

Douglas Adams: Analysing the Absurd

by

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DEDICATION



I dedicate this dissertation:
first of all, to God – author of subjective and objective reality;
to my parents, my two sisters and ‘little’ brother – for endless entertainment in the face of
absurdity;
to Babsie – mother, mentor, friend;
and finally, to my wonderful husband, Freddie –
for knowing that faith is ‘a madness which is the only sanity’.

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ABSTRACT

This research emerges from an observation that Douglas Adams's *Hitch Hiker* Series is not merely characterised by light-hearted comedy, but is underpinned by intricate philosophical ideas, especially those of twentieth century Existentialism and the related notion of absurdity. The study also investigates the interlaced functions of Adams's fantasy and landscapes of alterity. Paradoxically, Adams's fantastical creatures serve to illuminate the human condition and the follies and monstrosities that lurk at the heart of humanity. Not only does Adams's fantasy mirror the maladies of twentieth century society, thus serving a satirical function, but it is also a mechanism for constructing meaning in the shape of alternative realities. Concepts related to alterity, such as simulation (Baudrillard), the structure of 'reality', dreaming (Descartes) and parallel universes are investigated as building blocks of Adams's fantastic story space. Furthermore, the ideas of Sartre, Camus and other originators of Existentialism, a philosophy which considers the futility of existence and the compulsion to construct subjective meaning, are elucidated and explored in relation to Adams's work. Existentialist concepts such as *facticity* and *angst*, as well as the Beckettian universe and the Theatre of the Absurd, are also discussed in the light of the *Hitch Hiker* series. Adams's extensive satirical comment is also emphasised in this study. Adams's satire does not merely castigate the evils of twentieth century society such as capitalism and bureaucracy, it also unmask universal human vices such as pomposity and grandiosity, vices that are rooted in the rejection of objective morality. Although Adams comments on the folly at the heart of society, he also presents the reader with an alternative: the subjective reconstruction of one's inner world in an attempt to spin individual webs of meaning from the nothingness at the world's core. This study also investigates the ambiguous concept of madness as a subjective reality born of the necessity to construct meaning, and analyses Adams's alternative landscapes based on the suggestion that 'much madness is divinest sense' (Emily Dickenson, in Ferguson et al., 1996: 1015).

[Key terms:

Douglas Adams, *Hitch Hiker* series, Existentialism, absurdity, facticity, functions of fantasy, constructing subjective meaning, dreaming, madness, satire, twentieth century society, objective morality.]

OPSOMMING

Hierdie navorsing spruit uit die waarneming dat Douglas Adams se *Hitch Hiker*-reeks nie bloot gekenmerk word deur ligte komedie nie, maar ondersteun is deur verwickelde filosofiese idees, veral twintigste eeuse Eksistensialisme en die verwante begrip van absurditeit. Verder ondersoek die studie die vervlegde funksies van Adams se fantasie en landskappe van alteriteit. Op paradoksale wyse werp Adams se fantastiese kreature lig op die menslike toestand, sowel as die dwaasheid en monsteragtigheid wat skuil in die hart van die mens. Adams se fantasie is 'n spieëlbeeld van die kwale van die twintigste eeuse samelewing, en vervul dus 'n satiriese funksie. Sy fantasie is egter ook 'n meganisme in die konstruksie van betekenis in die vorm van alternatiewe realiteite. Konsepte verwant aan alteriteit, soos simulاسie (Baudrillard), die struktuur van 'realiteit', drome (Descartes) en parallelle wêreldes word ondersoek as boustene van Adams se fantastiese narratiewe spasies. Verder word die idees van Sartre, Camus en ander vaders van Eksistensialisme as 'n filosofie wat dui op die vrugtelosheid van die menslike bestaan en die noodsaaklikheid om subjektiewe betekenis te konstrueer, toegelig en ondersoek met betrekking tot Adams se werke. Eksistensialistiese konsepte soos feitelikheid en angs, sowel as Beckett se heelal en die Teater van Absurditeit, word ook bespreek in konteks van die *Hitch Hiker* reeks. Adams se omvangryke satiriese kommentaar word ook in hierdie studie beklemtoon. Adams se satiriese waarneming kasty nie bloot twintigste eeuse euwels soos kapitalisme en burokrasie nie, maar ontmasker ook universele menslike verdorwenheid soos verwaandheid en grootsheid, 'n verdorwenheid wat ontstaan as gevolg van die verwerping van objektiewe moraliteit. Alhoewel Adams kommentaar lewer ten opsigte van die hart van die samelewing, stel hy ook aan die leser 'n alternatief voor: die subjektiewe rekonstruksie van die innerlike wêreld in 'n poging om individuele weefsels van betekenis te konstrueer vanuit die wêreld se kern van niksheid. Hierdie studie ondersoek ook die veelsinnige konsep van waansin as 'n subjektiewe realiteit wat spruit uit die noodsaaklikheid om betekenis te skep, en analiseer Adams se alternatiewe landskappe op grond van die

bewering dat 'much madness is divinest sense' (Emily Dickenson, in Ferguson et al., 1996: 1015).

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[Sleutelsterme:

Douglas Adams, *Hitch Hiker*-reeks, Eksistensialisme, absurditeit, 'facticity', funksies van fantasie, konstruksie van subjektiewe betekenis, drome, waansin, satire, twintigste eeuse samelewing, objektiewe moraliteit.]

INTRODUCTION

'The Galaxy's a fun place. You'll need to have this fish in your ear' (*The Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy*).



'There is a theory which states that if ever anyone discovers exactly what the universe is for and why it is here, it will instantly disappear and be replaced by something even more bizarre and inexplicable' (Adams, 1995: 153). Read at face value, this sentence is tinged with light humour, and indeed points to the fantastically entertaining narrative of *The Restaurant at the Universe* by Douglas Adams. However, further consideration soon shows that the light-hearted jest is subtly underpinned by an expansive array of philosophical, religious, scientific and political ideas, even if these ideas are shrouded in amusing and insightful satire.

One of the most prominent philosophical pursuits reflected in the abovementioned sentence seems to be the human desire to impose meaning on an invariably meaningless universe. This desire is disappointed and nullified in the light of what Existentialists call the human condition, a condition of being flung into an arbitrary and superfluous universe without having had any choice in this regard.

Sartre, Camus and other originators of Existentialism essentially investigate this unfortunate human condition. Both Sartre and Camus postulate that absurdity is steeped in humankind's ludicrous relation to the world, a world we did not specifically choose to exist in; a world without any inherent significance. Humankind is able to 'reflect on [its] existence, take a stance towards it, and mould it in accordance with the fruits of [its] reflection' (Cooper, 1999: 3). In essence, however, stripped of the meaning humankind imposes on the world, life is ludicrous. The human condition is thus steeped in absurdity, the absurdity of realising the insignificance of life and yet having to perpetually reinvent it in order to survive. Upon scrutinising a selection of

satiric works by author/technologist/contemporary thinker, Douglas Adams, it becomes evident that the Existential pursuit and the absurd human condition are addressed in these novels and are starkly, yet humorously, painted upon a fantastical backdrop.

1.1 DOUGLAS ADAMS: A PROFILE

An original and resonant satiric voice, Douglas Noel Adams is most renowned for his very first novel, *The Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy* (1979), which was developed from a radio series and sparked the composition of several sequential narratives such as *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). The *Hitch Hiker* series reflects Adams's astute satirical insight into the human condition. He arrives at this by pitting humankind against a malevolent universe steeped in hilarity, if not overt lunacy.

The five *Hitch Hiker* novels set out the author's view of a thoroughly paradoxical multivalent universe imbued with improbability, arbitrariness and absurdity. This series consistently portrays futile philosophical pursuits concerned with the discovery of absolute truth. This quest for inherent meaning in a universe apparently governed by dementia is humorously and thoughtfully depicted and applicable to every one who can see his/her own existential angst and subsequent realisation of the universe's condition in these narratives.

In addition to the *Hitch Hiker* novels, Adams wrote a series of novels starring Dirk Gently. These are *Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency* (1987) and the *Long Dark Tea-Time of the Soul* (1988). The *Dirk Gently* novels amalgamate fantastical, science fictional, mythic and comic elements within a narrative reminiscent of the traditional detective story. Adams's body of work also includes, *inter alia*, a dictionary defining things there aren't words for yet. *The Meaning of Liff* (1983), co-written with John Lloyd and revised by Adams and Lloyd as the *Deeper Meaning of Liff – A Dictionary of Things There Aren't Words for Yet, But There Ought to*

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Be (1990), reflects Adams's fascination with the arbitrary relationship between signifier and signified. *The Meaning of Liff* provides words for certain feelings or events that are all too familiar, but for some reason have not been named. For example, the word 'abercrave' refers to the 'desire to swing from the pole on the rear footplate of a bus' (1983: 7), and the word 'duddo' refers to the 'most deformed potato in any given collection of potatoes' (1983: 43). None of these words directly relate to what they signify, and this discrepancy is perhaps indicative of Adams's view of the world as an absurd and disjointed phenomenon.

Adams's body of work does not merely feature the absurdly comical, but also reflects an intense ecological and social awareness, and thus a blueprint of an objective moral code. Between July 1988 and April 1989, Adams and zoologist Mark Carwardine traversed Indonesia, Zaire, New Zealand, China and Mauritius and subsequently produced *Last Chance To See* (1990), a book about endangered species such as the Komodo dragon, the Rodrigues fruitbat and the baiji dolphin. According to MJ Simpson, not only was this Adams's favourite book; it was also his best written one (2003: 244). In this regard, Adams remarked:

I think one of the reasons I was very interested in doing this is, when I was doing *Hitch Hiker* I was always trying to find different perspectives on everyday things so that we would see them afresh. And I suddenly realised that the animals in the world, because they all have completely different perceptual systems, the world we see is only specific to us, and from every other animal's point of view it's a completely different place (Simpson, 2003: 250-251).

In addition to the works mentioned above, *The Salmon of Doubt – Hitchhiking the Galaxy One Last Time*, which is made up of eleven chapters of a *Dirk Gently* novel Adams was working on at the time of his death, as well as a selection of short stories, letters and articles, was published posthumously in 2002.

It is a pity that such an insightful voice had to be permanently silenced so soon. Numerous websites and forums that celebrate and advocate Adams's ideas bear witness to a persistent hunger for his insights. According to Adams's *Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, '...any man

who can hitch the length and breadth of the galaxy, rough it, slum it, struggle against terrible odds, win through, and still know where his towel is is clearly a man to be reckoned with' (Adams, 1995: 31). The Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy explains that a towel is 'about the most massively useful thing an interstellar hitch hiker can have' (Adams, 1995: 31). Apparently, a towel is not only of practical value, but also of 'immense psychological value' (Adams, 1995: 31). Each year, fans across the globe pay homage to a beloved author by celebrating Towel Day on May 25th. The Towel Forum invites fans worldwide to carry their towels with them everywhere they go on Towel Day, in memory of 'the late great one', 'that hoopy Douglas Adams....Now there's a frood who knew where his towel was' (SystemToolbox and KOJV.NET, 2004).

It would prove a complex if not impossible task to 'summarise' the achievements of someone as diverse and multitalented as Douglas Adams, so a brief profile of the author will have to suffice. Douglas Noel Adams was born in Cambridge on 11 March 1952. Adams later described himself thus, 'I was quite a neurotic child, twitchy, inclined to live in a world of my own. I didn't learn to speak until I was almost four. My parents were so concerned they had me tested for being either deaf or educationally subnormal' (Simpson, 2003: 6). As it turned out, Adams indeed inhabited an alternative universe and was at once stage appointed as 'Chief Fantasist' for his own dot-com organisation. In view of his many comic and yet deeply philosophical books, his being 'educationally subnormal', on the other hand, is clearly debatable.

Adams entered Cambridge University in 1971 and earned a BA with honours as well as an MA in English. Adams was thus exposed to an array of philosophical and theoretical ideas, and should not be regarded as a mere author and advocate of light entertainment. Adams's university years were characterised by the so-called theory wars of the 1970s and 1980s, which culminated in the Colin McCabe scandal in 1981 (Snapper, 2007:114). McCabe was opposed to the Leavisite approach to literary study which emphasised the importance of 'creating within universities, and particularly within English Departments, and informed, discriminating, and

highly-trained intellectual élite whose task it would be to preserve the cultural continuity of English life and literature' (Drabble and Stringer, 1996: 330). FR Leavis believed that the intellectualism of English literature was threatened by mass media and popular culture. Even though Adams functioned in the realm of the 'highly-trained intellectual élite', he decided to join the exclusive undergraduate Footlights Society, which established a sort of counter-culture. This society was emblematic of a shift from theory and intellectualism towards popular culture, irony and self-mockery. Adams, having been exposed to the seemingly polar opposites of intellectualism and popular culture, was thus able to communicate philosophy and theory in a palatable format.

Adams's idol, John Cleese, a Monty Python star, was also once a member of the Footlights Society and advocate of the counter-culture it represented. Adams was a British radio comedy enthusiast, and in *The Salmon of Doubt*, Adams is reported to have realised that '...being funny could be a way in which intelligent people expressed themselves' and a way in which they could 'be very, very silly at the same time' (Adams, 2003: xxi-xxii). Sketches composed by Adams during his Cambridge years were described as 'quirky' and 'individualistic' (Adams, 2003: xxii), and were shaped by his own fantastically absurd imagination. The fact that Adams's body of work is permeated with elements of the absurd, often reflecting landscapes reminiscent of the Theatre of the Absurd, is also highly significant. It is certainly worth mentioning that Adams's great-grandfather, a German actor-director named Benjamin Franklin Wedekind (1864-1918), was a precursor of the Theatre of the Absurd in his creation of contorted scenes and use of fractured dialogue and caricature (Simpson, 2003: 7). Adams's *Hitch Hiker* series features many characters and situations that are similar to ones portrayed in Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, for example. Adams's characters often take on clown-like qualities in their futile attempts at making meaning and entertaining themselves in a dour and essentially meaningless universe.

After Adams's Cambridge years and the production of a few absurd sketches, he worked with Python member Graham Chapman for a spell. Amongst others, they worked on a television comedy show called *Out Of The Trees*; 'it involved a man picking a flower – a seemingly innocuous act which triggers off a series of events: the police complain, the fire brigade turns up, then the army and so on until the world blows up' (Bbc.co.uk, 2005). The script for *Out of the Trees* was, however, not very good, since Adams was still inexperienced and 'slavishly imitating *Python*' (Simpson, 2003: 64).

Overall, Adams's attempts at writing humorous sketches and the work he produced with Graham Chapman turned out to be unsuccessful. However, Adams still honed his writing skills during the period he worked with Graham Chapman, and with the launch of the *Hitch Hiker* Radio Series in 1978, he proved himself to be a comic voice resonating with a distinct intellectual character. A few months after the radio series was released, Adams began writing yet another radio series, a television series and the *Hitch Hiker* novel. He always experienced difficulty in submitting manuscripts on time, and claimed that he loved deadlines: 'I love the whooshing noise they make as they go by' (Adams, 2003: xxv). Subsequently, he often found himself in locked hotel rooms where he had to finish his manuscripts immediately! By and by, however, Adams managed to write nine books in his lifetime.

After 1992, Adams wrote very little. This might perhaps be due to a more introspective and meditative phase in the Jungian cycle of the Self; perhaps a 'mandala' season that 'tends to draw [one's] focus back to the centre' (Boeree, 2006). Adams lectured frequently during this period, but also started a London production company named the Digital Village, which produced advanced computer games. Thus, although he lectured and functioned within an academic environment, he still had firm roots in the realm of popular culture and multimedia.

One of Adams's unfulfilled dreams was to help produce the *Hitch Hiker* film. In 1999 he moved to Santa Barbara, the hub of the film industry, in order to realise his dream. However, this was not to be. On May 11, 2001, Douglas Adams died suddenly of a heart attack while exercising, and fans across the globe were devastated. Adams was cremated, along with his towel, at 7:30 pm British time on 16 May, 2001, in Santa Barbara. Around that time, fans across the world had either a cup of tea or something that resembled a Pan-Galactic Gargle Blaster (Bbc.co.uk, 2005). In *The Unravelling of DNA: Douglas Noel Adams, 1952-2001*, Tim Wynne-Jones says, 'In closing, one can only quote the title of that next-to-last book, and say to Douglas, in whatever dimension he now finds himself, with great affection and a final wave of the towel, "So long, and thanks for all the fish" ' (2001: 632).

1.2 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The purpose of this study is to explore Adams's unique vision and insights as they are conveyed in popular, satiric form. Thus, this study attempts to show that Adams's works are not merely steeped in light hearted jest, but are underpinned by intricate philosophical ideas. This argument is enforced by the psychological functions of fantasy, as evidenced in Adams's works; the philosophical exploration of Existentialism (and the related concept of Absurdity); and Adams's depiction of human folly and futility by means of his uniquely satirical observations.

The scope of this study does not allow a thorough investigation of Adams's entire body of work. The novels which best serve the purpose of this study are: *The Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy*; *The Restaurant at the End of the Universe*; *Life, the Universe and Everything*; *So long, and Thanks for all the Fish*; and *Mostly Harmless*. These novels were selected not only because they reflect Adams's comic voice, but also because they convey his vision and insight relating to the functions of fantasy, Existentialist philosophy and satire as mechanisms for making meaning. These works also feature the recurrent themes of nothingness and the

absurd human condition, madness, alternative dream landscapes and the compulsion to reinvent one's world.

Seeing that Adams's work is multi-dimensional and eclectic in nature, a fairly eclectic approach is taken and the techniques of close analysis are used in this study. Furthermore, a genre-based approach, informed by the philosophical works of Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus, is followed.

1.3 A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE NOVELS SELECTED FOR THIS STUDY

Since Adams is such an eclectic thinker, his plots are often fast paced and comprise multiple layers of improbability. Therefore, to clarify narrative events, a brief summary of each of the novels in the *Hitch Hiker* series is provided.

The Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy portrays the adventures of Englishman, Arthur Dent, who escapes the demolition of Earth by an alien race called the Vogons. His friend, Ford Prefect, with whom he escapes, turns out to be an alien from a small planet in the vicinity of Betelgeuse, and to be employed as researcher for the *Hitch Hiker's Guide*. After they are teleported to and discovered on a Vogon spaceship, the Vogons attempt to dispose of Arthur and Ford. However, the two of them are rescued, against all possible odds, and end up on Zaphod Beeblebrox's stolen spaceship, the *Heart of Gold*, powered by the 'Infinite Improbability Drive'.

Beeblebrox is Ford's flamboyant, double headed and extremely irresponsible semi-cousin, who is the Galactic President. Arthur is reacquainted with both Beeblebrox and Trillian, having previously met them both at a fancy dress party in Islington. Trillian has literally been whisked away by Zaphod to another planet. Marvin, the perpetually depressed robot, is also introduced to Arthur at this stage.

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After this improbable reunion, the characters embark on a quest to locate the mythical planet of Magrathea. After discovering that the Mythical Magrathea, a planet used for the sole purpose of constructing tailor-made planets, does indeed exist, Arthur meets Slartibartfast, a coastline designer responsible for the spectacular Norwegian fjords.

By means of archival recordings, Slartibartfast gives an account of the race of hyper-intelligent pan-dimensional beings who once built a computer entitled Deep Thought, for the purpose of calculating the answer to the 'Ultimate Question of Life, the Universe, and Everything'. Due to the fact that the answer proved to be 42, they were compelled to design a more sophisticated computer to determine the original Ultimate Question.

Improbable as it seems, this sophisticated computer, encompassing biological life as part of its matrix, turns out to have been the Earth. Unfortunately, this computer, having been mistaken for a planet, has been destroyed by the mindless Vogons five minutes before the completion of its ten-million-year calculation.

Two of the hyper-intelligent pan-dimensional beings, Frankie and Benjy (Trillian's mice), attempt to dissect Arthur's brain to regain the question, seeing that he is the only survivor of the Earth's demolition. Franky and Benjy explain to Arthur that he will not even miss his brain, and that it could always be replaced by an electronic one. Frankie says, 'A simple one would suffice' (1995: 140).

Fortunately, Arthur and his companions manage to escape the sinister purposes of the pan-dimensional beings. The mice, not having succeeded in removing Arthur's brain, 'an organic part of the penultimate configuration', and not wanting to wait for yet another ten million years, fabricate the following question to which the ultimate answer may be 42: 'How many roads must a man walk down?'

The Restaurant at the End of the Universe begins with the protagonists' decision to dine at Milliways. Unfortunately, however, they are attacked by the Vogons and are unable to defend themselves, since the computer's circuits are all occupied with the mind-numbing problem of how to concoct the perfect cup of tea for Arthur. Arguing that desperate times call for desperate measures, Zaphod decides to contact his deceased grandfather via a séance. The ghost of Zaphod Beeblebrox the Fourth saves the protagonists, although Zaphod disappears during the spaceship's subsequent lurch through the dimensions of time and space.

It turns out that Zaphod has been transported to Ursa Minor Beta, 'a west zone planet which by an inexplicable and somewhat suspicious freak of topography consists almost entirely of sub-tropical coastline' (1995: 173). Ursa Minor Beta also happens to house Megadodo Publications, home of the *Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. Zaphod remembers that he has left a secret message engraved in his own brain, and, although he cannot remember the exact details of this, he somehow feels compelled to visit Mr Zarniwoop, editor of *The Guide*, in connection with finding the man who rules the universe. On a forced visit to the most pernicious planet in the known universe, Frogstar B, Zaphod meets Zarniwoop and is reunited with Trillian, Arthur and Ford. Together they visit Milliways, the Restaurant at the End of the Universe. The parties are once again separated, as Zaphod, Trillian and Zarniwoop discover that the universe is in fact governed by a lunatic living on a remote planet in a wooden shack.

Ford and Arthur, meanwhile, travel backwards through time and find themselves on a spacecraft transporting the outcasts of the Golgafrinchan civilisation. The ship has been programmed to crash on prehistoric Earth, and Ford and Arthur are stranded. It becomes evident that the obtuse Golgafrinchans are the ancestors of sophisticated humanity. Apparently, this unfortunate event disrupted the Earth's programming. Thus, when Ford and Arthur attempt to bring Arthur's subconscious brain-patterns to the fore to reconstruct the Ultimate Question, the following question is posed: 'What do you get when you multiply six by nine?'

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The characters thus fail to reconstruct a meaningful question, and Arthur concludes that the universe is thoroughly demented.

The third novel in the *Hitch Hiker's* series, *Life, the Universe and Everything*, starts with Arthur waking up, and once again discovering to his horror that he is living in a dank cave in Islington on prehistoric Earth. Just when Arthur decides that he will indeed go mad, he is reunited with Ford (which may in fact lead to madness). Ford explains that he has travelled to Africa, where he occupied himself with pretending to be a lemon and being cruel to animals. The two of them manage, by means of eddies in the space-time continuum, to travel from prehistoric Earth to Lord's Cricket Ground on a chesterfield sofa. Upon arriving there, they observe a sudden attack launched by a troupe of lethal robots. Fortunately they meet Slartibartfast, who aids them in the prevention of galactic war.

The story concerning galactic war and the lethal robots is once again related by Slartibartfast using Virtual Reality archives. Long ago, upon discovering that they were not the only living creatures in the known universe, the people of Krikket attempted to obliterate all life in the universe during a spell of severe xenophobia. However, they were prevented from accomplishing their mission, and were imprisoned on their home planet within a Slo-Time envelope. The key to the envelope was subsequently blasted into the space-time continuum, supposedly never to be found again. However, it turns out that the mission of the lethal robots is to reconstitute the key, in order for the Masters of Krikket to be released from the Slo-Time envelope so as to achieve their initial objective. However, with the help of Marvin, Zaphod and Trillian, Arthur and Ford prevent the obliteration of life in the Universe.

In *So Long, and Thanks for All the Fish*, Arthur returns to another version of Earth (Earth in another dimension). He falls in love with a girl named Fenchurch, whose house turns out to be located at the exact coordinates of Arthur's cave on prehistoric Earth. Together, Arthur and Fenchurch not only perfect the art of flying, but learn from a very reliable source, Wonko the

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Sane, that this version of Earth is a substitute provided by the dolphins in their 'Save the Humans' campaign. This information explains Arthur's and Fenchurch's mysterious gifts, fishbowls engraved with the message, 'So long, and thanks for all the fish'.

Eventually, Arthur remembers something he learnt from a man called Prak, concerning the ultimate Reason. According to Prak, God's Ultimate Message to humankind is written 'in thirty-foot-high letters of fire on top of the Quentulus Quazgar Mountains in the land of Sevorbeupstry on the Planet Preliumtarn' (Adams, 1995: 458). Consequently, Arthur and Fenchurch travel to the planet of Preliumtarn in order to see God's Final Message to his Creation. There, they are reacquainted with Marvin, who has deteriorated greatly, and eventually shuts down permanently. Arthur and Fenchurch defy the heat and dust of the land of Sevorbeupstry, only to discover that God's final message to humankind reads, 'We apologise for the inconvenience' (Adams, 1995: 588) .

In *Mostly Harmless*, the final novel in the *Hitch Hiker* series, Vogons usurp *The Hitch Hiker's Guide* (under the name of Infinidim Enterprises) for the purpose of finally demolishing the Earth. After suddenly losing Fenchurch in the space-time continuum, and traversing the universe in an attempt to construct meaning, Arthur's spacecraft crashes on the planet Lamuella. Here he is appointed as official sandwich-maker and is revered by the primitive villagers.

Meanwhile, Ford Prefect enters The Guide's offices illegally, obtains an infinite expense account from the computer system, and, after nearly being killed, meets The Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy, Mark II: an artificially intelligent, multi-dimensional and extremely powerful guide with a sinister purpose. Upon declining the Guide's aid, he sends it to Arthur Dent for 'safekeeping'.

