis solely on the novels, as *The Trilogy* is the most consistent and complete version of the story written solely by Adams himself, excluding Colfer's addition. Finally, it should be noted that due to *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy's* origin as a radio series, as well as the picaresque influences, the novels have a somewhat episodic feel to them. Apart from the first section of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* where the Earth is destroyed, most of the larger plot sections of *The Trilogy*'s first three novels could be rearranged without causing any significant problems for the overarching logic of the plot. For this reason, I have chosen to focus more on individual sections and themes rather than plotlines. The overarching plotlines are arguably not the most important parts of *The Trilogy*. The important part is the joy the reader can find in the individual and ridiculous sections.

Chapter 1:

Playing with Conventions: Novums, Big Dumb Objects, and World-Building

'That's one big whack of Improbability to be accounted for.'

This chapter will explore in what way and to what effect *The Trilogy* plays with the conventions that we have learned to recognise as characteristics of science fiction. For that purpose, I will explore both what the 'paradigmatic expectations' of SF are and in what way they are unsettled in *The Trilogy* (Kropf 1988, 61). The chapter will not only show how *The Trilogy* is a parody that comments on the problematic and exhausted aspects of SF; it will also show how *The Trilogy* uses parodic methods to comment satirically on issues, such as philosophy, bureaucracy and power structures in our society. While *The Trilogy* contains purely satirical sections, most of the satiric effect is derived from the parody of SF as a genre that often criticises society. Through parodying science fiction's tendency to produce social commentary, *The Trilogy* provides a satirical perspective on society.

In the course of this chapter, I will present different conventions found in science fiction and systematically show how *The Trilogy* plays with these. It is essential to mention, as Kropf puts it, that '[a]lmost any generalisation is liable to significant objection' (62). Throughout this text, I will provide generalisations of the SF genre, different literary tropes, and conventions. This is not to say that I believe the generalisations produced in this thesis to be valid for all texts, but I do believe them to be true for a large enough number of texts that the generalisations are valid for my purpose.

The Novum

In *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, Suvin argues that SF is the '*literature of cognitive estrangement*' (4, italics in original). Cognitive estrangement, in Suvin's definition, entails that SF lies somewhere between naturalistic depictions of 'the author's empirical environment,' and literature that is 'indifferent to cognitive possibilities' (1980, 8). In other words, it lies between realism and fantasy. The literature of *cognitive estrangement* is fiction based on characters, settings or objects that do not exist in 'the author's empirical environment,' or the 'Actual World' to use Paolo Bertetti's term (48-49). The objects are, in other words, *estranged*. However, the reader believes these estranged features to be plausible based on the knowledge of science and technology that exist in the reader's contemporary society; therefore, the objects are, in Suvin's words, *cognitive*. Kropf uses the term 'reasonable extrapolation' about the features that the reader is willing to accept as cognitive; while the elements that break with 'reasonable extrapolation' calls for the readers' 'willing suspension of disbelief' (64).

In addition to introducing the term *cognitive estrangement*, Suvin also establishes the concept of the *novum*, which is strongly connected to cognitive estrangement. According to Suvin, the novum is a defining trait of science fiction and the elements that distinguish SF from other genres. He explains that a novum is a novelty or innovation that is 'validated by cognitive logic' and further proclaims that a '*narrative dominance or hegemony*' of novums is the aspect that separates SF from both naturalistic fiction and fantasy (1980, 63, italics in original). The British scholar Tom Shippey uses somewhat more informal language as he explains a

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novum as 'a discrete piece of information recognisable as not-true, but also as not-unlike-true, not-flatly-(and in the current state of knowledge)-impossible' (10-11). Similarly to Suvin, Shippey presents novums as the core of SF and describes them as the 'basic building-block of science fiction' (10). A novum, then, can, for example, be a spaceship, aliens, artificial intelligence or time travel. Shippey further clarifies that even though novums are 'non-data', 'they are well labelled "nova data" or "new things given"' 'since they are data within the story' (ibid). It is primarily through these novums that readers understand that they are engaging with the science fiction genre. Even readers who are unfamiliar with SF will quickly understand what genre they are consuming when the first novum is presented. In other words, the readers interpret the novums as signifiers that they have been taught to recognise as signs of science fiction.

Some novums are immediately recognised as such by competent readers of science fiction. Other novums, in contrast, are more covert. Readers who are non-native speakers of the language of the story can sometimes come across terms in SF which they do not understand. An uncertainty can then arise where the reader is unsure if the unfamiliar term is a gap in their vocabulary or if it is the inclusion of a new novum in the story. The underlying reason for this confusion is that novums are often presented by the narrator as if they are known to the narratee. In many SF novels, the novums are not new to the narrator. If the narrator is presenting the novum to a narratee who is part of the world of the novel, they will mention the novum as if it were an everyday object, because it is an everyday object to both the narrator and the narratee. In these cases, the reader is the only one who does not share the frame of reference, and it is then the reader's job to gather enough information to understand the novum. The information is not always directly given

to the reader, but the reader can piece together what this new object, surrounding, or character is, by gradually collecting bits of information about the novum. Shippey, therefore, calls SF 'high-information literature' (14). The reader becomes a "literary detective;" gathering clues to understand the literary world they are engaging. An example of a novum being introduced without explanation is the first sentence in Philip K. Dick's novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep*. The novel starts with the sentence: 'A merry little surge of electricity piped by automatic alarm from the mood organ beside his bed awakened Rick Deckard' (2010, 13). The novum in this sentence is the 'mood organ.' When reading further, it becomes clear to the reader that the mood organ is an invention which can alter the characters' mood, in this instance, waking them up feeling refreshed. The reader is not provided with this information directly but understands it through the context; observing the characters as they interact with, and talk about, the object.

Through examining a passage from *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy,* we can study Adams' use of novums:

> On this particular Thursday, something was moving quietly through the ionosphere many miles above the surface of the planet; several somethings in fact, several dozen huge yellow chunky slablike somethings, huge as office blocks, silent as birds. They soared with ease, basking in electromagnetic rays from the star Sol, biding their time, grouping, preparing. (20)

The novum in this section is the 'several dozen huge yellow chunky slablike somethings.' The reader is only provided with vague descriptions of the exterior of the ships, yet the reader recognises the somethings as novums. The reader recognises the "office blocks" as spaceship because there does not exist anything in the Actual World of that size that could 'soar through the sky with ease'. In other words, it is

"estranged." The "office blocks" are estranged, yet they are also "cognitive." In other words, the concept of spaceships moving through the skies above the Earth is something that might be unlikely, but it is not unbelievable. It is logical to the reader that there might exist aliens, and these aliens might have spaceships. Even though an experienced SF reader can recognise the novums as spaceships, the novums are nevertheless presented in an unfamiliar manner by comparing them to office blocks.

The novums are, from page 20 to 25, referred to as "somethings" eight times before they are explained as spaceships belonging to the alien race known as Vogons. After the introduction of the novums in the previously cited quote, they are referred to as 'huge yellow something/s' three times, as 'the huge yellow machines' once, and as 'whatever it was' once. The repetition of the colour yellow throughout the six pages might seem like an absurd unnecessary detail; however, it is a hint of the fate that is to befall the Earth. The spaceships mirror a section from the start of the first chapter where the reader follows a groggy Arthur Dent's morning routine. Arthur goes through his regular routines while noticing yellow bulldozers outside of his house, yet he does not grasp the significance of them. The sleepy and hungover Arthur does not immediately register what he has seen. The reader, on the other hand, will take notice of the bulldozers when they are mentioned the first time. Throughout Arthur's morning, the words *bulldozer* and *yellow* are repeated. 'He woke up blearily […] opened a window, saw a bulldozer […] and stomped off to the washroom.' (7). Arthur has seen the bulldozer; we know this since the narrator uses the verb 'saw' and because Arthur is the focalizer in this section. Throughout the next page, Arthur observes the bulldozer several times without comprehending what he sees. In the text, Arthur is unable to comprehend what the bulldozers are and

what they represent. This inability is presented through the use of the words or signifiers "bulldozer" and "yellow" removed from the object or signified.

> The word *bulldozer* wandered through his mind for a moment in search of something to connect with.' […] 'The bulldozer outside the kitchen window was quite a big one. He stared at it. "Yellow," he thought' […] 'He caught a glint in the shaving mirror. "Yellow," he thought, and stomped on to the bedroom.' […] '"Yellow," he thought. The word *yellow* wandered through his mind in search of something to connect with. (7-8, italics in original)

The bulldozers are there to knock down Arthurs house in order to build a bypass. When the Vogon ships are introduced, and the colour yellow again is repeated, now in reference to the spaceships, it becomes clear to observant readers that the novums introduced are not just spaceships, but also "bulldozers". Neither Arthur nor the people of the Earth realize what is about to happen to their homes.

The repetition of the word "yellow" gives the readers hints, allowing them to anticipate the events that are about to happen. This type of mirroring is a familiar literary technique, and it is not an unconventional move. However, the section is parodic as Adams uses the established convention of mirroring to challenge the reader's expectation of how aliens are supposed to be represented. Even as Adams presents the reader with hints in the form of the colour yellow and the bulldozers, the reader might not realize the link to the spaceships and the demolition of the earth before it is explained. The idea of building bypasses because '[y]ou've got to build bypasses' seems "unworthy" of an alien race (Adams 1996, 9). Aliens in science fiction novels might be evil or good; dangerous or benevolent; nevertheless, they are almost always smarter and more evolved than humans. In *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy,* on the other hand, the aliens do not have an evil plan of conquering Earth, they are only following bureaucratic orders regarding the construction of a

new 'hyperspace express route' (25-26). It later turns out that the new express route will become superfluous due to new technology that eliminates the need for hyperspace travel, and thus also express routes. The aliens are humanised by having the same systems and lives as humans do, only on a galactic scale. This is one of many sections where Adams makes use of travesty, both as a comedic and parodic tool.

The mirroring of the Vogons with bureaucratic processes surrounding the demolition of Arthurs home parodies the science fiction trope that alien races, and future humans, are brilliant beings with grand schemes and plans, almost God-like in their contact with humans. Take for instance the obelisk from *2001: A Space Odyssey* by Arthur C. Clarke that, in its mystique and wisdom guides the early 'man-apes' and later humans, always with an intricate plan for what is to come. The plans and schemes of Adams' aliens, on the other hand, are not thoroughly planned or executed. The plans are also often driven by very "human" motives like greed and ego. An early synopsis of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* radio script, written by Adams, explains that 'many of the eccentric alien races they encounter epitomise some particular human folly such as greed, pretentiousness, et cetera, rather in the manner of *Gulliver's Travels'* (Cited in Gaiman 1993, 194). The introduction, with its disoriented protagonist and bureaucratic aliens, sets the tone of the novel. It signals to the reader that this is not just a comedy or a straight-forward science fiction novel. By starting the book off on an absurd and highly parodic tone it alerts the reader to the changes Adams has made to the established conventions of science fiction. When the reader is alerted to these changes, they will pay more attention to the parodic comments about the norms of the science fiction genre found throughout the novels.

The manner in which Adams introduces the spaceships in this section is a rather straightforward introduction of a SF novum; the reader is given some information yet left to theorise about the information that is missing. The reader's theorisations are heavily based on the existence of SF conventions which they have been taught through previous engagement with SF texts, movies and tv-shows. However, the reader might not be able to explain what these conventions are. The conventions might appear as being part of a whole; the reader, therefore, might not contemplate on the specifics of the conventions. As Gérard Genette puts it 'literature […] like any other activity of the mind, is based on conventions of which, with some exceptions, it is not aware' (Cited in Tompkins 1980, 104). I argue that one of the functions of *The Trilogy*'s parodic nature is to make the reader aware of exactly these conventions. For example, from the description of huge blocks that soar with ease through the skies, an SF reader could deduce that the objects described are spaceships; however, if we examine the description of the spaceships in more detail, we start to understand the parodic nature of the quote. Adams uses a mix of scientific language and informal and unconventional descriptions. He turns the genre on its head as he describes the spaceships in informal language and everyday objects in scientific language.

Adams describes how the spaceships move through the 'ionosphere' and that they are 'basking in electromagnetic rays from the star Sol.' Both these examples could easily be re-written into colloquial speech. "Ionosphere" could be "the skies" or simply 'many miles above the surface of the planet.' Furthermore, 'basking in electromagnetic rays from the star Sol' could be rewritten as "basking in the sunlight." Adams here uses a technique called "defamiliarization," which can also be described as an "estranged representation". Bertolt Brecht defines an estranged

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representation as 'one which allows us to recognize its subject, but at the same time makes it seem unfamiliar' (Cited in Suvin 1980, 6). As a playwright, Brecht's original intention with the term was to alienate the audience from the characters and action on the stage so that the audience could form a more objective interpretation of the play. Suvin argues that '[i]n SF the attitude of estrangement—used by Brecht in a different way, within a still predominately "realistic" context—has grown into the *formal framework* of the genre' (1980, 7, italics in original). Adams uses both Suvin's form of estrangement through novums and Brecht's use of the term when using strange descriptions of everyday objects.

