universität
wien

DIPLOMARBEIT

Titel der Diplomarbeit

„Infinite improbabilities: mechanisms of parody in Douglas Adams' comic science fiction writing.“

Verfasserin

Eva-Maria Haslauer, Bakk. phil.

angestrebter akademischer Grad

Magistra der Philosophie (Mag. phil.)

Wien, im November 2010

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt:	A 343
Studienrichtung lt. Studienblatt:	Diplomstudium Anglistik und Amerikanistik
Betreuerin:	Ao. Univ.-Prof. Mag. Dr. Eva Müller-Zettelmann

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisor, Professor Eva Müller-Zettelmann, for making this project possible by welcoming my topic so wholeheartedly. I also thank her for her valuable feedback and guidance.

Many thanks go to my friends both in- and outside Austria for their encouragement and patience; for listening, watching and reading, but above all – for their interest and enthusiasm that were still there when mine seemed to falter.

My thanks also go to all my family near and far for their trust and inestimable support, which they always offer without even knowing it. I would like to dedicate this thesis to my parents, Elgar and Andrea Haslauer, whom I thank not only for their unconditional love and support, but also for their friendship.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction..1

1. Parody...4

1.1. Definitions of Parody..5
1.2. Functions of Parody..8
1.3. Types of Parody...12
    1.3.1. Text parody...12
    1.3.2. Genre parody...13
    1.3.3. Discourse Parody..14

2. Science Fiction...15

2.1. Defining science fiction: problems and starting points...................................16
2.2. Science Fiction: defining features...19
    2.2.1. Cognitive estrangement...20
    2.2.2. The *novum*...21
    2.2.3. SF and social criticism...23
    2.2.4. The confrontation with alterity...25
    2.2.5. Intertextuality..27
2.3. A short history of science fiction...29

3. The *Hitchhiker* series as genre parody...33

3.1. The *Hitchhiker's Guide* and the science fiction field.......................................34
3.2. Parody regarding the text as a whole...36
    3.2.1. “There was a point to this story, but it has temporarily escaped the chronicler's mind”: narrative situation(s)...36
        3.2.1.1. The self-conscious narrator..37
        3.2.1.2. Perspective...39
        3.2.1.3. The book within the book..42
    3.2.2. Adams' disruption of the SF plot...46
    3.2.3. Mock science fictional antiheroes: the characters of the *Hitchhiker's Guide*....52

    - 3.2.4. Parodying the themes and motifs of science fiction...56
        - 3.2.4.1. Adams' aliens.. 57
        - 3.2.4.2 . “Your Plastic Pal Who's Fun to Be With”: Androids, robots and artificial intelligence.. 59
        - 3.2.4.3. “Not impossible, just very, very improbable”: Adams' parody of the technological novum.. 63
        - 3.2.4.4. “The Ends of the Earth”: apocalypse as entertainment.............................67
        - 3.2.4.5. “To explore the human condition”: Adams' parody of science fiction's self-image and didacticism...69
- 3.3. Parody on the level of style and language.. 72
    - 3.3.1. Parody of individual texts and styles...73
    - 3.3.2. Creating the language of the future: the linguistic dilemma in science fiction. .75
    - 3.3.3. The Babel fish and other impossibly useful devices: addressing issues of multilingualism and language variation in the space opera narrative.........................79
    - 3.3.4. Micro-parody: word coinage...82
- 3.4. “We apologise for the inconvenience”: conclusion to chapter three........................84

4. Discourse parody in the *Hitchhiker* novels.. 85

- 4.1. “Beware of the Leopard”: the discourse of bureaucracy..87
- 4.2. The discourse of literature and literary criticism; or, a brief discussion of Vogon poetry.. 90
- 4.3. The discourse of politics and economics...95
- 4.4. “Please do not push this button again”: the discourse of technology....................100

Conclusion.. 103

Appendix...105

Bibliography...106

German summary.. 112

Curriculum Vitae.. 114

Introduction

> [A]nother [...] weakness in the medium as at present conducted: lack of humour and, far more than this, bad attempted humour. There is undoubtedly a kind of priggish pomposity which can afflict even the better writers, enough at times to subvert the moral tendency of what they are saying, and I connect this with the parochial circuit of mutual congratulation, leading in some cases to delusions of grandeur, in which most of them are involved […]. As regards simple absence of humour, I like to think I'm as fond of a good laugh as the next man, but I can stand doing without for long periods when reading, having been trained in the Oxford English school. (Amis 145)

With these words author, critic and self-proclaimed science fiction (SF) addict Kingsley Amis bemoaned the lack of humour in the genre in 1960. According to him, most writers of science fiction were too concerned with having dashing young captains of space ships rescue beautiful blond maidens from bug-eyed monsters in fast-paced and often badly written adventure stories. Others yet were preoccupied with offering epic and unsettling visions of the future, frequently providing critiques of human society in which laughter had little or no room. “However, the picture as a whole is not as grave as this”, Amis (146) went on to ensure us, giving a list of science fiction writers who in one way or another had achieved humour in their work, both voluntarily and involuntarily. On the whole, however, the passionate reader of science fiction sensed a relative absence of humour in the genre of his preference in the 1950s, an era also often referred to as the “Golden Age” of SF. The elevation of this period in science fiction writing to “Golden Age” status may also be a reason why Amis seemed to have been of the opinion that the genre was taking itself too seriously.

Amis' survey of science fiction was published over fifty years ago and it can by now be said that the mode has come a long way since then. Many of its most original and comic writers, such as Philip K. Dick or Kurt Vonnegut, were yet to publish their works and Amis' anticipation of humorous science fiction surely cannot have been disappointed in the long run. Nevertheless, science fiction was still regarded as a genre that dealt with big ideas of universal importance that were hard to reconcile with comic elements. Thus, the few humorous works either remained on the margins or incorporated humour only as a supporting element to a serious plot.

When Douglas Adams developed the idea for his science fictional radio play *The*

Hitch-Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy in 1978, his primary motif, however, seems to have been to make audiences roar with laughter, which, given its success, is exactly what they did and still do when reading Adams' stories. In fact the play was so popular that it was followed by several sequels, five novels, a computer game, a television series, a major Hollywood movie (produced after Adams' death in 2001) and even a beach towel, among other incarnations. The books were clearly the most successful components of the series, have never been out of print and still provoke lively discussions on internet forums and newspapers. When the BBC started *The Big Read* series in which it asked viewers to vote on their favourite books of all time, *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* came in as the fourth most beloved book of the British nation, overtaken only by books by JRR Tolkien, Jane Austen and Philip Pullman. The first two novels, *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* and *The Restaurant at the End of the Universe* were also generally well received by critics; the quality of the following three novels, *Life, the Universe and Everything*, *So Long and Thanks for All the Fish* and *Mostly Harmless* is often said to be dwindling, although they still included some original ideas. In 2009, the Irish author of young adults' literature, Eoin Colfer, provided an addition to the series in novel form (*And Another Thing...*) to commemorate the first book's 30 year anniversary (see Page). This sequel was received with mixed feelings by Adams' by then enormous fan base. However, the publication of a sequel over seventeen years after the last original *Hitchhiker* novel had been published indicates the cherished place Adams' writing still has especially in British popular culture. What could not yet be foreseen in the 1980s and 1990s when Adams' writing first received some degree of attention in academic criticism is now evident: Adams' science fiction has entered popular mythology.