The story also depicts the life of Tricia McMillan (Trillian) in another dimension/parallel universe. The version of Trillian traversing space, however, falls pregnant by means of sperm donated by Arthur (for the purpose of obtaining some travelling money). Upon having some DNA tests

conducted, she learns, to her astonishment, that Arthur is the father of her child. She abruptly leaves her daughter, Random Frequent Flyer Dent, with Arthur, seeing that her schedule is quite busy.

Random's curiosity compels her to steal The Guide Mark II, and, on being introduced to its sophisticated power, she uses it to travel to Earth. Arthur, Ford, Trillian, Random and Tricia McMillan (Trillian, in this alternate universe) follow her to a crowded club, where a perturbed Random tries to shoot her father. However, the bullet misses Arthur and kills a man (the creature Agrajag, who claims to have been killed by Arthur on numerous occasions, and in various forms). The sinister purpose of The Guide Mark II is revealed by its causing the obliteration of all possible dimensions of Earth from probability. All of the protagonists, save Zaphod, are consequently killed, and the Vogons' mission is finally accomplished.

1.4 OUTLINE OF ARGUMENT

As was mentioned earlier, the main argument of this dissertation is that there is a philosophical dimension to Douglas Adams, and that his works are not rooted in mere entertainment. The three strands of the argument comprise the psychological function of fantasy, the philosophical exploration of Existentialism and Adams's satirical observations.

The landscapes created in Adams's *Hitch Hiker* series are distinctly shaded with fantastical and science-fictional elements. Although this dissertation does not focus on science fiction as a literary genre, I will make some brief comments in this regard. Most acclaimed science fiction and fantasy narratives constitute an encounter with the alien or the other. These fantastical and fictional creatures serve to illuminate our own human condition: we are, as it were, exposed to the stark reality of our existence when we encounter these figures from a seemingly safe distance. According to Patrick Parrinder, 'The ultimate theme of the genre of science fiction is

to come to terms with the cosmos [humankind] inhabits'(1979: 114), even if humanity sees its imperfections and its world reflected in an alien form.

In chapter one, emphasis is placed on the function performed by Adams's fantasy, especially as it relates to the human pursuit of meaning. Evident similarities between the fantastical landscapes created by Adams, and the nightmarish 'dream-scapes' painted by renowned fabulists such as Kafka and Gogol, are also discussed. Other concepts such as the nature of reality and dreaming (Descartes) as well as simulation and virtual reality (Baudrillard) are also dealt with in the first chapter.

According to Rosemary Jackson, fantastic literature constitutes a literary mode which generates a number of related genres. Thus, according to Jackson, this fantastical mode gives rise to the marvellous (including fairy tales and science fiction), purely fantastic literature (including stories by Poe, Gautier, Kafka, Dostoevsky, Gogol and Lovecraft) and related tales depicting deviant psychic states associated with delusion and hallucination [the uncanny] (1981: 7). Furthermore, Jackson postulates that fantasy is not concerned with the fabrication of other worlds, and may therefore not be regarded as transcendental. Rather, fantasy involves the inversion of elements of the known world, 'recombining its constitutive features in new relations to produce something strange, unfamiliar and *apparently* "new", absolutely "other" and different' (1981: 8). In Adams's novels, 'elements of the known world' are cast into alien shapes, and the reader is compelled to view human sadness and folly from a different perspective. Twentieth century societal concerns such as bureaucracy, ecology and capitalism are, for example, reflected in Adams's alien race, the Vogons. Stripped of their deformed and alien appearance, the Vogons are essentially human.

Rosemary Jackson also contends that 'The represented world of the fantastic is of a different kind from the imagined universe of the marvellous [fairy tale landscapes, paradisiacal worlds]

and it opposes the latter's rich, colourful fullness with relatively bleak, empty, indeterminate landscapes, which are less definable as places than as spaces, as white, grey, or shady blanknesses' (1981: 42). Although Adams's landscapes sometimes reflect the paradisiacal, more often than not they are imbued with 'shady blanknesses' or dream-scapes subtly reminiscent of the gothic/horrific. Adams, for example, describes the second planet of the Frogstar system as 'stale' and 'unwholesome', with 'dank winds that swept...over salt flats, dried up marshland, tangled and rotting vegetation and the crumbling remains of ruined cities' (1995: 193).

Another horrific landscape in the *Hitch Hiker* series is that of Agrajag's Cave. Agrajag is a sad and abominable being that continually manifests in different forms. His cave is described as 'a Cathedral of Hate' (1995: 390), 'a huge palpitating wet cave with a vast, slimy, rough whale-like creature rolling around it and sliding over monstrous white tombstones' (1995: 390). Seeing that these landscapes stage the hilarious and the absurdly comical, the effect of the bleakness is minimised. However, the shades linger somewhere in the dark spaces of the subconscious, even if they do so beneath a thin veneer of hilarity.

In order to cast some light on the sub-genres of fantasy, Tzvetan Todorov's classification of fantastic literature, as explicated in *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (1975), is also briefly discussed in the first chapter. For the moment, however, it suffices to say that Todorov regards the purely fantastic as neither miraculous (fairy tales, supernatural events) nor uncanny (explanations of the supernatural in terms of deviant states of mind). Instead, he regards the purely fantastic as the narrative realm which induces the reader to question the nature of reality, in terms of whether or not the protagonist is dreaming. In addition, the first chapter investigates the concept of dreaming in relation to reality in the light of Descartes' theories on dreams and dreaming. The uncanny, a sub-genre of the fantastic, is also explored

as it pertains to deviant mental states, psychosis or madness, since the *Hitch Hiker* series features a number of allusions to madness.

In the light of the absurd, contorted landscapes depicted by Adams in the selected novels, this dissertation also attempts to elucidate the concept of absurdity, which implies the human condition and existence within an apparently indifferent, or even pernicious, universe. As was mentioned previously, Sartre, Camus and other Existentialists explore the human condition, which is, according to them, informed by the ridiculous or the absurd.

The respective arguments of Sartre and Camus, reflected in the *Hitch Hiker's Series* in particular, are emphasised in the second chapter of this study. Both Sartre and Camus postulate that absurdity is rooted in humankind's ludicrous relation to the world, a world it did not specifically choose to exist in; a world without any inherent significance. Existentialist concepts such as facticity and anguish are discussed in relation to the *Hitch Hiker* series.

Facticity, which is the state of being thrown into the realm of the living, without having chosen such an existence, and the subsequent responsibility for making meaning from the madness, are satirically explored in the relevant novels. Humankind is able to 'reflect on [its] existence, take a stance towards it, and mould it in accordance with the fruits of [its] reflection' (Cooper, 1999: 3). In essence, however, stripped of the meaning humankind imposes on the world, life seems deeply ludicrous.

The third chapter of this study emphasises Adams's satirical insights. This chapter attempts to explicate the intricate and remarkable relationship between the fantastic landscapes of absurdity, Existentialism and absurdity, and satire as a device employed to illustrate and exploit the human condition. Chapter three explores Adams's use of satiric techniques such as parody, invective and burlesque in order to point out human folly, and argues that Adams's

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combination of satire and fantasy enables him to cast human foibles into otherworldly forms, and renders these imperfections all the more monstrous. The absurd and the ludicrous stem from a sense of incongruity between the perfect and the deformed: the human ideal and the imperfect reality. Douglas Adams's satirical insight is based on a blueprint of objective morality, and illuminates the disparity between the real and the ideal, and consequently, the absurdity of existence.

In view of Adams's remarkable literary and philosophical contribution, it is surprising that so little research has been conducted on this topic. The only study conducted within the past ten years, entitled the *Comic Techniques of Douglas Adams and Terry Pratchett: A Comparative Study of Selected Works and an Illustration of the Role of Comedy in Science Fiction/Fantasy*, was composed by Bitzer C. in 1998. Her study concentrates on Adams's (as well as Pratchett's) comic techniques in the light of fantasy and science fiction. The current study aims to take a novel view and to elucidate aspects of Adams's work which have not been thoroughly investigated as yet. Thus, this study focuses on Adams's philosophical and intellectual contribution. It explores his views regarding the absurd human condition, his use of fantasy as mechanism for reinventing one's subjective reality, and, paradoxically, his use of satire to comment on objective morality. This study also argues that, ultimately, the sheer act of writing or composing is a mechanism for constructing meaning, for entertaining oneself with a pencil and a piece of paper, as the demented 'ruler' of the universe does in *The Restaurant at the End of the Universe*, and being 'delighted [to discover] how to make a mark with the one on the other'(Adams,1995:284).

CHAPTER 1: ADAMS'S FANTASTIC LANDSCAPES OF THE ABSURD – MAKING SUBJECTIVE MEANING

'Why should I want to make anything up? Life's bad enough as it is without wanting to invent any more of it' (*The Restaurant at the End of the Universe*).

'The Guide is definitive. Reality is frequently inaccurate' (*The Restaurant at the End of the Universe*).

'Only twenty minutes ago he had decided he would go mad, and now here he was already chasing a Chesterfield sofa across the fields of prehistoric Earth' (*Life, the Universe and Everything*).



Brian Attebery asks the following questions about the functions of fantasy in literature:

Is the fantastic a function of language, as JRR Tolkien suggests: based on our ability to separate modifier from substantive and recombine them to produce *green suns* and *flying serpents*? Is it a function of psychology, based on the suppression and subsequent disguising of intolerable realities?....Is it a sort of game? A structure reflecting the brain's own ordering mechanisms? A survival of myth into a rational age? (1992: 4-5).

Attebery attempts to answer these questions by asserting that some fantasies indeed deal with language, while some of them attempt to represent psychological processes. Other fantasies serve to mirror society, and yet others communicate an author's or society's philosophy (1992: 5). Before Adams's *Hitch Hiker* series can be thoroughly analysed in relation to the functions of fantasy, fantastic concepts will first be established by exploring a variety of stories ranging from popular culture and graphic novels to high art.

In Neil Gaiman's (a friend of Douglas Adams's and author of *Don't Panic: The Official Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy Companion*, published in 1988) and Dave McKean's graphic novel, *Mirrormask* (2005), for example, Helena Campbell disguises 'intolerable realities' by dreaming of a world made up of the pictures she has drawn. In a sense, she invents and controls this dream world in the same way she invents the pictures in her room. In her dream, she becomes two girls: the daughter of the White Queen, and, on the other side of the Mirror Mask, the daughter of the capricious Dark Queen. 'There's a park on the borderlands, between

the city of light and the wilderness of shadows. It's a dream park. I'm not sure that I can describe it properly. It looks like dreams' (2005: no page reference, graphic novel). Helena invents her fantasy dreamscape: 'And if it was my dream, then I'd put a little building – a little white dome – in the middle of the pool – just like I'd done when I drew this place. It was on my wall, and in that drawing, it had a little dome in it. So I knew it was there...' (2005: no page reference, graphic novel). Helena eventually realises the following: 'I don't think life as a sort of doll prepares you for very much except for running away'. When her nemesis says, 'I just wanted a real life', Helena retorts, 'Real life?...You couldn't handle real life' (2005: no page reference, graphic novel). It is apparent that one side of Helena's persona wants to crawl into a 'disguised' dream world, while the other wants to face reality as she knows it. I think that, although fantasy may reflect the notion that 'humanity cannot bear very much reality' (Eliot, 1963: 190, *Four Quartets, Burnt Norton*, lines 44-45), it may, paradoxically, also guide readers to a better understanding of the reality they are trying to evade.

In *The Uses Of Enchantment – The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*, Bruno Bettelheim contends that one achieves an understanding of one's conscious and unconscious self through 'spinning out daydreams – ruminating, rearranging, and fantasising...' (1976: 7). The compulsion to make meaning and to come to grips with reality is often expressed in fantastic form. For example, in Arthur C. Clark's science fiction novel *The Songs of Distant Earth*, Carina places her ear to the ribbon of gossamer connecting the planet of Thalassa to the great spaceship Magellan, hovering thirty thousand kilometres from the surface of the planet. The sound reminds her of the interstices of empty meaningless at the heart of the universe:

At first it seemed that she was hearing the deepest note of a giant harp whose strings were stretched between the worlds....The more she listened, the more she was reminded of the endless beating of the waves upon a desolate beach. She felt that she was hearing the sea of space wash upon the shores of all its worlds – a sound terrifying in its meaningless futility as it reverberated through the aching emptiness of the universe (1987: 199).

Adams's fantasy is also a means of making meaning, of reinventing the known world and creating alternative dreamscapes in order to reflect on reality and to subsequently mould an understanding of it. In Adams's fictional worlds, vestiges of various functions of fantasy are evident. Adams's fantasy often explodes the arbitrary relationship between signifier and signified. For example, the sentient mattresses inhabiting the swamps of Squornshellous Zeta 'flop' around, they 'globber' upon hearing distressing news and they 'volute' every once in a while (1995: 346-347). Adams's 'Squornshellous swamptalk' (1995: 347) ignores arbitrary codes of signification and reflects a fantasy realm in which signifier and signified are separate concepts.

Adams's fantasy also explores the labyrinthine human psyche and the most prominent desire born of it; the desire to mould meaning from madness. Moreover, Adams's fantastic realms serve to comment on social dynamics as well as the philosophy at the heart of twentieth century society. As will become evident from this dissertation, Adams's amalgamation of fantastic functions serves to highlight the common human compulsion to make meaning. In reading Adams's fantasy, one actually comes to grips with the 'reality' rooted in his dreamscapes.

Reality is made manifest in various forms. Thus, Adams's fantasy comments on both reality as we know it, be it intolerable or bearable, and on the alternate 'realities' born of dreaming and hallucination. JRR Tolkien, one of the world's most prominent authors of the marvellous, makes the following observation about fantasy in *Tree and Leaf*:

Fantasy, of course, starts out with...arresting strangeness. [However]...many people dislike being 'arrested'. They dislike any meddling with the Primary World, or such small glimpses of it as are familiar to them. They, therefore, stupidly and even maliciously confound Fantasy with Dreaming...and with mental disorders...with delusion and hallucination (1964: 50).

It is interesting that Tzvetan Todorov, author of *The Fantastic – A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, defines the 'heart of the fantastic' as 'the ambiguity...sustained to the very end

of the adventure: reality or dream? truth or illusion?' (1975: 25). Todorov's notion of the purely fantastic is rooted in ambiguity: can narrative events be regarded as reality, or as dream-scapes?:

In a world which is indeed our world, the one we know, a world without devils, sylphides, or vampires, there occurs an event which cannot be explained by the laws of this same familiar world. The person who experiences the event must opt for one of two possible solutions: either he is the victim of an illusion of the senses, of a product of the imagination – and laws of the world then remain what they are; or else the event has indeed taken place, it is an integral part of reality – but then this reality is controlled by laws unknown to us (Todorov, 1975: 25).

It is essential to note that, according to Todorov, the purely fantastic never provides the reader with an answer as to the true nature of narrative reality. It is never clearly revealed whether or not the characters moving in narrative space are in fact dreaming, or experiencing reality as it is. Furthermore, the characters themselves may experience hesitation with regard to the nature of reality, 'thus the reader's role is so to speak entrusted to the character, and at the same time the hesitation is presented, it becomes one of the themes of the work' (1975: 33). The reader often identifies with the character in that he/she experiences uncertainty as far as the nature of reality is concerned.

If one were, however, to dissolve the uncertainty by selecting either the dream option, or the reality option, one would be opting for the other sub-genres of fantasy, the marvellous or uncanny, respectively. Todorov asserts that 'we cannot exclude from a scrutiny of the fantastic either the marvellous or the uncanny, genres which it overlaps' (1975: 44).

Concerning the marvellous mode of fantasy, the reader classifies events as being supernatural. As is mentioned in the introduction to this study, the marvellous mode includes fairy tales and science-fictional narratives. Thus, events occurring in these stories are explained by means of laws dramatically different from the naturalistic ones generally known to us. Therefore, works

rooted in the marvellous are characterised by an acceptance of the supernatural (angels, hobbits, vampires, fairies, etc.) by both the reader and the characters inhabiting the narrative space.

According to Rosemary Jackson, the 'uncanny', another sub-genre of fantasy, is a term which has been used in both philosophical and in psychoanalytic contexts, to indicate 'a disturbing, vacuous area' (1981: 63). Within the uncanny fantastical mode, supernatural events are explained in terms of deviant psychological states. Jackson mentions about 'uncanny' stories that '...strangeness is an effect produced by the distorted and distorting mind of the protagonist' (1981: 24).

Todorov and Jackson attempt to establish clear boundaries between sub-genres of the fantastic, although they allow some room for overlap. I think that these genres are much more intricately related. What is 'real' or 'true' for one person, may be 'illusory' for another. What appears to be a 'dream-scape' or 'hallucinatory' state, may for another person be his/her fundamental 'reality'. The selected works by Adams are permeated with fluid combinations of fantastic sub-genres that constantly overlap.

Seventeenth century French philosopher, scientist and mathematician, René Descartes' theory of dreams and hallucinatory states is very informative. Strange phenomena seem to be characteristic of dreams. According to Mark Rowlands, author of *The Philosopher at the End of the Universe* (an incidental allusion to *The Restaurant at the End of the Universe?*), 'Weird things happen in dreams – all the time....One minute you are you, then you magically transform into an itinerant fisherwoman from fifteenth-century Okinawa with surprisingly radical ideas for her time and station (or is that just me?)' (2003: 33). In *The Theatre of the Dream* Salomon Resnik defines the dream as follows:

A dream is a complex scenic landscape, made up of several pieces: fragments of houses, bridges, figurative or abstract shapes, which are the expression of a world based on multiplicity, a world that does not respect the conventional rules and is organised 'in its own way', governed by the 'unreality' principle....(1987: 135-136).

Whether dreams are governed by 'reality' or 'unreality' principles is not the point, since, as has been mentioned already, 'reality' and 'fantasy' are highly subjective terms. What is important, though, is the fact that dreams occur in a space which allows the dreamer complete freedom to reinvent and to dream his/her world into existence. This notion is, of course, closely related to the Existentialist argument that the only meaning is subjective meaning; meaning that is invented, constructed or dreamt up by individual minds. I think that the subjective meaning moulded from dreams or fantasies is the important issue, and it turns the 'unreality' or 'reality' of dreams into mere mists.

Descartes is especially concerned with the 'reality' of dreams. He poses the following, rather perturbing question: can you be certain that, at this moment in time, you are not, in fact, merely dreaming? In Descartes' *Meditation 1 – Concerning the Things of Which we may Doubt*, he argues:

...I must bear in mind that I am a man, and am therefore in the habit of sleeping, and that what the insane represent to themselves in their waking moments I represent to myself, with other things even less probable, in my dreams. How often, indeed, have I dreamt of myself being in this place, dressed and seated by the fire, whilst all the time I was lying undressed in bed!....I cannot, however, but remind myself that on many occasions I have in sleep been deceived by similar illusions; and on more careful study of them I see that *there are no certain marks distinguishing waking from sleep; and I see this so manifestly that, lost in amazement, I am almost persuaded that I am now dreaming* (Smith, 1952: 197-198, italics mine).

Thus, Descartes asserts that it is impossible to know for certain whether or not you are dreaming *from within the landscape of the dream* (Rowlands, 2003: 35). Therefore, according to Descartes, seeing that we cannot know whether or not we are dreaming at a given stage, we

cannot be certain that our entire life has not merely constituted a very vivid and coherent dream: 'We are all, in reality, asleep in our pods' (Rowlands, 2003: 37).

The philosophically informed fantastic journey depicted by Jostein Gaarder in *The Solitaire Mystery* features excellent examples of Descartes' arguments discussed above. The story features an old man called Frode, who is shipwrecked and lives on a peculiar island all by himself for 50 years. As a result of his painful solitude, he plays perpetual games of solitaire with his pack of cards, and eventually endows each little card with human characteristics to relieve the monotony: 'I don't know if you can imagine how lonely I felt. The stillness was never-ending here....After a few days I started talking to myself. After a few months I'd started talking to the cards as well. I would lay them in a big circle around me and pretend they were real people made of flesh and blood like myself' (1997: 154).

One day, however, Frode discovers that his imaginary card-people suddenly start existing undependably; outside the borders of his mind. His first reaction is, of course, to argue that he must be dreaming. The following extract is very distinctly reminiscent of Descartes, in the sense that Frode considers the possibility that life may be a very vivid dream:

I had been dreaming extra vividly that night. When I left the cabin early in the morning, the dew was still lying on the grass and the sun was rising over the mountains. Suddenly two silhouettes came walking towards me from a ridge of hills in the east. I thought I finally had some visitors on the island and started to walk towards them. My heart turned somersaults in my chest when I got closer and recognised them. It was the Jack of Clubs and the King of Hearts. At first I thought I must still be lying in the cabin asleep and the meeting was just another dream. Yet I was absolutely positive that I was wide awake. But this had happened to me many times when I had been asleep, so I wasn't completely sure....Although I have lived with these friends around me for many, many years, although we have built the village together, worked the land together, prepared and eaten food together, I have never stooped asking myself whether the figures around me are real. Had I entered an eternal world of fantasy? Was I lost (Gaarder, 1997: 155-156).

Descartes argues that, not only is it possible for your life to be a lucid dream, but there just may be a possibility that your view of the world is warped. In other words, instead of your life being a

dream, you may be perpetually deceived by a malignant entity: Descartes' so-called malignant genius (Smith, 1952 :201):

...I shall now suppose, not that a true God, who as such must be supremely good and the fountain of truth, but that some malignant genius exceedingly powerful and cunning has devoted all his powers in the deceiving of me; I shall suppose that the sky, the earth, colours, shapes, sounds and all external things are illusions and impostures of which this evil genius has availed himself for the abuse of my credulity....(Smith, 1952: 201).

This *malignant genius* is made manifest in many science-fiction narratives. In the science-fiction film, *The Matrix* (directed by the Wachowski brothers), humankind lives in a simulated dream-world created by an intelligent and pernicious race of machines. Humans are under the impression that they are in control of their mundane lives, whereas, in actual fact, they merely serve as human batteries, generating sufficient energy in order for the machine population to survive (human beings are, as it were, 'asleep in their pods'). Should one of these 'human batteries' discover the truth, concealed from them by the *malignant genius* (the machine population, in this case), he/she is discarded from the system (recycled, as it were), and the sinister truth remains shrouded in secrecy.

Another example of this is Diana Wynne Jones's *The Homeward Bounders*. According to this science-fictional children's tale, the world is governed by a group of malevolent entities called the Masters of the Real and Ancient Game, who determine the events of people's lives by means of a sinister board-game. Once again, should a person discover the truth, he/she is cast from the system, and is doomed to spend his/her life travelling from one world/dimension to the next. As one of the malignant entities explains to Jamie, the protagonist, 'You are now a discard....We have no further use for you in play. You are free to walk the Bounds as you please, but it will be against the rules for you to enter play in any world' (1993: 23).

Descartes does not argue that the world is, beyond all reasonable doubt, ruled by a malign entity: '...if Descartes thought that this was how things really were...he would probably have

been a drug-induced paranoid delusional rather than a great philosopher (assuming there is a clear distinction between the two)' (Rowlands, 2003: 38). Nonetheless, Descartes definitely asserts that it might be a *possibility* that the world as we know it is in reality governed by a pernicious intelligence whose sole purpose is to trick and deceive the human race. Therefore, according to Descartes, we cannot know for certain that our familiar reality/the world actually exists.

The theme of madness/delusion is, of course, related to the concept of dreaming and the nature of 'reality'. Salomon Resnik describes the dream space of madness/psychosis thus:

The dream space of the psychotic, which grows and expands according to a centrifugal force, seizes on external reality; the dream-delusion becomes spatialised and transformed into a 'world system': delusion is a dream that has lost self-control, which leaves its original space to take up new positions in the space of the world (1987: 137).

Shoshana Felman adds to this notion by saying that, '...literature, fiction, is the only possible meeting-place between madness and philosophy, between delirium and thought....' (1958: 48).

I think that, since 'reality' manifests in various forms and is highly subjective, a study of any fantasist's work in terms of whether it portrays 'truth' or 'illusion' will simply be meaningless. Moreover, in the true spirit of Existentialism, one should rather investigate the extent to which a given work of fantasy compels the reader to make subjective meaning, whether that meaning is steeped in the 'real', the 'illusory', the 'dream', or 'the delusional', assuming that there are definite boundaries between these modes! Brian Attebery in fact argues that fantastic genres should be regarded as 'fuzzy sets', 'defined not by boundaries but by a centre' (1992: 12).

The notion of 'fuzzy sets' is, for example, evident in Kafka's *Metamorphosis*. Gregor Samsa awakes one morning to discover that he has miraculously transformed into an insect of grotesque proportions. At first, he attempts to explain the strange event in terms of a delusion, 'What about sleeping a little longer and forgetting all this nonsense' (1988: 89). However, as

the story progresses, the protagonist rejects the solution offered by delusion/dreaming, and accepts his unfortunate metamorphosis.

Another example is Nicolai Gogol's *The Nose*, which also features an overlap of the marvellous, the purely fantastic and the uncanny. Ivan Yakovlevitch awakes one morning to discover a human nose in his freshly baked breakfast loaf. He is dumbfounded as to the origin of the nose, and disposes of it in the river. The nose turns out to belong to Collegiate assessor Koralev, who, understandably, flies into a panic when he discovers the absence of his nose. To aggravate the perturbing situation, the nose is later sighted (by its owner!), ascending the steps of a building, dressed in State Councillor's uniform. The owner of the mischievous nose, upon contemplating the absurd turn of events, exclaims, 'it is impossible for a nose to disappear – absolutely impossible. I am probably either dreaming or raving' (1945: 181).