When Adams draws attention to the language and conventions of SF by using "excessively scientific" jargons, he estranges the reader from the novel, in Brecht's definition of the term, thus making it easier for the reader to view Adams' critique of science fiction more objectively. Moreover, the estrangement of the familiar continues throughout the novels as Adams parodies SF's tendency to explain objects in scientific detail. An example from the SF canon is Isaac Asimov's novel, *I, Robot*, which consists of several short stories pieced together by a reporter interviewing a renowned scientist within the field of robotics. In *I, Robot,* the narrator describes that 'Robbie nodded his head – a small *parallelepiped* with round edges' (11, italics added). The use of scientific jargon is a reoccurring feature in SF, and perhaps especially in Asimov's fiction as he was a professor of biochemistry in addition to being an author. Throughout *I, Robot*, there are examples of this scientific language, both in the form of vocabulary and phrasing. For example, 'an appreciable corrosive action atmosphere,' 'the abnormality indicated,' and 'profound observations' (40, 103, 160).

The examples from *I, Robot* lead us to Adams use of pseudo-scientific jargon. Douglas Adams' way of describing novums, technology, logic and philosophy in *The Trilogy* does not only parody the hollow scientific language used in SF, it also satirises the logic-driven and technological language with which we surround ourselves in the Actual World. Just because an idea or object is shrouded in technical jargon, does not make it unique; it does not increase its intrinsic value. This is true for the parodic parts and for the satire that occurs through *The Trilogy*. The critique can be seen in the language of the novel, such as when Adams names and describes novums in an over-simplistic and positive manner. For example the description of a robot as 'Your Plastic Pal Who's Fun to Be With', the 'Sens-O-Tape,' which is a virtual reality simulator, and the 'Kill-O-Zap gun' (64, 124, 264). Here Adams turns the trope on its head, describing novums in an overly simplistic manner. Adams is satirising and critiquing consumer culture and the marketing businesses, like when *The Guide* describes 'the marketing division of the Sirius Cybernetics Corporation as "a bunch of mindless jerks who'll be the first against the wall when the revolution comes"' (64). It can also be seen in Magrathea's slogan: '*Whatever your tastes, Magrathea can cater for you. We are not proud*' (124, italics in original). The parody of explanations offers the reader a new perspective on an already existing object, expanding the literary universe and the Actual World by offering a new point of view on our everyday existence. When Adams estranges everyday objects, he transfigures the object, imbuing it with new meaning and value. He additionally transfigures our view on the world; in Adams' words turning 'the telescope round, by letting you stand so far outside things' and seeing them 'from a totally different perspective' (Cited in Joll 2012, 246)

Hutcheon explains, as mentioned earlier, that parodic works do not only comment on other works of art; they also comment on themselves. One of the functions of metafiction is to make the reader aware of the writing and reading process; to estrange the reader from the text. Estrangement in metafiction and can, therefore, be a tool to make the reader aware of the tropes and conventions of literary genres. Cognitive estrangement by itself is not enough to defamiliarize the text as it is a well-known concept. However, when Adams over-uses the technique of defamiliarization in *The Trilogy*, he makes the reader aware of SF-writers' tendency to use scientific language even when it is not necessary for the story. Some SF writers seem to try to cement their works as SF by embedding as much scientific language into the text as possible. The over-usage of scientific language in *The Trilogy* then becomes comedic to the reader. According to Pawlak and Joll, '*Hitchhiker's* parodies technological explanations' (Joll 2012, 240). They explain that 'SF deals in explicable things […]. And it likes to offer grand explanations' (ibid). Through defamiliarization, the observant SF reader is made to view the events and descriptions more objectively, making it easier to identify and be critical of the parodied conventions and tropes.

The Trilogy has novums (the infinite improbability drive and the restaurant at the end of the Universe) that are on the borders of what can be called cognitive, in Suvin's sense of the word. However, the novels also have novums that wholly fail to meet Suvin's standard for cognition. One of the clearest examples of this is the séance and subsequent appearance of the ghost of Zaphod's great-grandfather, Zaphod Beeblebrox the fourth (160-166). The scientific community rejects the idea of ghosts, and Adams' use of them breaks with Darko Suvin's thoughts surrounding the definition of SF. Suvin argues that '[i]t is intrinsically or by definition

impossible for SF to acknowledge any metaphysical agency, in the literal sense of an agency going beyond *physis* (nature). Whenever it does so, it is not SF, but a metaphysical or (to translate the Greek into Latin) a supernatural fantasy-tale' (1980, 66, italics in original). Although I do recognise that genres and genre definitions are helpful, I cannot agree with Suvin's strict regulations for what constitutes SF.

In order to define *The Trilogy* as either SF or "fantasy-tale", we have to examine the overarching traits of the text. If we were to agree with Suvin that any metaphysical agency within a text excludes it from ever being defined as SF, all SF stories that for instance include hyperspace, a method to achieve "superluminal" or faster than light travel, would be excluded from the SF genre. Such exclusion would include novels by renowned SF writers like Isaac Asimov's *I, Robot*, and Frank Herbert's *Dune* series. Although *The Trilogy* includes metaphysical agency, the majority of its conventions are typical SF conventions; there are spaceships, aliens, time travel, robots with artificial intelligence and supercomputers. It is, therefore, in my opinion, wrong, as Darko Suvin's theory would imply, to reject *The Trilogy* from SF based on a few isolated incidents. As Hutcheon describes it, '[l]abels are always comforting, but often also castrating' (1985, 2). If novels are made to fit within a specific and strict structure, we will end up with literature that does not renew itself; that does not evolve. Parody and satire often have this renewing and transfiguring effect on genres, and I believe *The Trilogy* has been a part of renewing the genre of science fiction.

The Trilogy is hard to define. The SF elements are all there, the spaceships, the aliens, the robots, the quest to figure out the meaning of our existence in the Universe, yet they are all slightly wrong, and the quest for meaning ends up with an

absurd answer of no meaning at all. The difficulty of defining *The Trilogy* as one particular genre is partly down to the fact that, as Bakhtin describes, 'parodied genres do not belong to the genres that they parody; that is, a parodic poem is not a poem at all' (59).

Big Dumb Objects

In *The Trilogy,* there is parodying of a subgenre of science fiction that mimics adventure literature. In these adventure SF stories there often exists a peculiar novum called a *Big Dumb Object* (*BDO*) or *megastructure*. Christopher Palmer explains that a Big Dumb Object has the following qualities: 'it is artificial; it wasn't made by humans; its makers are absent so that it is or seems deserted; it is large enough to explore; indeed, it is usually very large, so that the human explorers are dwarfed; and very often the human explorers are swallowed up – they are enclosed, they are exploring an interior' (95). Well known examples of the BDO is the "Ringworld" in Larry Niven's novel by the same name, the 50km-long cylinder floating through space in Arthur C. Clarke's novel *Rendezvous with Rama* and "the monolith" in another Clarke novel, *2001: A Space Odyssey.* BDOs serve specific functions in science fiction novels, for example, as Andrew M. Butler describes, a BDO 'evokes a sense of estrangement in characters and readers/audiences,' and 'it draws attention to the work of science-fiction authorship, it marks a conceptual breakthrough for the characters and readers, and it invokes the sublime (55-56). Further, Damien Walter proclaims that 'for sheer inventiveness, no author has ever come close to Douglas Adams's BDO in The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy' (Walter 22.06.2016). Walter is here referring to "the Earth", which, in *The Trilogy*,

was created at the legendary planet of Magrathea, to function as a supercomputer tasked with calculating the ultimate question of Life the Universe and Everything.

In one of the scenes in *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, Arthur is guided through the "construction floor," on Magrathea, where the production of the planets take place. His guide is a native architect named Slartibartfast, who reveals to Arthur the true purpose of the Earth. The Earth in *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, as mentioned earlier, is itself a BDO; artificial, apparently abandoned by its alien creators and vast. However, the readers do not know that the Earth is a BDO until it is revealed by Slartibartfast, rather late in the story. Further, humans and most of the aliens in *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, except for Arthur and his friends, are never privy to this information about the earth, which somewhat breaks with the typical use of the feature. Slartibartfast then reveals that the earth was commissioned by mice, which are actually 'particularly clever hyperintelligent pandimensional beings' (110). The beings have taken the form of mice to guide the earth through its ten-million-year calculation to extrapolate the question to the answer of Life the Universe and Everything. Adams here creates travesty by taking the Earth, a construct which we consider to be vast and beautiful, and which we are yet to understand fully, and reducing it to a single purpose object created by animals which we consider to be "below" us in the natural hierarchy. It also turns out that the mice's motivation for finding the ultimate question is fame and fortune, further undermining the purpose of the planet and the lives thereupon. When the true purpose of the Earth is revealed to Arthur and the crew, the consensus is, "does it really matter?" They decide to go to a restaurant to get something to eat instead of finding the question. This is part of the philosophy that continues throughout the novels. If we discovered today that the planet we live on was created by a

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supercomputer to calculate an answer to our existence, would that reduce the quality of our life? Would nature be less beautiful? Or our lives be less meaningful? I would argue that *The Trilogy* tells us, no.

This attitude is also embodied in the character Slartibartfast. Slartibartfast conveys to Arthur the nature of the Earth and finishes his history lesson with '[s]o there you have it' (127), leading to a discussion between the two that is emblematic of the overarching philosophical attitude of the novels. After receiving the information about the intentional creation of the Earth and the grand plans behind it, Arthur realises that 'all this explains a lot of things. All my life I've had this strange unaccountable feeling that something was going on in the world, something big, even sinister, and no one would tell me what it was' (ibid). Arthur here evokes exactly what Andrew M. Butler describes when he discusses the function of the BDO: it 'evokes a sense of estrangement in characters and readers' (55). Arthur is suddenly able to both physically and mentally estrange himself from the Earth and can, therefore, view it with a new perspective, or as Adams describes it in an interview, Arthur has turned 'the telescope round' (Cited in, Joll 2012, 246). Moreover, this 'marks a conceptual breakthrough for the characters and readers' (Butler 2012, 55-56).

Arthur has a conceptual breakthrough where he suddenly realises what the big sinister thing that no one would tell him was, thus giving comical expression to a feeling that many people have experienced where there seems to be something big, just out of grasp, that is controlling our world. This feeling might correspond with religion, spiritualism, and even conspiracy theories. Slartibartfast, however, counters Arthur's newfound, typical SF, conspiratorial realisation in the characteristic Douglas Adams manner: '"No," said the old man, "that's just perfectly normal

paranoia. Everyone in the Universe has that"' (127). Arthur, still trying to hold on to his newfound enlightenment, responds "'[e]veryone? […] Well, if everyone has that perhaps it means something! Perhaps somewhere outside the Universe we know…"', before again being countered by Slartibartfast's 'Maybe. Who cares?' (ibid). "Maybe. Who cares?" is indeed the core of Douglas Adams' science fiction. Adams presents scenarios or ideas that can rival any science fiction story, which he then either backs away from or he turns the concept on its head by saying "Maybe. Who cares?" The outcome of Adams' parodic approach to SF tropes is that the reader starts to question the function of these literary tropes. So what if we are not alone in the Universe? So what if there is an alien conspiracy going on? Adams does not give the reader any answer to these questions, and through the refusal of an answer, the reader is invited to become more critical of the literature and of the genre.

Adams' Big Dumb Objects stretch the boundaries of what BDOs are believed to encompass. Damien Walter argues that Douglas Adams, when creating the Earth as a supercomputer in *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy,* also created the biggest, dumbest object in SF history. However, I argue that there exists an even bigger and dumber object in *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*: the Universe. Firstly, '"Space" [The Guide] *says,* "is big. Really big. You just won't believe how vastly hugely mind-bogglingly big it is' (53, Italics in original). The description of the Universe is in agreement with Palmer's definition of BDO's: 'it is usually very large, so that the human explorers are dwarfed' (95). However, the vastness of space is not enough to proclaim it a BDO. In Adams' novels, the Universe is 'artificial' and 'it wasn't made by humans,' moreover, 'its makers are absent so that it is or seems deserted' (Palmer 2006, 95). In Adams' literary universe, God is proven to

both exist and not exist, as exemplified in the Babel fish (a fish you can put in your ear that will instantly translate every language for you). On the one hand, this fish is so practical that it could not possibly have occurred by accident and therefore proves that God exists. On the other hand, since 'proof denies faith', God does not exist (42). Later in the trilogy, however, Arthur and his girlfriend travel to find 'God's Final Message to His Creation', which is written in 'blazing letters along the crest of the mountain.' The message reads: "We apologize for the inconvenience" (609-610). The Universe, consequently, is shown to be created by an alien force (God) who has left the Universe; as a result, it seems deserted by the power that created it. Thus, Adams has authored a seemingly divine creator who has purposefully created the Universe that the characters of *The Trilogy* exist in, making it a BDO. However, Adams uses every opportunity to remark that nothing in the Universe matters and that everything is either random or a coincidence. In addition, Adams invokes travesty by describing the Universe as 'vastly hugely mind-bogglingly big.' It is not, as Butler describes BDOs, sublime. The Universe is removed from the sublime and the mysterious way we often view it and is brought down to the ordinary by its ridiculous description. Making the Universe a BDO in this fashion opens it up to be a playground of creativity. Drawing on the human desire for exploration, which is at the centre of SF, Adams changes the trope with this laidback attitude.