Even though there had been comic science fiction before, Adams' books are remarkable in so far as they also seem to work extremely well with readers not familiar with the genre, as their success testifies. This, according to one of his biographers, had not been the case before (Webb 113). It also seems odd at first glance, as the *Hitchhiker's Guide* is often seen essentially as a parody of the science fiction genre itself; at least the *New Encyclopaedia of Science Fiction* classifies it as such (Gunn 2). Still, it does not seem to be absolutely necessary for readers to read the text as a parody of SF. The humour seems to work on several different levels.

“Considered as a straight science fiction story about the adventures of a group of characters, the Hitchhiker's Guide is, to be honest, rather silly, and many contemporary critics dismissed it as such,” Bethke (41) points out and one almost tends to agree with this statement. The *Hitchhiker's Guide* is the story of Arthur Dent, an eccentric Englishman who, together with the alien Betelgeusian Ford Prefect, hitches a ride on a spaceship in order to escape the demolition of Earth. Arthur stumbles through many epic and hilarious adventures and meets characters that are even stranger than himself. Yet, the only thing that drives him is his restless search for a cup of tea. Most of the other characters have motivations that are similarly dubious[1].

> But if you take a look at what makes the thing *work* – and what has continued to make it work for more than twenty-five years now – it becomes apparent that the so-called "plot" has almost nothing to do with the entertaining qualities of the piece. What makes the Hitchhiker's Guide fun [...] are the *digressions*: the factoids, the parenthetical commentary, the completely twisted and self-referential threads and the putative excerpts from the guidebook which cheerfully hop and skip across half-baked links to every topic under several dozen suns, along the way drawing improbable but hilarious lines of connection and causality between bad poetry, civil servants, existential philosophy and anthropomorphic mattresses.
> (Bethke 41-42)

In other words, *The Hitchhiker's Guide* offers a patchwork of various different discourses that are distorted, parodied and digress from the main narrative, which often only seems to be there for the sake of providing a vehicle for humorous musings about the state of pretty much everything. The attraction lies in the style and the underlying mechanisms of humour and parody.

In this thesis, therefore, I would like to have a closer look at "what makes the thing work", the parodic potential of *The Hitchhiker's Guide*. Certainly the novels tend to use, abuse and subvert many of the classical themes of science fiction while still apparently counting as works of the same genre. However, it will also be argued that other mechanisms of parody are at work in the novels, which do not necessarily have the conventions of SF as their target, but rather use them as a vehicle to offer a parody of numerous aspects of contemporary (British) culture and society. It will be argued that this kind of parody is so effective because it offers a parodic imitation of familiar discourses and distorts them via the science fictional strategy of *cognitive estrangement*. This strategy combines the familiar with the alien and thus has great satirical and comic potential that both genres taken on their own would not be able to achieve. It allows readers to see themselves as the alien Other in space, as it were, or at least from a safe distance. Thus, readers do not necessarily need to have any special knowledge of the science fiction genre; the source of humour is their own day-to-day environment, which might explain why the kind of parody in Adams' writing is still so pervasive today.

---

[1] See chapter 3.

The paper will start off with a discussion of parody as a literary form and then progress to do the same with science fiction. In the paper's analytical part, the two modes' combined forces will be analysed, first with regard to SF and then with regard to “reality”. But first, some clarification regarding the text used is in order as the *Hitchhiker* novels have been published in various editions over the years. The 1996 omnibus edition of the five *Hitchhiker* novels (*The Ultimate Hitchhiker's Guide*) shall serve as a primary source in this thesis, which is why all works will be treated like one sequential novel rather than a collection of five individual pieces. As a result, the earlier novels of the sequence might be mentioned more often than those produced later, as their organisational principles can be said to remain more or less the same throughout the series. Page numbers given always refer to passages in the omnibus. The collection was published in the USA and therefore includes Americanised spelling and an instance of censorship in *Life, the Universe and Everything*.[2] Otherwise the book is identical with the British edition.

1. Parody

Parody is an ancient form of literature which has recently been rediscovered both in literature and literary criticism together with other “playful” forms. The word itself derives from the Greek *parodia; para* meaning *against* or *beside*, *ode* meaning *song*. A parody was thus understood by the Ancient Greeks to be both a song sang beside and in opposition to another, a feature which is still important as will be shown later (Korkut 12). Despite its ancient origins, defining parody has not always been a straightforward process as the many different definitions of the form demonstrates.

One major problem has always been to separate the term from related modes such as pastiche, burlesque and travesty, among others, most of which developed much later than parody itself. Another controversial question regards the place and purpose of parody, which has clearly been subject to historical change. This chapter will therefore review some more recent definitions and viewpoints regarding parody, its forms and functions, in order to decide on a model that can most readily be applied to Adams' work.

---

[2] A common swear word has been replaced with the word *Belgium* in chapter 22, which prompted Adams to include another humorous episode in the American edition that the British version lacks (see page 421 in the omnibus).

1.1. Definitions of Parody

While parody has previously often been disregarded, seen as a “low” form of literature and confused with other modes such as burlesque, travesty and pastiche (Rose 25), the twentieth century saw a renewed interest in the so-called “playful” forms of literature, which resulted in a wealth of different definitions regarding parody. One reason why parody has not been held in particularly high regard is the fact that it was often purely seen as an unimaginative imitation mocking a particular literary successor, not offering anything new or original. Parody was seen as a faulty copy that could only be destructive to its source text (Rose 25-26). What has been established, nevertheless, is that parody is both comic and critical, in whichever way. This critical tendency however, has often been played down. Theories regarding the ways in which parody uses its source text to create something new as well as its other various function have long been an unexplored field in the study of literature. Why exactly is it that parody is comic and critical? Which effects does it create in the reader? These questions have long remained unanswered.

One groundbreaking contribution to the advancement of the study of parody has certainly been Gerárd Genette's model of hypertextuality. This model focuses on a several literary modes that are intertextual in so far as they are based on certain source texts. His definitions and categorisations are painstakingly exact and clearly defined. The model is important, because not only does it establish parody as a specific form of intertextuality, but it also specifies the way in which parody works. Genette classifies parody as a hypertext, more exactly as a *playful* hypertext. For Genette, playful hypertexts are certain forms of intertextuality that do not merely imitate but rather *transform* their targets (Genette 40). Thus, according to Genette, parody transforms the hypotext (A) into the hypertext (B). Parody shares its slot in Genette's model with travesty and transposition. All three transform the hypotext, whereas pastiche, forgery and caricature, merely imitate the hypotext (Genette 41). What Genette disregards, however, is the critical function of parody. For him, this function is not included in the category of playful hypertexts as they primarily serve to entertain the reader. The forms of hypertextuality he credits with being able to critique their targets are travesty and caricature (Genette 43). Furthermore, Genette establishes that parody can only transform individual texts. This is explained by his focus on transformation rather than imitation. Genette points out that one can only really imitate a genre, as an imitation of an individual source text would inevitably lead to its *transformation* and reinterpretation. Hence he calls the mode that is concerned with imitating styles and genres as a whole travesty rather than parody (Genette 42-43).

Genette's points regarding the transformation of the source text as well as parody's status are especially useful ones and have been incorporated into later theories of parody. However, his model is hard to apply to a wide field of texts. As Hutcheon has specified, “Genette [...] wants to limit parody to such short texts as poems, proverbs, puns, and titles, but modern parody discounts this limitation.'”(Hutcheon, *Theory* 33) The categories proposed by him are rather narrow and frequently overlap and it is therefore often necessary to apply several of his terms to one particular text when it would be much easier to use one umbrella term instead. Furthermore, the history of parody, starting in antiquity, has exemplified that the term parody has definitely been applied to describe forms that imitate and thereby transform both individual texts as well as genres long before the terms *travesty* or *burlesque* came into being (Rose 19). Why not, therefore, dispose of some of the newer terms and widen the definition of parody instead?