Both Kafka's *Metamorphosis* and Gogol's *The Nose* are tinged with the miraculous, purely fantastic and the uncanny. However, it is one thing to categorise a fantastic narrative, and quite another to create one's own tapestry of meaning from various fantastic threads. So, the question remains: what purpose do these narratives serve? How do they compel individual readers to mould meaning from madness?

In view of the permeable margins between fantastic genres, it will be meaningless to cast Douglas Adams's fantasy in proverbial stone by labelling it as either 'purely fantastic', 'uncanny' or 'marvellous'. Instead, Adams's fantasy is an intricate lattice of various fantastic functions and an amalgamation of fantastic modes. This study will rather focus on the way in which Adams's fantasy contributes to the making of subjective meaning, which might be regarded as the ultimate existential endeavour. In the selected works of fantasy by Douglas Adams, the themes of dreaming, fantastic states, delusion and madness are philosophically morphed to

such an extent that a delightfully ambiguous atmosphere ensues. These novels are imbued with the bizarre and the delusional, and therefore relate perfectly to the focal points of this essay, namely the fantastic, the absurd and the satiric.

Vestiges of the purely fantastic hesitation between 'reality' and 'dream world' are evident in the *Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy* from the very first chapter. This chapter depicts Arthur Dent's struggle to prevent his house from being demolished by the government, in order for a bypass to be constructed (this, of course, reflects the major plot of the Earth's demolition by the Vogons for the purpose of building an interplanetary bypass). When Ford realises that the Earth is about to be obliterated, he attempts to coax a very flummoxed Arthur into leaving his precious home in order for them to escape certain death. Ford, by means of absurd logic, manages to persuade Mr Prosser, the person in charge of the demolition of Arthur's home, to lie in the mud in front of Arthur's house (where, until a moment before, Arthur has lain himself):

"Come on", [Ford] said to him, "get up and let the man lie down". Arthur stood up, feeling as if he was in a dream. Ford beckoned to Prosser who sadly, awkwardly, sat down in the mud. He felt that his whole life was some kind of dream and he sometimes wondered whose it was and whether they were enjoying it (1995: 26).

Thus, even in the opening paragraph of the novel, the hesitation as to the nature of reality is introduced. In addition to this hesitation, related suggestions of madness/delusion indirectly come to the fore: 'Mr Prosser's mouth opened and closed a couple of times whilst his mind was filled with inexplicable but terribly attractive visions of Arthur Dent's house being consumed with fire.... Mr Prosser was often bothered with visions like these, and they made him feel very nervous' (1995: 20). Moreover, Mr Prosser wonders why his brain is occupied by 'a thousand hairy horsemen all shouting at him' (1995: 20).

Another example of the ambiguous nature of reality in Adams's fantastic landscapes is Ford's and Arthur's bouts of 'madness'. On being rescued by the *Heart of Gold* against all possible odds, the space-time continuum is probably a trifle distorted, and Arthur and Ford witness a

series of phenomena which they cannot explain, and thus come to the conclusion that they must be mad:

“It looks just like the sea front at Southend”. “Hell, I’m relieved to hear you say that...because I thought I must be going mad”. “Perhaps you are. Perhaps you only thought I said it”.... “Well, perhaps we’re both going mad”.... “Well, do you think this is Southend?” “Oh yes”. “So do I”. “Therefore we must be mad”
(1995: 65).

A moment later, for the purpose of confusing matters and aggravating Arthur’s and Ford’s concern that they might be losing their minds, a passing maniac with five heads and an elderberry bush adorned with kippers mentions something about the weather being fine, before a million-gallon vat of custard abruptly empties itself over their heads. Ford and Arthur realise that something bizarre is happening, and they are hesitant as to the nature of the absurd event. Instead of merely accepting an alternative ‘dream’ reality, they question their own sanity based on the laws governing the world as they know it. Characters never become accustomed to the glimpses of alterity, and question their sanity sporadically throughout the series.

In addition to the inexplicable events related above, Ford and Arthur, before being summoned by Marvin, encounter a troupe of monkeys claiming to have composed the script for *Hamlet*. In this regard, the reference to *Hamlet* proves significant in the sense that madness constitutes one of the major themes in *Hamlet*: ‘*Hamlet* is about insanity. Madness is the means Shakespeare used to convey the disillusion...that pervades the characters....Madness is, moreover, essential to the structure of the play as well as to the development of its themes’ (Lidz, 1976: 33).

Finally, just as Arthur becomes accustomed to the fact that the myth of Magrathea has turned out to be real, he once again questions his own sanity upon hearing that the Earth was in fact a computer designed to calculate the ultimate question, and that it was actually governed by white laboratory mice. His reaction to Slartibartfast’s account is simply, ‘Look...would it save you a lot of time if I just gave up and went mad now? (1995: 117)’

Related to madness is the theme of drug-induced landscapes of alterity, and Ford's preoccupation with liquor proves quite remarkable in this regard. The entry on alcohol in the *Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy* is quite interesting. The Guide says about the Pan Galactic Gargle Blaster that its effect is that of 'having your brains smashed out by a slice of lemon wrapped around a gold brick' (1995: 27). The many allusions to alcohol in the *Hitch Hiker* series, and its soporific and delusional effects, are not merely a source of comic relief, but comment on the subjective nature of 'reality'. The references to alcohol also serve to comment on an uncanny view of the fantastic landscape; on an alternative reality as the product of a deranged (or, in this case, intoxicated) mind.

Furthermore, during the protagonists' travels through the vast landscape of outer space, Zaphod claims to have located the mythical planet of Magrathea. Ford responds to this revelation by accusing Zaphod of insanity: ' "You're crazy, Zaphod...Magrathea is a myth, a fairy story" ' (1995: 88). Ford reasons that it is sufficient to gaze at a strange new planet without being tempted to believe the myths surrounding it: ' "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?" ' (1995: 89). Magrathea is, however, one of the phenomena which are confirmed by the protagonists as being real.

Although the mythical Magrathea turns out to be real (at a narrative level), Zaphod's sanity is once again questioned (by himself) while the party explores Magrathea. In order to investigate the notion of madness in relation to Zaphod Beeblebrox's character, one should consider his account of cauterising his own brain. As the protagonists traverse the subterranean pathways of Magrathea, Zaphod mentions that sections of his mind seem to be dysfunctional. He then relates the story of having discovered that he has tampered with his own brain in a desperate attempt to keep a secret, even from himself. On being questioned as to whether he is crazy, he replies: ' "It's a possibility I haven't ruled out yet" ' (1995: 106), thus sustaining the hesitation

between reality and fantasy. However, it is not confirmed that any of the characters are indeed mad, it is only suggested. Once again, madness and the experience of an alternate 'reality' are relative terms. What manifests as madness for one character might be perfectly 'real' to another.

Related to the concept of the hesitation between the real and the fantastic is, of course, the notion of dreaming and Descartes' theories in this regard. At one stage during their visit to Magrathea, Zaphod, Ford and Trillian are shown a simulated, Virtual Reality catalogue of exotic planets manufactured on Magrathea. This informational illusion comments on dreaming and the hesitation between the real and the fantastical, since it is an alternative landscape existing beyond the borders of the 'real'.

Jean Baudrillard, a prominent postmodern philosopher and authority on simulation and simulacra. Baudrillard regards simulacra as reproductions of objects or events, and describes them in relation to various stages or 'orders of appearance' (Kellner, 1989: 78). Concerning the present day and age, Baudrillard argues that we live in a world characterised by a third-order simulacra: 'This is the stage of "simulation proper", the end result of a long historical process of simulation, in which simulation models come to constitute the world, and overtake and finally "devour" representation' (Kellner, 1989: 79). Evidently, the protagonists find themselves in such a world governed by third-order simulacra, in that they are constantly exposed to simulation, and constantly hover on the brink of 'reality'.

The Virtual Reality scene in this novel illustrates the interconnectedness between dreaming (Descartes) and simulation (Baudrillard). Zaphod's companions attempt to wake him from his gas-induced dream. Upon awaking, Zaphod notices that the ground is made of solid gold and instantly recovers. However, when he is told that he is merely looking at a simulation, he exclaims: ' "You wake me up from my own perfectly good dream to show me someone else's" '

(Adams, 1995: 131). This statement may, of course, also be linked to Mr Prosser's remark (in the first chapter of the novel) concerning the hesitation about who is in fact dreaming.

In view of the above analysis of the *Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, the hesitation between the real and the fantastic is sustained to some extent. The allusions to madness and dreaming further serve to emphasise the subjective nature of reality and compel the reader to mould his/her own meaning from Adams's ambiguous fantastic fabric.

Descartes' malignant genius has been mentioned previously. In *The Restaurant at the End of The Universe*, this malign genius is made manifest in a 'man, being, something, with ultimate power' (1995: 170). At first it is suggested that this being might be malignant by nature: 'Somewhere in the shadows behind is another man, being, something....' (1995: 170). However, as the story unfolds, it becomes apparent that this being supposedly lurking in pernicious shadows is, in fact, mad as a hatter, and seems to be ruling the universe from a shack.

The notions of madness and the deranged imagination feature very prominently in the second novel of the *Hitch Hiker* series. The *Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, for example, offers the following definition of population:

It is known that there are an infinite number of worlds, simply because there is an infinite amount of space for them to be in. However, not every one of them is inhabited. Therefore, there must be a finite number of inhabited worlds. 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 may meet from time to time are merely the products of a deranged imagination* (1995: 245, italics mine).

Moreover, the musings of the man who supposedly rules the universe from a shack are tinged with delirium: ' "Fish come from far away...or so I'm told. Or so I imagine I'm told. When the men come, or when in my mind the men come in their six black shiny ships, do they come in your mind too?" ' (1995: 279-280).

Evidently, the novel argues that the universe might be the product of a severely deranged imagination, and that the nature of reality is rather obscure. It is also significant that the ruler of the universe himself perpetually questions the nature of reality, and it is hardly surprising to discover that the characters within this unstable universe constantly hesitate between the fantastic and the 'real'.

The deranged ruler of the universe argues that you cannot be sure of the existence or the reality of phenomena: ' "How can you tell there's anything out there?... the door's closed" ' (1995: 282). This man also asks the following question regarding the past: ' "How can I tell...that the past isn't a fiction designed to account for the discrepancy between my immediate physical sensations and my state of mind?" ' (1995: 282). Thus, it might be argued that the man in the shack does not rule the universe after all, seeing that he is apparently also subjected to the fictions and ambiguities which constitute the fabric of reality. The section depicting the man in the shack, his cat and his philosophical musings is concluded thus:

The ruler of the Universe dozed lightly in his chair. After a while he played with the pencil and the paper again and was delighted when he discovered how to make a mark with the one on the other. Various noises continued outside, but he didn't know whether they were real or not. He then talked to his table for a week to see how it would react (1995: 284).

The ambiguity at the root of reality is also brilliantly depicted in the section featuring Zaphod Beeblebrox on a simulated version of the hideous and pestilential planet, Frogstar B. Zaphod Beeblebrox finds himself in an artificially-created, alternative computer reality similar to the world as he knows it. However, he is not aware of the fact that this 'reality' is a simulation. Therefore, when he is addressed by a curious bird-like creature, he immediately questions this event, seeing that it would not normally have occurred in the 'real' world:

"Go away", said Zaphod. "OK", muttered the bird morosely and flapped off into the dust again. Zaphod watched its departure in bewilderment. "Did that bird just talk to me?" he asked Marvin nervously. He was quite prepared to believe the alternative explanation, that he was in fact hallucinating. "Yes", confirmed Marvin (1995: 195).

Although Zaphod initially hopes that he is hallucinating or imagining these events, Marvin confirms that they are real. Note, however, that 'real' in this sense implies an alternate, artificially simulated reality. The character, Zarniwoop, explains: ' "When you entered the door of my office, you entered my electronically synthesized Universe" ' (1995: 208). Therefore, the reader might still wonder whether or not something such as this would have occurred in the 'real' world depicted within this novel.

The inherent ambiguity of 'reality' is infused with Descartes' notion of life as a dream. Arthur says near the end of the novel: ' "It really doesn't matter. It's just like a dream from the past, or the future" '. Evidently, Arthur also resorts to Zaphod's first explanation of events as being the nebulous products of a dream. The allusions to dreaming and alternate states of existence in *The Restaurant at the End of the Universe* may point to the human compulsion to mould meaning, not only from the world as we know it, but also by constructing dream-scapes born of the inner recesses of our imaginations. In constructing dream-worlds, we have the power to alter our very existence, to escape or suppress Attebery's 'intolerable realities' that form part of the universe we were flung into. Adams's fantasy does not merely aim to entertain; it reflects the heart of humanity and its deepest pursuit of meaning.

At the beginning of *Life, the Universe and Everything*, Arthur's daily yell of horror is reminiscent of Gregor Samsa's discovery of his grotesque transformation in Franz Kafka's *Metamorphosis*. On a particular day, confronted with the absurdity of his situation, Arthur decides that he will go mad. He argues that a deranged mind might better accept or make sense of the surreal 'reality' (or un-reality) of the situation: 'He had just had a wonderful idea about how to cope with the terrible lonely isolation, the nightmares, the failure of all his attempts at horticulture, and the sheer futurelessness and futility of his life here of prehistoric Earth, which was that he would go mad' (1995: 316). Evidently, Arthur's resolve to go mad is also echoed in the absurd behaviour of Ford Prefect. Arthur and Ford have the following conversation after having been reunited:

“I thought you must be dead...” he said simply. “So did I for a while”, said Ford, “and then I decided I was a lemon for a couple of weeks. I kept myself amused all that time jumping in and out of a gin and tonic”. Arthur cleared his throat, and then did it again. “Where” he said “did you...?” “Find a gin and tonic?” Ford said brightly. “I found a small lake that thought it was a gin and tonic, and jumped in and out of that. At least, I think it thought it was a gin and tonic. I may”, he added with a grin which would have sent sane men scampering into trees, “have been imagining it” (1995: 317).

Evidently, the theme of madness or deviant psychotic states as well as the hesitation between the real and the imaginary is continued in this novel. An example of the amalgamation of madness, fantasy and dreaming is Arthur’s and Ford’s improbable journey to present-day England on a chesterfield sofa. Although Ford explains this hilarious event in science fictional terms, ‘ “That sofa is there because of the space-time instability I’ve been trying to get your terminally softened brain to get to grips with. It’s been washed up out of the continuum, it’s space-time jetsam....” ’ (1995: 321), the element of hilarity and madness lingers.

Ford’s and Arthur’s pursuit of the sofa is described in terms of the fantastic, the dream world and the imaginary, and in spite of Ford’s eloquent explanation, the hesitation as to the nature of reality once again comes to the fore: ‘They careered wildly through the grass, leaping, laughing....The sun shone dreamily on the swaying grass, tiny field animals scattered crazily in their wake’ (1995: 321). The words ‘wildly’, ‘laughing’ and ‘crazily’ serve to subtly introduce the theme of madness, which is brilliantly depicted in this hilarious scene, whereas the word ‘dreamily’ once again evokes the purely fantastic hesitation between the real and the imaginary.

Arthur’s perception of their pursuit of the sofa is described as follows:

Arthur felt happy. He was terribly pleased that the day was for once working out so much according to plan. Only twenty minutes ago he had decided he would go mad, and now here he was already chasing a Chesterfield sofa across the fields of prehistoric Earth. The sofa bobbed this way and that and seemed simultaneously to be as solid as the trees as it drifted past some of them and hazy as a billowing dream as it floated like a ghost through others (1995: 321).

Upon materialising at Lord’s Cricket Ground, Arthur implores Ford to tell him that the last five years have been a dream, thus sustaining the purely fantastic hesitation between the real and the imaginary, and once again reflecting Descartes’ notion of the possibility that life might be a

very lucid dream. Arthur regards the past five years as having been a prolonged nightmare: a surreal and horrific experience akin to that of Gregor Samsa in Kafka's *Metamorphosis*. In the case of Gregor Samsa, the nightmare is substantial and confirmed; his horrifically transformed body eventually dies. In *Life, the Universe and Everything*, the reality of Arthur's nightmare also seems to be confirmed by Ford, when he draws Arthur's attention to the tell-tale bone in his beard:

"I'm home", he repeated, "home. It's England, it's today, the nightmare is over...." "There are two things I think I should tell you", said Ford, tossing a copy of the Guardian over the table at him. "I'm home", said Arthur. "Yes", said Ford. "One is", he said pointing at the date at the top of the paper, "that the Earth will be demolished in two days' time.... And the other thing", said Ford, "is that you appear to have a bone in your beard" (1995: 326).

Evidently, Arthur's nightmare is far from over. A short while after having materialised at Lord's Cricket Ground, Arthur and Ford witness a violent attack launched by the lethal robots of Krikket. Once again, Arthur's initial reaction is to doubt the nature of the 'reality', or 'un-reality', of the situation:

The ghostly but violent shapes that could be seen moving within the thick pall of smoke seemed to be performing a series of bizarre parodies of batting strokes, the difference being that every ball they struck with their bats exploded wherever it landed....The very first one of these had dispelled Arthur's initial reaction, that the whole thing might just be a publicity stunt by Australian margarine manufacturers (1995: 333-334).

The fact that Arthur initially attempts to dismiss the nightmare as an outrageous advertisement comments on the absurd mechanisms of the media world, a world which manipulates and distorts perceptions of 'reality' and 'unreality'. In a discussion entitled *Reality, Hyperreality and Public Relations*, Alan Rycroft (2007) argues that postmodernism has 'taken us beyond reality, to a place...where "reality" has been drowned in an ocean of media, messages and symbols, spun out by legions of PR professionals and elites manipulating "reality" through the all-pervasive mediascape' .

Arthur's nightmare, whether 'real' or induced by the manipulation of the media, hovers on the misty margins between 'reality' and 'unreality'. Jane White-Lewis remarks about nightmares:

'Nightmares, like all dreams, live in that domain somewhere between psychology and literature, between non-fiction (day-residues and psychological history) and fiction (creative imagination)' (Rupprecht, 1993: 49). Moreover, in primitive times, nightmares were regarded as objective reality, and were often thought to have been sent by demons or gods (1993: 50). Interestingly, we may relate the abovementioned ideas to Descartes' malignant genius, and might even speculate that the nightmarish events related in this novel might be the product of the deranged mind of that genius.

Arthur's nightmarish encounter with Agrajag is an example of what Rosemary Jackson calls the 'shady blanknesses' (Jackson, 1981: 42) characteristic of the purely fantastic. Agrajag is an unfortunate character in the sense that he/it is killed by Arthur (who is ignorant of this macabre fact) in a number of reincarnated forms. According to Agrajag, he has been obliterated by Arthur in the form of a rabbit, a housefly, a bowl of petunias, a newt and a cricket spectator. When Arthur enters Agrajag's lurid grotto, he attempts to explain the ghastly interior of this 'Cathedral of Hate' (Adams, 1995: 391) as a trick of the imagination: '[The sign] flicked off with a sort of contemptuous flourish. Arthur then tried to assure himself that this was just a ridiculous trick of his imagination' (1995: 386).

The hologram of a giant housefly, a monstrosly large rabbit and a 'giant green scaly newt (1995: 389)', with which Arthur is thereafter confronted, reflects the nightmarish and surreal qualities of Kafkaesque fantasy. Gregor Samsa's transformation in Kafka's *Metamorphosis* is described thus:

As Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from uneasy dreams he found himself transformed in his bed into a gigantic insect. He was lying hard, as if it was armor-plated, back and when he lifted his head he could see his dome-like brown belly divided into stiff arched segments....His numerous legs... waved helplessly before his eyes (1988: 89).

When Arthur eventually meets Agrajag in his current form, the nightmarish atmosphere prevails. Agrajag turns out to be a demented bat-like creature of grotesque proportions. His hideous

cave is perceived by Arthur as something born of a deranged imagination: '[The Cathedral] was the product of a mind that was not merely twisted, but actually sprained' (Adams, 1995: 391). The themes of dreaming, the ambiguous structure of 'reality', and fantastic states as a product of madness/dementia overlap, thus creating a labyrinth of the real and imaginary.

Detailed accounts of the interior of the 'Cathedral of Hate' add to the horrendous atmosphere and the qualities of madness. The colours of the walls have, for example, been picked with malignant care; they vary from 'Ultra Violent' and 'Infra Dead' to 'Liver Purple' and 'Loathsome Lilac' (1995: 391). The horrific creator of the cave is described thus: 'Each of his three eyes was small and intense and looked about as sane as a fish in a privet bush' (1995: 393).

In *Life, the Universe and Everything*, the section depicting the gigantic computer, Hactar, who is responsible for designing a Supernova Bomb capable of obliterating the known universe, also comments on the doubtful nature of reality. Hactar is subdued in an attempt to destroy the bomb completely. However, Arthur and Trillian are granted an opportunity to converse with the computer. In its fragile state, Hactar is merely able to create illusions: ' "I have nothing to offer you by way of hospitality", said Hactar faintly, "but tricks of the light" ' (1995: 440).

Humanity is, of course, the master of all illusions. We are cast into a malignant universe and continuously spin existential webs of illusion. We pretend that life has an inherent meaning to be discovered. We imagine that there is a 'deeper' reality than the one with which we are confronted. Perhaps, in Hactar, Adams is commenting on existential revolt and the illusion of meaningfulness. The Hactar section may even serve as a sort of meta-text, commenting on the genre of fantasy itself as a means of spinning cocoons of illusion into which to crawl and hide.

Arthur perceives the illusory sofa created by Hactar as 'real': 'It was real. At least, if it wasn't real, it did support them, and as that is what sofas are supposed to do, this, by any test that mattered, was a real sofa' (1995: 440). Arthur realises that 'time and distance [are] one, that

mind and Universe [are] one, that perception and reality [are] one...' (1995: 449). According to Salomon Resnik, 'The man who questions himself decides to penetrate the secret meanders of the inner world. The "inner" man confronts himself with the inwardness of the world. The experience of the open is invested with enigmatic intentionality, with an inner "truth"....' (1987: 170-171). Thus, whatever the characters in *Life, the Universe and Everything* perceive, whether 'real' or 'imaginary', becomes their inner reality, their subjective truth and their means of making meaning. The barriers between 'real' and 'unreal' are irrevocably dissolved.

The theme of dreaming/hallucinating, and its connotations of madness, features very prominently in the fourth novel of the *Hitch Hiker* series, *So Long, And Thanks for All the Fish*. First of all, Arthur falls madly in love with Fenchurch, who is labelled by her brother as 'merely barking mad' (1995: 482). Her brother gives an account of Fenchurch's situation, and mentions that, '...she suffers from strange delusions that she's living in the real world' (1995: 483).

In the previous novel Arthur concludes that reality and perception are one, and in *So long, and Thanks For All the Fish*, Arthur is once again confronted with events so utterly mind-boggling that he initially resorts to dismissing these events as figments of a deranged imagination. Arthur explains to his supervisor where he has been for the past few months: 'Oh, hello, Arthur Dent here. Look, sorry I haven't been in for six months but I've gone mad' (1995: 497). Arthur Dent is once again questioning his own sanity:

He shook his head sharply in the hope that it might dislodge some salient fact which would fall into place and make sense of an otherwise utterly bewildering Universe, but since the salient fact, if there was one, entirely failed to do this, he set off up the road again, hoping that a good vigorous walk...would help to reassure him of his own existence at least, if not his sanity (1995: 487).

Furthermore, in a lucid and disturbing dream, Arthur discovers that the Earth he currently finds himself on is Earth in an alternate dimension: 'He danced dizzily over the edge as the dreamland dropped sheer away beneath him....Across the jagged chasm had been another land, another time, an older world, not fractured from, but hardly joined: two Earths' (1995: 495).

He also learns that the demolition of the Earth in its current dimension is shrugged off as drug-induced hallucinations experienced by the global population. Fenchurch, Arthur discovers, is not barking mad; she simply seems to be the only person who perceives the *other* Earth: 'I know it sounds crazy, and everybody says it was hallucinations, but if that was hallucinations then I have hallucinations in big screen 3D with 16-track Dolby Stereo....' (1995: 535).

Neither Arthur nor Fenchurch is content with the general notion of the Earth's demolition being the product of drug-induced hallucination: ' "People think that if you just say "hallucinations" it explains everything you want it to explain and eventually whatever it is you can't understand will just go away. It's just a word, it doesn't explain anything" ' (1995: 536). In this regard, Laurence M Porter remarks that 'Anything that violates what we consider to be natural laws, or what a philosopher might call our sense of nomological necessity, is usually called "fantastic" ' (Rupprecht, 1993: 32).

Evidently, Arthur and Fenchurch are not prepared to accept the explanation that fantastical events are merely the products of deviant, psychotic states of mind. Consequently, they embark on a quest to disentangle the ambiguities of 'real' and 'unreal'. Ironically, their quest leads them to the only person who might offer them some reliable answers to their questions: Wonko the Sane. Upon entering Wonko's absurd premises, the two protagonists realise that Wonko's name does not presuppose any vestiges of sanity:

His house was certainly peculiar....It was inside out. Actually inside out, to the extent that they had to park on the carpet....All along what one would normally call the outer wall, which was decorated in a tasteful interior-designed pink, were bookshelves....Where it got really odd was the roof. It folded back on itself like something Maurits C. Escher, had he been given to hard nights on the town...might have dreamed up....(Adams, 1995: 563).

The utterly astounding explanation for the demented layout of Wonko's house is that, when he discovered that the world had gone mad, he designed an asylum to put the world in. In effect, Wonko is therefore the only sane person in the world, the rest of the world being enclosed

within a gigantic asylum, until it 'heals' itself. This statement is positively reminiscent of Gérard de Narval in his letter to Mme Emile de Girardin, April 27, 1841: 'I am afraid I am in a house of wise men and the madmen are on the outside' (Felman, 1958: 59).