Aletta van der Colff makes the point that 'Adams's fictional universe is carefully constructed on Sartre's claim that "Existence itself is contingent, gratuitous, unjustifiable"' (125). Although I agree that the novels contain the same sentiment as Sartre's claim, I cannot support the argument that the novels are constructed on it. Adams has created a massive BDO that meets all the criteria, yet also reverses them; pushing the concept to the extreme (having the entire Universe

as the BDO and having the creative alien force as God). Further, Adams deprives the BDO of meaning and the Universe of coherence. The novels even refuse to allow the readers and the characters to find sublimity in the vastness and beauty of space, unless they find it on Adams' terms with chaos and randomness included. It is not to be overlooked that Adams was a humourist who loved to play with expectations and language for the sake of comedy. Nevertheless, I argue that the use of the Universe and the Earth as BDOs is evidence of Adams' atheistic and absurdist worldview and comment on the general function of BDOs in science fiction. This is further supported when viewed in combination with the nihilistic reactions to the BDOs and the refusal to provide a form of closure in the novels. In David Seed's words 'the importance of human existence is undermined, the pettiness of human officialdom mocked, and the scale of human achievement parodied' (300).

World Building

As mentioned, the Big Dumb Object has functions such as evoking the sublime and creating a sense of estrangement; however, it also has some more tangible functions. It provides a "safe space" for authors to explore the Universe or the alien. This safe space is needed as the entirety of space is an impossible world-building task. World-building is a technique used in all literature, both fiction and prose. It entails creating and describing the setting and surroundings of the characters. Even when writing historical fiction, the reader needs to be able to understand and visualise the world surrounding the characters. The information needed includes both descriptions of the physical surroundings and the history, norms and laws of the society created in the fiction. Descriptions of the surroundings are necessary for the reader's general

understanding of what is going on in the plot, as it would be confusing to read a story where the characters wander around in a blank space without context. The descriptions of the norms, history and rules of the *possible world* (Bertetti 2017, 48), are essential in order to build an exciting world, as nothing exists in a vacuum. Paolo Bertetti claims that although general world-building is pivotal to all genres, 'in science fiction and fantasy, in fact, the creation of detailed settings seems to be a structural necessity' (47). Further, Umberto Eco argues that all fictional worlds, even SF and fantasy worlds, are heavily based on our world, or the Actual World, as no fictive world can exist 'ex nihilo' (Bertetti 2017, 49). Adams once again takes a typical SF trope, such as worldbuilding and pushes it to its limits. He takes the concept of worldbuilding and, through Magrathea, uses it literally. In addition, he makes the earth, our Actual World, into a false object.

The creation of a possible world with the depth and detail of the Actual World is an impossible world-building task. *The Guide* comments on this in *The Restaurant at the End of the Universe* under the sub-heading '*The Universe—some information to help you live in it*' (243, italics in original). The section explains that the area of the Universe is '*infinite*,' and that there exists a '*finite number of inhabited worlds*.' This, of course, leads to the realisation that:

> *Any finite number divided by infinity is as near to nothing as makes no odds, so the average population of all the planets in the Universe can be said to be zero. From this it follows that the population of the whole Universe is also zero, and that any people you meet from time to time are merely the products of a deranged imagination*' (244, italics in original).

The section humorously shows the impossible task of world-building, as the Universe is most likely infinite. The section is also an example of Adams' ridicule

of the use of logic in much science fiction. Adams' logic in this section is sound. If you divide a finite number by an infinite number, the answer approaches zero; nevertheless, we know that there exists life in this Universe because we are surrounded by it every day, and the readers know that there exists life in *The Trilogy* because they read about it.

Another example of Adams' play on the reliance on logic in science fiction is the infinite improbability drive. The infinite improbability drive is the engine in the Starship Heart of Gold which allows the crew to cross 'vast interstellar distances in a mere nothingth of a second' (60). The inclusion of the improbability drive in the story leads to several calculations of probability. For example, when the ship containing Zaphod and Trillian picks up Arthur and Ford who are floating in the vacuum of space, Zaphod decides to calculate the probability of it. 'Trillian punched in the figures. They showed two-to-the-power-of-Infinity-minus-one to one against (an irrational number that only has conventional meaning in Improbability physics).' Zaphod then answers '[t]hats one big whack of Improbability to be accounted for. Something pretty improbable has got to show up on the balance sheet if it's all going to add up into a pretty sum' (69-70). Adams' here plays with the concept of plausibility and logic, which often play a big part in the strive for cognition in SF. By literally driving the spaceship on improbability, and including calculations of the improbable events that occur, Adams pokes fun at both SF and the notion that a novel must be believable and probable.

It has been claimed that 'Adams himself insisted he hadn't set out to write science fiction, but simply found himself without many other options after he blew up the Earth in episode one of the original radio series' (O'Dair 12.10.2009). However, when examining the text, it becomes clear that Adams both knew of and actively engaged with SF conventions. To insist that Adams stumbled into the SF genre and that his writing is a comedy that just happened to be set in space is to underappreciate and undervalue his work. In an interview, Adams discussed that an aspect of SF he enjoyed and tried to include in *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* was the aspect of letting the reader stand outside things in order to let them see the world from a 'totally different perspective' (Cited in Joll 2012, 246-247). Further, he explained that he liked 'when [SF] enables you to do fairly radical reinterpretations of human experience, just to show all the different interpretations that can be put on apparently fairly simple and commonplace events. I find that fun' (ibid). This again shows that Adams actively engaged with SF conventions.

Through metafiction, *The Trilogy* points out how ridiculous SF can be and how commonly accepted tropes, when examined closely, do not make sense. As Kropf points out in his article, *The Trilogy* draws attention to the paradigms of SF, exposing them to the reader. By using made-up statistics to prove that the plot is improbable, yet possible, Adams shows that anything can be made to sound scientific. Further, *The Trilogy* causes readers of SF to rethink what a novum is, and how they should be described. *The Trilogy* makes the familiar strange, and the strange even stranger by describing it as mundane. The remaining chapters of this

thesis will explore how *The Trilogy* makes readers re-evaluate general literary

concepts that are not SF-specific. I will primarily discuss how the novels describe

and use narrative constructs, such as the narrator and character.

Chapter 2:

Playing with Narrative: Narrators, Narratives, and Counter-Narratives

'There was a point to this story, but it has temporarily escaped the chronicler's mind.'

In this chapter, I will examine how the parodic nature of *The Trilogy* works in connection with narratological elements of narrator and narrative. I will show how *The Trilogy* can be seen as a critique of the seriousness of the science fiction genre and the dystopian and conspiratorial elements that characterise a large part of science fiction.

Narrator

Science fiction novels typically rely on either a character bound first-person narrator that functions as a witness, or a covert and neutral omniscient narrator. The use of these two types of narrators, I argue, serves to cement the characteristic SF attitude of plausibility and reliability that has become a staple of the genre, and which is considered fundamental features of SF by critics like Suvin. The function of the narrator in SF stories is to convince the narratee or implied reader, and to some degree, the reader, that the narrative being presented is plausible. The plausibility of an SF narrative is heavily based, as earlier discussed, on the cognition of the novums presented. Additionally, the plausibility is based on the reliability of the narrator. A

narrator, as Mieke Bal puts it, has to justify to the narratee how they have obtained

the knowledge they present. In order to do this and provide a trustworthy frame for

the narrative, SF novels often have a "witness narrator", which Bal defines as a

narrator who 'stands apart, observes the events, and relates the story according to

their point of view' (Bal 2017, 20). Moreover, the story told by a witness narrator

'must be considered "true"' (ibid). "True" here does not signify that the story should

be considered historical or non-fictional, only that it 'speaks for the implied claim of

the narrator' (ibid). With *The Trilogy*, Adams does the opposite.

Adams once again challenges a norm in SF literature; he uses an external,

not character-bound narrator who is seemingly omniscient, yet refuses to make clear

how they have obtained the information they are providing. Further, the narrator

openly manipulates and edits the story and holds back information from both the

narratee and the reader. An example of the narrator presenting information to the

narratee without any indication of where the information is gathered from can be

seen in the incident where a sperm whale and a bowl of petunias are suddenly called

into existence above the planet of Magrathea. The narratee is given insight into both

what the whale and the bowl of petunias are thinking. This insight makes the reader

question the narrator's reliability. At this point in the story, the notion of the

"omniscient" narrator presenting the characters' thoughts to the narratee is not new,

and it can be argued that the reader accepts it as reasonable extrapolation. Yet, in the

section with the whale and petunias, Adams pushes the notion of presenting the

character's thoughts even further, and the narration becomes even less "believable."

As the bowl of petunias is falling to its death, it thinks 'Oh no, not again'

(91). The inclusion of the bowl of petunias' thought fits in with the reader's

reasonable extrapolation. However, the narrator then proceeds to explain that

'[m]any people have speculated that if we knew exactly why the bowl of petunias had thought that we would know a lot more about the nature of the Universe than we do now' (ibid, italics added). The narratee is here presented, not only with the thoughts of a character but also with the speculations of unnamed groups of actors who have no function in the rest of *The Trilogy*. What is implied here is that the information conveyed in the narrative is common knowledge for 'many people,' which in turn makes us ask why and how it is known, and why the narrator is telling the story if it is already a known "historical event." I am not arguing that the intention behind this incident is to force readers to contemplate the function and conventions of the concept "narrator." However, the section is emblematic of the disregard Adams has for conventions in SF and his readiness to ignore these in pursuit of a humorous and interesting narrative. When Adams ignores these conventions, he reclaims the freedom that is inherent in literature, especially in the science fiction genre, but that sadly seems to have been neglected; he is bringing joy and imagination back to the genre.

The Counter-Narrative: Adams' Philosophy in *The Trilogy*

It could be argued that Adams' literary universe is a pessimistic one; however, when studied in more detail, it becomes evident that the underlying message of the novels is positive. Adams was a vocal atheist who through his novels created a universe that is chaotic and full of coincidences. It seems like nothing the characters in *The Trilogy* do has any meaning or impact; it is all random. Although Adams' literary universe is chaotic and atheistic, it is not pessimistic. Adams simply invites us to marvel at the wonders of the Universe without trying to impose meaning, structure

or divinity on it. He is asking: 'Isn't it enough to see that a garden is beautiful without having to believe that there are fairies at the bottom of it too?' (80). Pawlak and Joll argue that the meaning or philosophy that can be extracted from *The Trilogy* is the realisation that the universe's lack of intrinsic purpose is in fact 'reassuring or liberating' and that 'the marvels of the world give us sufficient reason to hang around' (259).

What the novels try to teach their readers is that instead of forcing order and meaning onto the Universe, we should accept it as it is. This overarching theme of giving in to the absurdity of the Universe seems, first of all, to be a philosophical message for the reader; besides, it also functions as a parodic counter-narrative to the typical SF novel in which the goal is to gain a better understanding of the Universe through exploration and scientific discovery. *The Trilogy* does not oppose exploration or science per se; it merely suggests that "understanding" should be considered secondary to "happiness"; we should 'rather be happy than right' (128).

Throughout the novels, different characters express philosophical thoughts that echo each other. Ford is the one who ponders about the intrinsic beauty of a garden in the aforementioned quote (80). In *The Restaurant at the End of the Universe*, he continues this philosophy when uttering: 'forget all of it. Nothing matters. Look, it's a beautiful day, enjoy it. The sun, the green of the hills, the river down in the valley' (308). Arthur, at one point, decides to 'go mad,' which in Arthur's case is synonymous with letting go of control, a decision that makes him rather happy (320). The final novel of *The Trilogy*, *Mostly Harmless*, starts with four sentences, printed on individual pages: 'Anything that happens, happens. Anything that, in happening, causes something else to happen, causes something else to happen. Anything that, in happening, causes itself to happen again, happens again. It

doesn't necessarily do it in chronological order, though' (631-634). What these examples show is a philosophical attitude towards the disorder and aimlessness that surround us every day and that the Universe is comprised of.

Ford's utterances are attempts to articulate that we should appreciate the world or universe as it is without forcing belief systems, hidden meanings or conspiracies onto it. The Universe does not need anything extra to be beautiful; it is intrinsically so. Ford is a rather easy-going character who follows the flow of the Universe and adapts to the situations he is in, while Arthur is the opposite: a rigid Englishman who was thrown into an intergalactic adventure against his will. He continually tries to reintroduce the familiar ways of the Earth into a universe that does not want them, examples being his constant hunt for a decent cup of tea or trying to teach "cavemen" scrabble. Due to Arthur's rigid nature, when he decides to go mad, what he in fact does is to stop questioning the absurdity and chaos of the Universe, and to become more like Ford, and just accept reality as it is – even if reality is 'chasing a Chesterfield sofa across the fields of prehistoric Earth,' which it is in Arthur's case (325). The section at the beginning of *Mostly Harmless* conveys the same sentiment, in its own humoristic spin on "Que sera, sera."

A significant plot point in the first novel is the search for "the ultimate question." The search is an example of where satire is produced through the parody. Science fiction generally endeavours to answer the questions of where humanity is going and what challenges we face in the future. In *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, the search is not for the answer but for the question. The answer has already been calculated by a super-computer named 'Deep Thought;' however, as Deep Thought explains 'I don't think […] that you are going to like [the answer].' The answer is absurdly enough forty-two (119-120). Adams turns the quest-trope on its

head; making the protagonists search for the ultimate question that will make sense of the ultimate answer. As SF tends to comment on society and our place in it, when *The Trilogy* parodies SF we get a commentary on SF's need to make sense of the Universe as well as a satirical comment on humanity's and philosophers' constant struggle to try to find meaning in our existence. *The Trilogy* takes this longing for an understanding of life's big question and satirises it by making everything improbable and pointless. In addition, the satire is also a part of *The Trilogy*'s underlying philosophy of how we should view life. Adams, as mentioned, criticises commercialism, with its focus on buying unnecessary objects in an attempt to produce happiness. This can be seen already in the preface to *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* as the narrator describes humans as 'ape-descended life forms [that] are so amazingly primitive that they still think digital watches are a pretty neat idea' (5). They continue by describing that the Earth had a problem

> which was this: most of the people living on [Earth] were unhappy for pretty much of the time. Many solutions were suggested for this problem, but most of these were largely concerned with the movement of small green pieces of paper, which is odd because on the whole it wasn't the small green pieces of paper that were unhappy. (ibid)

Adams also criticises the monotony of routines, which Arthur is a symbol of. Through this satire, Adams offers the reader an alternative perspective on society as well as a new and potentially empowering outlook on our lives and the world. Being able to say, "hang the sense of it" and to revel in the randomness and weirdness of the Universe, discovering the beauty in chaos, can be experienced as liberating. The philosophical attitude towards the randomness of the Universe is also a part of what I call the "positive dystopia."