The same question has evidently been asked by other scholars dealing with parody and led to a number of much wider definitions, often based on Genette's model but expanding it. Linda Hutcheon has dedicated a large part of her research to parody, recognising that this form that has risen to such prominence in the twentieth century must suit other purposes apart from humorous transformation. In her study *A Theory of Parody*, she analyses parody in all major art forms, including film, literature, architecture and the pictorial arts. Thus, hers is a deeply postmodern understanding of text. All art is and can be treated as text. No fundamental difference can be made between a literary text or a piece of architecture, for example. Her definition is therefore rather broad and applicable to all kinds of parody in the arts. She defines the form as “a form of imitation, but imitation characterised by ironic inversion, not always at the expense of the parodied text” or, in other words, as “repetition with critical distance, which marks difference rather than similarity” (Hutcheon, *Theory* 6). Such a definition stresses the critical and therefore the creative potential of parody. This “[i]ronic 'trans-contextualization' is what distinguishes parody from pastiche or imitation'”(Hutcheon, *Theory* 12). Parody may use its source text as basis, but by transforming it, it stresses the differences rather than the similarities, thus evaluating the source text in one way or another. However, this evaluation need not always be negative, as Hutcheon points out (*Theory* 15).

This definition has been developed further by Margaret Rose who misses a fundamental characteristic of parody in Hutcheon's definition, namely humour. For Rose, humour is what sets parody most clearly apart from related forms such as pastiche. Parody, as has been pointed out by Hutcheon, creates a critical distance between the source text and itself. It does this by creating a change in context which is unfamiliar to the reader, thus creating an ironic and humorous awareness of the differences between the two texts. The reader expects to find X, but is presented with Y, which is identified as similar to, but not quite like X and thus has to laugh about the discrepancy (Rose 33). Based on this theory of humour, Rose defines parody as "*the comic refunctioning of preformed linguistic or artistic material*." (53) The difference between Hutcheon's and Rose's definitions is mainly one of emphasis. While Hutcheon stressed the critical nature of parody, Rose allocates a specific function to the critical distance created by parody, that is, humour. However, both studies show a similar understanding of what constitutes a text; both do not only discuss literature, but also take other art forms into account and Rose even extents the definition to all linguistic material, although she does not give any examples for parody outside literary texts.

One critic who does is Simon Dentith. His definition of parody is perhaps the broadest in existence to date and is most clearly based on a linguistic rather than a literary model of intertextuality. He identifies intertextuality, and more specifically parody, as an inherent component of daily life. Culture and speech are constructed in such a way that they constantly make use of ready-made formulae which allude to all kinds of precursor texts, be they linguistic in nature or simply represented by previous cultural practices. One can thus not only parody literary texts and other art forms, but also speech, gestures, customs, etc. which is regularly done by socialised language users in their daily interaction with one another (Dentith 6). Although he points out that defining parody is therefore a rather fruitless endeavour that always has to be attempted anew in relation to the text under discussion, he offers a preliminary definition which states that "[p]arody includes any cultural practice which provides a relatively polemical allusive imitation of another cultural production or practice" (Dentith 9). This definition is useful because it addresses the possibility that cultural practice too can be read as text. It thus accounts not only for parody as a genre being based on specific texts and styles, but also as a technique in narrative which can allude to familiar discourses without relying on their structure as a guideline for its own construction. Since this is exactly what Douglas Adams does frequently in his writing, this definition should be kept in mind.

Very similar to, but slightly narrower than Dentith's definition is that by Nil Korkut, who published a work on parody in 2009. In her book she attempts to reconcile all previous definitions of parody, taking into account culture, criticism, as well as humour, thus uniting the ideas of Hutchen, Rose, Dentith and to an extent also Genette. Her definition reads: “Parody is an intentional imitation – of a text, style, genre, or discourse – which includes an element of humour and which has an aim of interpreting its target in one way or another” (Korkut 21). Although this definition includes not much that is new, it is useful as it lays down the various kinds of parody Korkut distinguishes in her study. As a definition it is again rather broad, but as a model it can be readily applied to all kinds of texts while recognising their differences. Her definition will therefore be of great use when it comes to classifying different types of parody; but first it may be necessary to make some brief observations about parody's functions.

1.2. Functions of Parody

What then, is the purpose of producing parody? Is its primary function to make the reader laugh as Rose has pointed out or does it have more to contribute to literature as a whole than pure entertainment?

What most contemporary critics seem to agree on is that functions of parody vary depending on the historical period in which the parody in question was produced. After all, parody has been established as a form already at the time of the Ancient Greeks, in which period it was restricted to epic poems (Hutcheon, *Theory* 32). However, within one particular historical period too, parody may take on various different functions, which is especially true for the postmodern period. As the texts to be discussed in this thesis have been produced in the twentieth century, it will suffice to review some of parody's functions that have been identified within the past fifty years.

One function which has already been pointed out is of course criticism. Parody can either be used to ridicule and evaluate literary genres and styles or the work of one particular author. Used in conjunction with – or as a form of – satire, as is often the case, parody can also be used as a tool for social criticism. The direction this criticism takes can be both affirmative as well as rejective of the status quo. Dentith gives several examples for either direction of criticism. For example, in the time when the novel in English came to be established as a form of serious literature, parodies frequently mocked the romance-form, which was (and usually still is) seen to be inferior. This clearly is an example of parody being used in a conservative fashion. In other cases, parody has been used to undermine dominant discourses and was proven to be a more progressive means of literary criticism (Dentith 20). Evaluation of such criticism too tends to be of varying kinds. One the one hand it has been claimed again and again over the centuries that it might be lethal to “real” literature if it was parodied overly much. If the parody becomes more popular than the original genre, all that may be left is pure ridicule and criticism which as a result suffocates the original genre. Indeed, in some cases this has proved to be true. Dentith mentions the example of the melodrama, a form of drama which was overtaken in popularity and thus “killed” by its parody – the burlesque – in the eighteenth century (see Dentith ch. 5). It was also before the twentieth century that the constructive potential of parody's criticism was often overlooked. The twentieth century saw a re-evaluation of parody and its functions, which is evident both in the more frequent use of parody in literature as well as numerous serious discussions of the form in academic discourse.

An important movement in this respect was Russian formalism which contributed a great deal to the study of parody and the understanding of its possible functions, not only with regard to contemporary literature, but also taking historical parodies into account. Russian formalism and especially the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, who was influenced by it, thus laid the foundation for postmodern interpretations of parody, bringing the form into connection with literary evolution. Especially important in this context are Shklovsky's notions of “defamiliarisation” and “laying bare the device” as well as Bakhtin's concept of the “carnivalesque”.