Wonko the Sane evidently shares Fenchurch's opinion of humankind's tendency to shrug off any event or phenomena it does not understand by arguing that it must be the product of delirium. Wonko's opinion of reality also coincides with Arthur's conclusion that reality and perception are one; a conclusion he arrives at in *Life, the Universe and Everything*. Wonko remarks:

"The reason I call myself by my childhood name is to remind myself that a scientist must also be absolutely like a child. If he sees a thing, he must say that he sees it, whether it was what he thought he was going to see or not. See first, think later, then test. But always see first. Otherwise you will only see what you were expecting" (Adams, 1995: 566).

So Long, and Thanks For All the Fish offers significant commentary on the subjective nature of reality. It argues that one should first acknowledge what one perceives before trying to explain the inexplicable as a product of dementia.

The fifth and final novel in the *Hitch Hiker* series, *Mostly Harmless*, is also concerned with the inexplicable, and focuses on parallel and multiple universes. According to Reissner-Nordström geometry, an infinite number of pairs of universes are connected, and this conception of space-time is often referred to as the 'paper doll topology', seeing that the pattern resembles a chain of linked paper dolls (Gribbin, 1992:172). This idea of 'paper doll universes' is reflective of postmodern thought in that it stresses multiplicity.

The multiplicity inherent in the notion of parallel universes may be briefly explained in relation to the so-called 'many-worlds hypothesis': 'It holds that whenever the universe...is confronted by a choice of paths at the quantum level, it actually follows *both* possibilities, splitting into two universes....' (Gribbin, 1992: 202).

This hypothesis is, of course, rooted in the classic 'Schrödinger's Cat' experiment on quantum mechanics. In this experiment, a hypothetical cat is shut in a box containing poison, radioactive material and a Geiger counter. If the radioactive material decays, the Geiger counter will trigger a device which will release the poison and kill the cat. Schrödinger wanted to know what the state of the cat in the box would be if he were to set up the experiment and wait until there were a 50:50 chance that the radioactive material had decayed. John Gribbin contends that 'Commonsense tells us that the cat is either alive or dead' (1992: 201). However, according to quantum mechanics, the cat is both alive and dead at the same time, and, hence, two universes blossom into existence.

In *Mostly Harmless*, Tricia McMillan, a television reporter in one dimension, exists as Trillian in another dimension:

The garden door was open. I went outside. There were lights. Some kind of gleaming thing. I was just in time to see it rise up into the sky, shoot silently up through the clouds and disappear. That was it. End of story. End of one life, beginning of another. But hardly a moment of this life goes by that I don't wonder about some other me. A me that didn't go back for her bag. I feel she's out there somewhere and I'm walking in her shadow (1995: 620).

Tricia McMillan evidently experiences her life in one dimension as shadowy, fantastical, something less real than the life she could have chosen as an alternative, the life now led by Trillian. Tricia also mentions that she chose television as career seeing that 'Nothing is real' (1995: 621).

Multiple universes presuppose a multiple reality instead of a singular, accepted notion of the real. This links with Arthur's realisation that perception and reality are one, and with the notion of subjective truth as conveyed in Adams's fantasy. Vann Harl, the new editor-in-chief of InfiniDim Enterprises, explains it thus: 'There are limitless futures stretching out in every direction from this moment – and from this moment and from this. Billions of them, bifurcating

every instant! Every possible position of every possible electron balloons out into billions of probabilities!' (1995: 641).

Ford attempts to explain that human beings question the nature of reality because they have sensory filters, and are therefore incapable of perceiving *all* reality:

The new Guide came out of the research labs. It made use of this new technology of Unfiltered Perception....Unfiltered Perception means it perceives everything. We have filters. The new Guide doesn't have any sense filters. It perceives everything....Now because the bird can perceive every possible Universe, it is present in every possible universe (1995: 738).

It seems that the characters may perpetually hesitate as to the nature of reality, since their sensory filters prevent them from seeing the fabric of reality as a whole. Thus, what appear to them as figments of a deranged imagination, or fantastical events, may perhaps be explained in another universe within the tapestry of multiple realities.

Tricia McMillan's perception of her supposed visit to the Grebulon planet is shrouded in uncertainty:

She hit the fast forward button again. There was nothing of any use here at all. It was all nightmarish madness....She shook her head and tried to get a grip. An overnight flight going East...The sleeping pills she had taken to get her through it. The vodka she'd had to set the sleeping pills going....She must have had a nervous breakdown. That was it. She was exhausted and she had had a nervous breakdown and had started hallucinating some time after she got home. She had dreamt the whole story. An alien race of people dispossessed of their own lives and histories, stuck on a remote outpost of our solar system and filling their cultural vacuum with our cultural junk. Ha! It was nature's way of telling her to check into an expensive medical establishment very quickly (1995: 753-754).

Instead of considering the possibility of the Grebulons' existence, Tricia finds it easier to explain her fantastical experience as the product of a mental illness or psychotic breakdown. In this section, Descartes' idea that life might be an extended dream reappears. When Tricia studies the tape recording of the absurd events, she realises that she might have faked the interview with the leader of Rupert. However, she immediately thinks that she is hallucinating even at this

moment: 'She must *still* be hallucinating....She continued to watch in a bewildered trance' (1995: 755).

The final novel in the *Hitch Hiker* series ends with the demolition of the Earth in all of its possible dimensions. All the protagonists are killed, and the reader is left with a profound sense of loss. Perhaps other versions of Earth are still left to be discovered? Sadly, we will never know what regions of 'fantasy' and 'reality' still lay dormant in the subconscious of the author. The subjective concept 'reality', whether real or imaginary, whether born of dementia, psychosis or hallucination, remains elusive. To once more quote from TS Eliot's *Four Quartets*: 'Humankind cannot bear very much reality' (1963: 190, *Burnt Norton*, lines 44-45), whether it be the shadow lands of the fantastic or the spectres of the uncanny.

Arthur C. Clarke writes in the foreword to his renowned novel, *2001 – A Space Odyssey*:

How many of those potential heavens and hells are now inhabited, and by what manner of creatures, we have no way of guessing....But the barriers of distance are crumbling; one day we shall meet our equals, or our masters, among the stars. Men have been slow to face this prospect; some still hope that it may never become reality. Increasing numbers, however, are asking: 'Why have such meetings not occurred already, since we ourselves are about to venture into space?' Why not, indeed? Here is one possible answer to that very reasonable question. But please remember: this is only a work of fiction. *The truth, as always, will be far stranger* (1968: 7-8, italics mine).

This chapter has dealt with the discrepancies and shady areas of the 'real' and the 'fantastic', and the subjective meaning derived from these inner landscapes in Adams's *Hitch Hiker* series. Not only does Adams spin shadowy, fantastical cocoons of alterity to 'suppress' intolerable realities, but on a meta-level he also comments on this very function of fantasy. Humanity did not choose its universe, it did not choose its existence. Therefore, in an existential revolt, we create our own dream-scapes, our own fantastic vessels of meaning.

These vessels of meaning are, of course, full to the brim for some, and empty for others, since 'reality' is fluid and subjective. Attebury remarks in *Strategies of Fantasy* that fantasy may also

be a *game* of sorts (1992: 4-5). It may be a game played in the spectral chambers of the mind, or in drug-induced landscapes of delirium, to relieve the monotony of a meaningless universe.

Fantasy may be yet another means of imposing meaning on an invariably insignificant world. The second chapter investigates this absurd meaninglessness at the heart of being.

CHAPTER 2: PHILOSOPHICAL UNDERPINNINGS – EXISTENTIALISM AND ABSURDITY IN ADAMS'S WORK

'Nothingness lies coiled in the heart of being – like a worm' (Jean-Paul Sartre).

'At any street corner the feeling of absurdity can strike any man in the face' (Camus).

'If courage in the face of the absurd is the only point in a pointless world – then is it a pointless world?' (Nino Langiulli).



One of the questions posed by this dissertation is whether or not there is another dimension to Douglas Adams besides light entertainment. In this chapter, selected works by Douglas Adams are analysed against the backdrop of Existentialism, and the related concept of Absurdity, in an attempt to answer the abovementioned question. In order to analyse the philosophical underpinnings of Adams's works, it is necessary to gain an overview of Existentialism and its roots. According to William Barrett, 'Existentialism is a philosophy that confronts the human situation in its *totality* to ask what the basic conditions of human existence are and how man can establish his own meaning out of these conditions' (1962: 143). After the Second World War, French Existentialism featured not as an elite philosophy, but as popular culture, seeping through the intellectual divide. French Existentialism was 'a kind of Bohemian ferment in Paris; it had, as a garnish for the philosophy, the cult its younger devotees had made of night-club hangouts, American jazz, special hairdos and style of dress' (Barrett, 1962: 7-8).

The word 'Existentialism' was coined towards the end of World War II by the French Philosopher Gabriel Marcel to name the ideas of Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir that were current at that time. Although these philosophers first resisted this labelling of their ideas, they gradually grew accustomed to it, and Sartre even published his *Existentialism and Humanism* in the very year (1945) that he refused the label of Existentialism.

In that same period of time, other writers were also described as Existentialist. Among these writers were Martin Heidegger and Karl Jaspers, whose influence on Sartre was profound. The Existentialist label was also attached to some of Sartre's French contemporaries such as Albert Camus and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Thinkers of the remote philosophical past who were also associated with Existentialism included Søren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche, the '*enfants terribles*' of the nineteenth century (Cooper, 1999: 2).

According to David E Cooper, 'Although the name "Existentialism" is only of wartime vintage, the special use of the word "existence" which inspires the name is older' (1999: 2). Karl Jaspers, for instance, referred to his writings of the 1920s and 30s as *Existenzphilosophie* (Cooper, 1999: 2). The term 'existence' may be understood more clearly if one considers Heidegger's application of the word. In some of his philosophical writings, Heidegger spelt the word 'exist' with a hyphen: ex-ist. The spelling of the word thus emphasises its derivation from Greek and Latin words meaning 'to stand out from' (Cooper, 1999: 4). In view of the Greek and Latin derivations, to exist means to be 'beyond' or 'ahead' of what characterises a person at a given time (Cooper, 1999: 4). To exist is to make meaning, to move forward, to become, to invent oneself.

Robert C. Solomon describes Existentialist philosophy as:

...the explicit conceptual manifestation of an existential attitude – a spirit of the "present age". It is a philosophical realisation of a self-conscious living in a "broken world" (Marcel), an "ambiguous world" (de Beauvoir), a "dislocated world" (Merleau-Ponty), a world into which we are "thrown" and "condemned" yet "abandoned" and "free" (Heidegger and Sartre), a world which appears to be indifferent or even "absurd" (Camus) (1989: 238).

Existentialism as a literary movement was further reflected in the Theatre of the Absurd, which entertained audiences across Europe with reflections on the absurdity of the human condition. According to *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 'the critic Martin Esslin coined

the phrase “theatre of the absurd” in 1961 to refer to a number of dramatists of the 1950s (led by Samuel Beckett and Eugène Ionesco) whose works evoke the absurd....’ (Baldick, 1990: 1). The classic absurdist play, according to *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, is Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* (*En attendant Godot*, 1952) which ‘revives some of the conventions of clowning and farce to represent the impossibility of purposeful action and the paralysis of human aspiration’ (Baldick, 1990:1).

Waiting for Godot features two clown-like tramps, Vladimir and Estragon, who are waiting for a mysterious person called Godot in a place best described as nowhere. These two tramps, existing in a waste world devoid of meaning, have nothing left to do but to wait, and to entertain themselves. Nothing of any consequence happens in the play: the characters merely keep themselves occupied with trivialities: ‘Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it’s awful’ (Beckett, 1990: 41).

In an essay entitled *Beckett and the Quest for Meaning*, Martin Esslin argues that the Beckettian universe ‘...is free of illusions, consolations or hopes, be they utopian or transcendental. It is a harsh region, not unlike Dante’s Inferno, were it not for the fact that much laughter resounds through it....’ (2001: 28). Vladimir and Estragon attempt to make meaning by entertaining themselves. This entertainment takes on various forms: anything from trying to hang themselves, to exercising, acting and pretending, trying on boots and discussing turnips. The following dialogue from the play illustrates life’s inherent monotony and the human compulsion to make meaning.

Estragon: Ah! [Pause. *Despairing.*] What’ll we do, what’ll we do!
Vladimir: There’s nothing we can do.
Estragon: But I can’t go on like this!
Vladimir: Would you like a radish?
Estragon: Is that all there is?
Vladimir: There are radishes and turnips.
Estragon: Are there no carrots?
Vladimir: No. Anyway, you overdo it with your carrots.

Estragon: Then give me a radish....It's black!
Vladimir: It's a radish.
Estragon: I only like the pink ones, you know that!....
Vladimir: This is becoming really insignificant.
Estragon: Not enough. [*Silence.*]
Vladimir: What about trying them?
Estragon: I've tried everything.
Vladimir: No, I mean the boots.
Estragon: Would that be a good thing?
Vladimir: It'd pass the time....I assure you, it'd be an occupation

(Beckett, 1990: 63-64).

Vladimir's words resonate with the absurdity of the human condition and the compulsion to mould meaning from the nothingness which lies at the core of the universe: 'We wait. We are bored....We are bored to death, there's no denying it. Good. A diversion comes along and what do we do? We let it go to waste....In an instant all will vanish and we'll be alone once more, in the midst of nothingness!' (Beckett, 1990: 75).

According to MH Abrahams, 'Like most works in this mode, the play is absurd in the double sense that it is grotesquely comic and also irrational and nonconsequential....The lucid but eddying and pointless dialogue is often funny, and pratfalls and other modes of slapstick are used to project the alienation and tragic anguish of human existence' (1999:2).

In *Being and Nothingness – An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, a groundbreaking work in the field of Existentialism, Jean-Paul Sartre distinguishes between two modes of existence. He identifies these modes as unconscious being, which he names Being-in-itself, and conscious being, which he calls Being-for-itself. Being-in-itself refers to an amalgamation of natural phenomena, those phenomena that are unaware of their own existence. Being-for-itself, on the other hand, refers to a conscious awareness of existence; '*Being-for-itself (pour-soi)* is coextensive with the realm of consciousness, and the nature of consciousness is that it is perpetually beyond itself. Our thought goes beyond itself, toward tomorrow or yesterday, and toward the outer edges of the world' (Barrett, 1962: 245).

Sartre postulates that human beings are both Being-in-itself, and thus form part of the amalgamation of physical phenomena such as trees, rivers and flowerpots; as well as Being-for-itself, in that humanity is conscious of its own existence. This consciousness is, however, described as a nothingness, something that is not categorised as Being-in-itself. Therefore, Sartre comes to the conclusion that 'man himself is being and nothingness' (Sartre, 1956: xviii). Therein lies humanity's existential anxiety, in the debilitating oneness with phenomena and the futile desire to transcend.

According to the Existentialists, human beings are thrown, as it were, into the cauldron of Being-in-itself, among the trees and buildings and dust roads of the world, without having had a choice in the matter. The German philosopher, Heidegger, calls this situation '*Geworfenheit*', or 'thrownness' (Butler, 1984: 9). Existentialists also argue that we are flung into certain conditions that are beyond our power to control. These conditions comprise our so-called 'facticity'. In *Irrational Man – A Study in Existential Philosophy*, William Barrett explains it thus: '...If we exist our facticity, then we *are* it, and it makes up the total essence of what we are. These factual conditions, particularly of the epoch in which we live, colour every portion of our being' (Barrett, 1962:109). Lance St. John Butler describes facticity as follows, 'Facticity is "the way things are"....It is all that cribs, cabins and confines us but, like all such limitations, it is also the condition of the possible' (Butler, 1984: 14).

Seeing that facticity does not merely imply limitation, but also possibility, human beings are condemned to be free; we are free to make choices and free to invent ourselves. Therefore, Existentialists claim that this facticity is the cause for existential despair, or *angst*, a word associated mainly with Kierkegaard, and which may be translated as anxiety (Butler, 1984: 46). Lance St. John Butler very eloquently describes *angst* as 'my peering into the abyss of my freedom' (Butler, 1984: 88). *Angst* is steeped in the human compulsion to define its own

meaning, to invent itself. We cannot choose our 'factual conditions', and yet we have to perpetually make meaning and reinvent ourselves. Roquentin's notes on facticity in the novel *Nausea* resonate with the notions of *angst* and facticity:

We were a heap of existents inconvenienced, embarrassed by ourselves, we hadn't the slightest reason for being there, any of us; each existent, embarrassed, vaguely ill at ease, felt superfluous in relation to the others. *Superfluous*: that was the only connexion I could establish between those trees, those gates, those pebbles.... And I – weak, languid, obscene, digesting, tossing about dismal thoughts – I too was *superfluous* ([1949] 2000: 184).

Sartre expresses the notion of superfluity as *de trop*, and explains it thus: 'Existence itself is contingent, gratuitous, unjustifiable. It is absurd in the sense that there is no reason for it' (Sartre, 1956: xvi). Furthermore, the *Macmillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners* defines *de trop* as 'not wanted or needed' (2002: 378). In this novel, Roquentin experiences his facticity as nausea; something which wells up and threatens to overwhelm him. According to Sartre, the shock of nothingness, meaningless and absurdity is vividly revealed to us in moments of intense existential angst and musings on facticity.

In a world devoid of any inherent meaning, what are we to do? Sartre suggests that the only way in which to survive is by taking action and making meaning for oneself. In this regard, the self may be regarded as a bubble with nothing at its centre: '...The bubble is empty and will collapse, and so what is left us but the energy and passion to spin that bubble out? Man's existence is absurd in the midst of a cosmos that knows him not; the only meaning he can give himself is through the free project that he launches out of his own nothingness' (Barrett, 1962: 247). Barrett's 'bubble existence' is reminiscent of William Butler Yeats's belief that,

The things a man has heard and seen are threads of life, and if he pull them carefully from the confused distaff of memory, and who will can weave them into whatever garments of belief please them best. I too have woven my garment like another, but shall try to keep warm in it, and shall be content if it do not unbecome me (in Ellman, 1954:42).

In this we see that humankind is compelled to create itself, and to create its world. Albert Camus echoes Sartre's suggestion that the only antidote to facticity and absurdity is to create meaning for ourselves. In an introduction to Camus's *The Outsider*, Cyril Connolly writes that, 'The philosophy of Camus is a philosophy of the absurd, and for him the absurd springs from the relation of man to the world, of his legitimate aspirations to the vanity and futility of human wishes' (Camus, 1942: 6). Camus argues for courage in the very face of the absurd; the courage to continually reinvent oneself in a world steeped in meaninglessness.

Camus confirms the existential notion of humankind's condition being one of absurdity. How, then, should one define absurd man? Camus argues that the absurd man is a person who harbours no hope for an eternal future. That person constantly attempts to make his/her own meaning by using the limited resources at his/her disposal. These resources, according to Camus, are courage and reasoning. The absurd man is a person who 'lives out his adventure within the span of his lifetime' (1975: 64).

Camus's arguments regarding absurdity and absurd man are clearly reflected in the *Myth of Sisyphus*. According to Greek mythology, the gods condemned Sisyphus to perpetually rolling a stone to the top of a mountain, after which the stone would roll back down again. Camus explains,

...Sisyphus is the absurd hero. He *is*, as much through his passions as through his torture. His scorn of the gods, his hatred of death, and his passion for life won him that unspeakable penalty in which the whole being is exerted towards accomplishing nothing....If this myth is tragic, that is because its hero is conscious. Where would his torture be, indeed, if at every step the hope of succeeding upheld him? The workman of today works every day in his life at the same tasks and this fate is no less absurd. But it is tragic only at the rare moments when it becomes conscious. Sisyphus, proletarian of the gods, powerless and rebellious, knows the whole extent of his wretched condition....The lucidity that was to constitute his torture at the same time crowns his victory. There is no fate that cannot be surmounted by scorn (1975: 108-109).

Camus concludes his discussion of the *Myth of Sisyphus* by arguing that happiness and absurdity cannot be severed from one another. There is no ultimate, meaningful destination; no

final victory or reward. Sisyphus will continue to bear his terrible burden until the end of his days. However, he bears his burden with courage and defiance: 'The struggle itself towards the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy' (1975: 111).

Therefore, Camus's philosophy is evidently not a philosophy of bleak despair: 'Far from being pessimistic, his whole work postulates an alternative to the nihilism which was fashionable when he grew up, and which the horrifying experience of the war made almost inescapable' (Masters, 1974: 1). Moreover, Camus argued that the love of life is much more important than its meaning.

Camus' view of courage in the face of absurdity is very clearly reflected in his novel *The Outsider (L'Etranger)* published in 1942. Camus did not regard himself as an intellectual. Instead, he was concerned with the trials and tribulations of the 'little man', the ordinary person 'whose sufferings went unnoticed, who was inarticulate, introverted, discontented in silence' (Masters, 1974: 19). Consequently, the hero of the story is a 'little man', an insignificant and unremarkable person. Meursault works in an office in Algiers. He does not really talk, and he does not really act either. Upon learning of his mother's death, for example, he fails to show the 'proper' emotional response. Meursault's neighbour treats a former Arab mistress harshly, and is pursued by two Arab men with murder on their minds. When Meursault by chance encounters the two Arabs on the beach, he shoots one of the men for the sole reason that he is blinded by the sun. Subsequently, Meursault is arrested, tried, found guilty and condemned to death.

Meursault's life is one of boredom and apathy. However, while awaiting certain death in his tiny cell, Meursault suddenly rejoices in the life which he is to lose. He does not hope for anything beyond death. He simply makes meaning in the present tense by memorising every brick and crevice of his entrapment. Meursault actually accepts the absurdity of life, and refuses to hope

for anything more; he vigorously opposes the Priest when he tries to appease Meursault with religion. In his moment of revolt, Meursault realises that, although life is absurd, it must be lived.

Camus regards absurdity as a bilateral relationship between the human being and the world he/she is living in; a discrepancy between humankind's being part of the world, yet separate from it. According to M Holquist, 'The absurd points to a discrepancy between purely human values and purely logical values....' (Tigges, 1988: 129). This view quite evidently echoes Sartre's notion of Being-in-itself and Being-for-itself, in that the human being is both emerged in the world of things, and yet separate from it, seeing that he/she is aware of his/her own existence.

In the first chapter I examined the ambivalent fabric of fantasy and reality as it is constructed in Adams's work. In this chapter, ambiguity features as a prominent theme, and is examined in light of the discrepancy between Being-in-itself and Being-for-itself, and the consequent absurdity which stems from it. Absurdity, according to *The Anatomy of Literary Nonsense*, 'is the art form that conveys meaninglessness' (Tigges, 1988:130). Therefore, this chapter examines the absurdity reflected in the selected novels by Douglas Adams against the backdrop of Sartre's and Camus's theories on Existentialism and the recurrent theme of meaninglessness.

In an article entitled 'The Unravelling of DNA: Douglas Noel Adams', Tim Wynne-Jones argues that '...in Adams's exploded, improbable universe, a drink of water might very well answer back! Adams animates the galaxy with far more than the usual stock of reptiloid monstrosities....His absurdism has a way of rushing up to you and smacking you in the face' (2001:630). Wynne-Jones mentions *absurdism* and not *absurdity* in his article. According to Tim Wynne-Jones,

absurdism may be traced back to Tertullian, an early church father, who argued that the clearest sign of the truth of Christianity is its absurdity. Tertullian postulated that 'the idea of an infinite deity incarnating himself and undergoing suffering for human beings is so irrational that no one would invent such a story; therefore it must be true' (2001: 630). Adams's novels echo this Tertullian *absurdism* to a great extent. In the *Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, for instance, it is observed that '...because of the quasi-reciprocal and circular nature of all Improbability calculations, anything that was Infinitely Improbable was actually very likely to happen almost immediately' (Adams, 1995: 370). Although this chapter focuses on the absurdity of the human condition as defined by Existentialist philosophy, Adams's *absurdism* will be briefly touched upon seeing that it contributes to the overall theme of absurdity and the necessity for constructing meaning.

As an introduction to the first chapter of *The Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, Adams writes:

Far out in the uncharted backwaters of the unfashionable end of the western spiral arm of the Galaxy lies a small unregarded yellow sun. Orbiting this at a distance of roughly ninety-two million miles is an utterly insignificant little blue-green planet whose ape-descended life forms are so amazingly primitive that they still think digital watches are a pretty neat idea' (1995:15).

Evidently, the theme of meaninglessness, even if suggested in a comic manner, is introduced on the very first page of the novel. Adams portrays a cosmos in which the Earth, and specifically humankind, are diminutive and utterly insignificant on the greater scale of things. In chapter one, the reader is introduced to Arthur Dent, the insignificant and utterly ordinary Everyman. In Arthur Dent, we see reflected the character of Meursault, a character created by Albert Camus in *The Outsider*, who embodies the absurdity of the human condition and the ambiguity inherent in every individual life, as well as the solitary struggle to construct meaning. Arthur Dent lives in a bubble, a bubble filled with everyday, inconsequential phenomena such as kettles, plugs, refrigerators and, of course, tea.

In the course of the *Hitch Hiker* series, however, Arthur comes face to face with the sheer meaninglessness of the universe, and of his life as a 'little man'. Yet, he also learns how to 'spin out his bubble', and to construct meaning, even if the meaning constructed is farcical, absurd and grotesquely comical. He learns that keeping oneself occupied, as the two tramps in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* do, is the sole means of survival. Arthur learns, metaphorically speaking, to count the bricks and crevices in his cell, as Meursault does in *The Outsider* to while away the hours before his life finally comes to a close.

Another theme which is closely related to the theme of absurdity and meaninglessness in *The Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, is the theme of boredom, and the idea that nothing is about to happen. This is, of course, reminiscent of the Theatre of the Absurd, in which nothing happens and continues to do so for an indefinite period of time. In chapter one, for example, the reader is informed that, 'Ford Prefect was desperate that any flying saucer at all would arrive soon because fifteen years was a long time to get stranded anywhere, particularly somewhere as mindbogglingly dull as the Earth' (Adams, 1995: 22).