The Positive Dystopia

The Trilogy functions as a counter-narrative to the long-lasting trend of serious and dystopian science fiction, which seems to have increased in popularity in the last century. Many SF dystopias are "political dystopias" where the government or ruling classes are oppressing a section of the people. The oppressed group can be working class, as in *The Time Machine* by H. G. Wells or *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins; people of colour (often represented metaphorically through aliens) such as in *The Day After the Day the Martians Came* by Frederik Pohl; women, as in *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood; and people with disabilities like in *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley. One of the functions of such dystopian novels is to demonstrate to the reader the consequences if we, as Walter Benjamin pointed out, view progress as 'something that automatically pursued a straight or spiral course;' something that happens automatically as if it were autonomous (Benjamin 2017, 741). Dystopias serve to point out that history will not change for the better if humanity does not set out to do so. Further, these novels force us to interact with ideas like John Stuart Mill's famous quote, which is continually rephrased, '[b]ad men need nothing more to compass their ends, than that good men should look on and do nothing' (Mill 1867, 36). Mill is also credited as the first person to use the term dystopia as a counterpart to utopia. Science fiction is filled with dystopian imagery, conspiracies, empires and dictatorships. *The Trilogy* actively uses SF readers' knowledge of these reoccurring patterns and attitudes to challenge the norm of dystopian science fiction.

The Trilogy, on the one hand, qualifies as a dystopian novel. The earth is destroyed; the population of the Galaxy is tricked into believing that they live in a democracy when, in reality, it is an autocracy; finally, God has literally left his creation. On the other hand, whereas most dystopian novels depict a bleak and cynical world, the dystopian elements *The Trilogy* are not pessimistic; they are components in the overarching theme of accepting the Universe with all its flaws and randomness. An example of this "positive dystopia" is the autocracy of the Galaxy.

The conspiracy surrounding the power structure of the Galaxy is first mentioned in a footnote on page 28, which details the reason for the word 'Imperial' being part of the president's title, and explains that the president is a figurehead. The footnote goes into details about the President of the Galaxy's function as a figurehead and that 'very very few people realise that the President and the Government have virtually no power at all, and of these people only six know whence ultimate power is wielded' (28). Throughout the first two novels of *The Trilogy,* the conspiracy becomes an increasingly significant part of the narrative and plot. It becomes clear throughout *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* and *The Restaurant at the End of the Universe* that Zaphod is part of a group dedicated to uncovering the truth behind the governing of the Galaxy. The hints concerning the conspiracy become more apparent as the novel progresses, building to a sinister sensation, similar to that of many dystopian science fiction stories. Nevertheless, the reveal of the galactic autocrat is intentionally anti-climactic. In Chapter 28 of *The Restaurant at the End of the Universe*, the narrator explains that 'one of the many major problems with governing people is that of who you get to do it; or rather of who manages to get people to let them do it to them' (278). Further, the narrator

suggests that the people who want to rule are the people who are 'least suited for the job;' the narrator then goes on to ask '[w]ho can possibly rule if no one who wants to do it can be allowed to?' (ibid). The section builds in similar ways to other dystopian SF novels where there is a sinister conspiracy to uncover.

The unravelling of conspiracies, often performed by a small group who have understood a secret that the rest of society cannot grasp, is a reoccurring theme in dystopian SF. *The Trilogy* builds on SF readers' pre-existing knowledge of the genre to create suspense and, subsequently, humour when the readers' expectations are subverted. Zaphod, Trillian and Zarniwoop (a member of Zaphod's group) arrive at a world hidden away by a 'vast field of Unprobability,' where they find a small shack where the leader of the Galaxy resides with his cat (279). The scenery that the group encounters is described as a 'scrubby land' with a 'small rough pathway' leading up to a 'small shack' with a 'leaking roof.' The interior of the shack is similarly described as old, 'beaten up' and 'scratched,' and the Ruler of the Galaxy is depicted as 'shabby, his back was hunched, and his eyes, though open, seemed closed' (ibid). The descriptions reverse the reader's expectations of what an all-powerful autocrat should be depicted as. It also challenges the expectations the readers have built up through the narrative. The expectations built up by the reader is something that Bal calls *determination* (108). The issues surrounding the conspiracy has been repeated throughout the narrative, making the reader build an expectation of the events to come. Even though the section reverses the typical dystopian suspense that it has built up, a new type of suspense appears as the reader comes across an unfamiliar counter-narrative.

When examining the autocracy of the Galaxy in closer detail, it becomes clear that the governing of the Galaxy is not as bad as presented. As Zaphod

concludes: 'I think the Universe is in pretty good hands' (284). The ruler of the Galaxy is not an egomaniac dictator who revels in power; he is a man who, according to himself, tries his best not to rule. The ruler is a truly neutral sovereign as he is not sure about anything; he does not make any assumptions. He does not even assume that there exist other beings in the Universe than the ones he can observe in the present. Because of this, he makes decisions based solely on himself, without taking into account how it will affect other people, but also without any thought of gain or external motivations. He even contemplates if the men who visit him to consult about the fate of the Galaxy actually came to visit him that day, or if it was just in his imagination. He believes they did because '[t]here's mud on the floor, cigarettes and whisky on the table, fish on a plate for you and a memory of them in my mind. Hardly conclusive evidence I know, but then all evidence is circumstantial' (280). The nature of the ruler fits in with the sentiment presented in *The Restaurant at the End of the Universe*: the person who least desires to rule the Universe is the only person who can do so justly. Further, it represents the overarching philosophical theme of *The Trilogy*: the positive dystopia.

The novels are permeated with this philosophy, reminding us that science fiction is not inherently serious and dark; it can be fun and silly. As Octavia Butler explains 'I was attracted to science fiction because it was so wide open. I was able to do anything and there were no walls to hem you in' (Cited in Balagun 13.01.2006). Science fiction is a genre open to almost anything imaginable when it comes to location, characters, characteristics, objects and inventions. Still, it seems that many SF writers have continued to write serious and dystopian novels that are very close to the Actual World. *The Trilogy* then becomes a potent counter-narrative to the dark, realistic science fiction we have become used to. The playfulness and

excitement of the possibilities that exist within SF become evident in a scene from *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* movie. In the scene, Trillian explains why she left the Earth and chose to travel with Zaphod. She enthusiastically shows Arthur the different inventions that are in the spaceship's kitchen, such as a machine that 'detects what you are craving and makes it for you,' and a knife that toasts bread while slicing it. She then exuberantly exclaims '[w]e're on a spaceship, Arthur! In space!' (Jennings 2005, 38:33-39:03). The positive and strikingly different narrative that *The Trilogy* presents is perhaps one of the reasons that it is still popular after 40 years; the dystopian trend in SF has persisted. Therefore, we are still in need of this positive counterpart.

The Trilogy and the Picaresque Tradition

As mentioned, *The Trilogy* are metafictional and self-reflective novels. In chapter eight of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, Ford and Arthur are thrown into the vast vacuum of space. *The Guide* then explains that '*you can survive in the total vacuum of space for about thirty seconds*.' It then goes on to say that '*the chances of getting picked up by another ship within those thirty seconds are two to the power of two hundred and seventy-six thousand, seven hundred and nine to one against*' (53-54, italics in original). Ford and Arthur are then picked up by a passing ship. By applying probability to the story, Adams tests how far the concepts of novums and cognitive estrangement can be stretched before they become useless, and he challenges what the reader accepts as reasonable extrapolation. He is "mathematically" showing that the plot he has written is improbable, yet not impossible. By playing with such mathematical improbabilities, Adams comments

on science fiction's search for probability. Similarly, *The Trilogy* continually comments on how ridiculous some of its concepts are and is also critical and self-aware of the narrative process throughout the novels. Michele Hannoosh argues that a 'major aspect of parody to emerge from recent theoretical considerations of the genre is its essential reflexivity, its capacity to reflect critically back upon itself, not merely upon its target" (113). This reflexivity can also be described as metafiction or metacommentary. Hutcheon explains that one of metafiction's functions is 'to make readers aware of both its production and reception as cultural products' (xiii). Throughout *The Trilogy*, there are instances where it becomes clear that the narrator is aware that they are retelling a story to a narratee. Examples of this are when the narrator pauses the retelling to address the reader directly or when the narrator trails off on a tangent and then admits to not remembering what the point of the story was; consequently, the narrator of *The Trilogy* openly manipulates the story.

As earlier discussed, it is challenging to place *The Trilogy* within one genre, and I have tried to define the novels based on what I observe to be the key elements of the novels; this has led to *The Trilogy* being defined, in this thesis, as a parodic science fiction comedy with strong elements of satire. Nevertheless, *The Trilogy*, being post-modern parodic novels, draw on several sources of inspiration and include more than the elements mentioned. In other words, *The Trilogy* does not let itself be limited by genre. For example, the novels rely on elements of the picaresque and travel literature. An example of the picaresque influence is the narrator or, 'implied author,' which Kropf argues is a 'bungling author whose work embodies disorder and aimlessness as opposed to the genre's usual embodiment of order and direction' (61). The "implied author" of *The Trilogy*, nevertheless, differs from the typical picaresque narrator. The difference is due to *The Trilogy*'s narrator

being a third-person narrator while picaresque narratives are usually told from a first-person perspective. *The Trilogy* has also received criticism for its plot being somewhat untidy. The blame for the untidy structure of the novels has often been placed on Adams' notorious aversion to deadlines and his tendency to add last-minute additions to the story (O'Dair 12.10.2009). In *The Salmon of Doubt*, Adams famously wrote 'I love deadlines, I love the whooshing noise they make as they go by' (McCrum 12.05.2012), and there were rumours of Adams being placed on house-arrest by his editors to make sure he finished production on time (O'Dair 12.10.2009). The untidy plot structure is also a connection to the picaresque influence and the episodic origin of the radio show. I agree that *The Trilogy* appears to be narrated aimlessly and with an impression of disorder, but the aimlessness is only on the surface. Looking at the overarching structure of *The Trilogy*, it becomes apparent that there is consistency both concerning plot and the underlying meaning and philosophy of the novels. Plot threads, like the bowl of petunias thinking 'Oh no, not again', get picked back up and explained in later novels, showing that while the structure and presentation of information seem random at first, is often explained at a later point. Sections of narration that seem unnecessary are hints of things yet to come. In addition, the style of the bungling author represents the overarching philosophy by "going with the flow".

In his article "The Nature of Picaresque Narrative: A Modal Approach," Ulrich Wicks argues that the picaresque is not a dead genre, as some critics claim; instead, he proposes the picaresque should be defined not as a genre, but as a mode. Wicks argues for a spectrum of modes reaching from *romance* at one end to *satire* at the other, with *history* in the middle. The spectrum ranges from 'better than the world of experience' (*romance*) to 'worse than it' (*satire*) with 'more or less equal to

it' in the middle (*history*). *Picaresque* is situated between *satire* and *comedy* on this scale (Wicks 1974, 240). By viewing the picaresque as a mode and not a genre, Wicks argues that 'we would expect to find [the picaresque] in widely varying degrees in much fiction' (1974, 241). Wicks' theory applies to *The Trilogy* since they are foremost science fiction novels, while also drawing heavily on the picaresque.

One of the aspects that connect *The Trilogy* with the picaresque is the overtly intrusive narrator. The narrator in *The Trilogy* can be compared to Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* or the narrator in Lemony Snicket's children's book series *A Series of Unfortunate Events*. Wayne C. Booth reminds us that 'It is evident that in *all* written works there is an implied narrator or "author" who "intrudes" in making the necessary choices to get his story or his argument or his exposition written in the way he desires' (164, italics and notations in original). The intrusive narrator is not limited to the picaresque mode; yet the narrator in picaresque novels tends to be more overtly intrusive than the narrators in other genres. The intrusive aspect of the narrator of *The Trilogy* is combined with a self-conscious element. According to Booth, a self-conscious narrator is a narrator 'who intrudes into his novel to comment on himself as a writer, and on his book, not simply as a series of events with moral implications, but as a created literary product' (165). This type of narrator is also a significant part of the picaresque. Wicks' in his book *Picaresque Narrative, Picaresque Fictions*, argues that '[a]lready with the third and fourth major picaresque [...] self-consciousness is coded into the genre' (1989, 62). The overtly self-conscious, intrusive narrator, which *Tristram Shandy*'s narrator exemplifies, is clearly not a new literary device, however, it seems to be a somewhat lost art as the modern realistic novel tends to value the covert narrator, who does not

convey their judgement on the story being told. Even in novels with first-person narrators, the narration occurs so seamlessly that the reader is supposed to forget that there is a narrator, thus forgetting that the narrator inflicts "personal" motives and intentions onto the narrative. To clarify, when I discuss the motives of the narrator, I do not imply it in a psychoanalytic manner. I am referring to the motives that are visible in the text, imbued into the narrator by the author. The narrative style of *The Trilogy* breaks with the expectations of the modern novel and returns to the opinionated, intrusive, self-conscious narrator of *Tristram Shandy*. For readers unfamiliar with this narrative style, it becomes surprising, thus defamiliarizing the text. The defamiliarization of, and disregard for, conventions in *The Trilogy* enable the novels to be read on three levels of understanding. Firstly, it can be read fairly straightforwardly as a form of travel-literature where the humour is found in the absurdity of the situations. Secondly, it can be read with a deeper understanding of language, where the reader understands the humour that occurs when Adams plays with phrasing and the satirical elements in the novel. Lastly, it can be read parodically and metafictionally with an understanding of the references to conventions found in science fiction and with an understanding of the literary history and conventions surrounding narrators, narration, and characters.