Defamiliarisation, according to Russian formalism, is a feature characteristic of all literary language (Korkut 13). It becomes a means of “laying bare the device”, or, in Waugh's words, of “renewing perception by exposing and revealing the habitual and the conventional” (65). Literary language, via defamiliarisation, exposes its own techniques and forces the reader to view them in a different light. Literature can therefore be seen as inherently self-conscious as it comments on its own development and tries to improve upon it. According to Hutcheon, summing up the Russian concept,

> [p]arody develops out of the realization of the literary inadequacies of a certain convention. Not merely an unmasking of a non-functioning system, it is also a necessary and creative process by which new forms appear to revitalize the tradition and open up new possibilities to the artist. (Hutcheon, *Narrative* 50)

Parody, according to postmodern interpretations of Shklovsky, thus experiences a very positive reevaluation. Since it transforms its source text into something unfamiliar and is therefore the prime example for a defamiliarising form, it becomes the driving force of literary evolution by which new forms are negotiated and developed. Read as a sign of literary exhaustion, parody can widen genre boundaries that are felt to be too tight and point to a form's inherent inadequacies or clichés while proposing alternatives.

Another contribution to the postmodern rethinking of parody was Mikhail Bakhtin's oft-quoted concept of the carnivalesque. Via a discussion of Medieval carnival, Bakhtin lays down some of the special features of parody as well. The carnival in medieval times was an ideal environment in which to be playfully critical. Only in the time of carnival could rules be subverted and the establishment criticised in a socially accepted fashion. The social criticism of the carnival is linked to a specific time and place; it is therefore placed both in opposition and beside established norms (Hutcheon, *Theory* 74). This is also true of parody, which has been defined since ancient times as a song sung both beside and in opposition to another, both meanings being part of the word's Greek origin. Like the carnival, parody does have its limitations and is both part of the establishment while at the same time showing a clear potential to subvert and overturn this very same establishment, though within clearly defined boundaries. This is the case because

> [t]he recognition of the inverted world still requires a knowledge of the order of the world which it inverts and, in a sense, incorporates. The motivation and the form of the carnivalesque are both derived from authority: the second life of the carnival has meaning only in relation to the official first life. (Hutcheon, *Theory* 74)

Parody is therefore “double-coded” (Rose 232). It makes use of the established norms of a genre, discourse or precursor text while at the same time using the same norms to create something fresh, critical and often humorous. It is thus possible to read a parody in numerous different ways. If the parodic intent is overlooked, the parody text can be read simply as a text representative of the original form as it uses the same rules and conventions. The critical nature of parody only reveals itself if some knowledge of the parodied discourse is given and thus strongly relies on the cooperation and preformed expectations of the reader (Dentith 39). In this carnivalesque paradox also lies the explanation for the fact that parody in its criticism can be both conservative and progressive and is variously seen as destructive or enriching to a literary form, depending on the critic observing it (Hutcheon, *Theory* 77).

Based on these features, defamiliarisation and double-coding, parody has come to be seen as the ideal vehicle of literary self-reference in postmodern writing and criticism. Especially Rose and Hutcheon explicitly discuss parody in its relation to, and use in, contemporary metafiction. The function of such metafictional parody in postmodern literature is to playfully “lay bare the device” of literature and thus expose itself as an artificial construct (Hutcheon, *Narrative* 51). Parody inevitably depends on a particular precursor text, be it represented by a style, discourse or genre, and therefore cannot help but point towards this precursor, that is, if the reader recognises the parody as such. Parody is therefore “one of the major forms of modern self-reflexivity; it is a form of inter-art discourse” (Hutcheon, *Theory* 2). The form points to an important feature of poststructuralist philosophy according to which the author as a creative individual is dead and all texts are just intertexts reworking previous texts (Dentith 15). Parody's role in literary evolution comes to the foreground in postmodern fiction, especially the postmodern novel. By incorporating older and established literary forms, postmodern novels show awareness of their history while at the same time trying to deconstruct conventions by breaking established rules of constructing fiction. According to Waugh, parody thus “exploits the indeterminacy of the text, forcing the reader to revise his or her rigid preconceptions based on literary and social conventions, by playing off contemporary and earlier paradigms against each other and thus defeating the reader's expectations about both of them” (67).

However, although self-reference can be seen as an inherent feature of parody, it does not always have to be played out in this obvious way by the author. Seeing metareferentiality as the sole function of parody may be a mistake as there are certainly parodic works in existence whose purpose is not primarily to point towards their own “constructedness” as texts. One slightly obvious but still common function of parody is, quite simply, entertainment. “Sometimes,” Dentith too points out, “the laughter is the only point, and the breakdown of discourse into nonsense is a sufficient reward in itself” (38). In the overturned world of the carnival nothing is sacred and parody can thus provide redeeming comic relief by simply ridiculing and humorously playing with established conventions and discourses. This it can do without an underlying “serious” purpose, simply for the sake of laughter. Indeed, its entertainment value is often played down in critical discussions of parody, as if laughter for the sake of laughter had no place in literature. This function of parody shall be mentioned nevertheless, as it has a central place in the primary texts under discussion in this paper. Although all other functions of parody discussed in this chapter can clearly be applied to the texts, a simple gleeful celebration of humour and absurdity is often the primary one and the author is not ashamed to admit this fact.

1.3. Types of Parody

Simon Dentith distinguishes two kinds of parody. On the one hand, there is *specific parody*, which is “aimed at a specific precursor text” (Dentith 7), on the other hand, *general parody “*is aimed at a whole body of texts or kind of discourse” (7).[3] Based on his very broad definition of parody, the mode is therefore capable not only of imitating, ridiculing and criticising a specific literary predecessor, but also whole modes of cultural production.

This analytical framework has been developed further by Nil Korkut. As has been shown above, she defines parody rather broadly. Also, she does not only offer formal distinctions between different kinds of parody, but distinguishes them by the kinds of texts they parody. For her, the realm of text does not end with a certain literary work or style, but also includes generic and thematic conventions and non-literary discourse. This seems like an ideal framework for analysing Adams' work with regard to parody, as he also imitates styles that are culturally and socially functional rather than literary, but nevertheless show a clear imitational and critical tendency that can easily be called parodic according to the definition offered by Dentith. Dentith's definition of parody as “any cultural practice which provides a relatively polemical allusive imitation of another cultural production or practice” (9) is very applicable with regard to discourse parody. However, it is also useful in order to achieve more clarity of argument, to maintain a distinction between parody of text, genre and discourse within this paper as these forms in Adams' work have been found to do very different things for different groups of readers. Therefore, Korkut's framework, which will be introduced in this section, can best serve to illustrate the complexity of parodic mechanisms at work in the novels of Douglas Adams.

1.3.1. Text parody

What shall here be termed “text parody”, Korkut defines as “[p]arodies of texts and personal styles” (22). This could be seen as parody in its purest form in accordance with Genette's definition. The definition of this kind of parody is rather straightforward: it includes parodies of one particular work of art (painting, literature, film, etc.) and/or the style of the original creator associated with it. For example, Henry Fielding's *Shamela* (1741) falls into this category as it is clearly a parody of one particular literary predecessor, namely Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (1740). Like Richardson, Fielding uses the medium of the epistolary novel and introduces a female character also called Pamela by her masters (though her true name is Shamela). However, apart from her name and situation, her character is completely opposed to that of Richardson's pure and innocent Pamela. Fielding's parody thus imitates both the content and style of Richardson's novel.

---

[3] This differentiation is also mentioned in Rose and Korkut, if not in as much detail.