In chapter seven, the reader is introduced to Vogon poetry, which is regarded as the third worst poetry in the known universe. The section on Vogon poetry may be seen in relation to humanity's attempts at creating art, at expressing the absurdity of the human condition and the insignificance of life. In the words of William Barrett in *Irrational Man – A Study in Existential Philosophy*, '...The artist too must stand face to face with a flat and inexplicable world' (Barrett, 1962: 49). Adams describes the second worst poetry in the world, that of the Azgoths of Kria, as follows:

During a recitation by their Poet Master Grunthos the Flatulent of his poem 'Ode To A Small Lump of Green Putty I Found In My Armpit One Midsummer Morning' four of his audience died of internal haemorrhaging, and the President of the Mid-Galactic Arts Nobbling Council survived by gnawing one of his legs off. Grunthos is reported to have been 'disappointed' by the poem's reception, and was about to embark on a reading of his twelve-book epic entitled *My Favourite Bathtime Gurgles* when his own major

intestine, in a desperate attempt to save life and civilization, leapt straight up through his neck and throttled his brain (Adams, 1995: 55).

The subjects, handpicked by Grunthos the Flatulent for his heinous poems, quite clearly reflect the grotesque humour and absurdity of the human condition. These subjects do not entail lofty ideals or human aspiration. True to the Existentialist notion of making meaning, these subjects simply deal with Being-in-itself, in a celebration of the trivialities and even obscenities of everyday life. Once again, in chapter nine, the reference to *Hamlet* (Adams, 1995: 68), with its underpinning theme of madness, also evokes the absurd meaninglessness of existence, and the artist's attempt to portray this universal absurdity.

In the ninth chapter of the *Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, Ford and Arthur are confronted with and immersed in the absurdity of Being-in-itself, or the world of phenomena, after having performed a hyper-spatial jump:

Wild yowling noises of pipes and strings seared through the wind, hot doughnuts popped out of the road for ten pence each, horrid fish stormed out of the sky and Arthur and Ford decided to make a run for it. They plunged through heavy walls of sound, mountains of archaic thought, valleys of mood music, bad shoe sessions and footling bats.... (Adams, 1995: 66).

The above may be significant of the human revolt against facticity and against Being-in-itself. Arthur and Ford, being both part of the world of phenomena and conscious of themselves in this world, and experiencing existential angst due to the ensuing confusion, decide to 'make a run for it' Phrases such as 'wild yowling noises', and 'horrid fish [that] stormed out of the sky' signify the angst and utter absurdity of the human condition as portrayed in this section. Moreover, to add to the confusion and absurdity, a million gallon vat of custard is randomly emptied over the characters' heads.

In Existential terms, the notions of meaninglessness and nothingness are interrelated, and are both embodied in Marvin, the 'paranoid android'. However, Marvin is not exactly Camus's Sisyphus, or the absurd hero. The reader definitely does not imagine Marvin happy. If

humankind (and Artificial Intelligence, for that matter) exist in an Existential bubble with nothingness at its centre, then Marvin is not 'spinning out his bubble' at all. He does exactly the opposite of what Camus proposed humankind should do in order to survive in an absurd universe; instead of celebrating life in its everyday form, Marvin dwells in Existential despair:

Marvin regarded [the door] with cold loathing whilst his logic circuits chattered with disgust and tinkered with the concept of directing physical violence against it. Further circuits cut in saying, Why bother? What's the point? Nothing is worth getting involved in (Adams, 1995:74).

Marvin is also known for soliloquies steeped in self-pity and grave depression, such as, 'Sorry, did I say something wrong?...Pardon me for breathing, which I never do anyway so I don't know why I bother to say it...I'm so depressed. Life! Don't talk to me about life' (Adams, 1995: 75). Marvin evidently does not rejoice in life, judging, for example, by his response to Arthur's appreciation of the night sky:

'Night's falling' [Arthur said]. 'Look, robot, the stars are coming out'....
The robot obediently looked at them, then looked back.
'I know', he said. 'Wretched isn't it?'
'But that sunset! I've never seen anything like it in my wildest dreams...the two suns! It was like mountains of fire boiling into space'.
'I've seen it', said Marvin. 'It's rubbish' (Adams, 1995: 109).

Ford Prefect, on the other hand, does grasp the concept of celebrating life without hoping for something more or dwelling in the pits of despair. Zaphod Beeblebrox, for example, wants to believe that the planet of Magrathea is imbued with the marvellous (thus hoping for something else beyond what the physical universe offers), while Ford simply appreciates the beauty of a planet he has never seen before, and this is enough for him: 'All this Magrathea nonsense seemed juvenile. 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?' (Adams, 1995: 89).

One of the most powerful depictions of the human condition is found in chapter eighteen of the *Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, when a lone sperm whale is called (or flung, as it were) into existence above the surface of an alien planet. First of all, the term 'alien' is significant, in that,

according to the Existentialists, human beings are flung into a hostile universe in which they are alien and nothing more than outsiders. Consider the following extract cataloguing some of the whale's thoughts from the moment of its birth until its final thought only moments later:

Ah...! What's happening? It thought.
Er, excuse me, who am I?
Hello?
Why am I here? What's my purpose in life?
What do I mean by who am I? (Adams, 1995: 99).

The whale does not have the opportunity to choose its facticity, in other words, for example, the planet that is eventually to be its graveyard, or the colour of its tail. In a futile attempt to discover the inherent meaning or purpose of its life (which, of course, is undiscoverable), the whale rushes towards its final moments in an absurd and apathetic universe. Towards the end of its brief lifespan, however, the whale eventually understands the existential notion of keeping itself occupied and constructing meaning for itself: 'Perhaps I can call that...wind! Is that a good name? It'll do...perhaps I can find a better name for it later when I've found out what it's for....Hey! What's this thing? This...let's call it a tail – yeah, tail. Hey! I can really thrash it about pretty good can't I? Wow! Wow!' (Adams, 1995: 99). The repetition of question marks in this extract emphasises the confusion and facticity of the human condition, and the never-ending quest for meaning.

In the same chapter, a bowl of petunias, also being so unfortunate as to be created in mid-air, does not have thoughts about meaning or purpose or, in fact, anything at all. It merely thinks, 'Oh no, not again' (Adams, 1995: 100). The words 'Oh no, not again' suggest something peculiar about space-time and the possibility of multiple dimensions of existence. It turns out that the bowl of petunias is a reincarnated form of the creature Agrajag, a poor unfortunate soul who is accidentally obliterated in each of its lifetimes. The bowl of petunias thus mirrors the incomprehensibility and randomness at the heart of the universe.

In chapter 25 of this novel, the theme of life's ultimate meaning is continued. The story goes that,

Many many millions of years ago a race of hyper-intelligent pan-dimensional beings...got so fed up with the constant bickering about the meaning of life which used to interrupt their favourite pastime of Brockian Ultra-Cricket (a curious game which involved suddenly hitting people for no readily apparent reason and then running away) that they decided to sit down and solve their problems once and for all (Adams, 1995:119).

In the true Existential spirit, these pan-dimensional beings realise the absurdity of pondering life's supposedly inherent meaning, and add more value to entertainment by engaging in endless games of Brockian Ultra Cricket. However, the meaning of life still hovers at the back of their minds like a grey mist, and therefore they design a computer (Deep Thought) to perform the onerous task of calculating the meaning of life *for* them:

And to this end they built themselves a stupendous super computer which was so amazingly intelligent that even before its data banks had been connected up it had started from I think therefore I am and got as far as deducing the existence of rice pudding and income tax before anyone managed to turn it off (1995: 119).

In the meantime, like the two tramps in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, these beings entertain themselves while patiently awaiting the answer to Life, the Universe and Everything. It is important to remember that, according to the Existentialists, the act of waiting is far more significant than that which people wait for, since people wait for meaning, and meaning will never be revealed. The emphasis is placed upon '...the interim rather on the expectation; not the act of waiting *for* something but the activity of waiting itself, in all its existential and spiritual dimensions' (States, 1978: 49).

Deep Thought, in all its majestic circuitry, is indeed able to calculate the answer to Life, the Universe and Everything. The pan-dimensional peoples joyously await its answer, and exclaim that: 'Never again will we wake up in the morning and think Who am I? What is my purpose in life? Does it really, cosmically speaking, *matter* if I don't get up and go to work?' (Adams, 1995: 126). And so, after seven and a half million years, Deep Thought reveals to its stunned

audience that the ultimate answer is, in fact, 42. Forty two is entirely and frustratingly insignificant as an ultimate answer to Life, the Universe and Everything.

Although Deep Thought is unable to calculate the ultimate question, he consoles the downcast pan-dimensional beings by promising to design yet a greater computer, 'a computer which will calculate the Question to the Ultimate Answer' (Adams, 1995: 129) in order to help them understand the answer, 42. The computer that Deep Thought designs turns out to be the Earth, a computer 'of such infinite and subtle complexity that organic life itself [forms part] of its operational matrix' (Adams, 1995: 129).

To this effect, Deep Thought programs every human being who will ever form part of the Earth's operational matrix to constantly ask questions concerning the meaning of Life, the Universe and Everything. We may argue that Deep Thought activates in them the bits and bytes that will compel them to ponder the meaning of their lives, and to consequently dwell in the pits of existential anguish. Fortunately, however, Deep Thought has not accounted for creatures such as Ford and Arthur, who after having a series of adventures steeped in meaninglessness, stop asking questions about the meaning of life, and start *inventing* meaning by simply entertaining themselves with all kinds of insanity.

This entertaining the self with madness or insanity is, of course, reminiscent of Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. A similar theme is also evident in *Boesman and Lena*, a South African play by Athol Fugard. This play depicts Boesman's and Lena's futile attempts at moulding meaning from a life with a circular structure of suffering. In the tradition of the existential and the absurd, Lena says to Boesman, 'Don't be like that tonight, man. This is a lonely place. Just us two. Talk to me'. When Boesman responds that he has nothing left to say to Lena, she says, 'I'll go mad' (Fugard, 1983:9). Therefore, in the face of the nothingness of life and the 'lonely place' of

existence, the only option left is to entertain oneself, even if it requires one to revert to insanity. Boesman and Lena, like Beckett's clowns, are perpetually inventing themselves, moving forward, becoming.

In contemporary writer Paulo Coelho's novel, *Veronika Decides to Die*, the interrelation between madness and meaning is a recurrent theme. In this novel, Eduard is a young man diagnosed as schizophrenic, 'a man who had destroyed an indifferent world in order to recreate it again in his head, this time with new colours, new characters, new stories' (2000: 118). Eduard's new, subjective reality includes 'a woman, a piano and a moon that was continuing to grow' (2000: 118). In Eduard's reconstructed reality, the interwoven threads of fantasy and the Existentialist notion of making subjective meaning are diagnosed as 'madness'. However, in his 'madness' also lies his salvation, as well as the realisation that the love of life surpasses any objective structure of 'meaning'.

In Chapter 30 of the *Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, the mysterious old man, Slartibartfast, confirms the existential suggestion that one had better entertain oneself in order to survive, since there is no such thing as ultimate, inherent meaning: 'Perhaps I'm old and tired...but I always think that the chances of finding out what really is going on are so absurdly remote that the only thing to do is to say hang the sense of it and just keep yourself occupied. Look at me: I design coastlines. I got an award for Norway' (Adams, 1995:134).

The above comment by Slartibartfast is perhaps one of the more direct allusions to Existential philosophy and the absurd condition of humankind in this particular novel. This argument also reflects the notion of our 'bubble' existence, and the urgency to spin our bubbles outward by inventing meaning and entertaining ourselves. In the words of Robert J Sternberg, 'To a large extent, we can create our own lives and determine our own destinies, rather than allowing

ourselves to be shaped and buffeted by inexplicable forces outside our conscious grasp' (Sternberg, 1998: 575).

In this novel, and in the particular dimension it portrays, the Earth as super computer is destroyed, and with it the hope of finding the Ultimate Question. This section portrays the fact that, without the right question, an answer is superfluous. In Ursula Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness*, a classic science fiction novel, the emphasis is also placed upon asking the right questions instead of focusing on answers. When the protagonist, an alien envoy on the planet Winter, consults the Foretellers to learn more about their art, he is informed that 'The more qualified and limited the question, the more exact the answer....Vagueness breeds vagueness. And some questions of course are unanswerable' (1969: 56). When the envoy wants to know what will happen if one poses a question that is unanswerable, he learns the following:

Unanswerable questions have wrecked Foretelling groups....Do you know the story of the Lord of Shorth, who forced the Foretellers of Asen Fastness to answer the question *What is the meaning of life?* Well, it was a couple of thousand years ago. The Foretellers stayed in the darkness for six days and nights. At the end, all the Celibates were catatonic, the Zanies were dead, the Pervert clubbed the Lord of Shorth to death with a stone.... (1969: 56-57)

Thus, it seems that the question of what the meaning of life is is utterly unanswerable, and should one attempt to answer it, as the Foretellers in Le Guin's novel attempt to do, one may end up either dead or insane.

In *The Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, Franky Mouse, one of the pan-dimensional characters sent to Earth to navigate its ten-million-year programme, aptly summarises the doubts we all feel when forced to consider the meaning of life:

... 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 multi-dimensional infinity of the Universe is almost certainly being run by a bunch of maniacs. And if it comes to a choice between spending yet another ten million years finding that out, and on the other hand just taking the money and running, then I for one could do with the exercise....(1995: 139-140).

To quote Adams in *The Restaurant at the End of the Universe*: 'In the beginning the Universe was created. This has made a lot of people very angry and been widely regarded as a bad move' (1995: 155). This, of course, may be seen in light of Sartre's description of our facticity and Heidegger's concept of *Geworfenheit* or 'thrownness'; we have been flung into a universe with certain characteristics, without having had any say in them. This facticity, as was mentioned previously, causes people to dwell in the dank caves of anxiety and despair. Therefore, people's opinion of the creation of the universe as a 'bad move', and their consequent anger directed at whatever caused their existence in an absurd universe, seem quite justified!

According to the *Oxford Concise Companion to English Literature*, to define the world as absurd would mean to 'recognise its fundamentally indecipherable nature' (Drabble and Stringer, 1996: 2). This theme of the indecipherable nature of the world, ludicrously reflected in the *Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, is perpetuated in the *Restaurant at the End of the Universe*. Even on the very first page of the novel, the reader is entertained by the ridiculous attempts of humankind to impose meaning on an utterly meaningless universe. Consider, for example, the Jatravartids' absurd attempt at explaining the universe: '...The Jatravartid people of Viltvodle VI believe that the entire universe was in fact sneezed out of the nose of a being called the Great Green Arkleseizure' (Adams, 1995: 155). This Jatravartid creation myth perhaps reflects Adams's view of creationism as utterly implausible. The small, blue Jatravartid creatures also constantly fear a time they call 'The Coming of the Great White Handkerchief' (Adams, 1995: 155). The Jatravartid world view, which revolves around a creation myth and messianic prophecies, may thus be regarded as a parody of the Christian world view and the origins of the universe according to Genesis. One may argue that these creatures, as mirrors of humankind, have been flung into an indecipherable universe and consequently attempt to impose an even more ludicrous explanation upon an already absurd world.

On the other hand, even if the invention of creation myths is born of fantasy, is it necessarily meaningless? In a letter to Milton Waldman, JRR Tolkien comments on *The Silmarillion*, his own extended creation myth, ‘...I do not remember a time when I was not building it’ ([1951] 1999: x). He also remarks, ‘I do not suppose that it is of much interest to anyone but myself’ ([1951] 1999: x). Once again, the subjective meaning moulded from fantasy and creation myths, instead of the ‘reality’ or ‘unreality’ of the situation, is the important issue.

While spinning out their creation myth and waiting for the Great White Handkerchief to make its dreaded appearance, Adams’s Jatravartid race, having more than fifty arms each, at least entertain themselves by inventing the aerosol deodorant! In the same way that Beckett’s clown-like tramps in the classic absurdist play, *Waiting for Godot*, entertain themselves while waiting for meaning to manifest itself (which it will not), these creatures resort to inventing things and thus constructing meaning, however trivial.

When Zaphod visits the Guide Offices on the planet of Ursa Minor Beta, he encounters a number of existential elevators, with whom he has the following dialogue:

“Hello”, said the elevator sweetly, “I am to be your elevator for this trip to the floor of your choice. I have been designed by the Sirius Cybernetics Corporation to take you, the visitor to the Hitch Hiker’s Guide to the Galaxy, into these their offices”....

“Yeah”, said Zaphod, stepping into it, “what else do you do besides talk?”

“I go up”, said the elevator, “or down”.

“Good”, said Zaphod, “we’re going up”.

“Or down”, the elevator reminded him.

“Yeah, OK, up please”....

“May I ask you”, inquired the elevator in its sweetest, most reasonable voice, “if you’ve considered all the possibilities that down might offer you?”....

“Like what other possibilities”, he said wearily.

“Well”, the voice trickled on like honey on biscuits, “there’s the basement, the microfiles, the heating system...er...”

It paused.

“Nothing particularly exciting”, it admitted, “but they are alternatives”.

“Holy Zarquon”, muttered Zaphod, “did I *ask* for an existential elevator?”

(Adams, 1995: 181-182).

First of all, the elevator's existence is defined by the repetitive action of going up, or going down. Therefore, the elevator may be regarded as a kind of electronic Sisyphus, doomed to moving up and down in its concrete shaft for all eternity. The elevator does not have an ultimate goal in its life, in the same way that Sisyphus does not have an ultimate, transcendental destiny. Sisyphus, doomed by the gods to rolling a boulder up and down a hill until the day he departs from this life, will never see his labour come to fruition in, for example, the form of a temple or building. He merely bears his burden with absurd pride and perseverance, seeing that it is the only thing that is left to him. On the other hand, however, if Sisyphus had an ultimate goal, for example the building of a temple, and the temple were to be completed, he would tumble down with his boulder into the deepest chasm of despair. At least now Sisyphus is able to rejoice in life, hoping for nothing more, for, as Camus says, there is nothing more.

Similarly, Adams's existential elevators move up and down, carrying their boulders, as it were, up and down, achieving nothing. This is an action 'launched out of their own nothingness'. They never reach the top and actually achieve something transcendental; neither do they find meaning at the bottom of their existence, so to speak. Consider for a moment the following description of the mindset of these electronic Sisyphuses:

Not unnaturally, many elevators imbued with intelligence and precognition became terribly frustrated with the mindless business of going up and down, up and down, experimented briefly with the notion of going sideways, as a sort of existential protest, demanded participation in the decision-making process and finally took to squatting in basements sulking (Adams, 1995: 183).

In the elevators' rebellious experimentation with sideways movement, we recognise the desperate attempt at making meaning, characteristic of all humanity. However, the *Myth of Sisyphus* serves to remind us of the fact that although our existence is absurd, we should still rejoice in life, in the transient, in order to be absurd heroes. We should never resort to existential despair or suicidal thoughts. In this sense, Adams's existential elevators cannot be regarded as absurd heroes, seeing that neither their love of life nor their revolt is passionate;

instead they dwell in the basements of despair. Camus remarks about Sisyphus' plight, 'The struggle itself towards the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy'(1975:111). However, it is impossible for us to imagine the existential elevators, squatting in their dank basements, happy. There is something about the human condition and absurd heroism which they simply have not been programmed to understand.

Another powerful and very comic reflection on the absurdity of existence in this novel is the section depicting the race of creatures inhabiting a relatively 'small and crowded nut tree'. Adams describes these creatures' futile existence as follows:

...In the corner of the eastern Galactic arm lies the large forest planet Oglaroon, the entire 'intelligent' population of which lives permanently in one fairly small and crowded nut tree. In which they are born, live, fall in love, carve tiny speculative articles in the bark on the meaning of life, the futility of death and the importance of birth control, fight a few extremely minor wars, and eventually die strapped to the underside of some of the less accessible branches (Adams, 1995: 198).

The nut tree may of course be regarded as a microcosm of the world. People are cast into a certain milieu; be that a nut tree in the eastern Galactic arm or an insignificant blue and green planet in the 'unfashionable end of the western spiral arm of the galaxy' (Adams, 1995: 15). Whatever their circumstances or milieu, people speculate on the meaning of life and the futility of death, and carve articles to this effect on the nut trees of the world. The 'minor wars' evidently reflect the insignificance of human endeavour, or, in the words of William Barrett, 'projects launched out of nothingness' (Barrett, 1962: 247). After having spent a lifetime pondering the elusive meaning of life, people die, and return to the earth or the skies or the less accessible branches of nut trees, so to speak. In this section, the reader comes face to face with the futility of existence, even if depicted in an absurdly comical manner.

The section portraying the supposed ruler of the universe, who is a madman living with his cat in a shack on the outskirts of nowhere, has been discussed in chapter one in relation to the

hesitation between the real and the fantastic. Once again, this section features in this chapter and is highly significant of the absurd. The old man's as well as his cat's attempts at making meaning are all rooted in absurdity, and resound with the comic actions of characters born of the Theatre of the Absurd. The old man's fascination with a pencil and paper is an excellent example:

[The old man] tried wrapping the paper round the pencil, he tried rubbing the stubby end of the pencil against the paper and then he tried rubbing the sharp end of the pencil against the paper. It made a mark, and he was delighted with the discovery, *as he was every day* (Adams, 1995: 279, italics mine).

At the end of the section, the old man once more embarks on a pencil-and-paper meaning-making expedition. He is delighted with this discovery every day, just as Beckett's clowns in *Waiting for Godot* anticipate the mysterious Godot's arrival every day. Humankind anxiously anticipates the arrival of ultimate meaning, which, of course, is a futile and frustrating endeavour.

After having 'discovered' the mark on the paper once again, the old man turns to other sources of entertainment, such as talking to his table for a week to see how it will react. Moreover, following his owner's cue, the cat is constantly entertaining itself with the limited resources at its disposal: '...the cat exhausted the entertainment possibilities of the speck of dust and pounced on to the fish' (Adams, 1995: 279). The old man is not even certain of the existence of anything else beyond his solitary shack, least of all the ultimate meaning of Life, the Universe and Everything. Therefore, he resorts to entertaining himself in an absurd attempt at 'spinning out' his existential bubble.

The *Restaurant at the End of the Universe* ends with Ford and Arthur being stranded on prehistoric Earth, still trying to find the ultimate question to the ultimate answer, which, of course, is 42. Arthur decides to introduce the prehistoric men to his version of the board game, Scrabble, in order to encourage them to evolve. However, this proves to be an impossible

exercise, seeing that 'the only word they know is grunt and they can't spell it' (Adams, 1995: 301). After a few weeks of fruitless Scrabble lessons, one of the natives accidentally spells out the word 'FORTY-TWO'.

Consequently, Arthur gets the stupendous idea of trying to extract the ultimate question to the ultimate answer, 42, from the minds of the cavemen. The question, however, turns out to be 'What do you get when you multiply six by nine', and the meaninglessness prevails. (Note that this is in fact a miscalculation, the question should read: 'What do you get when you multiply six by seven'). As a confirmation of this meaninglessness, when Arthur implores the cavemen to tell him what 42 actually means, 'one of them rolled over on the ground, kicked his legs up in the air, rolled over again and went to sleep' (Adams, 1995: 303).

Therefore, at the end of this novel, Ford and Arthur realise the futility of trying to discover life's ultimate meaning, since this is utterly elusive. When approached by two girls on prehistoric Earth, Ford explains the absurdity thus, 'My friend and I were just contemplating the meaning of life. Frivolous exercise' (Adams, 1995: 306). In the spirit of absurdity, once again reflecting the Theatre of the Absurd, Ford also adds, 'Nothing's *for* anything....Come and join us, I'm Ford, this is Arthur. We were just about to do nothing for a while but it can wait' (Adams, 1995: 306).

As a grand finale, Ford also echoes Camus's suggestion that we should celebrate and love life instead of imposing an enigmatic, ultimate meaning on it, by referring to the vestal beauty of prehistoric Earth: '...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, the burning trees' (Adams, 1995: 307).

In the third novel of the *Hitch Hiker* series, *Life, the Universe and Everything*, the themes of absurdity and the compulsion to make meaning are perpetuated. The reader is briefly

introduced in the first chapter to an immortal and dour creature called Wowbagger the Infinitely Prolonged, whose sole mission in life is to insult the known universe. This mission, the reader is told, is what drives his being and fills the solitary interstellar spaces with entertainment: 'He 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*' (Adams, 1995: 313, italics mine).

According to the story, this alien creature did not choose his immortality, as part of his facticity, as the Existentialists would have it. Instead, 'he had his immortality inadvertently thrust upon him by an unfortunate accident with an irrational particle accelerator, a liquid lunch and a pair of rubber bands' (Adams, 1995: 313). According to the story, the details of the accident are of no great importance, because 'no-one has even managed to duplicate the exact circumstances under which it happened' (Adams, 1995: 313). Wowbagger's condition is rooted, once more, in the random and arbitrary structure of the universe.

This section depicting Wowbagger's ultimate 'purpose' very evidently resonates with the absurdity of the human condition, and suggests that humanity too might have had its existence 'thrust' upon itself, perhaps as the result of a cosmic accident of gigantic proportions. Wowbagger the Infinitely Prolonged may be regarded as an alien Sisyphus in the sense that he will perform his onerous task of insulting the universe for an indefinite period of time. Although Sisyphus, as an absurd hero, is characterised by defiance and existential revolt, he does not despair or insult the universe. His defiance is steeped in his resolve to enjoy life and appreciate its beauty. Wowbagger is definitely no absurd hero, and his derision of the universe serves no noble purpose. It may not even be seen as a productive way in which to occupy the self. Wowbagger the Infinitely Prolonged makes the same existential mistake as Marvin the paranoid

android does in that he allows a festering hatred and anguish to taint his existence. In his own existential bubble there is no place for absurd heroism.