One of the clearest examples of the intrusive narrator can be seen in *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* where the crew of the Starship Heart of Gold are in orbit around what Zaphod believes to be the newly rediscovered legendary planet of Magrathea. As they all stand on the bridge and marvel at the 'binary sunrise' over the presumably dead planet, Arthur utters: '[t]he suspense is killing me' (79-82). Arthur's utterance is then followed by commentary from the intrusive narrator:

Stress and nervous tension are now serious social problems in all parts of the Galaxy, and it is in order that this situation should not be any way exacerbated that the following facts will now be revealed in advance.

The planet in question *is* in fact the legendary Magrathea.

The deadly missile attack shortly to be launched by an ancient automatic defence system will result merely in the breakage of three coffee cups and a mouse cage, the bruising of somebody's upper arm, and the untimely creation and sudden demise of a bowl of petunias and an innocent sperm whale.

In order that some sense of mystery should still be preserved, no revelation will yet be made concerning whose upper arm sustains the bruise. This fact may safely be made the subject of suspense since it is of no significance whatsoever. (82, italics in original)

In addition to the obvious comedy produced by the idea that literary suspense would lead to any dangerous amount of stress, and the satire of the societal focus on nerves and stress management that had a surge in the mid-20th century and has continued into the 21st century, the section also has some narratological functions. The pause in storytelling is a form of *anticipation*, an anachrony or deviation in chronology that anticipates future events (Bal 2017, 70-71). According to Bal:

One more or less traditional form of anticipation is the open summary. The rest of the story explains the outcome presented at the beginning. This type of anticipation can suggest a sense of fatalism, or predestination: nothing can be done, we can only watch the progression towards the final result […]. This type [of anticipation] robs the narrative of suspense. […] However, another kind of suspense – or rather a tension that keeps the reader engaged – may take its place, prompting questions like "How could it have happened like this?" (83)

By removing the suspense about *what* is going to happen, the narrator creates suspense around *how* it is going to happen. Removing the suspense also frees the reader so that they can study the story in more detail. The suspense of *how* is, in the excerpt from *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, heightened by the absurdity of the anachrony. The readers ask themselves how a sperm whale and a bowl of petunias can be called into existence in space, and why is it 'untimely'? Further, the

reader is forced to recognise the narrator as the omnipotent force they are. The reader is reminded that the narrator includes and excludes information at their choosing and presents it in their preferred order.

As mentioned, Bal points out that '[t]his type of anticipation can suggest a sense of fatalism, or predestination: […] we can only watch the progression towards the final result' (83). This is interesting as it does not seem to fit with the philosophy of *The Trilogy*. However, I would argue that in this instance the effect of the anticipation is not, as Bal proposes, fatalism. Instead, the section reinforces the reoccurring philosophy found in these novels, which seem to be that it is not the result that is interesting; it is the travel that leads you there; the twists and turns that appear on the road to the goal. So, even though the narrator pauses to "spoil" the ending for the narratee, the intrusion does not spoil the enjoyment of the telling.

The narration of *The Trilogy* differs from the picaresque tradition as it is narrated by a seemingly omniscient third person narrator. Wicks refers to opposing viewpoints when explaining that there exists disagreement in the academic community concerning the validity of picaresque novels with third-person narrators. Claudio Guillen's argument 'that the absence of the first-person form "prevents a story … from being picaresque in the full sense,"' is contrasted with Alexander Parker's concern that the autobiographical form can be a handicap to the picaresque novel (Cited in Wicks 1989, 56). Wicks argues that '[u]ltimately, distinctions based on person do not hold up to intensive narratological scrutiny.' He then, somewhat contradictory, goes on to discuss basic themes and motives of the picaresque novel where some, like closure, wholly depend on the narration stemming from a first-person autobiographical narrator, showing that Wicks bases the picaresque tradition

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on a first-person narrator as well (1989, 56-57). Given that the first-person picaro narrator is an essential aspect of the picaresque tradition, *The Trilogy* is not necessarily a picaresque novel, but it draws on the traditions and fits within the mode of the picaresque.

The narrative style of *The Trilogy* is similar to the picaresque as it is "biographical." However, the narrator of *The Trilogy* is not an author of fictional literature or writing his autobiography, as the narrator so often is in metafiction. The narrator of *The Trilogy* is a chronicler or bibliographer retelling a series of "true events." This aspect of the narrator as a chronicler of true events brings *The Trilogy* closer to the narrative style of traditional science fiction. However, unlike traditional SF, and similar to picaresque and metafiction, it becomes clear that the narrator both can and will manipulate the story. This overt manipulation and self-consciousness can, for example, be found in small instances where the narrator edits the narrative in full view of the reader. Examples of the manipulation are: '[i]n an extraordinary gesture *which is pointless attempting to describe*,' 'Zaphod moved forward to it, slowly, like a man possessed – *or more accurately like a man who wanted to possess*' and 'Zaphod's eyes sparkled with something that may or may not have been avarice as he passed over them. *In fact, it's best to be clear on this point – avarice is definitely what it was*' (211, 235, 238, italics added). These examples show how the narrator 'verbalize ideas *adjectivally*' through 'judgemental phrases that infiltrate descriptive and narrative language and that often apply to the other characters of the fictional world' (Cohn 2000, 308, italics in original).

One of the clearest examples of the opinionated and intrusive narrator is found in Chapter 25 of *So Long, and Thanks for All the Fish*. Chapter 25 is also, perhaps, the most openly metafictional section in the entire trilogy. The chapter

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appears after Arthur has taught Fenchurch, his girlfriend, how to fly, and before they fly off to a romantic night among the stars. The narrator, then, inserts a chapter where he addresses the criticism that they have received about the telling of the story. The narrator starts the chapter: '[t]hose who are regular followers of the doings of Arthur Dent may have received an impression of his character and habits which, while it includes the truth and, of course, nothing but the truth, falls somewhat short, in its composition, of the whole truth in all its glorious aspects' (568). The narrator then explains that they do not narrate every instance in the protagonist's life, such as the brushing of teeth and the number of steps on the stairs. The narrator has also omitted instances like what happened between Arthur and Trillian, 'did that get anywhere? To which the answer was, of course, mind your own business' (569). The section is a metafictional commentary on the process of storytelling. It is impossible to include every action and description in a novel. The chapter also clearly shows that the narrator manipulates the story based on their ideology and preference. Further, the chapter is highly disruptive. The chapter, which is a "disclaimer" or explanation, is not presented as a preface, epilogue, or footnote; the chapter is placed in the middle of the narrative and intrudes while Arthur and Fenchurch float mid-air. The narrator is once again disrupting the process of reading, estranging the reader from the story. These are elements that are rarely found in science fiction, but can be found in both the picaresque tradition and the post-modern novel. The section becomes further intrusive and opinionated when the narrator explains that 'the cry from the farthest reaches of the Galaxy' wants to know:

> "This Arthur Dent" […] "what is he, man or mouse? Is he interested in nothing more than tea and the wider issues of life? Has he no spirit? Has he no passion? Does he not, to put it in a nutshell, fuck?"
> Those who wish to know should read on. Others may wish to skip on to the last chapter, which is a good bit and has Marvin in it. (569)

The reader is here faced with the narrator's overtly intrusive style, commenting metafictionally on the structure and content of the story. Through metafiction and an attitude of judgement towards the narratee, the reader is defamiliarized from the text and can, therefore, along with the narrator, reflect on the story.

The narrative editing leads to a feeling of orality, as if the narrator has not decided how the story should be told before telling it. This continues to show the unreliability of the narrator, further separating it from the narrative style of traditional science fiction. Moreover, the overt editing makes the subjective intentions and narrative manipulation evident to the attentive reader. As mentioned, all narrators must be understood as narrating from a position of power. The story is told with the information that the narrator wishes to convey; in the specific manner that the narrator wishes to convey them. It is easy for the reader to forget the subjective intentions of the narrator in novels that are not metafictional; when the narrator of *The Trilogy* openly manipulates and edits the story, this becomes more apparent to the reader. The overtly manipulative narrator becomes, then, an apparent parody of, and counter-part to, the objective and scientific narrators that the reader of science fiction is used to.

Parody of the typical narrative style of traditional science fiction appears throughout *The Trilogy*. The parody becomes apparent already in the introduction of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. The introduction parodies the narrative style found in space operas, such as *Star Wars,* which famously opens with the sentence 'A long time ago in a Galaxy far, far away' (Lucas 1977, 00:21-00:26). *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* begins: '*Far out in the uncharted backwaters of the unfashionable end of the Western Spiral arm of the Galaxy lies a small unregarded yellow sun*' (5, Italics in original). The introduction goes on to describe that '*[o]rbiting [the small yellow sun] at a distance of roughly ninety-eight million miles is an utterly insignificant little blue-green planet whose ape-descended life form are so amazingly primitive that they still think digital watches are a pretty neat idea*' (ibid, italics in original). The parody of stereotypical science fiction narration continues throughout the novels. In chapter 15 of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy,* there is an excerpt from *The Guide*'s entry about Magrathea

> *Far back in the mists of ancient time, in the great and glorious days of the former Galactic Empire, life was wild, rich and largely tax free. [...]In those days spirits were brave, the stakes were high, men were real men, women were real women and small furry creatures from Alpha Centauri were real small furry creatures from Alpha Centauri* (Adams 1996, 78, italics in original)

The quote shows a narrative style that can be found in novels like *Star Wars, Star Trek*, and Isaac Asimov's *Foundation*, to mention a few. The quote also reminds the

reader of the use of galactic bureaucratic governments that are so common in science fiction, whether it is galactic empires, federations, or unions.

The quoted section then goes on to explain how the enormous wealth of the planet of Magrathea broke the galactic economy and 'so the system broke down' and 'the Empire collapsed. […] In these enlightened days, of course, no one believes a word of it' (ibid). The empire is also brought up on page 28 where the full title of President of the Imperial Galactic Government is explained. The last living emperor was put in a "stasis field" just as he was about to die. Since his descendants are long dead and the emperor still technically is alive, the political power has 'simply and effectively moved a rung or two down the ladder.' The function of keeping the emperor alive is thus to make this power shift 'without any drastic political upheaval.' However, as the footnote points out, the job of the Galactic President 'is not to wield power but to draw attention away from it' (28). Adams here mocks the idea that science fiction stories set far in the future would still exist within an ancient autocratic governmental system, such as empires. We would like to imagine that the intelligent races in the Galaxy would have found a better ruling system than inherited power. Both the introduction of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* and the excerpt about the Empire from *The Guide* have the same function. They introduce a concept and style that is familiar to the readers and then subverts their expectation. The novel sets up plot points, the character's behaviour and a narration that is familiar to the reader, causing the reader to expect a particular outcome based on literary conventions they have observed in earlier works of SF. When the novel then breaks with these conventions the outcome becomes humorous.

Narrative Digression

Another aspect of the narrator that can seem foreign to an experienced reader of science fiction, and that is connected to *The Trilogy*'s picaresque influence is the narrator's apparent digressions. Alexis Grohman argues that the freedom of novels like *Tristram Shandy* and *Don Quixote* is 'directly related to their digressiveness,' a feature that is permitted within the frames of the novel (188). Science Fiction, especially hard SF, is written with a clear objective in mind and is stylistically narrated to convince the narratee that the story is "true." Some postmodern SF novels like David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* and Michael Moorcock's *Behold The Man* play with the concepts of sequence and time, yet, the sections in the story relate directly to the plot. The digressions found in *The Trilogy* tend to stray further from relevance than what is typically found in SF. The digressive nature of *The Trilogy* is already evident in the introduction of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* when the narrator introduces a woman sitting in a café in Rickmansworth, who has just discovered '*how the world could be made a good and happy place. This time it was right, it would work, and no one would have to get nailed to anything*' (5, italics in original). The narrator then goes on to say that '*[t]his is not her story*' (ibid, italics in original). The woman is not mentioned again until the fourth novel, where she becomes Arthur's girlfriend. The narrator's digressions throughout *The Trilogy* have several functions, as will be discussed below.

One of the clearest digressions in *The Trilogy* appears in the epilogue to *So Long and Thanks for All the Fish.* In addition to being a digression, it is also an example of metafiction and the self-conscious narrator. Further, I argue that the

section is a reference to Adams' own struggle to be a focused and productive writer. The epilogue occurs after Arthur and his girlfriend have observed God's last message to his creation, and Marvin "the Paranoid Android's" lights have gone out for the very last time. The one-page digression tells of 'a man who couldn't keep his mind on the job at hand' (611). The man was the most brilliant inventor of his planet and was, therefore, instructed to create a weapon to save the planet from an imminent alien invasion. 'The problem was that he was far too interested in things which he shouldn't be interested in, at least, as people would tell him, not *now*' (ibid, italics in original). The man did not manage to finish the weapon in time for the invasion. However, he had invented a super-fly and an off switch for children instead. The inventions he made while digressing from his task luckily turned out to become the tools for a peaceful meeting between the two species. After the narrator has told the reader the story of the inventor, they conclude that '[t]here was a point to this story, but it has temporarily escaped the chronicler's mind.' *So Long, and Thanks for All the Fish* then ends without further explanation of the relevance of the story (611).