Text parody is the most specific form of parody as its understanding clearly depends on the reader's knowledge of the target text. A large part of the information encoded in the parody depends on this knowledge. Text parody is therefore also quite restricted in its possibilities. As the style or work of one particular author has to be imitated, it is unlikely that parodies of individual texts or styles can be extended to include a longer series of books, as it is the case with Adams' *Hitchhiker* novels. However, text parody does not necessarily have to determine the structure of entire works of art. Especially in film and literature, texts and styles can be parodied episodically in a work not completely parodic and serve as humorous additions rather than plot vehicles as such. This kind of parody therefore can be seen as a genre if it determines the structure of the work, or simply as a technique used by authors in texts of a different genre to communicate certain ideas (criticism, metareference or quite simply comic relief). Text parody always involves evaluation of the target text. However, this evaluation can be both positive and negative (Rose 46). Also, if text parody is only inserted as a technique, the target of the parody does not necessarily have to be the text parodied, but can also be represented by an idea or a concept which the parodied text stands for and can help underline.

1.3.2. Genre parody

Korkut defines genre parodies as “parodic works that target a particularly literary genre characterized by a certain style and by certain formal and thematic conventions” (23). Again, this definition is rather straightforward. As opposed to text parody, the scope of genre parody is much broader as the target of the parody is not an individual text but a whole body of texts representing a genre.

Since parody is a double-coded mode of writing, genre parody both ridicules and uses the norms and conventions of a certain genre. A “misreading” in this case does not have the same consequences as a misreading of text parody. If the parodic intent of the text is overlooked, the work can still be taken to represent a work of exactly the genre it parodies. For example, Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1759-67), among other genres, most obviously parodies that of fictional autobiography. However, at the same time Sterne employs all the techniques of autobiography in a clearly exaggerated way. For example, story time and discourse time overlap over large stretches of the novel, which can be taken as a sign that the author is actually attempting to write the most “authentic” kind of autobiography by trying to relate every single detail.

As genre parody encompasses a whole body of texts, it does not only imitate the style and language of the genre, but also its themes and conventions, as Korkut has pointed out. This kind of parody may therefore also include ridiculing of narrative techniques, techniques of characterisation and themes that can be said to appear most frequently within texts of the genre. A genre parody can thus be observed on all levels of the work in question, which is what will be attempted in chapter three.

1.3.3. Discourse Parody

Discourse parodies, perhaps the most problematic kinds of parody, are defined by Korkut as “parodic works directed towards a discourse, i.e. towards language that characterizes any philosophical, social, professional, religious, political, ideological, etc. activity or group” (23). This technique is generally associated with satire rather than parody, because not another literary text or genre is the target of criticism, but rather an aspect of daily life as represented by the language used in its context. Discourse parody extends the dialogue within art to a dialogue between art and social reality. Korkut's definition can even be extended further if we take Dentith's definition into account. According to it, discourse parody would not only be able to imitate discursive language, but all forms of cultural practice which, according to poststructuralist theory, can be read as text. As can be seen, discourse parody takes us further into the domain traditionally occupied by satire.

However, Rose points out that parodists may make themes their target which are normally the domain of satire and that “the parodist may also recreate or imitate certain norms or their distortions in order to attack or defend them in the parody text. If the perspective of some parodists may seem to be anti-normative and distortive, much parody has served to renew norms by recreating them in a new context before making them the subject of a new critique and analysis” (Rose 82). In other words, whereas the satirist simply offers criticism of the target, the parodist may also incorporate the same target in his or her text to distort it or put it in a different context.

More specifically, satire, rather than imitating the discourse it aims to criticise, prefers to work with symbols. In many science fiction texts technological innovations or imaginary changes in the layout of the science fictional society depicted, serve as symbols that point towards perceived problems in the world outside the text.[4] Discourse parody, however, takes the target discourse as it finds it and greatly exaggerates or distorts its defining features so that readers may laugh about and rethink them. This, according to Korkut, is frequently done by postmodern novelists. For example, Salman Rushdie often parodies the discourse of politics. David Lodge's main target in his campus novels is the discourse of academia and especially literary criticism (See Korkut, ch. 3.2.1 and 3.2.2). Like satire, discourse parody is therefore strongly dependent on the social environment in which it was produced. However, unlike political and societal circumstances, which are the main targets of satire, discourses and the forms of language associated with them tend to be much more durable and it can therefore be said that the relevance of criticism voiced in a discourse parody may prove to last longer than that voiced in a non-parodic satire.

2. Science Fiction

> Science fiction is less a genre – a body of writing from which one can expect certain plot elements and specific tropes – than an ongoing discussion.
> (Mendelsohn 1)

Mendelsohn here addresses a fundamental problem in SF: the apparent impossibility of defining the genre in a commonly accepted way. There are numerous definitions of science fiction, approaching the genre from various different angles. Literary critics tend to define it in terms of themes and content, linguists in terms of style and reader-reception. Fans, on the other hand, will give much more favourable definitions, often assigning to the genre much more importance than scholars. It therefore seems fruitless to give a satisfactory definition of science fiction which will take into account its form, style, content and reception. Defining SF sometimes seems to be a strictly subjective and individual undertaking. This chapter will review some of the more popular definitions in use in the field of SF criticism at present, some of which will be dismissed. It is the aim of this chapter to collect as many defining features of SF as possible in order to make them account for a great variety of texts so that their parody can be subsequently explained. Giving a concise definition of SF is not at the centre of attention. Secondly, as parody is always an instance of intertextuality, it is necessary to give some kind of history of SF, however brief and incomplete, and introduce some core texts. Hardly any other genre is so conscious of its own conventions and traditions, which is, of course, another feature that parody can easily take advantage of.

---

[4] This aspect will be discussed in more detail in chapter two.

2.1. Defining science fiction: problems and starting points

Most scholars tend to define SF in terms of content. The aspects that are associated with it, first and foremost, are new and often impossible technological innovations such as space ships or time travel. In terms of setting, it is often said that SF texts tend to be set in unfamiliar new environments such as different planets, alternative universes or the future. While those aspects can certainly be found in much of SF and are of great importance to most of the genre's definitions, they do not occur in other texts that are also classified as science fiction.

There exists the common stereotype that SF texts (especially those from the Pulp era[5]) tend to be badly written, focusing on adventure and technical innovation rather than characterisation, psychological insight or in-depth description. This is indeed true for much of SF. However, there might be a problem with automatically classifying those features as “bad” writing. According to Parrinder, the classification of most SF as “paraliterature” (“popular literature”) is less due to the actual quality of the writing than to its subject matter. Science fiction is a literature of ideas that often claims to be concerned with predicting future events and innovations rather than mimetically representing the age in which it was produced (although, like all literature, it cannot help but do so as well to some extent). Works that have been canonised as “high literature” usually focus on characterisation and are valued for their portrayal of “authentic” human nature. Genres like SF that focus on ideas rather than the realistic portrayal of characters and their circumstances serve as literature's Other in opposition to which it becomes possible to define literature to begin with; which is not to say that such definitions cannot change over time (Parrinder, *Science*

---

[5] See section 2.3.

Fiction 46).