A very entertaining section in this novel is Ford's and Arthur's attempts at making meaning while stranded on prehistoric Earth. Their attempts at making meaning are reminiscent of the Theatre of the Absurd in that their movements and actions border on the grotesque; their actions are rooted in the madness that ensues in a world devoid of purpose or direction. In our eyes, these protagonists are transformed into Beckett's clowns.

The following dialogue between Ford and Arthur on prehistoric Earth was discussed in chapter one in the light of fantasy. This dialogue is, however, also highly significant in relation to the theme of absurdity and the construction of meaning:

"I thought you must be dead..." [Arthur] said simply.

"So did I for a while", said Ford, "and then I decided I was a lemon for a couple of weeks. I kept myself amused all that time jumping in and out of a gin and tonic". ...

"Where", [Arthur] said, "did you...?"

"Find a gin and tonic?", said Ford brightly. "I found a small lake that thought it was a gin and tonic, and jumped in and out of that. At least, I think it thought it was a gin and tonic.

"I may", he added with a grin which would have sent sane men scampering into trees, "have been imagining it" (Adams, 1995: 317).

Ford also tells Arthur that he visited Africa and that he behaved very oddly there. For example, he took to being cruel to animals, 'but only...as a hobby' (Adams, 1995: 318), and he tried to learn to fly. Ford's actions and attempts at making meaning do not merely border on the grotesque: they actually radiate madness. However strange Ford's actions may be, it is easy for humankind to relate to them, seeing that everyone experiences the emptiness at the centre of their existential bubbles, and acknowledges the urgency to 'spin the bubble' outward by making meaning, even if trivial and preposterous.

This section is vaguely reminiscent of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. One of the most salient parallels between *Heart of Darkness* and this section of *Life, the Universe and Everything* is perhaps the theme of madness. Ford Prefect exercises a certain cruelty stemming from madness by harming African animals. In *Heart of Darkness*, Kurtz is sucked into the turbid madness of the African jungle as well as that of the human heart. His madness and cruelty are made manifest in the twisted grins of dried human heads he displays on poles. Ford Prefect observes the emptiness at the core of existence, and it drives him to insanity. In the same way, upon being faced with the utter futility of human endeavour and the emptiness it is launched from, Kurtz exclaims: 'The horror! The horror!' (1989: 85). According to Frederick R. Karl in an essay called 'Introduction to the Danse Macabre – Conrad's Heart of Darkness':

...Heart of Darkness is one of our archetypal existential literary documents. The images of the narrative, like images of a poem, intensify man's sense of absurdity – and alienation; in the appearance of the pale, white-skulled, ailing, then dying Kurtz, we confront an elongated image of wasted power and fruitless endeavour...(1989: 125).

Furthermore, Arthur's being stranded on prehistoric Earth and living in a miserably isolated cave almost drives him to the brink of dementia. His attempts at making meaning and entertaining himself are not as extreme as Ford's, seeing that he only entertains himself by talking to trees. However, without the option of entertainment and of keeping oneself occupied, death by madness would most probably ensue!

Chapter five of *Life, the Universe and Everything* provides the reader with 'important facts from Galactic history':

Since this Galaxy began, vast civilisations have arisen and fallen, risen and fallen, risen and fallen so often that it's quite tempting to think that life in the Galaxy must be

- (a) something akin to seasick – space-sick, time sick, history sick or some such thing, and
- (b) stupid (Adams, 1995: 337).

In the abovementioned 'important Galactic fact', we see reflected the Existential notion of life's being essentially idiotic. This madness at the heart and mind of the universe is reminiscent of Macbeth's famous soliloquy:

Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more. It is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury
Signifying nothing (Shakespeare, edited by Nicholas Brooke, 1994: 204).

Furthermore, regarding madness, Michel Foucault argues in *Madness and Civilization – A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* that madness is a prominent human characteristic: 'Madness and the madman become major figures, in their ambiguity: menace and mockery, the dizzying unreason of the world, and the feeble ridicule of men' (1989: 13). Concerning humankind's fascination with its own madness, Foucault contends that 'the face of madness has haunted the imagination of Western man' (1989: 15). Foucault argues that the madness that blossoms from a work of art forces its audience to reflect on its own insanity; it 'opens a void, a moment of silence,...provokes a breach without reconciliation where the world is forced to question itself' (1989: 288).

In the *Hitch Hiker* series, Adams does not only mirror human madness, he also suggests that it might be another mechanism for making meaning; a form of entertainment. When Ford Prefect for example pretends that he is a lemon for a couple of weeks, he is in effect 'spinning out' his existential bubble, 'launching' a mad project from his own absurd nothingness. To quote Emily Dickenson:

Much Madness is divinest Sense –
To a discerning Eye –
Much Sense – the starkest Madness –
'Tis the Majority
In this, as All, prevail –
Assent – and you are sane –
Demur – you're straightway dangerous –
And handled with a Chain – (Ferguson et al., 1996: 1015-1016).

The theme of madness in Adams's work is, of course, amalgamated with the themes of absurdity and absurdism. Much has already been mentioned about absurdity. In chapter six of *Life, the Universe and Everything*, however, the Tertullian absurdism mentioned earlier comes

to the fore. Slartibarfast's space-ship resembles an Italian bistro, and relies on what Slartibarfast calls 'Bistromathics' in order to function (Adams, 1995: 341). This entails a number of robots dining in a small cubicle and being served by other robots: 'And all participated in a little dance together – a complex routine involving the manipulation of menus, bill pads, wallets, cheque books, credit cards, watches, pencils and paper napkins....' (1995: 340). Slartibarfast explains to his guests that 'Bistromathics' is 'the most powerful computational force known to parascience' (1995: 241). Arthur's reaction is one of stunned disbelief, and he initially regards the scene before him as a joke: '...He refused to believe it. The Universe could not possibly work like that, he thought, cannot possibly. That, he thought to himself, would be as absurd as, as absurd as...he terminated that line of thinking. Most of the really absurd things he could think of had already happened' (1995: 340).

As is mentioned earlier in this chapter, Tertullian argued that Christianity seemed so absurd that it must be true, seeing that no one would invent a story of such absurd proportions (Wynne-Jones, 2001: 630). The same applies to the really absurd things, such as the Bistromathics, which Arthur experiences; these things are so absurd, who would have invented them? Therefore, they must be true! That is the core of absurdism, and is expressed by Adams as follows: '...Because of the quasi-reciprocal and circular nature of all Improbability calculations, anything that was Infinitely Improbable was actually very likely to happen almost immediately' (1995: 370). Peter Simons writes in his article, *The Universe*, that, generally, the universe is regarded as an orderly system: 'The members of or things in the cosmos are, despite some degree of contingency,...in some sense co-existent: they form a system given structure by laws, at the very least linked by spatiotemporal, causal and other links' (Simons, 2003: 247). However, John Gribbin comments on the absurdity inherent in the seemingly orderly structure of the universe in his book, *In Search of the Edge of Time*, when he says that 'Commonsense is *not* always a good guide to the laws on which the Universe operates....' (1992: 198).

The Existentialist and Absurdist themes continue in chapter nine of *Life, the Universe and Everything*, although they are presented from a different philosophical perspective. Squornshellous Zeta is a planet which houses a sentient mattress population that dwells in the marshes: 'Many of them get caught, slaughtered, dried out, shipped out and slept on. None of them seem to mind this and all of them are called Zem' (Adams, 1995: 346). The fact that the mattresses are all called 'Zem' may in fact be a clever allusion to Zen Buddhism. According to Zen philosophy,

...Our suffering begins when we impose upon this fluid, interdependent moment of experience the illusion of independent selfhood, and then attempt to protect this false selfhood from losing those imposed boundaries to the forces which surround it....True enlightenment is...the realisation that one has no separate existence, that one is the "ten thousand things" of the universe (Blackstone and Josipovic, 1986: 52-53).

If one bears in mind the above fragment of Zen Buddhism, all the mattresses on Squornshellous Zeta might be called 'Zem' to illustrate the illusion of leading a separate existence, and to emphasise the fact that all mattresses are the 'ten thousand things of the universe'. In Existentialist terms, Zen Buddhism urges us not to embrace Being-for-itself. Instead, it urges us to embrace Being-in-itself, the tapestry composed of the trees, clouds, and chesterfield sofas of the universe. A twentieth century Zen master explains it thus:

The truth is that everything is one....Falsely seeing oneself confronted by a world of separate existences, this is what creates antagonism, greed, and, inevitably, suffering. The purpose of Zazen is to wipe away from the mind these shadows of defilements so that we can intimately experience our solidarity with all life (Blackstone and Josipovic, 1986: 58-59).

The scene on Squornshellous Zeta is also reminiscent of the Theatre of the Absurd, in that nothingness as theme features prominently:

The mist clung to the surface of the marshes. The swamp trees were grey with it, the tall reeds indistinct. It hung motionless like held breath.
Nothing moved.
There was silence.
The sun struggled feebly with the mist, tried to impart a little warmth here, shed a little light there, but clearly today was going to be just another long haul across the sky.
Nothing moved.

Again, silence.
Nothing moved.
Silence.
Nothing moved.
Very often on Squornshellous Zeta, whole days would go on like this, and this was indeed going to be one of them (Adams, 1995: 344-345).

This section echoes the nothingness which also features in *Waiting for Godot*. In Beckett's play, Estragon exclaims, 'Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it's awful!' (Beckett, 1990: 41). The nothingness and silence in this extract from *Life, the Universe and Everything* are further emphasised by the repetition of sibilants: 'The mist clung to the surface of the marches', and '...the tall reeds indistinct'. Once again, the notion of silence very strongly evokes the tranquillity of Zen Buddhism. In his book, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, Robert Persig notes: '...One of the most admirable aspects of Zen is that it encourages silence' (1999: 433).

The nothingness and emptiness reflected in this passage are also reminiscent of the Marabar Caves in EM Forster's *A Passage to India*. Any word uttered in these caves is returned as an empty bubble of sound, signifying nothing:

The echo in a Marabar cave...is entirely devoid of distinction. Whatever is said, the same monotonous noise replies, and quivers up and down the walls until it is absorbed into the roof. 'Boum' is the sound as far as the human alphabet can express it, or 'bou-oum', or 'ou-boum', utterly dull. Hope, politeness, the blowing of a nose, the squeak of a boot, all produce 'boum' (1939: 130)

The Marabar caves in Forster's novel echo the hollow pockets of sound that return to the mind as it struggles to discover 'ultimate meaning'. In addition to the Existentialist theme of nothingness, this section from *Life, the Universe and Everything* reflects Camus's discussion of *The Myth of Sisyphus*. The sun, which may be regarded as the absurd hero in this section, struggles to rise through the pall of mist every day without accomplishing anything. However, instead of nursing its despair, as Marvin and the existential elevators do, the sun faces the new

mist-mangled day with resilience and enthusiasm: 'And a few hours later it reappeared, squared its shoulders and started up on the sky again' (Adams, 1995: 345).

Directly juxtaposed with the sun's brave resilience in the face of absurdity, is Marvin, the paranoid android. When the mattress Zem comes across Marvin, who morosely trudges through the swamp, he expresses his wish to discuss the weather for a while. The mattress, like Beckett's tramps, sees the discussion of the weather as a desperate attempt at entertainment, and a welcome diversion. It will pass the time until the sun sinks beneath the horizon once more 'with a sense of totally wasted effort' (1995: 345). Marvin is, however, not the ideal person to discuss the weather with, and the conversation follows thus: "My name", said the mattress, "is Zem. We could discuss the weather a little". Marvin paused again in his weary circular plod. "The dew", he observed, "has clearly fallen with a particularly sickening thud this morning" (Adams, 1995: 346). Once more, in this section, Marvin embodies the nihilist nemesis of absurdity. He does not celebrate life in all its absurd beauty, but prefers to wallow in the marshes of shadow.

This section is particularly interesting seeing that it reflects the nonsense which also stems from nothingness. I have mentioned Barrett's existential bubble which should be spun outward, and the necessity to 'launch projects out of nothingness'. These projects are, more often than not, reminiscent of madness, the grotesque and the nonsensical, as is evident in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. One of Beckett's clowns, Estragon, remarks: 'We are all born mad. Some remain so' (1990: 75). We occupy ourselves with actions and discussions steeped in nonsense, and arrive at nothing but nonsense. The following conversation between Marvin and the mattress Zem illustrates this meaning-making process which is ultimately nonsensical:

"Why are you walking in circles?"

"Because my leg is stuck", said Marvin simply.

"It seems to me", said the mattress eyeing it compassionately, "that it is a pretty poor sort of leg".

“You are right”, said Marvin, “it is”.
“Voon”, said the mattress.
“I expect so”, said Marvin’ (Adams, 1995: 347).

The mattress expresses its empathy with the heartfelt word ‘voon’, which, of course, signifies nothing. Marvin responds appropriately to the nonsense by saying, ‘I expect so’. To me, this little dialogue illustrates the nonsense and nothingness that Existentialists find at the core of life: ‘Consciousness is a “hole” in the solidity of “Being”, it “decompresses” the otherwise total pressure of it’ (Butler, 1984: 75). Being is, in fact, a nothingness.

Furthermore, the word ‘voon’ may be briefly analysed in view of the structuralist notion that ‘all codes of signification are arbitrary, and there is no way of apprehending reality without a code’ (Drabble and Stringer: 1996: 562). The word ‘voon’ does not refer to a given aspect of reality as we know or express it. According to Drabble and Stringer in the *Oxford Concise Companion to English Literature*,

As applied to literary criticism [structuralism] calls into question the idea that a literary text reflects a reality that is already given....Critical “deconstruction”, derived from the work of Derrida, aims to show that any and every text inevitably undermines its own claims to a determinate meaning, and emphasises the role of the reader in the production of meaning (1996: 562).

The word ‘voon’ not only serves to comment on the discrepancy between the signifier and the signified, but also points to the human condition as viewed by the Existentialists. Just as Derrida’s reader is responsible for making meaning, and the reader of Adams’s *Life, the Universe and Everything* has to mould meaning from the word ‘voon’, human beings are compelled to invent their own lives.

Ford Prefect is perhaps one of the protagonists who embraces the nothingness and nonsense of things to the greatest extent, and who is more than prepared to opt for entertainment as an alternative to ultimate meaning. It is Ford who suggests alcoholic beverage as an antidote to

existential angst, and who often entertains himself with all manner of intoxicating drink. In chapter 16 of *Life, the Universe and Everything*, when faced with the incomprehensibility and absurdity of being, '...Ford Prefect [wants] to drink a lot and dance with girls' (Adams, 1995: 380).

As a continuation of this theme of entertainment in the face of absurdity, the Holy Lurching Friars of Voondoon believe that:

...Just as lunch was at the centre of a man's temporal day, and man's temporal day could be seen as an analogy for his spiritual life, so lunch should
(a) be seen as the centre of a man's spiritual life, and
(b) be held in jolly nice restaurants.... (Adams, 1995: 397).

These Holy Lurching Friars, although not deriding spirituality and the quest for ultimate meaning, simply regard entertainment and living-for-the-moment as the essence of man's absurd existence, and the only way of making meaning.

Life, the Universe and Everything draws to a close with the characters' perpetuated struggle to entertain themselves in an indecipherable universe. Although Arthur Dent, for instance, still nurtures the hope that there might be some ultimate and elusive meaning behind all things, he eventually decides to settle down and entertain himself while waiting...for *Godot*...for reason...for inherent meaning to cling to. The reader is informed that Arthur settles for a while on the planet Krikkit, where he spends a substantial amount of time trying to fly and talking to birds, whose conversation he finds 'fantastically boring' (Adams, 1995: 458). The novel comes full circle with Wowbagger the Infinitely Prolonged still roaming the interstellar spaces and insulting every living being in a sad attempt at making meaning.

In *So Long, and Thanks for All the Fish*, Arthur returns to another version of Earth (Earth in another dimension). Arthur, after listening to Fenchurch's brother's account of the Vagon spaceships, and the possibility that they might have been illusory, comes face to face with the

madness of the universe for the umpteenth time. Arthur's experience of the universe as a thoroughly indecipherable place is expressed thus:

The Saab seethed off into the night....[Arthur] shook his head sharply in the hope that it might dislodge some salient fact which would fall into place and make sense of an otherwise utterly bewildering Universe, but since the salient fact, if there was one, entirely failed to do this, he set off up the road again, hoping that a good vigorous walk, and maybe even some good painful blisters, would help to reassure him of his own existence at least, if not his sanity' (Adams, 1995: 487).

Moreover, in a dream Arthur has later in the chapter, he experiences the sheer 'thrownness' of the human condition, as expressed by the Existentialists: 'He danced dizzily over the edge as the dreamland dropped sheer away beneath him, a stupefying precipice into nothing, him wildly twisting, clawing at nothing, flailing in horrifying space, spinning, falling' (Adams, 1995: 495). The words 'nothing', 'flailing', 'spinning' and 'falling' serve to intensify the horrifying experience of being flung into facticity.

A theme which is related to the human condition in its absurdity, and which has been discussed to some extent, is that of madness. Previous allusions to Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, as well as the South African play, *Boesman and Lena*, contain direct references to the madness which ensues from an existence rooted in absurdity. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that Arthur Dent, after having seen the universe in all its absurd splendour, phones his department head at the BBC with the following explanation as to his prolonged absence: 'Oh, hello, Arthur Dent here. Look, sorry I haven't been in for six months but I've gone mad' (Adams, 1995: 497). Seeing that madness is steeped in absurdity, and absurdity defines the existence of every human being, the department head is not surprised to hear about Arthur's bout of madness at all: 'Oh, not to worry. Thought it was probably something like that. Happens here all the time' (Adams, 1995: 497). Judging by the reaction from Arthur's head of department, madness is something that echoes in the being of every person.

In chapter 23 of this novel, Ford Prefect once again testifies to this madness which clings to the human condition. Upon being asked what life is like, Ford, arguing that 'here was something that [he]...could speak about with authority', answers: 'Life...is like a grapefruit....It's sort of orangey-yellow and dimpled on the outside, wet and squidgy in the middle. It's got pips inside too. Oh, and some people have half a one for breakfast' (Adams, 1995: 544). Ford's definition of life once more reflects the arbitrariness of human existence. What is even more disturbing, however, is the fact that Ford readily gives this 'definition' of life without contemplating the absurdity of his words first. Madness seems to come very naturally to Ford Prefect. Perhaps his knowledge of the absurd tapestry of space-time causes him to abandon all sense of coherent meaning.

The theme of waiting for meaning, as Beckett's clowns wait upon Godot, is once again evident in *So Long, and Thanks for All the Fish*. The character Wonko the Sane is mentioned in chapter one of this dissertation. In chapter 15 of *So Long, and Thanks for All the fish*, the reader encounters a dejected Wonko sitting on the beach, waiting:

He watched the long slow Pacific waves come in along the sand, and waited and waited for the nothing that he knew was about to happen. As the time came for it not to happen, it duly didn't happen and so the afternoon wore itself away and the sun dropped beneath the long line of the sea, and the day was gone (Adams, 1995: 516).

In this extract, the repetition of 'waiting' emphasises the futility of waiting for meaning to manifest itself. In *Waiting for Godot*, Vladimir and Estragon are caught in a futile cycle of waiting for Godot every day whilst entertaining themselves with all manner of madness. Each day draws to a close on their dejection and disappointment at Godot's absence. However, as a new day dawns, so does their renewed resolve to wait for Godot:

Estragon: He should be here.
Vladimir: He didn't say for sure he'd come.
Estragon: And if he doesn't come?
Vladimir: We'll come back tomorrow.
Estragon: And then the day after tomorrow.
Vladimir: Possibly.

Estragon: And so on (Beckett, 1990: 16).

In *So long, and Thanks for all the Fish*, the theme of waiting for ultimate meaning culminates in Arthur's and Fenchurch's visit to the planet Preliumtarn to view God's Final Message to His Creation. The message which burns 'with the divine brilliance of the heavens' (Adams, 1995: 588) turns out to be 'We apologise for the inconvenience'. The novel seems to convey the message that, waiting for meaning, waiting for Godot, waiting for God's ultimate message to His creation, amount to exactly the same thing: nothingness. According to Earle, et al., in *Christianity and Existentialism*, the characters in *Waiting for Godot* 'wait, in obscurity, fatigue, weakness and indecisiveness, without knowledge and really without hope, with only a vague, childish trust that Godot will come and explain the *meaning* of their waiting to them' (1963: 123). In the same way, Arthur and Fenchurch wait upon God to explain to them the *meaning* of everything.

The meaninglessness and nothingness are of course reminiscent of Nietzsche's nihilism and belief in the death of God. According to Nietzsche's philosophy,

There is no primordial order; there is nothing but chaos turning upon itself, looking nowhere, desiring nothing, throwing up in its random movements the most beautiful and fragile forms and without thinking twice engulfing them back into its own raging self. Being is in itself profoundly meaningless; to believe in a Providence, watching over the course of nature and bringing good out of evil, transforming disasters in to heavenly or earthly triumphs, is nothing but the sheeplike dream of the timid who can't endure the hard facts. It is all senseless, it is a *perpetually recurring* senselessness (Earl, Edie and Wild, 1963: 80).

Arthur and Fenchurch, upon gazing at God's final message, 'are slowly and ineffably filled with a great sense of peace, and of final and complete understanding' (Adams, 1995: 588). Perhaps they finally understand that existence remains a hollow bubble filled with echoing sounds of insignificance. The only option left to humankind, it seems, is to spin the bubble outward, ever outward; to invent oneself, entertain oneself and to embrace the madness. Alternatively, the

characters might realise, as Kierkegaard does, that faith in God is 'a madness which is the only sanity' (Earl, Edie and Wild, 1963: 75). It is for the reader to decide.

Furthermore, in this novel, the numerous references to illusion and delusion remind the reader of Camus's belief that the world is cast in illusion; an illusion of hope for something eternal and transcendent. For example, upon observing Arthur's and Fenchurch's erotic nocturnal flight, a lady in an airplane is 'immensely relieved to think that virtually everything that anybody had ever told her was wrong' (Adams, 1995: 553). Moreover, Fenchurch, for example, admits to her brother that she is suffering 'from strange delusions that she's living in the real world' (Adams, 1995: 483). According to Camus, 'we must...recognise that we shall live *without hope*; our present state is our only state. There is no tomorrow' (Masters, 1974: 45). However, he also adds that 'To live without hope is not to live in despair, it is to *live without illusion*' (Masters, 1974: 45, italics mine).

The last novel in the *Hitch Hiker* series, *Mostly Harmless*, concludes the amalgamated themes of absurdity, madness and the compulsion to make meaning. In chapter one of *Mostly Harmless*, the author refers to the Infinite Improbability Drive and its effects on the structure of the universe:

When the Infinite Improbability Drive arrived and whole planets started turning unexpectedly into banana fruitcake, the great history faculty of the University of MaxiMegalon finally gave up, closed itself down and surrendered its buildings to the rapidly growing joint faculty of Divinity and Water Polo (Adams, 1995: 604).

Human attempts at explaining an indecipherable universe are thoroughly absurd, seeing that, if one agrees with Nietzsche, 'there is nothing but chaos turning upon itself' (Earl, Edie and Wild, 1963: 80). If one takes the time to ponder the inexplicability of the fabric of reality, planets may just as well turn into some or other form of pastry, and do so recurrently. The reader may ask 'Why banana fruitcake? Well, why not. It is completely random and arbitrary, and reflects the

structure of Adams's universe. In *The Black Swan – The Impact of The Highly Improbable*, Nassim Nicholas Taleb confirms the notion of a random universe when he says that 'life is the cumulative effect of a handful of significant shocks' (2007: xix) and that 'just being alive is...a chance occurrence of monstrous proportions' (2007: 298). Taleb uses the extended metaphor of a black swan throughout his book to argue that most things in life are based on improbability and the utterly unexpected.

The randomness and arbitrariness of existence are further reflected in the character 'Random', Arthur and Trillian's child. Arthur donates some of his precious sperm to a sperm bank in order to be able to travel in style. As the universe will have it, these sperm are implanted in Trillian, and she has 'somebody's child at random' (Adams, 1995: 621). Random lives up to her name, being an impossible teenager who curses the universe and everything in it for not being able to accommodate her in the scheme of things:

"Where do I fit?" screamed Random suddenly....

"I thought I would fit here", she cried, "on the world that made me! But it turns out that even my *mother* doesn't know who I am!" She flung the watch violently aside, and it smashed into the glasses behind the bar, scattering its innards (Adams, 1995: 774).

Random's smashing the watch may be significant of the fact that the universe is not logically structured, according to time or anything else. Her action of smashing the watch confirms her frustration with the chaos and senselessness of existence. In a sense, the notion of Descartes' clockwork universe, where 'all...things are just intricate machines' (Rankin, 1993:71), is discarded.

In *Mostly Harmless*, life's inherent absurdity and arbitrariness are illustrated by the findings concerning Herring Sandwiches at the MaxiMegalon Institute of Slowly and Painfully Working out the Surprisingly Obvious:

The scientists at the Institute thus discovered the driving force behind all change, development and innovation in life, which was this: herring sandwiches. They published

a paper to this effect, which was widely criticised as being extremely stupid. They checked their figures and realised that what they had actually discovered was 'boredom', or rather, the practical function of boredom (Adams, 1995: 636).

In this section, the herring sandwiches serve the same function as the banana fruitcake, which is to point out the arbitrariness of existence. The seriousness with which these scientists approach their subject is thoroughly absurd in the sense that there is a discrepancy between their academic aspirations and the actual ludicrous content of their research. The formal phrase 'they published a paper to this effect' serves to emphasise the absurd academicism of these scientists in view of the bizarreness of their subject.