The section, as mentioned, can be read as a clear metaphor for the situation Adams found himself in several times, where he had a deadline to meet and kept getting distracted from the writing process. This interpretation is rather obvious if the reader is familiar with interviews of Adams or biographical works. Marcus O'Dair, author of *The Rough Guide to The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, wrote that '[l]arge portions of the saga were conceived at the last possible minute, often under house arrest by whoever had the misfortune to be his editor at any given point' (O'Dair 12.10.2009). Further, the BBC writes about Adams' experience in writing the radio series that '[h]e was prone to writing notes about how irritated he was with the whole process, occasionally jotting down things like, "[t]oday I am monumentally fed up

with the idea of writing"' ("How We Got to Where We Are Tomorrow" 2020). The digression above, therefore, appears to be Adams providing the attentive reader with a glimpse into his writing process. The digressions of the inventor in *The Trilogy* are what save his planet from destruction; it could also be argued that digressions are one of the features that make *The Trilogy* great.

In *Textual Wanderings: The Theory and Practice of Narrative Digression,* both J.J. Long and Samuel Frederick argue that one of the main uses of narrative digression is pleasure. Frederick points out that 'digression delays not just the end, but also the plot elements that would point *towards* that end' (Atkin 2011, 22, italics in original). Frederick explains that digressions do not deny satisfaction, '[r]ather, it insists on its own kind of satisfaction *through* this denial' (ibid, italics in original). Using examples from Robert Walser's works, Frederick draws on the metaphor of children saving their candy to prolong pleasure; savouring the desire, because when the child eats the candy, the pleasure is over. Thus, by putting off eating the candy, savouring in the expectation of what is to come, pleasure is created, more so than the short pleasure of eating the candy (Atkin 2011, 20). *The Trilogy* has sections where the digression functions as the type of pleasure that Frederick describes. For example, the introduction of the character Wonko the Sane. In chapter 15 of *So Long, and Thanks for All the Fish*, the reader is introduced to Wonko and then told that '[w]e can talk of him much later on. This was just an interlude to watch the sun go down and to say that he was there watching it' (533). It sparks the reader's interest and creates anticipation for what is to come; allowing the reader to savour in this anticipation. I would argue that digressions like this are directly related to the plot, even if they are not relevant at the moment the digression is introduced, the section becomes relevant as the narrative thread is picked up later in the story, therefor

instances like these are not true digressions. *The Trilogy* has other digressions that are wholly unrelated to the plot, yet related to the theme, philosophy, and overall atmosphere of the novels.

Examples of the digressions that stray completely from the plot are the several appearances of Bowerick Wowbagger the Infinitely Prolonged in *Life, the Universe and Everything*. At this point in the story, Arthur has been stuck on prehistoric Earth for five years, and he has not seen his only companion on Earth, Ford, for four years. Arthur reminisces back to one of the few interactions he has had in his years on prehistoric Earth, which happened two years prior. Arthur saw a spaceship appear, which he described as 'the castaway's dream' (315). The spaceship lands near him and Wowbagger appears in front of Arthur Philip Dent and says 'You're a jerk, Dent' (316). He then flies off again. The reader is privileged to the backstory of this encounter; Arthur is not. The reader learns that Wowbagger 'was a man with a purpose. Not a very good purpose, as he would have been the first to admit, but it was at least a purpose, and it did at least keep him on the move' (317). Wowbagger is an immortal being who does not know how to cope with immortality. To combat the terrible listlessness or 'long dark teatime of the soul' that he felt, he decides to insult every being in the Universe systematically (ibid). He reappears later in the novel to insult 'Arthur Philip Deodrat and to insult Arthur Philip Dent again, only to realize that he has 'done [Arthur] before' (340, 469).

Another of these digressive sections appear in the transition between chapter 30 and 31 of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy,* where Arthur has uttered: 'I seem to be having tremendous difficulties with my life-style' (128). The narrator then goes on to explain that '[i]t is of course well known that careless talk costs lives, but the full scale of the problem is not always appreciated' (129). The reason for this comment

is that 'at the very moment that Arthur said, "I seem to be having tremendous difficulty with my life-style," a freak wormhole opened up in the fabric of the space-time continuum and carried his words far far back in time across infinite reaches of space to a distant Galaxy where strange and warlike beings were poised on the brink of frightful interstellar battle' (ibid). During a meeting between the leaders of the two warring species, a silence fell, and at that moment, Arthur's words floated across the table. Unfortunately, in the language of the warring species, this was one of the most insulting things a person could say. Arthur's words become the start of a war that lasts for millennia. The two species fought until they realized that the utterance had not come from either of the leaders, but had, in fact, come from "our" Galaxy. They then set out to wage war on our Galaxy, however 'due to a terrible miscalculation of scale the entire battle fleet was accidentally swallowed by a small dog' (ibid).

Both these sections digress entirely from both the plot of the novels they appear in and the plot of *The Trilogy* as a whole. Nevertheless, a digression is never useless; it will always serve as information; this is because all text is at its core information. Thus, sections added to the narrative will contain information about, for example, the narrator, characters, literary universe, philosophy of the novel, et cetera. The digressions set a tone for the novels; in the section with the two warring races it shows us the omnipotence of the narrator; Arthurs' reaction to being called a jerk, twice, tell us something about Arthur as a character. Further, what the digressions do in *The Trilogy* is to aid in creating a massive literary universe which Adams continues to build upon, continually adding new information. Some of this information serves to expand both plot and universe, while other pieces of information only serve to expand the literary universe. The creation of large fictional universes, where relatively unrelated sections fit together due to an overarching theme and because they exist in

the same fictional universe, is something that especially comic book franchises like Marvel and DC have actively pursued throughout the years.

Even though the digressions stray from the plot, they stay true to the underlying philosophy and theme of the novels. *The Trilogy* simply asks its reader to go with the flow; to accept the pretences of the novels and enjoy the silly adventure, inventions, and characters presented there. When deciding to ignore the hopeless existential crises provided when faced with the endlessness of the Universe, as we often are in science fiction, and focus on the beauty that is created by, and exist in the chaos, the positive dystopia is created. The digressions help to underline this sentiment. Further, a function of these digressions is to fully take advantage of the opportunities that the science fiction genre provides. The adventurous digressions with no real connection to the plot are likely one of the reasons why this novel is so popular with young readers. The story rejects the norms of the science fiction genre, but it also rejects the notions we have of what a coherent narrative should be. *The Trilogy* represents the pure joy of imagination and reading.

Chapter Conclusion

The narration in *The Trilogy* is a large part of what makes the novels parodic, and the satirical elements are also highly connected to it. The parodic and satirical elements are not only connected to the overarching narration and plot structure but more specifically, to the small descriptions that the narrator adds in between dialogue. This is one of the reasons for arguing that the novels are the preferred format for the story. The television and movie versions, and to some degree, the radio version, do not display the descriptions from the narrator that are imbedded

between lines of dialogue. As these descriptions are "acted out" in the television show, movie and radio show, it misses a lot of the nuances and tones that the novels include.

The narrator directly challenges the reader with their intrusive and objective style. When the narrator openly edits and manipulates the story, they create a narrative that is defamiliarized. The defamiliarization is both due to the break with the science fiction tradition of objective narrators and because the narrator inserts themselves into the story in a metafictional manner that is unfamiliar to readers of most types of fiction.

Chapter 3:

Playing With Character: Challenging Expectations and Empowering the Reader

"Ford," he said, "you're turning into a penguin. Stop it."

Since the novels are narrated in an overtly intrusive and opinionated manner, the narrator has a form of character-effect. Bal defines the character-effect as occurring 'when the resemblance between human beings and fabricated figures is so strong that we forget the fundamental difference: we even go so far as to identify with the character' (105). Although they are not a 'character-bound' narrator, as Bal would call it (13), they have "personality", and the reader views them as more than merely a semantic function. The study of characters has long been an essential part of literary criticism. In *Poetics*, the earliest surviving text on dramatic theory, Aristotle identifies plot as more important than character, while later critics like E. M. Forster argues the opposite (Herman et al. 2012, 97-98). Bal, like Forster, argues that the '[c]haracter is intuitively the most crucial category of narrative, and also the one most subject to projection and fallacies' (105). The study of characters in *The Trilogy* can, therefore, provide us with insight into the parodic nature of the novels. However, as Bal points out, the study of characters is subject to faults through projections from the analyst in the form of ideology and psychoanalysis of the character. James Phelan and Peter J. Rabinowitz, when defining the term character, explain that they consider the character to be able to hold several positions in the

story; that '[c]haracters do resemble possible people, they are artificial constructs that perform various functions in the progression, and they can function to convey the political, philosophical, or ethical issues being taken up by the narrative' (Herman, et al. 2012, 97). In line with Phelan and Rabinowitz's argument, one of the functions of the characters in *The Trilogy* is to help convey the philosophical ideas of the novel.

When Phelan and Rabinowitz discuss the position of characters as resembling possible people and being artificial constructs, they are differentiating between *characters* and *actors,* respectively. Mieke Bal defines *character* as 'the anthropomorphic figures provided with specifying features the narrator tells us about. Their distinctive characteristics together create a character-effect' (104). I would argue that while the character-effect is essential in all fiction, it is even more critical in novels where the settings and plot seem far removed from the Actual World, such as fantasy and science fiction. The importance of character-effect in these genres is due to the estrangement the reader otherwise experiences. When engaging in a literary universe that is far removed from the Actual World, it is helpful for the reader to have a relatable element that they can hold on to; this element can often be a character. In addition, one of the attractions of fantasy and science fiction is for the reader to "escape" reality and almost feel like they are part of the narrative. This is easier when engaging with a relatable protagonist. In contrast, the character-effect in Adams' stories is not particularly strong. Adams plays with character stereotypes and provides the reader with un-relatable, chaotic, and sometimes frustrating characters. The constant absurdity of the stories, which is evident in the narrating style, descriptions, and characters' appearance and actions,

serves to estrange the reader from the character and to downplay the character-effect.

The protagonists of science fiction novels are naturally very diverse, given the range of sub-genres that exist. Examples of SF-protagonists are the 'ambivalent hero' (Prieto-Pablos 1991), a kind of anti-hero like the protagonist in Frank Herbert's *Dune*, whose powers could as easily be used for evil as for good. We also find the scientist or researcher who is on a trip where they are sent to research a novum, or they come across one on their travels, as in Clarke's *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Another incarnation of the SF protagonist is the human who comes into contact with an extra-terrestrial for the first time, like in the Steven Spielberg movie, *E.T.*, or in Wells' novel *The War of the Worlds*. Even though these examples are highly different, the protagonists are connected by an inner drive for adventure, knowledge, justice, and closure. All these characters, whether they are bureaucrats, scientists, children, or members of the military or search and rescue groups, all want to understand how their particular novum works and to see their quest through. In *The Trilogy*, Adams plays with these stereotypical qualities of the SF characters. The characters in *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* face an honourable and exciting quest to find the question that goes with the answer to life the Universe and everything. However, none of the characters are particularly motivated, and none of them are motivated by the hunt for knowledge, the thrill of adventure or to seek closure in the search for meaning; motivations which we usually find in SF characters. In *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, the characters who are invested in the quest are so for the "wrong reasons," like Zaphod, whose motivations are 'partly the curiosity, partly a sense of adventure, but mostly I think it's the fame and the money…' (81).

Bal explains that '[g]enre plays a part in a character's predictability' and further that '[c]haracters give the most pleasure when they are allowed to resist their readers instead of being overruled and forced to conform to readers' expectations' (110, 106). What Bal here explains is, arguably, one of the reasons why *The Trilogy* has become such a popular story. The characters, the narrator and the plot all resist the reader, producing a more interesting read than if it were to conform to SF's conventions. This character predictability is 'closely related to the reader's frame of reference' (Bal 2017, 112). Bal's point about frame of reference is even more poignant when discussing parody. She further points out that 'the effect of this predictability also depends on the reader's attitude with respect to literature and the book he or she is reading' (ibid). In this section, I will examine how Adams' characters resist the SF reader in a manner that becomes parodic. I will also show that the characters are imbued with either negative or positive attitudes towards the underlying philosophy of *The Trilogy*. The characters are also paired together as opposing pairs. This pairing is showed in a diagram later in the chapter. I will start this examination of Adams' characters and their resistance to the reader's expectations by examining one of the shortest-lived characters in *The Trilogy*, namely the sperm whale called into existence above the alien planet of Magrathea. Even though the whale's existence in the fictive universe of *The Trilogy* only lasts a few minutes, it still has an important symbolic role in the novels.