This brings me to another accusation with which science fiction has often been confronted, namely that it is said to be a purely escapist genre. For example, Heinz Antor starts his essay on satire in Douglas Adams' work with a definition of science fiction, claiming that one of its major purposes is to express and subsequently ease fear and anxieties about the future. It offers an alternative future in which – the reader is assured – everything will be alright, a fantasy that will please the unsettled masses (Antor 174-175). His focus consequently is on an analysis of wish-fulfilment, narrative closure and their disruption by Adams' parody. Such an insistence on equating even what he calls "traditional SF" with popular literature, which apparently has to be treated differently from "serious" literature, can only bedim analysis. A definition of SF as escapist, no matter how often it may have been uttered by influential figures within the genre, surely cannot satisfy with regard to science fiction and is in conflict with anything an SF fan will say about the genre of his or her liking. Indeed, when asked, most fans will say that they read SF because of its predictive qualities (positive or otherwise), its potential for social criticism and its encouragement to see the world in a different light and ponder possible alternatives to the existing establishment. This is also illustrated by the very active part fans take in SF fandom.[6] Furthermore, an apparent tendency towards narrative closure and happy endings surely is not a feature solely of science fiction. Parrinder points out that "[t]he aim of reading fiction may well be that the world for a time should take on 'the shape of our heart's desire' – but this is true of *all* fiction, or make-believe, and not just of its more popular varieties" (*Science Fiction* 57). How many Shakespearean comedies or classic Victorian novels do not eventually end in marriage against all odds? Of course, there are fictions that break with these conventions, but they are as frequent if not more so in science fiction as in mainstream fiction. SF and fantasy author Ursula K. Le Guin in the preface to her novel *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969) fittingly observes that "many people who do not read science fiction describe it as 'escapist', but when questioned further, admit they do not read it because 'it's so depressing'" (Le Guin, Introduction). Popular or not, SF certainly deserves the same standard of critical assessment as any other literary genre.

As has already been hinted at, definitions from within the genre are in stark contrast with those from outside. Especially science fiction authors tend to give rather self-confident definitions. Three of those shall be briefly introduced, as they can be said to represent three different schools of viewing science fiction. The first and probably oldest definition of the genre comes from the Romantic poet Percy Shelley, who wrote in his preface to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818):

---

[6] Roberts recommends Henry Jenkin's study *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Anticipatory Culture* (1992) in which, according to him, the author "shows the extent to which [SF-] fans are creative, active participants in the textual universes of their favourite shows" (Roberts, *History*, 17).

> The event on which the interest of the story depends is exempt from the disadvantages of a mere tale of spectres or enchantment. It was recommended by the novelty of the situations which it develops, and, however impossible as a physical fact, affords a point of view to the imagination for the delineating of human passions more comprehensive and commanding than any which the ordinary relations of existing events can yield. (P. Shelley 11)

Shelley here defends the fact that *Frankenstein* is a novel of the imagination which is not directly connected to reality. He does this by claiming that the novel is not, however, a piece of purely entertaining and sensational literature, but has much to say about the human condition *because* it is imagined. It is an allegory which can only be realised by employing the techniques of the Gothic novel. This definition therefore foreshadows many later definitions of the genre with a very similar content.

A second school of defining science fiction is represented in a quote by science fiction author Robert Heinlein, submitted in 1969. He says that SF is: “A realistic speculation about possible future events, based solidly on adequate knowledge of the real world, past and present, and on a thorough understanding of the nature and significance of the scientific method.” (Heinlein qtd. in Suerbaum, Broich, and Borgmeier 9) For Heinlein science fiction is not primarily a fantastic literature. Although the SF author imagines things, he or she has to make a serious effort at predicting future events and technology and has to be well educated in the natural and social sciences of his or her time. This reflects a view prominent in the first half of the twentieth century. Most SF magazines of the time were purely interested in the scientific accuracy of the stories submitted rather than their literary quality and took great pride every time an SF author 's prediction about future scientific findings came true.[7]

Another science fiction author and chronicler, Brian Aldiss, takes science into account but appoints a different importance to the aspect. He says that “[s]cience fiction is the search for a definition of man and his status in the universe which will stand in our advanced but confused state of knowledge (science), and is characteristically cast in the Gothic or post-Gothic mould” (Aldiss 8). For him, science fiction is not as much about science as about humanity confronted with profound changes represented by scientific innovation. His definition is especially grand as it claims a specific philosophical and didactic mission for science fiction. This trend came about later in the twentieth century when SF became increasingly concerned with *inner space* rather than *outer space*.

---

[7] See section 2.3. for an outline of this development.

All three definitions cannot hold, of course. Not all science fiction novels offer a new world view as has been suggested by Shelley (although he did not yet know this in 1818, of course), nor do all works of SF attempt to offer a convincing portrayal of science or actually attempt prediction. Pseudo-science as a plot device is a much more common feature. The point that SF texts are characteristically exploratory and philosophical in nature can also be dismissed, the main focus being, more often than not, to entertain the reader. What the three remarks quoted above show, however, is the genre's self-image which is in stark contrast to both the popular and critical image of the mode. The constant need for justification is clearly visible. Shelley had to defend *Frankenstein* so it would not be dismissed as a violent and vulgar novel and Heinlein and Aldiss had to defend their genre against accusations of it being escapist pulp fiction, thus trying to make a connection to the real world and appointing some fundamental importance to SF.

As has been shown, compressed definitions of science fiction are not particularly satisfying as they are either too restrictive or apply to other genres as well. Especially in academia there exist numerous definitions of the genre and even more attempts to improve upon them. Almost every serious study of SF starts by trying to establish a new definition, either focusing on form, content, linguistic or historical aspects. The next section will therefore attempt to bring some order into the various ideas and conceptions in circulation. Rather than finding one all-encompassing definition it will try to identify some defining features of science fiction that may also be able to take most of what has been said above into account while at the same time enabling one to speak exclusively of SF as a genre.

2.2. Science Fiction: defining features

The science fiction field in the twentieth and twenty-first century has been incredibly productive. In 1998, Scott McCracken reported that “[i]t accounts for one in ten books sold in Britain, and in the United States the number is as high as one in four.” (McCracken qtd. in Roberts, *Science Fiction* 30). It is no longer a purely literary genre but also includes film, television, graphic novels and video games. Much of the writing that has been produced inevitably corresponds to the stereotypical conception of science fiction as a badly written, escapist literature. However, as has been shown above, this cannot be a means of defining the genre as the same is true for all literature published, no matter of which mode. This section therefore includes several features and concepts that have been established to define the genre. While they may not be all-encompassing, they convincingly explain several aspects of the genre and can serve as useful guidelines for an analysis of SF texts.

2.2.1. Cognitive estrangement

What most critics dealing with science fiction seem to agree on is its status as a fantastic literature that deals with a world which is wholly or largely imagined rather than mimetic. But SF is by far not the only literature that includes fantastic elements. How then can we distinguish science fiction from other fantastic literatures such as myth, fairy tale, fantasy literature or magical realism? Brian Aldiss, who wrote one of the first comprehensive histories of science fiction, maintains that it is often impossible to separate science fiction from fantasy, due to the status of both as fantastic literatures. He only establishes that in some cases, fantasy literature is closer to myth than SF, as it relies more strongly on emotion rather than reason (Aldiss 9). This was a first step in the direction taken by later analysts of the genre for whom the carefree mingling of SF and fantasy became a problem and who were thus working on definitions that would keep the two genres more clearly apart.

One of those critics was Darko Suvin, who has done a considerable amount of work on the subject and in 1979 published his influential work *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction,* in which he makes several convincing attempts to locate and distinguish science fiction in its relation to other genres, most notably fantasy and realism. Based on the Russian Formalist concept of defamiliarisation (discussed above) and Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt*, he classifies fantastic literatures as estranged literatures. They are estranged because they confront the reader with unfamiliar environments or alien characters. As they have to include some references to the world of the reader in order to be readable, they can be said to *estrange the familiar*. Science fiction, according to Suvin, can be differentiated from other estranged literatures in so far as the estrangement has to be *cognitive*, that is, not based on metaphysics and possibly irrational elements, but on logically conceivable processes which have their roots in the scientific culture of the reader (Suvin 6-7). It is of no matter whether those processes are actually possible or provable, but they have to explained in a (pseudo-) scientific manner which seems feasible in the reader's current environment. Fantasy hence can be said to deal with the impossible whereas science fiction deals with the *improbable*, or at least has to mask the impossible as such (Roberts, *Science Fiction* 8).