Moreover, in this extract, the theme of boredom (a theme closely related to absurdity) comes to the fore. It is once more reminiscent of the act of waiting for meaning, and the frustrating boredom which ensues if one is unable to entertain oneself. This reference to boredom also surfaces in Chapter 18, when Arthur animatedly tells Ford Prefect about his sandwich-making endeavours on the remote planet of Lamuella:

"What are you doing in a place like this, Arthur?" demanded Ford.
"Well", said Arthur, "making sandwiches mostly"....
"And you *enjoyed* that?"
"Well, yes, I think I sort of did, really. Getting a good set of knives, that sort of thing".
"You didn't, for instance, find it mind-witheringly, explosively, astoundingly, blisteringly dull?"
"Well, er, no. Not as such. Not actually blisteringly" (Adams, 1995: 733).

The remoteness of the planet Lamuella almost reminds one of the waste and void space occupied by Beckett's tramps in *Waiting for Godot*. In order to while away the endless hours of boredom and nothingness while awaiting the arrival of 'ultimate meaning', Beckett's tramps resort to seemingly foolish and absurd entertainment. In the same way, Arthur Dent eradicates, or at least numbs, the absurd boredom of existence by passionately becoming immersed in the process of sandwich making:

He sliced, he sang. He flipped each side of [Perfectly Normal Beast] meat neatly on to a slice of bread, trimmed it and assembled all the trimmings into their jigsaw. A little salad,

a little sauce, another slice of bread, another sandwich, another verse of *Yellow Submarine* (Adams, 1995: 693).

The final novel of the *Hitch Hiker* series ends with the destruction of the Earth in all its possible dimensions, and the reader is left with a sense of echoing nothingness:

In the darkness of the bridge at the heart of the Vogon ship, Prostetnic Vogon Jeltz sat alone. Lights flared briefly across the external vision screens that line one wall. In the air above him the discontinuities in the blue and green watery sausage shape [dimensions of Earth] resolved themselves. Options collapsed, possibilities folded into each other, and the whole at last resolved itself out of existence. A very deep darkness descended. The Vogon captain sat immersed in it for a few seconds. 'Light' he said. There was no response....*The Vogon turned on the light himself*Well, that was done. His ship slunk off into the inky void (Adams, 1995: 776, italics mine).

Even though the protagonists' numerous attempts at making meaning are eradicated by the 'deep darkness' of death, the Existential message is perpetuated in the Vogon captain's action of turning the light on himself. According to the Existentialists, there is no inherent or ultimate 'light' or meaning; there is only an 'inky void' at the heart of a hollow bubble. If one waits for meaning, for light, for Godot, one will wait eternally, since there will be 'no response'. Rather follow the Grebulon leader's example in the final paragraph of the novel, and 'put on some light music instead' (1995: 776).

CHAPTER 3: ADAMS'S SATIRE – UNMASKING ABSURDITY AND THE REJECTION OF OBJECTIVE MORALITY IN SOCIETY

'Tis the intent and business of the stage,
To copy out the follies of the age,
To hold to every man a faithful glass,
And show him of what species he's an ass' (John Vanburgh, *The Provoked Wife*).

'Satire is a sort of glass wherein beholders do generally discover everybody's face but their own' (Jonathan Swift).

'You can't make up anything anymore. The world itself is a satire. All you're doing is recording it' (Art Buchwald, American Journalist)



According to Ogborn and Buckroyd, the term 'satire' was derived from the Latin word 'satura', which originally referred to the vessel containing harvest produce. The word also came to mean a mixture, and then 'a mixed sort of entertainment, of the kinds people might have at harvest time, with songs and jokes and other kinds of humour' (2001: 13). Contemporary critics, however, are less certain about the derivation of the word, but the notion of satire as a 'mixed sort of entertainment' nevertheless applies to this dissertation. Gilbert Highet describes this 'mixed sort of entertainment' thus:

The essence of the original name... was variety – plus a certain down-to-earth naturalness, or coarseness, or unsophisticated heartiness. Let the rich and refined have their *truite au bleu* and breast of guinea-hen. The ordinary man likes stew, or fish chowder...or a platter of mixed cold cuts with pickles and potato-salad and a couple of slices of cheese, in fact a *satura*. To be true, therefore, to its original derivation and first conception, a satire must be varied, it must be large enough to fill the bowl, and it must be coarse and hearty (1962: 231).

The function of satire is not merely to entertain, but also to reflect on humankind and its absurdities. Thus, satire is related to comedy in that it reflects upon people and their behaviour. According to James Sutherland in *English Satire*, the writers of comedy and satire often work with similar materials, i.e. the foibles and imperfections of humankind. However, the writer of comedy accepts these human foibles and imperfections; 'he is a sort of human bird-watcher, detached and attentive, but no more troubled by moral issues than the ordinary bird-watcher is

when starlings swoop down on his bird table and drive away the tits and the nut-hatch' (1958:3). The writer of satire, on the other hand, observes and comments on the same human foibles and imperfections, but refuses to tolerate or accept them.

Satirists may be regarded as advocates of an objective moral code that is imprinted in the heart and mind of humanity, but that is nevertheless often ignored. In *The Abolition of Man*, CS Lewis refers to objective morality as 'the reality beyond all predicates' ([1943] 2002: 405), and argues that a person who does not imitate this objective moral order should recognise this as a personal defect, in the same way he/she may have to recognise that he/she is 'tone deaf or colour blind' ([1943] 2002: 405). Lewis's point of view thus directly contradicts the Existentialist notion of subjective reality and the compulsion to construct subjective meaning. Douglas Adams's *Hitch Hiker* series not only emphasises the Existential pursuit and the construction of subjective meaning, but also provides the reader with a hidden blueprint of objective morality, and satirises a society that is, as it were, 'tone deaf and colour blind'. Adams's combination of Existentialist tropes and satire, a genre underpinned by the concept of objective truth, is highly unusual. Adams erodes the boundaries between two polar opposites and produces something altogether novel and exciting.

The content of Douglas Adams's novels is evidently comical, but this chapter aims to specifically comment on their satirical value, since satire links more deeply with the philosophical underpinning of Adams's work. Adams's satire, by definition, is both 'coarse and hearty'. This is, for example, evident from the following quote from *The Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy*: 'An Antarean parakeet gland stuck on a small stick is a revolting but much sought after cocktail delicacy and very large sums of money are often paid for them by very rich idiots who want to impress other very rich idiots' (1995: 96). There is generally little polite or stylised veneer to Adams's satire.

Thus, this chapter aims to analyse the extent to which Adams's novels are satirical, that is, the extent to which these novels observe human imperfections and folly and yet, on a very subtle and humorous level, refuse to tolerate these. The satirist is a person who is unusually sensitive to discrepancy; to the 'gap between what might be and what is' (Sutherland, 1958:4). Since the absurdity of the human condition (as discussed in the second chapter) also implies a certain measure of discrepancy between the real and the ideal, this absurdity lends itself to satirical analysis.

The modes of satire are varied. Arthur Pollard contends that, 'Few indeed are the literary forms that cannot accommodate at least a touch of satire, for satire is...a chameleon adapting itself to its environment....' (1970:22). Since Adams's novels portray fantastic, intergalactic landscapes and curious creatures such as Vogons and hyper-intelligent shades of the colour blue, they clearly involve both satire and fantasy. This blend is by no means unusual. In the *Anatomy of Satire*, Gilbert Highet remarks that:

Of course not all fantastic books of travel can be called satires. Many dreamers have journeyed far and high in their dreams – across the earth into unknown regions, twenty thousand leagues under the sea, out into the inconceivable distances of intergalactic space....Some dreamers simply want to display human courage and explore human imagination, and to have marvellous adventures without any critical reference to the world which, in real life, they inhabit. Such adventures are not satirical (1962: 175).

Douglas Adams's selected novels, although imbued with the manifestly fantastic and featuring ventures into 'the inconceivable distances of intergalactic space', are also very deeply rooted in satirical observation and subtle criticism of society. In *Science Fiction – Its Criticism and Teaching*, Patrick Parrinder contends that 'There is a sense in which every overall conception of a future or parallel world, like every conception of the past, simply documents the present in which we live' (1980: 142). This is recognised in works as old as Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*. Gilbert Highet remarks about *Gulliver's Travels* that '...it is quite clear to most readers that

Gulliver is not really voyaging to different countries, but looking at his own society through distorting lenses' (1962: 159). This is also true for Arthur Dent in Adams's *Hitch Hiker* series.

Patrick Parrinder also writes in *Science Fiction – A Critical Guide* that science fiction provides us with a means of viewing humanity through alien lenses. Furthermore, he argues that 'man fears Otherness at the same time as he needs it to complete himself' (1979: 122). Thus, science fiction, combined with satire, has the capacity to bring us face to face with the monsters and madness of society which we disguise in alien form in order to distance ourselves from our own folly. The following is an extract from an anonymous poem Kingsley Amis uses as introduction to his survey of the world of science fiction, *New Maps of Hell*:

What makes us rove that starlit corridor
May be the impulse to meet face to face
Our vice and folly shaped into a thing,
And so at last ourselves; what lures us there
Is simpler versions of disaster... (1969: 9).

In his book *Strategies of Fantasy*, Brian Attebery confirms the notion that science fiction serves to mirror society. He argues that '...science fiction texts are essentially extroverted: concerned with behaviour, physical environment, and the mechanisms of society' (1992: 109). He goes on to say that 'indeed, science fiction is so much a mirror of the writer's own time and place that SF stories from the turn of the century...could be used by historians as documents of vanished world-views, of futures past' (1992: 109-110).

Furthermore, according to Pollard, 'Satire always has a victim, it always criticizes' (1970: 73). In Adams's novels, the victim is quite evidently humankind, although extraterrestrials and fantastical creatures are deployed in the illustration of human characteristics. It is evident from Existentialism as a prominent current of twentieth century thought, as discussed in the second chapter, that all human endeavours are tinged with the delusion of grandeur; with a false sense of importance and with almost grotesque pomposity. The *Hitch Hiker* series often emphasises

the pomposity and sheer obtuseness displayed at various levels of society, especially relating to bureaucratic systems and social hierarchies.

It is evident from Adams's novels that, although he castigates society, 'he likes most people, but thinks they are rather blind and foolish....[and] he tells the truth with a smile' (Highet, 1962: 235). Adams employs various satiric techniques, such as invective, parody, zeugma and burlesque, to 'tell the truth with a smile'. In *Life, the Universe and Everything*, invective is, for example, evident in an alien creature's (Wowbagger the Infinitely Prolonged) endeavours to insult the known universe. This creature uses offensive language to 'castigate' the world as he knows it. For example, he visits Arthur Dent on prehistoric Earth for the sole purpose of calling him a 'jerk' (1995: 312). Adams's subtle burlesque is also apparent in his comical treatment of topics such as religion and politics. Adams invents absurd religions, based on what he observes about the world, and comments on, amongst others, 'the coming of the Great White Handkerchief', and an omnipotent being called the 'Great Green Arkle seizure' (1995: 155). Adams's parody of the biblical creation myth and messianic prophecies, as discussed in chapter two, perhaps reflects his view of creationism as utterly implausible.

In addition to burlesque, Adams also makes use of zeugma. In 'Some unhelpful remarks from the author' in the preface to the *Hitch Hiker's* series, Adams tells the reader that he went to Cambridge University, and that while he was there, he 'took a number of baths – and a degree in English' (1995: 8). Adams's clever use of this satiric technique already heralds his capacity to make fun of humankind (including himself) and to highlight human pomposity 'with a smile'. Directly after mentioning his degree in English, he mentions that he also 'worried a lot about girls' (reflecting the characters of Ford Prefect and Zaphod Beeblebrox to some extent!) and about 'what had happened to [his] bike' (1995: 8). It is evident that Adams regards a degree as being on the same level of importance as all other frivolous and meaningless activities such as

worrying about girls and bikes. He is, of course, commenting on the absurdity of human delusions of grandeur, a prevalent theme in the *Hitch Hiker* series.

In order to highlight this theme of human delusions of grandeur, the introduction to the *Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy* emphasises the actual diminutiveness and inferiority of human beings:

Far out in the uncharted backwaters of the unfashionable end of the western spiral arm of the Galaxy lies a small unregarded yellow sun. Orbiting this at a distance of roughly ninety-two million miles is an utterly insignificant little blue-green planet whose ape-descended life forms are so amazingly primitive that they still think digital watches are a pretty neat idea (Adams, 1995: 15).

This human insignificance is further illustrated in chapter eight, where Adams explains the vast interstellar distances in terms of 'a peanut in Reading', 'a small walnut in Johannesburg' and 'other such dizzying concepts' (1995: 63).

Douglas Adams highlights a number of twentieth century concerns, both societal and environmental, in this novel. He is particularly concerned, for example, with bureaucracy and the incompetence of human institutions and systems. In the very first chapter, Mr Prosser asks Arthur Dent how it is possible that he knows absolutely nothing about the plans to demolish his house. He explains to Arthur that the plans have been available for the last nine months. The following dialogue between Arthur and Mr Prosser highlights the ridiculous incompetence of some human institutions:

"But the plans were on display..."

"On display? I eventually had to go down to the cellar to find them".

"That's the display department".

"With a torch".

"Ah, well the lights had probably gone".

"So had the stairs".

"But look, you found the notice didn't you?"

"Yes", said Arthur, "yes I did. It was on display in the bottom of a locked filing cabinet stuck in a disused lavatory with a sign on the door saying *Beware of the Leopard*" (1995: 20).

The use of short, blunt sentences tinged with sarcasm serves to emphasise Arthur Dent's frustration in this extract. The fact that the display department and the stairs leading towards it are shrouded in darkness is also significant of the entrapment by bureaucracy and the ensuing vexation Arthur experiences.

This section reminds one of the frustration experienced by K in Kafka's *The Castle*. The entire novel tells the story of K's futile efforts to be admitted to the Castle and its residents, and may from one perspective be regarded as an analogy of societal and bureaucratic entrapment. The novel starts with the following words, which already herald the inaccessibility and obscurity of the Castle, and which indicate the opacity of bureaucratic systems: 'It was late in the evening when K. arrived. The village was deep in snow. The Castle was hidden, veiled in mist and darkness, nor was there even a glimmer of light to show that a castle was there' (1999: 9). Albert Camus comments on K's frustration in an article called *Hope and the Absurd in the work of Franz Kafka*: '...from the village to the Castle it is impossible to communicate. For hundreds of pages K. persists in seeking his way, makes every advance...and with disconcerting goodwill tries to assume the duties entrusted to him. Each chapter is a new frustration' (Gray, 1962: 151). The frustration evident in *The Castle* is, of course, reminiscent of the futility of human pursuit and the Existentialist notion of meaninglessness.

The incompetence depicted in this section is further reflected in the preposterous bureaucracy of the Vogon race. The *Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy* says about Vogon Constructor Fleets:

Here is what you do if you want to get a lift from a Vogon: forget it. They are one of the most unpleasant races in the Galaxy – not actually evil, but bad tempered, bureaucratic, officious and callous. They wouldn't even lift a finger to save their own grandmothers from the Ravenous Bugblatter Beast of Traal without orders signed in triplicate, sent in, sent back, queried, lost, found, subjected to public inquiry, lost again, and finally buried in soft peat for three months and recycled as firelighters (Adams, 1995: 48).

Adams's use of bathos in this section further emphasises the absurdity of the Vogon bureaucracy. Adams describes the complicated bureaucratic life cycle of Vogon orders using

formal terms and phrases such as 'queried' and 'subjected to public inquiry', only to conclude this process with 'soft peat' and 'firelighters', which are, of course, quite incongruous.

Another aspect Adams is concerned with in this novel is that of ecology. Humankind's thoughtless exploitation of all natural beauty and resources is reflected in the Vogons' barbaric destruction of the planet Vogosphere:

[The natural forces on the planet Vogosphere] brought forth scintillating jewelled scuttling crabs, which the Vogons ate, smashing their shells with iron mallets; tall aspiring trees of breathtaking slenderness and colour which the Vogons cut down and burnt the crab meat with; elegant gazelle-like creatures with silken coats and dewy eyes which the Vogons would catch and sit on. They were no use as transport because their backs would snap instantly, but the Vogons sat on them anyway (1995: 43).

In this passage, words associated with nature, such as 'scintillating', 'breathtaking slenderness', 'elegant', 'silken' and 'dewy' pose a stark contrast to the words associated with the destructive actions of the Vogons, such as 'smashing', 'iron' and 'burnt'. The satire in this section is deeply rooted in hyperbole, as is especially evident in phrases such as 'tall aspiring trees of breathtaking slenderness'. The use of hyperbole also serves to emphasise the stark contrast between the world in its natural state, and the world tainted by humankind.

In *Last Chance to See*, Douglas Adams and Mark Carwardine give an account of their travels to various countries in search of the endangered species of the world. In this book, Adams's deep concern with ecology and humankind's thoughtless exploitation of nature is eloquently and humorously expressed. One of the world's endangered species is the Yangtze river dolphin which lives in the polluted waters of the Yangtze in China. Adams poses the following question regarding humankind's neglect of this rare species: 'So...what do you do if you are either half-blind, or half-deaf, living in a discotheque with a stroboscopic light show, where the sewers are overflowing, the ceiling and the fans keep crashing on your head and the food is bad?' Whereupon Mark Carwardine answers: 'I think I'd complain to the management' (1990: 149).

The dolphins and other endangered species, however, cannot do that, and they 'have to wait for the management to notice' (1990: 149).

Adams is of the opinion that management (the Vogons/humankind) indeed fails to notice its destructive influence on nature, and fails to protect the rare and 'scintillating jewelled crabs', the Yangtze dolphins and the Rodrigues fruitbats of the world. It does not merely fail to notice its destructive influence, it deliberately annihilates the animal kingdom. Just as the Vogons smash the rare, jewelled crabs to glittering pieces in their obtuse drunken state, 'the large, gentle dove – the dodo – was just clubbed to death for the sport of it' (Adams and Carwardine, 1990: 193).

The theme of humanity being equated with destruction, while nature is equated with creation is reminiscent of Gerard Manley Hopkins's poem *God's Grandeur*. In the octave of this poem, Hopkins paints a bleak picture of humankind's incessant destruction of the Earth when he says that: 'Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;/ And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;/ And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell....' (Ferguson et al., 1996: 1062). Adams's concern with nature and humankind's failure to notice the treasures it offers is further reminiscent of Wordsworth:

The world is too much with us; late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers;
Little we see in nature that is ours;
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!
This Sea that bares her bosom to the moon,
The winds that will be howling at all hours,
And are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers,
For this, for everything, we are out of tune;
It moves us not.... (Ferguson et al., 1996: 735)

Adams's satire has prominent prophetic and optimistic qualities: it might be regarded as intrinsically romantic, since it does not merely denounce, but also aims to heal the maladies of twentieth century society.

Human delusions of grandeur are also very evident in the *Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. In chapter 23 Adams comments on these delusions of grandeur by mentioning that human beings might in actual fact be inferior to creatures such as dolphins and mice, and not the other way around:

...On the planet Earth, man had always assumed that he was more intelligent than dolphins because he had achieved so much – the wheel, New York, wars and so on – whilst all the dolphins had ever done was muck about in the water having a good time. But conversely, the dolphins had always believed that they were far more intelligent than man – for precisely the same reasons (1995: 113).

In *Last Chance to See*, Adams makes an insightful observation concerning the behaviour of Gorillas in Zaire. He once again observes that humanity is not necessarily the more advanced species. Adams writes about a particular Gorilla: 'The most disconcerting intelligence seemed to be apparent from the sudden sidelong glances he would give me....I began to feel how patronising it was of us to presume to judge their intelligence, as if ours was any kind of standard by which to measure' (1990:76).

Another relationship which, according to the *Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, has been misinterpreted by man is the relationship between laboratory mice and human beings. Adams satirically suggests that human beings are in fact the creatures being experimented on. This comment serves to further emphasise humanity's utter insignificance and absurd delusions of grandeur.

In chapter 31 of the novel, the prevalent theme of human delusions of grandeur is summarised by Benjy and Frankie, the two laboratory mice who have all the while been conducting experiments on humankind. When Arthur refuses to sacrifice his brain, the last remnant of the computer matrix of the Earth, the two mice respond as follows: ' "It could always be replaced", said Benjy reasonably, "if you think it's important". "Yes, an electronic brain", said Frankie, "a simple one would suffice" '(1995: 140).

In addition to ecology, another twentieth century concern Adams comments on in the *Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy* is capitalism. Related to the theme of exploitation is the human tendency to be discontented with one's surroundings, as well as the human propensity for conspicuous consumption. Adams casts a satirical light on this human tendency by mentioning the custom-made luxury planet building venture of mythical Magrathea. The notion of tailor-made planet building reflects the human propensity to mould life according to one's desires, and the tendency to never be fully satisfied with what one has:

And for all the richest and most successful merchants life inevitably became rather dull and niggly, and they began to imagine that this was therefore the fault of the worlds they'd settled on – none of them was entirely satisfactory: either the climate wasn't quite right in the later part of the afternoon, or the day was half an hour too long, or the sea was exactly the wrong shade of pink (1995: 87).

As a result of this popular planet building venture, Magrathea becomes the richest planet in the known universe and the rest of the Galaxy is 'reduced to abject poverty' (1995: 87). The very obvious consequence of this human discontentment and desire for luxury is a capitalist society where the rich get richer and the poor get poorer:

And so the system broke down, the Empire collapsed, and a long sullen silence settled over a billion hungry worlds, disturbed only by the pen scratchings of scholars as they laboured into the night over smug little treatises on the value of a planned political economy (1995: 87).

This is yet another example of Adams's carefully and humorously formulated social satire. The pursuit of money and power is a universal vice at the heart of humanity, and Adams succeeds in accentuating this.

In *The Restaurant at the End of the Universe*, Adams continues to satirise capitalism and a lack of morals. Once again, the Vogon race is a reflection of all the vices embodied in humankind. In chapter two, Adams writes about Captain Prostetnic Vogon Jeltz of the Galactic Hyperspace Planning Council:

It has been said that Vogons are not above a little bribery and corruption in the same way that the sea is not above the clouds, and this was certainly true in his case. When he heard the words “integrity” or “moral rectitude” he reached for his dictionary, and when he heard the chink of ready money in large quantities he reached for the rule book and threw it away (1995: 157).

The theme of human delusions of grandeur is also perpetuated in this novel. The notion of the Total Perspective Vortex, designed by Trin Tragula to indicate to his wife her insignificance in relation to an infinite universe, serves to comment on human grandiosity:

...Into one end he plugged the whole of reality as extrapolated from a piece of fairy cake, and into the other end he plugged his wife: so that when he turned it on she saw in one instant the whole infinity of creation and herself in relation to it. To Trin Tragula's horror, the shock completely annihilated her brain; but to his satisfaction he realized that he had proved conclusively that if life is going to exist in a Universe of this size, then the one thing it cannot afford to have is a sense of proportion (Adams, 1995: 202).

In this section Adams suggests that if we really were to face the immensity of the universe and realise our sheer diminutiveness by comparison, we would probably go insane. The fact that reality is ‘extrapolated from a piece of fairy cake’ in this section suggests a sense of the interconnectedness of things and the human inability to see oneself as merely a miniscule part of it.

When Zaphod Beeblebrox is plugged into a simulation of the Total Perspective Vortex on the hideous planet of Frogstar, it tells him that he is ‘a really terrific and great guy’ (Adams, 1995: 203). However, if Zaphod were to be placed in the real Total Perspective Vortex, he would never have survived:

“Oh, and in case you were wondering”, added Zarniwoop, “this Universe was created specifically for you to come to. You are therefore the most important person in this Universe. You would never”, he said with an even more brickable smile, “have survived the Total Perspective Vortex in the real one” (Adams, 1995: 209).

In addition to the theme of human grandiosity, other aspects of society which Adams satirises in *The Restaurant at the End of the Universe* are capitalism and the corporate world. In chapters 24 and 25 millions of hairdressers, TV producers, insurance salesmen, telephone sanitizers and

other menial workers who previously inhabited the planet of Golgafrincham are launched into outer space, doomed to crash on prehistoric Earth. After the ship crash-lands on prehistoric Earth, the survivors slowly emerge from the swamp. This image evokes the notion of a thousand creatures crawling from the primordial slime of the Earth, eventually evolving into human beings. Adams is evidently satirising humanity in its 'evolved' form, since this evolved form is clearly not very sophisticated. Adams describes the human beings in this section in animal terms by using words such as 'clawing', 'struggling creatures' and 'crawled':

When the sun came up that morning it shed its thin watery light over a vast area heaving with wailing hairdressers, public relations executives, opinion pollsters and the rest, all *clawing* their way desperately to land. A less strong-minded sun would probably have gone straight back down again, but it continued to climb its way through the sky and after a while the influence of its warming rays began to have some restoring effect on the *feebly struggling creatures*....As the day wore on they *crawled* out over the surrounding countryside....(1995: 274-275, italics mine).

Once settled on prehistoric Earth, these Golgafrincham outcasts continue to arrange meaningless meetings and advertising campaigns, and to make documentaries of themselves. A particularly absurd scene from chapter 32 depicts an afternoon meeting convened between the Golgafrincham outcasts. When Ford wants to explain to these people that they have actually landed on prehistoric Earth, they immediately want to know if this point appears on the agenda:

"I bring you news", he said, "of a discovery that might interest you". "Is it on the agenda?" snapped the man whom Ford had interrupted. "Now, come on", [Ford] said. "Well I'm sorry", said the man huffily, "but speaking as a management consultant of many years' standing, I must insist on the importance of observing the committee structure". Ford looked round the crowd. "He's mad you know", he said, "this is a prehistoric planet". "Address the chair!" snapped the management consultant. "There isn't a chair", explained Ford, "there's only a rock".... "You obviously have no conception", said the management consultant... "of modern business methods". "And you have no conception of where you are", said Ford (Adams, 1995: 293).