A Whale

The bowl of petunias and the whale which are dropped into existence above the planet of Magrathea, which is discussed earlier in this thesis, are examples of the

novels' absurd and humorous storytelling. The sperm whale also shows us how Adams uses characters as symbols which 'function to convey the political, philosophical or ethical issues being taken up by the narrative' (Herman, et al. 2012, 97); showing the reader a new philosophical way to view existence. The sperm whale becomes symbolic of life from birth to death, compressed into a few humoristic minutes of free fall. The narrator provides the reader with a 'complete record of [the whale's] thoughts from the moment it began its life till the moment it ended it,' as the whale had to come 'to terms with its identity as a whale before it then had to come to terms with not being a whale any more' (90). The sperm whale tries to name, categorise, and find meaning in its body as well as its role in this Universe. While naming the parts of its body, the whale thinks that it 'can find a better name for it later' and that it will 'probably find out what it's for later on.' Unfortunately, the whale meets a sudden death before it can figure out the functions of his body parts. The whale, like human beings, is trying to discover what its meaning in this life is, but quickly realises that it has not 'built up any coherent picture of things.' The whale decides 'never mind' and to just exist in the short, exciting, and dizzying life it has been granted. Adams' philosophy is here echoed in the whale's contemplation. Through the whale's comic search for meaning, the reader is offered an opportunity to similarly see the vastness, impossibility, and absurdity of our existence. We are like a sentient sperm whale being called into existence many miles above an alien planet. Through this section, the reader is invited to see that we too should marvel at the exciting and dizzying experience of life while we fall to our inevitable deaths. In the end, all we can hope for in our short existence is to, like the whale, be friends with the ground. (All references and

paraphrasings from the primary text in this paragraph are taken from pages 90 and 91).

The different characters in *The Trilogy* serve somewhat similar functions as the sperm whale. Just as the whale symbolises human beings' existential struggles from birth to death, so the different characters serve to represent a range of attitudes towards the meaninglessness of existence and the search for answers. Although this may sound quite bleak and serious, Adams' narrative is not a hard-hitting satirical text; it is a playful parodic counter-narrative. It does encourage the reader to view the world in a new way, but it does so in a parodic and entertaining fashion. In the end, the reader of Adams' works should, first of all, expect to be entertained, and then, if the reader is accepting, they can also be empowered. Through the narrative, the reader is presented with a disarming view of the mysteries of the Universe and a creative, unorthodox perspective on the world.

The Philosophical Pairs

In her study of characters, Bal introduces a method which shows the 'character's relevant characteristics' and the characteristics 'which are of secondary importance' (114). She proposes a method of 'relevant semantic axes,' which she describes as 'pairs of contrary meaning' (ibid). The qualifications selected for the analysis 'involves the ideological position of the analyst and also points out the ideological stances represented in the story' (ibid). Bal here uses the term *qualifications* instead of *qualities* because 'the features are attributed to the characters by a focalizer' (115). Applying the term *quality* would, according to Bal, 'suggest they really possess those features' instead of the features being placed on them by a focalizer

(ibid). The diagram that results from this relevant semantic axis is binary and subject

to the analyst's subjective take on the critical qualifications in the novel. While

inevitably reductive, the diagram can nonetheless be a good introductory tool to

show ideological positions and to discover similarities and differences between the

characters. I have chosen to include a diagram of the main characters of *The Trilogy*.

The diagram is used as a starting point for discussions on the main characters'

ideological attitudes toward the philosophy of the novels. Further, the diagram is

meant to demonstrate my interpretation that the literary characters are paired

together as oppositional characters in regard to the philosophy.

Character Qualifications					
Character	Adventurous	Positive nature	Purpose	Flexibility	Philosophy
Ford	+	+	-	+	+
Zaphod	+	+	0	+	-
Trillian	+	0	-	+	+
Eddie	0	+	-	+	0
Marvin	-	-	-	-	-
Arthur	-	-	-	-	-

Here: + = positive pole
    - = negative pole
 0 = unmarked

The table is organised from positive characters to negative character. On the positive

end of the spectrum, are Ford and Zaphod, at the negative end, we find Arthur and

Marvin, while in the middle are placed, the relatively neutral characters, Trillian and

Eddie. The reason for Eddie's and Trillian's neutrality is twofold. It is partly due to

them being the logical and calm characters that keep the rest of the crew pointed in

the right direction. They try to keep the focus and sanity of the crew. It is also because they are the two of the central or reoccurring characters that receive the least focus and are more one-dimensional than the other characters. It can also be mentioned that Adams unfortunately do not include many female characters in his novels, and the once that are included tend to be one-dimensional and seldom in focus. The female characters function more like accessories for the male characters than as characters themselves.

As mentioned, the characters are grouped into pairs of opposites. The pairings are based on the qualifications found in the chart and also on the characters' interactions with each other. The first pairing exhibits the most extreme oppositions as well as being the most featured characters, Arthur and Ford, next we have Marvin and Zaphod, and finally Trillian and Eddie. In this chapter, I will first discuss the function of the pairings. Then, the characters will be discussed individually to examine them in connection to the parodic elements. I will not be discussing all characters or pairing in detail, however, I elected to include all the main characters in the chart to show that the novels have characters on the entire spectrum.

Having the characters function as oppositional pairs have several effects. Firstly, it is a well-known fact within the comedy genre that opposites and irony create humour. Unlikely or oppositional pairings have been used in countless comedies; for example, the militarised Walter Sobchak and his counterpart, the mellow and chill The Dude in *The Big Lebowski*. In addition to this long-standing comedic tradition, the parings can also have the effect of presenting the individual character's viewpoint clearer. When the character's opinions and qualifications continuously are contrasted with their companion's opinions and qualifications, it becomes easier for the reader to grasp the differences. The juxtaposition of the

characters is similar to how the reader's views on science fiction become clearer to the reader as it is contrasted with the "un-science fiction" characteristics of the novels.

Arthur Dent is the protagonist in *The Trilogy*. Together with Ford and Marvin, Arthur is the only character to appears in all five novels. Zaphod and Trillian are mentioned in the fourth novel, but they are not part of the plot. Arthur is an uptight, rigid, and routine driven Englishman. If it were up to Arthur, he would probably prefer not to travel anywhere except down the road to the pub. Ford, on the other hand, is one of the original writers for The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy and enjoys adventure and travel, he was unfortunately marooned on Earth for 15 years before the Vogons appeared.

Ford and Arthur's relationship can be summed up in the following interaction, which occurs on the Vogon ship only minutes after the destruction of the Earth. Arthur expresses his feelings about the loss of his home planet to Ford, who responds:

> "Don't Panic."
> "I'm not panicking!"
> "Yes, you are."
> "All right, so I'm panicking, what else is there to do?"
> "You just come along with me and have a good time. The Galaxy's a fun place." (39)

This conversation demonstrates the general attitude toward life that the two characters portray. Arthur is uncomfortable with change, and through the entire trilogy takes a back seat to the actions in the story. He is grudgingly getting dragged along on adventures by the other characters. Watching Arthur stress in situations

where there are no solutions becomes hilarious as Ford effortlessly surfs through the problems with an attitude of "c'est la vie," even as they face imminent death. If the reader had been presented solely with Arthur's hopeless view of situations, it might have felt hopeless to the reader as well; however, when the situation is contrasted by Ford's "stress never helped a situation" casual attitude, the reader is given a choice of identifying or agreeing with one or the other, or maybe somewhere in between. Instead of the situation seeming dystopic, Ford's attitude always finds a way of turning the situation toward the positive and comedic.

Protagonists in science fiction stories often go through a shift in ideology or at least become more enlightened after experiencing unfamiliar sections of the Universe, meeting aliens, going through moral and ethical dilemmas surrounding AIs, et cetera. In contrast, the personalities, flaws, and traits of the characters in *The Trilogy* appear to exist in stasis. The main characters do not seem to grow, evolve, or change in any noteworthy way, the pairing of the characters, therefore also remain static. Even in *Mostly Harmless*, when Arthur suddenly gets custody of his teenage daughter, a plot twist that normally would induce change, he appears unchangeable. The static nature of the characters is evident as *The Trilogy* ends with Arthur, Ford, and Trillian on a version of the Earth as it too is destroyed by Vogons. The characters end up back where they started. There are a few exceptions such as Arthur and Marvin's reunion and bonding before Marvin's death in *So Long, and Thanks for All the Fish*. The static nature of the characters is almost more innovative, and definitely more parodic, than having the characters, especially Arthur, go through dramatic ideological or philosophical changes. In science fiction, the protagonist often gains new views on the society around them throughout the plot of the story; these changes are often meant to mimic the reader's own

ideological changes when reading the story. When Arthur subsequently returns to "Earth 2.0" in *So Long, and Thanks for All the Fish* with no changes in behaviour or ideology, it becomes comedic as his immediate instincts are to acquire a decent cup of tea and to head to his local pub. In addition to the comedic effect, the reader might contemplate what changes they would have experienced if they had gone through the same ordeals as Arthur. Instead of following the journey of the protagonist, both "physically" and mentally, the reader follows Arthur's story, but with a detached attitude. The reader can ask themselves if they would have seen the Universe in a new way, or if they would, like Arthur, have continued with their old life without any changes. The reader can, in their own reflections, "experience" the philosophy of the novels. The effect of this is, of course, down to the individual reader's focus and attention when reading; if the reader does not have any interest in pausing to reflect while reading, the effect will not be the same.

Arthur Dent: Anti-Hero, Picaro and Quintessential Englishman

Let us then start with the protagonist of these novels, Arthur Dent, the quintessential Englishman. Ulrich Wicks suggests that 'the *essential picaresque situation* – the fictional world posited by the picaresque mode – is that of an unheroic protagonist, worse than we, caught up in a chaotic world, worse than ours, in which he is on an eternal journey of encounters that allow him to be alternatively both victim of that world and its exploiter' (242, italics in original). It cannot be said that Arthur is 'worse than we,' as it is hard to imagine how anyone would cope when suddenly being thrown into a galactic adventure after the Earth is destroyed. We would perhaps hope that if given the same opportunities as Arthur, we would rise to the

occasion and take the chance to explore the Universe. Nevertheless, it is safe to say that Arthur is an 'unheroic protagonist.' Further, Arthur is involuntarily caught up in a long series of events, that seemingly have no natural end, which is a remnant of the picaro tradition.

Arthur is continually attempting to restore the normality around him, which at one point almost lead to the demise of the crew of the Starship Heart of Gold. In order to get the computer system to make a proper cup of tea, Arthur explains the history of the East India Company to it. Arthur's quest for tea leads the computer to divert all power to complete this task. Unfortunately, the attempt occurs at the same time as Vogons attack the ship. Arthur is not in search of new or exciting adventures; he is searching for routine and comfort. He drifts around without much insight into what is happening around him. Even though Arthur is the protagonist, he has little autonomy. Bal argues that '[i]n the course of the narrative the relevant characteristics are repeated so often that they emerge more and more clearly' (113) The notion of Arthur having limited control over his own life is a characteristic that has been repeated throughout *The Trilogy*. When Arthur then, in *Life, the Universe and Everything*, is faced with an alien that lives or dies due to Arthur, the juxtaposition becomes surprising and comedic. In this episode, Arthur finds himself in a cave, separated from Ford and Slartibartfast, after being teleported. The cave turns out to be a 'Cathedral of Hate' dedicated to Arthur, created by an alien named Agrajag (397). It turns out that Agrajag is a being who experiences reincarnations, and while most creatures do not retain memories from their previous lives, Agrajag does. The reason for his ability to retain memories is due to a constant through all his reincarnations: being killed by Arthur Philip Dent. In order to get his revenge on Arthur, Agrajag has come back to this world one last time. He is highly offended by

Arthur's mean-spirited vendetta against him, Arthur, on the other hand, has no recollection of Agrajag and proclaims that it is all a coincidence.

Science fiction novels often describe a search for answers; a search for the link between cause and causation, to understand how everything is connected. Here Adams presents us with the complicated mystery of how Agrajag and Arthur's lives intertwine in this morbid manner. Adams, humorously and frustratingly, denies the reader the answers to these questions when Agrajag gets killed one last time, and Arthur quickly moves on from the incident. Agrajag has become so obsessed with the notion of correlation and revenge that he has let it consume his life. Agrajag explains that in order to come back to this world in one last body to enact his revenge, he has had to 'fight to get it' (399). Agrajag is in the body of a 'fat bat' with 'broken floundering' wings (398). His mouth is filled with teeth that 'looked as if each came from a completely different animal' and they are positioned in such a way that when he speaks, they lacerate his face (ibid). Agrajag's obsession with understanding Arthur's motives, and enacting his revenge on him is causing Agrajag pain and suffering. Agrajag's search for meaning is representative of the philosophy of the novels, but also of the art of storytelling where the reader usually searches for a greater meaning that connects the different parts of the plot. Adams refuse his reader this closure and meaning. However, as the story quickly moves on to a new and equally ridiculous plot section, this refusal does not feel like a negative ideological lesson, it merely registers as part of the flow of the narrative and the flow of life. The questions in our life are not always answered. Still, we need to keep moving and tackle the next adventure, because dwelling too much on the past and searching for answers and meaning can cause us pain.

Ford Prefect

Ford is the character in *The Trilogy* who fits most with the characteristics we know from science fiction. He is adventurous and driven to explore, although he, like Zaphod, has an aura of refusing to take any situation seriously. Ford's main function in the novels is much the same as *The Guide*, namely, to be the deliverer of exposition. *The Guide* is also highly connected to Ford as he writes for the book and is usually the one who takes it into use. He guides Arthur and the reader through the unfamiliar environments and explains the novums that appear along the way. He is also the one who is most connected with the philosophy of the novels, accepting the Universe as it is and just marvelling at it without trying to imbue it with meaning and logic.