While this process described by Suvin may certainly be at work in science fiction, some scholars have been critical of its primary effect, that is, that it estranges the familiar. This, they say, is only partly true as regards the stories' content but not their form. Suerbaum, Broich, and Borgmeier point out that introducing unfamiliar elements into a narrative text usually has quite the opposite effect. As soon as the unfamiliar element is introduced, it has to be connected to the world of the reader. In order for the new element to function, it immediately has to be made familiar by balancing it with well-known elements of the reader's actually experienced environment so he or she can relate to it and “suspend his or her disbelief”. Otherwise, readers would either not be able to follow the story or consciously recognise it as fictional, which is usually tried to be avoided by authors of fiction. The new element has to be introduced extremely carefully and immediately be put into a familiar context. This usually happens through the narrator chosen and narrative techniques such as exposition. The primary effect of cognitive estrangement and estrangement of any kind is therefore, ironically, that it always primarily *familiarises the estranged* before it estranges the familiar. The latter can only be identified by observing the new element's possibly symbolic nature (Suerbaum, Broich, and Borgmeier 115). In this paper, this function will be seen as native to SF whereas the estrangement of the familiar can most definitely be identified as a main function of parody. An important point coming into prominence here is that both the most influential theories of parody and SF are based on the notion of defamiliarisation, which will be of great use in chapter four.

2.2.2. The *novum*

A common misconception when trying to define SF is the insistence on it being strictly connected with science. Not every fiction dealing with science can be classified as science fiction. There has to be something about the scientific component in SF that makes it science fiction rather than popular science. Darko Suvin again proposes a solution for this problem via the introduction of the term *novum* (plural: *nova*) to classify innovation, scientific and otherwise, in the SF text.

As the name suggests, a *novum* simply is any new element introduced into the fiction, or in Suvin's own words: “[a] *novum* of cognitive innovation is a totalizing phenomenon or relationship deviating from the author's and implied reader's norm of reality” (64). The advantage of such a definition is that the *novum* does not have to be technological or even scientific in accordance with the natural sciences. Science fiction can thus be distinguished by some kind of novelty which is *cognitively* introduced into the familiar environment and serves as a trigger for estrangement. In most basic science fiction the *novum* is usually a single new element which is indeed technological. For example, in H.G. Wells' novel *The Time Machine* (1895) the primary *novum* is of course the time machine. Although other strange elements make their appearance, such as the bizarrely changed human anatomy and society of the future, they are triggered, or rather, their narration made possible, through the *novum* of the time machine. However, some SF novels make use of anthropomorphic *nova* (aliens, robots or mutants) or new elements rooted in the social sciences. For example, the main *novum* in Ursula Le Guin's novel *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969) is a race of sexless aliens and thus a society without gender. The *novum* is therefore primarily sociological in nature and indeed the story is told from the point of view of an anthropologist.

The *novum* is a cognitive trigger for the reader, introducing him or her into the SF universe. Rather than immediately explaining all new elements, many SF novels lead the reader into the new world by gradually introducing various *nova* into a familiar scene and leave them to make sense of the new environment for themselves (Roberts, *Science Fiction* 20). For example, *The Space Merchants* (1952) by Manfred Pohl and C.M. Kornbluth starts with a description of the main character washing himself. The scene is familiar until in the second paragraph some new and science fictional elements are introduced: “I rubbed depilatory soap over my face and rinsed it with the trickle from the fresh-water tap. Wasteful, of course, but I pay taxes and salt water always leaves my face itchy.” (Pohl and Kornbluth 1) The scene described differs only very slightly from washing scenes familiar to most readers. However, it is made to appear odd by the introduction of a salt water tap, which is unusual in the real world. It is the first indicator in the text that this is a novel to make sense of which readers will have to change or reconsider their expectations. The appearance of a *novum* signifies that the text cannot be read as a realist novel. It forces the reader to read the text as science fiction and view the world represented within it in a different way than that depicted in a realist text (see Roberts, *Science Fiction* 20; Suerbaum, Broich, and Borgmeier 18).

Although all the novels mentioned above can be said to be science fiction, the nature of the *nova* used in the stories in question has led to a distinction between “Hard SF” and “Soft SF”. The former insists on presenting accurate scientific facts which are in accordance with actual scientific findings at the time the story was written, the latter uses the *novum* as a vehicle for imaginative thought experiments and reflections on society and the nature of science (Roberts, *History* 15). According to several influential critics however, it is impossible to test scientific hypotheses in a SF novel in the same way as in a laboratory. Rather, the science again has to be made plausible within the bounds of the story in a cognitive rather than a metaphysical way. All SF thus offers room for thought experiments, as this is the only means of hypothesis testing fiction can offer (Suvin 66; Roberts, *History* 15). The distinction between “Hard” and “Soft” SF is merely a question of emphasis.

2.2.3. SF and social criticism

Whatever its nature, no *novum* can deny a relationship to the world of the reader. Again Suvin specifies:

> [T]he necessary correlate of the novum is an alternate reality, one that possesses a different historical time corresponding to different human relationships and sociocultural norms actualized by the narration. This new reality overtly or tacitly presupposes the existence of the author's empirical reality, since it can be gauged and understood only as the empirical reality modified in such-and-such ways. (Suvin 71)

He then goes on to point out that as a means of estrangement, the *novum* cannot represent a one-to-one allegory of our society (Suvin 71). Rather, the *novum* can be seen as a form of metonymy, which makes one thing stand in for a totality of others (Roberts, Science Fiction 12). For example, it has been said that the Monster in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* stands for the dangers of technological innovation. Roberts sees in the use of the SF *novum* a new form of symbolism, whose symbols are not metaphysical in nature, but always material. Rather than offering abstract poetic metaphors, SF thus “reconfigures symbolism for our materialist age.” (Roberts, *Science Fiction* 18)

If the *novum* can be said to be symbolic of issues in the world of the reader, what follows is a large potential for social criticism. This is a point that is addressed in almost all academic discussions of the genre[8] and therefore counterpoints the popular stereotype of SF as an escapist literature. By presenting the familiar world in a slightly estranged form, SF is a popular vehicle for social satire. Malmgren suggests a division of the kinds of SF *nova* into five groups, according to their thematic functions. He distinguishes between alien encounter SF (expressing questions of self vs. Other), alternate society SF (self vs. society), gadget SF (self vs. technology), alternate world SF (self vs. environment) and science fantasy (addressing questions of epistemology and ontology) (Malmgren 18). It is difficult to apply those criteria since many novels combine several types of *nova* and identifying the primary one can be a challenge. However, Malmgren's categories help to establish a relationship between the *novum* and its thematic concern. Perhaps the most famous science fiction novels that have managed to address an audience outside the genre have done so because of their relevance to the times in which they were written; all of them would be included in Malmgren's “alternate society”- category. Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932), George Orwell's *Nineteen-Eighty-Four* (1949) and Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* (1953) are perhaps the best known examples. While Huxley and Orwell use the futuristic SF environments to ponder future class relations and political regimes, Bradbury envisions a world in which intellectual activity has come to be considered as dangerous. His *novum* is first of all a reversal of the function of firemen, who no longer extinguish fires but set fire to books. The second *novum* introduced is a mechanical hound (a reference to Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Hound of the Baskervilles*), which can be programmed to hunt down and kill its victims. The *novum* in each case serves as a trigger that makes possible a reconsideration of certain social issues. However, even in texts that have not gained popularity outside the genre itself, references to reality and suggestions for its improvement are frequently commonplace. This is illustrated by the sometimes very philosophical definitions of the genre, one of which has been quoted in the previous section. Since it usually involves a change of time and environment, SF can confront a society with its Others.