This section once more depicts the absurdity of human pomposity and the grandiose veneer of the corporate world. When the Fire Development Sub-Committee fail to produce fire, and instead fashion the two sticks they were supplied with into curling tongs, a marketer explains to

the crowd that any new product should first be properly researched: 'We've got to find out what people want from fire, how they relate to it, what sort of image it has for them' (Adams, 1995: 294). The marketer's perspective is, of course, ridiculous in this setting. The very primitive 'product', fire, has not even been produced yet, and already the Golgafrincham corporate realm wants to turn it into a commodity. Adams is quite evidently satirising a world in which everything becomes a commodity; something to be paid for and consumed. This is also a world of sensationalism, advertising and the corporate image. Ford Prefect perfectly sums up the absurdity of the situation by saying, 'Never mind...Rome wasn't *burnt* in a day' (1995: 294, italics mine).

The next satirical topic for discussion on the Golgafrincham agenda is, to Ford's utter amazement, that of fiscal policy. When Ford mentions that money doesn't grow on trees, the management consultant retorts that, in fact, it does, and that the Golgafrinchams have adopted the leaf as 'legal tender'. The obvious problem in this regard is that of a 'small inflation problem on account of the high level of leaf availability', and the fact that the current going rate 'has something like three deciduous forests buying one ship's peanut' (Adams, 1995: 298). The solution to this problem, according to the Golgafrinchams, is to burn down all the forests.

In this chapter Adams thus satirises the corporate world, the world of finance and the world of commerce by using mock-serious phrases such as 'in order to obviate the problem' (1995: 298) and 'we are about to embark on a massive defoliation campaign' (1995: 298). George Orwell, as social and political commentator, remarks in an article called *Politics and the English Language* that 'Such phraseology is needed if one wants to name things without calling up mental pictures of them' ([1946]1992: 109). Orwell also remarks that this 'inflated style is itself a kind of euphemism' ([1946]1992: 109). The use of the word 'defoliation campaign', for example,

is actually a euphemism for 'burning down the forests'. However, 'defoliation campaign' does not immediately evoke a mental picture of billowing black smoke and blazing leaves.

In *The Restaurant at the End of the Universe*, Adams also satirises persons in powerful positions. The Golgafrincham captain embodies the rich and idle section of society in that he soaks in the tub all day long accompanied by his trusted rubber duck. The Golgafrincham Television producers regard this as a very noble pastime and express their desire to make a documentary of the captain's responsibilities:

"I gather", said the girl, turning to address the Captain... "that he wants to make one about you next, Captain". "Oh really?", he said, coming to with a start, "that's awfully nice". "He's got a very strong angle on it, you know, the burden of responsibility, the loneliness of command..." The Captain hummed and hahed about this for a moment. "Well, I wouldn't overstress that angle, you know", he said finally, "one's never alone with a rubber duck" (1995: 297-298).

In the *Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy* and *The Restaurant at the End of the Universe*, Adams satirises twentieth century concerns such as ecology, bureaucracy and capitalism. He also comments on human pomposity and delusions of grandeur. In *Life, the Universe and Everything*, Adams's satiric commentary is focused on the phenomenon of xenophobia and the human tendency to want to annihilate the other. In this novel, Adams also comments on human frivolity and, once more, delusions of grandeur.

In chapter 12 of this novel, the protagonists watch a virtual recording of the history of the planet Krikkit. According to history, the Krikkiters have always believed that their planet was the only one in existence, and that beyond Krikkit existed nothing but a great void. When they discover that there is a universe speckled with stars and planets, they promptly decide to annihilate it:

They flew out of the cloud. They saw the staggering jewels of the night in their infinite dust and their minds sang with fear. For a while they flew on, motionless against the starry sweep of the Galaxy, itself motionless against the infinite sweep of the Universe. And then they turned round. "It'll have to go", the men of Krikkit said as they headed back for home (1995: 372-373).

The Krikkiters evidently symbolise humanity and its fear of the other, the alien and the unknown. This theme is related to human delusions of grandeur and the tendency to think that we are the centre of the multi-verse. In the above extract, the repetition of the word 'infinite', as well as words such as 'starry sweep' and 'staggering jewels', paints a picture of a miniscule world pitted against the immensity of the universe. Even though the Krikkiters behold this majestic scene, and although their minds sing with fear, they still decide that they *should* be the centre of the universe: 'On the way back [the Krikkiters] sang a number of tuneful and reflective songs on the subjects of peace, justice, morality, culture, sport, family life and the obliteration of all other life forms' (1995: 373). In this extract, 'the obliteration of all other life forms' is starkly juxtaposed with peace, morality and the like. The bathos and incongruity in the last sentence clearly point at humankind's hypocrisy as far as values and beliefs are concerned.

Adam Roberts remarks in *Science Fiction – The New Critical Idiom* that, 'Alterity... is something we need to train ourselves into accepting. The alternative is, one way or another, conceptually to squeeze everybody else into a caricature version of ourselves' (2000: 183). Perhaps the Krikkiters should not fear the other as such, 'everything that isn't Krikkit' (Adams, 1995: 374). They should rather be terrified of their own vice and folly moulded into the thing they might encounter beyond Krikket. The same is true for humankind.

The theme of frivolity is especially evident in Chapter 21, which features a flying building of drunken partygoers. According to the story, a band of drunken astro-engineers decided long, long ago that the party should fly, and adjusted the building to that effect. Adams describes one of the problems of this perpetually flying party:

One of the problems...is that all the people at the party are either the children or grandchildren or the great-grandchildren of the people who wouldn't leave in the first place, and because of all the business about selective breeding and regressive genes and so on, it means that all the people at the party are either absolutely fanatical partygoers, or gibbering idiots, or, more and more frequently, both (1995: 405).

The frivolity and idiocy of this flying party remind one of Sebastian Brant's *Ship of Fools* (*Narrenschiff*). Brant's *Ship of Fools* is another form of vehicle which transports all the vice, folly and stupidity of the human race. In the prologue to the *Ship of Fools*, Brant remarks about this ship of frivolity:

The whole world lives in darksome night,
In blinded sinfulness persisting,
While every street sees fools existing
Who know but folly, to their shame,
Yet will not own to folly's name.
Hence I have pondered how a ship
Of fools I'd suitably equip –
A galley, brig, bark, skiff, or float,
A carack, scow, dredge, racing-boat,
A sled, cart, barrow, carryall –
One vessel would be far too small
To carry all the fools I know.... (1962: 57-58).

Adams's flying building and Brant's ship serve to concentrate the folly of the world; to create, as it were, a microcosm of humanity. These vehicles aren't going anywhere in particular, nor do their passengers have any direction. Their minds are merely filled with frivolity and their actions rooted in inanity. The only concern of the flying partygoers, for example, is 'when the drink is going to run out' (Adams, 1995: 405). This is, of course, significant of the human tendency to drown vice and folly in soporific substances. In the *Ship of Fools*, people swim towards the ship and desperately want to add to the idiocy. Brant remarks about drinking and feasting: 'A fool shows no consideration,/ A wise man drinks with moderation,/ Feels better, illness too defies,/ Than one imbibing bucketwise' (1962: 99).

Not only is the flying party reminiscent of Brant's *Ship of Fools*, but it also reminds one of the Flying Island of Laputa in *Gulliver's Travels*. The Flying Island of Laputa is, however, inhabited by sages and philosophers, while Adams's flying party consists of fools. Once one notices the similarities between these two flying structures, one cannot help but realise that they are also very different. In that realisation lies the power of Adams's satiric insight. While the prince of Laputa '[brings] under his obedience whatever country [lies] within the attraction of [the island's]

magnet' (Swift, [1726] 1985: 212-213), Adams's flying party descends on the planet it hovers above, and '[holds] whole cities to ransom for fresh supplies of cheese crackers, avocado dip, spare ribs and wine and spirits....(1995: 405)'.

Should any country or town underneath the Flying Island of Laputa engage in mutiny or refuse to pay tribute to the king, the king of Laputa reduces the inhabitants to obedience in the following manner: 'The first and the mildest course is by keeping the island hovering over such a town, and the lands about it, whereby he can deprive them of the benefit of the sun and the rain, and consequently inflict the inhabitants with dearth and disease' (Swift, [1726] 1985: 214). Adams's flying party also has a destructive influence on the lands and cities underneath them, even if it does not deliberately wish dearth and disease on the inhabitants:

People had been dropping in on the party now for some years, fashionable gatecrashers from other worlds, and for some time had it had occurred to the partygoers as they had looked out at their own world beneath them, with its wrecked cities, its ravaged avocado farms and blighted vineyards, its vast tracts of new desert, its seas full of biscuit crumbs and worse, that their world was in some tiny and almost imperceptible ways not quite as much fun as it had been (1995: 412).

The flying party does not merely depict the idiocy and frivolity of the human race. In this extract, the words 'wrecked', 'ravaged', and 'blighted' once again comment on humankind's disregard of nature and thoughtless destruction of the Earth. In addition, the phrase 'it had occurred to the partygoers... that their world was in some *tiny and almost imperceptible ways* not quite as much fun as it had been (1995: 412, italics mine)' indicates the fact that humankind does not even notice the vast force of destruction it exercises on the Earth. As Adams and Carwardine state in *Last Chance to See*, management fails to notice the distress of the Earth. What is even more perturbing is the fact that management consists of a band of intoxicated idiots.

In *So Long, and Thanks for all the Fish*, Adams continues to satirise the idiocy of the human race. Arthur and Fenchurch visit Wonko the Sane in his 'Asylum', and initially think that Wonko is anything but sane. Wonko claims that he is regularly visited by angels with green wings,

wearing Dr Scholl sandals. This in itself sounds relatively delusional, but Wonko goes on to argue that the entire world has gone mad since people deem it necessary to write the following instructions on a packet of toothpicks: 'Hold stick near centre of its length. Moisten pointed end in mouth. Insert in tooth space, blunt end next to gum. Use gentle in-out motion' (1995: 564). Wonko explains that 'any civilization that had so far lost its head as to need to include a set of detailed instructions for use in a packet of toothpicks, [is] no longer a civilization in which [he] could live and stay sane' (1995: 565). Wonko relates the story of the dolphins' 'Campaign to Save the Humans', and one is once more reminded of human delusions of grandeur and a relationship that has been misinterpreted. When Arthur and Fenchurch listen to the message in the fishbowl left by the dolphins, they hear the sound of the dolphins' 'perfectly grey bodies rolling away into an unknown fathomless deep, quietly giggling' (1995: 568); quietly laughing perhaps at humankind's inability to save itself.

So Long, and Thanks for all the Fish is rampant with phrases and comments that suggest the obtuseness of humankind. When a flying saucer crashes in London, its inhabitant, a gigantic silver robot, mistakes the Earth for a planet where the humans are governed by lizards. Thus, he states, 'I come in peace', and after a moment of reflection, he adds, 'take me to your lizard' (1995: 575). Although the robot is mistaken in this regard, one is still left with the suggestion that humanity and its leaders may be likened to lizards!

Ford explains to Arthur that, on the planet ruled by lizards, the people hate the lizards who rule them. When Arthur asks why the people do not rid themselves of the lizards, Ford explains: 'It honestly doesn't occur to them....They've all got the vote, so they all pretty much assume that the government they'd voted in more or less approximates to the government they want' (1995: 576). When Arthur wants to know if the people actually vote for the lizards, Ford replies, 'Oh yes...of course....Because if they didn't vote for a lizard...the wrong lizard might get in' (1995:

576). In this section, Adams uses political satire in order to further castigate the idiotic behaviour of human beings in all spheres of life, including the political arena.

In the last chapter of *So long, and Thanks for all the Fish*, Arthur, Fenchurch and Marvin visit the Quentulus Quazgar Mountains to see God's Final Message to His Creation. By means of subtle burlesque, Adams satirises the human tendency to cling to the divine and to search for meaning in the supernatural, the unknown and the 'divine brilliance of the heavens' (1995: 588). Seen from a different perspective, whether one is a theist or an atheist, Adams might also be commenting on our 'quick-fix' culture. People do not search for the divine within their own souls, they do not want to travel the road less travelled, they do not want to wait for the divine to manifest itself even in small and seemingly insignificant ways; they rush to the mountain where God's message is engraved in burning radiance, and they merely have to look.

In *Mostly Harmless*, another version of Trillian, named Tricia McMillan, travels to the planet of Rupert and meets the Grebulon race. She discovers that these creatures have been dispossessed of their own identity and culture, and that they are now feeding, as it were, on the cultural refuse of the Earth. They cannot remember how their sophisticated electronic systems are supposed to operate, so they merely 'monitor' the Earth's game shows, riveted in front of their television screens and devouring imported McDonald's burgers.

Once more, in the Grebulon race, Adams creates a parody of humankind. The Grebulons, upon visiting Tricia McMillan, mention that some of their people speculate that Elvis Presley has been kidnapped by space aliens. When Tricia exclaims, 'Are you telling me that *you* have kidnapped Elvis?' (1995: 630), the Grebulons reply, 'No. Not us....Aliens. It is a very interesting possibility. We talk of it often' (1995: 630). This interesting interchange between Tricia and the Grebulons suggests that the Grebulons aren't at all alien: they are, once more, human 'vice and folly

shaped into a thing'. The planet of Rupert therefore acts as a mirror of twentieth century pop-culture, fast food, and escapism in the form of television shows. It seems that humankind has to travel to the 'tenth planet, out beyond the orbit of Pluto' (1995: 615) in order to face its own folly. Another interesting feature of the Grebulon race is that they have all lost their minds together with their identities. This seems to be another allusion to human madness and idiocy; a theme which is intricately woven into Adams's satiric commentary.

Another reflection on human vice is the planet of NowWhat, 'named after the opening words of the first settlers' (1995: 645), which turns out to be another version of Earth in a different dimension. The planet is a dismal, greyish realm inhabited by the NowWhattian boghog, a vicious little creature which bites one on the thigh in a manner of communication. Although this planet is not the Earth as we know it, and although it is inhabited by strange beasts, one still recognises human aggression and vindictiveness in the shape of alien beasts. Not only does one notice human vindictiveness in the NowWhattian boghog, one once again recognises the madness prevalent in the known universe. The information brochure mentions that:

The main trade that was carried out was in the skins of the NowWhattian boghog but it wasn't a very successful one because no one in their right minds would want to buy a NowWhattian boghog skin. The trade only hung on by its fingernails because there was always a significant number of people in the Galaxy who were not in their right minds (1995: 645).

It is evident from the above extracts that human vice and folly are universally recognisable. Even in a science fiction or fantastical landscape one is able to discern human foibles, though they might be disguised or appear contorted. To add to the general notion of human ignorance, a computer terminal in the Guide Offices offers the following useful information:

If you are reading this on planet Earth then:

a) Good luck to you. There is an awful lot of stuff you don't know anything about, but you are not alone in this. It's just that in your case the consequences of not knowing any of this stuff are particularly terrible, but then, hey, that's just the way the cookie gets completely stomped on and obliterated (1995: 652).

The above extract overtly stresses humankind's ignorance. However, one is consoled by the fact that one is never alone in one's folly; the entire world is but a ship of fools. Once one recognises the prevalence of folly in the world, one tends to agree with Adams that that is not the way the cookie crumbles; that is indeed the way it is 'completely stomped on'.

The Vogon, the Grebulon, the NowWhattian boghog, the Krikkit race; all of these may remain mere figments of fantasy should the reader distance him/herself from the human folly reflected in these characters. It is easier to cast our folly into alien shapes and then refuse to recognise our features in the monstrous and unknown. However, it is much more honest to admit to our own imperfections. When Arthur Dent visits the planet of Hawailus, a planet of oracles and seers, one of the seers says to him, 'You come to me for advice, but you can't cope with anything you don't recognise' (1995: 668).

It is quite ironic that the world is regarded as a ship of fools, and that only some of these fools recognise their own folly. Some of them merely see reflected in satire's mirror the folly of the world in general, but never their own.

Upon studying Adams's novels, one cannot help but realise that his satire paints a portrait 'which has a beating heart within and which, when we look into its eyes, seems to be a reflection, distorted with pain, of our own soul' (Gilbert Highet, 1962: 244).

CONCLUSION

In his novels, Douglas Adams paints a picture of absurdity; of our facticity imprinted on our existence and the compulsion to reconstruct our subjective worlds. Not only does Adams satirise 'reality' as the majority of people know it, the reality of capitalism, bureaucracy, pomposity and pretence, but Adams's satire also invites the reader to recreate his/her own world and even compels the reader to embrace the 'madness' and alterity of fantastic worlds and inner dream-scapes. On a meta-textual level, Adams's pervasive use of humour and entertainment points to the necessity to entertain the self as a means of making meaning. His fantastic landscapes indeed become Theatres of the Absurd.

The aim of this dissertation has thus been to analyse the fantastic, existential and satiric strands of absurdity present in *The Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy*; *The Restaurant at the End of the Universe*; *Life, the Universe and Everything*; *So long, and Thanks for all the Fish*; and *Mostly Harmless*. This analysis has served to comment on Adams's contribution to the corpus of 'serious'/philosophical literature, and the dissertation thus argues that not only is Adams a resonant comic voice, but his fiction is deeply rooted in the twentieth century *zeitgeist* and social concerns.

Adams uses a fantastical landscape as narrative space in which to portray twentieth century concerns, be they philosophical, social, ecological or religious in nature. The function of Adams's fantastic landscapes and characters is to mould humankind into an alien form. Adams does not create wholly new 'heavens or hells'. Instead, he urges the reader to see human folly and absurdity from a new perspective in the shape of Vogons, Krikkiters, robots, sentient mattresses and hyper-intelligent shades of the colour blue. Thus, Adams's fantasy is a means

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of making meaning, of reinventing the world, and of creating alternative dreamscapes in order to reflect the real world and the absurdity at the heart of it.

In Adams's works there is a sense of hesitating on the brink between primary and secondary worlds. Both the reader and the characters are occasionally confronted with a choice between the real world and the dream-space; a choice characteristic of what Todorov calls the *purely fantastic*. This hesitation between the real and the ideal, or between reality and the dream-space, gains new significance in view of Rene Descartes' thoughts on dreams and dreaming, and Baudrillard's ideas regarding simulation and virtual reality. The fact that Adams's readers and characters occasionally hover on the brink of the dream adds a new dimension to his fantasy. Adams's narrative space is not merely a marvellous, purely fantastic or uncanny one; it is much more complex. The fabric of Adams's narrative reality consists of fragments of the marvellous, the purely fantastic and aspects of the uncanny. His narrative reality is an example of what Brian Attebery refers to as 'fuzzy sets' (1992: 12); various aspects, genres and functions of fantasy converge in Adams's open-ended story space. Boundaries are permeable, genres and modes overlap, and the reader moulds subjective meaning from multiplicity.

In the spirit of the uncanny, Adams's fantasy is also tinged with notions of madness and delirium. Madness is one of the themes of Adams's work that ties all strands of the absurd together. This madness ensues from a hesitation between the landscape of the real and the landscape of the dream. Madness is also rooted in the realisation that life is a futile 'project launched out of one's own nothingness', and that, in order to survive, one needs to entertain oneself with all manner of insanity and alterity. In addition, this madness serves to mirror the mindset of a twisted society; a world which obliterates rare species and which deems it necessary to write instructions on a box of toothpicks. Therefore, madness incorporates the fantastic, the existential and the satiric in Adams's fiction.

CONCLUSION

In the selected novels, the themes of dreaming, fantastic states, delusion and madness are philosophically amalgamated. To once more quote Shoshana Felman: ‘...literature, fiction, is the only possible meeting-place between madness and philosophy, between delirium and thought (1958:48)’. In Adams’s fictional space, this lattice of madness, philosophy, delirium and thought clearly points to the inherent absurdity of the universe in general and of humankind in particular.

Moreover, the inherent absurdity in Adams’s work is significant of twentieth century Existentialist philosophy. His novels portray the absurd futility of human endeavour and the frustrated attempts at making meaning from madness. Adams’s narratives reflect the human condition of being cast into an arbitrary and hostile universe, and the *angst* which results from this situation. The characters dwelling in Adams’s fictional space all struggle to mould meaning from their absurd condition. Some of them, such as Marvin the Paranoid Android, fail to persevere in the face of meaninglessness and rampant nothingness. Although Existentialism is widely believed to be extremely pessimistic, thinkers such as Camus emphasise its inherent optimism. Camus believes that the beauty of life is much more important than its meaning. When Marvin thus dwells in electronic cathedrals of despair, and makes comments such as ‘I’ve seen [the binary sunset]....It’s rubbish’ (1995: 109), he is misinterpreting the heart of Existentialism.

Others, such as Ford Prefect, tend to submit themselves to alcohol and insanity as a means to subdue the stark absurdity of reality. It is evident from these novels that ‘going mad’ is not necessarily a solution to the existential problem either, since one might end up jumping in and out of an illusory gin and tonic for an indefinite period of time. Yet others, such as Adams’s sentient elevators, are reminiscent of Camus’s Sisyphus, performing their mindless tasks to perpetuity. The difference between Camus’s Sisyphus and Adams’s sentient elevators is that these elevators do not continue to bear their burdens with courage and defiance. They do not

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love life for what it is, despite the meaninglessness it emerges from. Instead, they squat in basements and resort to a bleak despair similar to Marvin's.

It is important to note that, although Adams's characters sometimes resort to despair, Adams is merely commenting on human reactions to absurdity and nothingness. He does not necessarily condone these reactions. It is evident from the selected novels that Adams still celebrates life in all its ambiguity and absurdity, and that he strongly advocates entertainment as an antidote to existential despair. In the spirit of the Theatre of the Absurd, Adams's characters have nothing left to do but to wait and to entertain themselves; to spin out their empty existential bubbles. The old man supposedly ruling the universe from a shack is an excellent example. Every day he entertains himself with a pencil and a piece of paper, just as Beckett's clowns perpetually entertain themselves with turnips, boots and carrots while they are waiting for Godot, waiting for the meaning which will never manifest in their lives.

The theme of boredom is very prevalent in Adams's work. Although the scene of the old man exhausting the entertainment possibilities of a piece of paper and pencil has a tragic-comic quality, I think that Adams wants to draw our attention to the positive aspects. Besides satirising an absurd world devoid of meaning, as well as people's attitudes towards nothingness, Adams actually encourages his readers to start making meaning for themselves, however trivial. Adams is, perhaps, himself exploring the entertainment possibilities of a piece of paper and pencil, all the while discovering the marks made with the one on the other, and constructing subjective meaning in the process. Although Sartre describes consciousness as 'a nothingness', Adams invites his readers to look past the void of the bubble, and to 'launch' themselves from their own emptiness.

CONCLUSION

It is said that many a true word is spoken in jest. Adams's satire addresses a number of modern day concerns, and does not only aim to entertain. I suppose that if one seeks light entertainment, Adams's fiction will most certainly not disappoint. However, Adams's contribution to literature is much more significant than the occasional word pun or hilarious parody. One might view the entertainment inherent in Adams's work as a sort of meta-text; as commentary on the absurdity of life and the human compulsion to make meaning. In effect, Adams's fiction even satirises entertainment and humour in order to emphasise the futility of human endeavour.

As a satirist, Adams is definitely not the 'ordinary bird-watcher'. He does not merely comment on human vice and folly, but very subtly castigates it. His satire is not steeped in dark humour and bouts of bitterness. Instead, by means of subtle castigation, Adams's satire has a redeeming quality. His satire opens our eyes to the destructive human force exercised on nature; on the rare and intelligent species massacred by humankind for the sheer fun of it. Of course Adams is criticising humankind's thoughtless exploitation of planet Earth, but he is also, by implication, presenting us with the ideal alternative. That is exactly what satirists do; they denounce the real and present us with an ideal. From an Existentialist point of view, Adams emphasises the importance of constructing subjective meaning. However, as a satirist, Adams comments on a different level of reality, that of objective morality. Adams acknowledges that there is an objective moral code, a billowing mist somewhere in Plato's realm of ideas and imprinted in every human mind. This moral code is what satirists present as the ideal. However, according to CS Lewis, if anyone were to observe the world from the outside, they would find no indication of a moral code, since society has the tendency to ignore it. Lewis explains it thus,

Anyone studying Man from the outside as we study electricity or cabbages, not knowing our language and consequently not able to get any inside knowledge from us, but merely observing what we did, would never get the slightest evidence that we had this moral

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law. How could he? For his observations would only show what we did, and the moral law is about what we ought to do ([1952] 2002: 23-24).

In the *Hitch Hiker* series, Adams comments on the reality of the situation, but also presents his readers with the ideal situation, a blueprint of objective morality. In Adams's work one thus finds a constant interplay between the construction of subjective meaning and the acknowledgement of an objective moral code existing beyond the inner space of the human mind. Although the very nature of Existentialism opposes the notion of objective reality or inherent meaning in the structure of the universe, Adams presents both sides of the argument by also emphasising the importance of an objective moral order.

The world according to Adams is indeed a ship of fools. Adams's fictional worlds are all mere mirror images of Earth, reflecting the vice, folly and pomposity of humankind from a different perspective. Be the ship of fools a Vogon spacecraft, a flying building, or the Heart of Gold, the fact that folly beats at the heart of humanity is very evident from Adams's work. Adams does not need to use landscapes of 'reality' for us to recognise our 'vice and folly shaped into a thing'. The fact that our vicious qualities are cast into alien creatures such as Vogons and NowWhatian Boghogs renders these properties all the more monstrous. We come face to face with the monstrosities born of our own souls.

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