Zaphod Beeblebrox the First

Zaphod is introduced to the reader in *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* as the president of the Galaxy and as Ford's "semicousin" (they share three of the same mothers). Throughout *The Trilogy*, Zaphod presents as a chaotic and confusing character. When focalised through Arthur, he is described as 'a man lolling back in a chair with his feet on a control console picking the teeth in his right-hand head with his left hand. The right-hand head seemed to be thoroughly preoccupied with this task, but the left-hand one was grinning a broad, relaxed, nonchalant grin' (72). Zaphod is supposed to represent the wise captain who leads the crew. At least that is the semantic function that a science fiction Starship captain is expected to have.

Instead, we are presented with an ego-driven, childish man who is not even sure what his true quest is. His uncertainty is based on an operation he went through in order to become president. To become the "figurehead president," he had to hide the true objective of his presidency; to discover the actual ruler of the Galaxy. Through this narrative device of "amnesia," Zaphod invokes the mystic and pensive character who we expect to deliver some sort of plot twist or revelation when he regains his memory, but even this expectation is diverted.

Adams refuses to create characters that take the quest, or even the premise of the novels, seriously. None of the characters are particularly invested in the adventure they have ahead of them. In *The Restaurant at the End of the Universe,* the "side-quest" of finding 'the nearest place to eat' takes precedence before the main quest (207). Refusal to grapple with the dark and serious and instead focusing on the easy and fun parts of the narrative is seen throughout the novels. As Zaphod puts it: 'He wished the dark, locked off sections of his two brains would go away because they occasionally surfaced momentarily and put strange thoughts into the light, fun sections of his mind and tried to deflect him from what he saw as being the basic business of his life, which was having a wonderfully good time' (154). Zaphod, in a way, becomes a symbol for a human tendency to push away the uncomfortable and often existential thoughts that appear in our mind. He quite literally is the personification of the fight between the "logical" left side of our brain and the "creative" right side of our brain. The way he is ignoring the small voice in his head and refusing to search for meaning is representative of these conflicting feelings of both wanting to have fun and to search for meaning in our lives.

Marvin the Paranoid Android

Steve Carper divides robots that appear in fiction into six categories; robots as servants, enemies, lovers, children, successors, and doubles (4-5). In *The Trilogy* Adams plays with robots that function as servants and enemies. Much of science fiction deals with the moral problems and dangers surrounding robots or machines with artificial intelligence (AI) and artificial consciousness (AC). The plot of such novels often revolves around the moral questions of keeping sentient and conscious robots as "slaves," and the danger that would befall us if these "slaves" decided to revolt against humanity. In these narratives, some version of Asimov's "three laws of robotics" is a common theme. The rules, famous from his novel *I, Robot*, are here paraphrased as: (1) robots cannot injure or let harm come to a human; (2) robots must obey all commands from humans, as long as the command does not conflict with rule (1); (3) robots must protect their own existence, as long as it does not conflict with rule (1) and (2) (Asimov 1977, 6). There is also fiction that uses AIs without dealing much with the problems commonly associated with the laws of robotics or the ethics connected with them, for example, *Star Wars.*

Marvin "the paranoid android" is a parody of both these ways of writing about AIs and ACs. He is a fascinating, funny, and tragic character. His pessimistic view of the Universe is so thoroughly depressive that it becomes humorous in an ironic manner. Even though his complaining is constant, he becomes a sympathetic character as he is subjected to injustices and is treated as a secondary member by the rest of the crew. As mentioned, Marvin functions as a comedic and parodic counter to the artificial intelligence service robots that we are used to from science fiction. In

Star Wars, we encounter C-3PO, a positive and helpful "droid" with an English accent. C-3PO is reminiscent of a butler. Marvin has similar tasks as a butler, but, in contrast to C-3PO, Marvin conducts all his tasks with an attitude of absolute disdain. He continually complains about the mistreatment he receives from the crew in the form of leaving him as the lookout, leaving him to fight a military robot, not changing the aching diodes down the left side of his body, and forgetting him, multiple times. Marvin is, in fact, due to being left behind on several time-travelling adventures, 'thirty-seven times older than the Universe itself' (608). Marvin is also very self-aware of the fact that he is always the smartest being in any room, he manifests this by continually and loudly making everyone aware of it: 'Here I am, brain the size of a planet and they ask me to take you down to the bridge. Call that *job satisfaction?* 'Cos I don't' (65, italics in original).

Both Marvin and the rest of the technology onboard the Heart of Gold are programmed with 'GPP' or '*genuine people personality*' (64, italics in original). The doors on the spaceship are all programmed to '*have a cheerful and sunny disposition. It is their pleasure to open for you and their satisfaction to close again*' (65, italics in original). This results in all the doors happily sighing as you pass through them. Marvin, on the other hand, is a 'personality prototype' (ibid). The cheery robots and Marvin are both extreme opposites. Science fiction readers are used to AIs with personality; however, when faced with these extreme personalities, which seem to be either manic or depressive, the notion becomes comedic and almost disturbing.

Technological Characters

The moral and ethical commentary about AIs in many SF stories starts at a point in the technological evolution where AIs are humanoid, as in *Blade Runner*. In some SF stories, the robots are even programmed to believe that they are humans, like the "hosts" in *Westworld*. Other narratives have a non-humanoid AI main-computer that controls the rest of the robots and machines, such as HAL 9000 in *2001: A Space Odyssey*. In *The Trilogy* we are, as with HAL 9000, confronted with a sentient ship computer. However, where HAL was calculating and menacing, Eddie, the shipboard computer, is elated and too eager to help. Eddie is equipped with GPP, and functions as a counterpoint to the chronically depressed Marvin. His cheeriness, however, approaches unnerving, as the stasis of his positive personality is unnatural, almost manic. Like when Eddie starts to sing "You'll Never Walk Alone" while the ship is under a missile attack (87-88).

The mundane, everyday objects in our lives, like elevators and doors, have also attained sentience in Adams' universe. The elevators, or 'Sirius Cybernetics Corporation Happy Vertical People Transporter,' operate 'on the curious principle of "defocused temporal perception"' which gives them the ability to 'see dimly into the future' so that they can be at the right floor and 'pick you up even before you knew you wanted it' (178-179). The narrator further explains that '[n]ot unnaturally, many elevators imbued with intelligence and precognition became terribly frustrated with the mindless business of going up and down' (179). The absurdity of existential elevators provides a fresh perspective to a narrative that has been told countless times.

Chapter conclusion

Both the narrator and the characters in *The Trilogy* resist the reader's ideas of what the narratological elements of science fiction should entail. Through the humour and absurdity that is evident in all the elements of the novels, the reader is first and foremost entertained, which is the main objective of these novels. When viewing the narrator and characters in more detail, we also see that *The Trilogy* parodically pushes boundaries of science fiction and uses elements from metafiction, the absurd and the picaresque. *The Trilogy* does not impose limits on itself in its pursuit of entertainment and providing a new outlook for the reader.

The characters resist the readers. They refuse to fit the characteristics that the reader is familiar with from science fiction, and Adams refuses to let the reader experience any closure when it comes to the characters' endings. When the characters and narrator resist the readers, the narrative becomes new and intriguing. In having characters embody the philosophy of the novels, Adams also invites a reading experience that is liberating and potentially empowering.

Conclusion

'You just come along with me and have a good time. The Galaxy is a fun place.'

The Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy trilogy was Adams' lifework. He continually revisited the story throughout his life, revising and adding editions in new media. The story has dedicated fans who return to it repeatedly, and new readers still find their way to the novels. The story has reappeared in different formats, like the comic books produced by DC Comics and the 2005 movie. The additions to the *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* "universe" in new and popular media have helped keep the narrative relevant by introducing it to new focus groups and generations. However, I would argue that the new editions are not the reason for *The Trilogy*'s continuing popularity. The popularity is due to the relevance of the counter-narrative that the novels provide. *The Trilogy* is a counter-narrative to serious and dystopian science fiction, and also to serious, formulaic and unimaginative literature of all genres. The contemporary relevance is heightened further when compared to the popularity of the tv-show *Rick and Morty*, which bases its premise on similar absurd, metafictional, and parodic elements as *The Trilogy*.

I began my research with an interest in *The Trilogy*'s stark difference from the rest of the science fiction genre. As my project developed, I started to see that the elements I found to be interesting were parodying and commenting on characteristics of SF. The parodic elements showed that the novels were not merely comedic and silly; they were constructed as a response to the serious and overused features of the SF genre. Through further examination, I discovered how strong the

connection was between the parody and the novels' philosophical elements, which are interconnected throughout the five novels. Adams, I argue, had a particular "take" on SF that was present from the start. In the introduction to *The Ultimate Hitchhiker's Guide*, Adams explains that he came up with the idea for the first novel, lying in a field in Austria with *The Hitch-hiker's Guide to Europe* by his side. Lying there, he pondered what a hitchhiker's guide to the stars would constitute. The core element of a "guide to the galaxy" is a quite simple premise. However, it is executed with such humour, imagination, and mastery of the English language that it stands out from the literature generally found within science fiction, both then and now. For Adams, it seemed not to be the complicated plotlines with plot twists around every corner that mattered. What mattered was the telling of the story. The focus on the enjoyment of the telling is seen throughout *The Trilogy*. For example, when Adams introduces new characters that are gone again within the next page and digressions that lead nowhere. His fondness for the absurd and adventurous followed Adams throughout his career, from his time as a writer for Monty Python and script editor for *Doctor Who*, to his later work, such as the *Dirk Gently* series.

In order to examine the parodic elements of the novels, I chose to draw on concepts and ideas from different theoretical fields. Through Suvin's theories, I gained a better understanding of the science fiction genre and the foundations on which it was built. For my examination of parody, I turned to Linda Hutcheon's *Theory of Parody*, which in turn led me to her book *Narcissistic Narrative*. As the narrator and characters were among the parodic elements that stood out the most, in addition to the novums, I chose to use Bal's *Narratology* as a guide. In Chapter One, I focused on the parodic elements that are specific to the genre. Through the discussion of novums, logic, Big Dumb Objects, and World-Building, I set out to

demonstrate how Adams playfully critiques the exhausted conventions of the genre. In Chapter Two, I shifted focus to the novels' parody of narratological elements, while in Chapter Three, I examined the functions and effects of Adams' parody of norms for character representation.

As I have shown, the novels' philosophical focus on accepting the Universe with all its absurdity and meaninglessness is connected to their parodic elements. The philosophy is also connected to the novels' function as a counter-narrative. When *The Trilogy* parodies the seriousness of the SF genre and the conspiratorial nature of dystopias, it becomes satirical. Through parody, the novels comment on the attitudes of not only SF but also society more generally. These different layers of information and interpretation produce different levels of reading. The story can be read for its comedic value based on the play with language and absurd situations, or if the reader chooses, it can be read with deeper levels of understanding of the parodic and satirical elements. The possibility of multiple readings provides one reason for the novels' continued popular acclaim.

Objections may be raised with regard to the validity of the generalisations of science fiction made in this thesis. I would like to point out that no generalisation can be valid for all individual elements involved. Nevertheless, in order to analyse *The Trilogy* as a parody of science fiction, generalisations were necessary. Moreover, I consider the generalisations put forward in this thesis to be relatively uncontroversial. Objections might also be raised about the validity of studying a novel which is considered to be quite silly and nonsensical. However, as I hope this thesis has shown, *The Trilogy* deserves attention for the challenges it presents to generic norms in a way that is new and exciting. It is philosophical, without being

preachy, and it is an experiment in the limits of possibility and imagination. The novels try to be both fun and philosophical, and I would argue that they succeed. To quote Franky the Mouse: 'Well, I mean, *yes* idealism, *yes* the dignity of pure research, *yes* the pursuit of truth in all its forms, but there comes a point I'm afraid where you begin to suspect that if there's any *real* truth, it's that the entire multidimensional infinity of the Universe is almost certainly being run by a bunch of maniacs' (132-133, italics in original).

Working on this project has been somewhat challenging because few academic articles or books focus on topics that are directly relevant for my thesis. Criticism within science fiction tends to focus on serious issues such as racism, sexism, and colonialism. This focus is not a bad thing, as earlier neglected fields like feminist SF readings have had fantastic growth in the last decades. Yet, finding articles that comment on the funny, absurd or ridiculous aspects of SF has been a struggle. In my view, scholarship on science fiction could gain something by at least acknowledging the fun and fantastic aspects of the genre. When ignoring novels like *The Trilogy*, we fail to understand what they bring to the reader and the genre. We ignore the fact that these novels are popular for a reason, an attitude that can seem quite condescending. There is still work to be done with regards to the parodic elements in *The Trilogy*, as well as the non-parodic parts. When writing this thesis, I had to limit my focus so as not to stray too far from the topic of parody. There were many elements that I wanted to discuss and an abundance of literary evidence I wanted to include. These novels deserve to be studied further, and I believe there is still much to be said on the topic of discourse and humour, especially the elements of absurdity. Further, I believe that the narrator of the novels deserves a more in-depth examination than I have had the opportunity to provide here. The narrator,

with their overt intrusiveness, breaks radically not just with the norms of science fiction but the norms of most narratives.

The novels offer the readers a fresh perspective on the world and on a genre that has stalled somewhat. Science fiction, perhaps in an attempt to be taken seriously as a genre, has historically focused on dark, serious and dystopian elements. *The Trilogy*, on the other hand, is an attempt to produce science fiction that is playful, imaginative and liberating. The novels are liberating from a literary viewpoint, as they break free from the conventions and norm of the genre. The novels also have a liberating effect for the reader. *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* introduces the readers to a way of viewing the world that is based on acceptance and recognition of life's intrinsic beauty.

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