---

[8] See for example Scholes (ch. one), Amis, Parrinder (*Science Fiction*), Suvin, Roberts (*Science Fiction).*

2.2.4. The confrontation with alterity

Encounters with the Other, both conscious and subconscious, are frequently at the centre of the science fiction narrative. The SF narrative transports its protagonists into another time or to distant planets where they meet alien life forms or strangely evolved human beings who come to represent all that is different in our own society. Questions of race, gender and colonialism are therefore frequently recurring themes in such narratives, according to Roberts (*Science Fiction* 28). He says:

> Specific SF nova are more than just gimmicks, and much more than cliches [sic]: they provide a symbolic grammar for articulating the perspectives or normally marginalized discourses of race, of gender, of non-conformism and alternative ideologies. We might think of this as the progressive or radical potential of science fiction. (Roberts, *Science Fiction* 28)

This is the case not only because of the formal properties of science fiction. The genre has always shown sympathy for the marginalised, as Roberts goes on to point out. Although both fans and authors active in the genre have long been almost exclusively middle class males, showing events from the perspective of the suppressed (e.g. working class, female, black) and offering alternatives can be seen as the recurring mission of many writers. This could have something to do with the fact that both the literary genre and its fans have often been marginalised (Roberts, *Science Fiction* 29). Whatever the case may be, science fiction, due to its status as a literature of cognition and estrangement and the symbolism expressed by the *novum*,

> […] allows the symbolic expression of what it is to be female, black, or otherwise marginalised. SF, by focusing its representation of the world not through reproduction of that world but instead by figuratively symbolising it, is able to foreground precisely the ideological constructions of Otherness. In other words, in societies such as ours where Otherness is often demonised, SF can pierce the constraints of this ideology by circumventing the conventions of traditional fiction. (Roberts, *Science Fiction* 30)

Indeed, the SF *novum has* to be presented as Other in order to fulfil its purpose as an estranging element. Be it technological or environmental in nature, the *novum* as an unfamiliar element always juxtaposes its own alienness with the familiar empirical world of the reader and thus leads to explorations concerning the self in opposition to its Other.

One famous example is H.G. Wells' *The War of the Worlds* (1889) in which the

Martian race is introduced for the first time in the history of science fiction. Although the Martians are depicted as cruel, frightening and despicable, Wells' novel can be read as a tale of subverted colonisation. As it is the convention in SF, Wells uses his narrative for a thought experiment which ponders how it would feel for the then-colonial power Britain to be overrun by a superior and highly evolved culture, thus becoming the subject of colonisation rather than the coloniser. Other narratives dream of humankind colonising distant planets and conquering frontiers which can no longer be found on Earth. Statements about the confrontation with difference therefore can be both conservative and critical (Parrinder, *Science Fiction* 82). Several SF narratives, especially those stemming from the first half of the twentieth century, often include underlying racist tones and are supportive of colonialism. This is clearly visible in the descriptions of aliens, which are either depicted as pure evil or as superior but merciless life forms. In any case, aliens usually look different. At the very least they have a skin colour different to that of humans. Edgar Rice Burroughs in his *Martian Chronicles* (started in 1912) differentiates between red and green Martians, the former of which are comparatively noble, whereas the latter are literally the archetype of the barbaric “green men” (Roberts, *Science Fiction* 71). Other narratives, especially those found in “New Wave” SF (discussed below in section 2.3.3.), challenge those discourses. Ursula Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness*, which challenges gender roles and makes the single human in the story its alien, has already been mentioned. Yet the Other need not always be akin to humans in its physiological description. Stanislaw Lem's novel *Solaris* (1970), in confronting its main protagonists with a mysterious intelligent ocean covering an entire planet, addresses the boundaries of human understanding as well as the futility of colonisation. Of course, motifs like robots and artificial intelligence also represent a form of Other which can bear a relation to contemporary society.

Named above are a number of texts that have experimented with representing different forms of alterity. In all those novels, alien life-forms can be said to bear some kind of relation to the world of the reader. However, like the famous bug-eyed monsters, many of science fiction's tropes have been used and re-used many times over the years, thus ridding themselves of much of their symbolism. This strong intertextual tradition will be discussed in the next section.

2.2.5. Intertextuality

> Superman is a submyth. His father was Nietzsche and his mother was a funnybook, and he is alive and well in the mind of every ten-year-old – and millions of others. Other science fictional submyths are the blond heroes of sword and sorcery, with their unusual weapons; insane or self-deifying computers; mad scientists; benevolent dictators; detectives who find out who done it; capitalists who buy and sell galaxies; brave starship captains and/or troopers; evil aliens; good aliens; and every pointy-breasted brainless young woman who was ever rescued from monsters, lectured to, patronised, or, in recent years, raped, by one of the aforementioned heroes. (Le Guin qtd. in Parrinder, *Science Fiction* 58)

Ursula Le Guin here humorously refers to the underside of the SF *novum*, that is, its frequent degeneration into convention and cliché. Although the *novum* can be used as a means of social criticism, as has been pointed out in the previous section, in a large portion of SF texts this is not the case. LeGuin provides a list of motifs stereotypically used in science fiction and indeed these are the elements of which most SF narratives are constituted. Not only certain kinds of plot development and characterisation (or the lack thereof) can be seen as well established conventions in popular SF, but also many of the previously subversive innovations have been repeated into non-signification.

However, this again is not a defining feature of science fiction as such but can rather be seen as a sign of its high popularity. Repetition of established formulae and tropes is often used to please the readership and its assumed hunger for exoticism and sensation. “Formulaic characters and plots like these occur *in* science fiction; but they are not characteristic *of* science fiction as opposed to other genres” Parrinder (*Science Fiction* 59) again defends the genre.

What *can* be seen as a defining feature of the genre, however, is a high degree of self-awareness and an unusually well developed intertextual tradition. This can again be ascribed to the ghettoised nature of the SF genre on the one hand, but on the other hand also to the premises on which the genre is based. Since so many narratives deal with scientific innovation, space travel or jumps in time, reusing old *nova* is simply a matter of convenience. Due to the status of SF fandom as a sub-culture, it is safe to assume for authors that readers will be aware of *nova* introduced by previous texts. Hence, authors do not have to explain established devices for faster-than-light-travel, for example. Stockwell points out that the conception of what SF is strongly depends on how many SF texts individual readers have read. He proves this theory in an experiment in which he has students indicate their degree of experience with science fiction and then lets them categorise a list of text as SF or not-SF. The more science fiction an individual has read, the more texts from the list he or she will categorise as SF. Since there is no clearly established canon of SF texts, based on the language and conventions used in the genre as well as different reading experiences, different readers will also offer different definitions of the genre as such. This may be one way of accounting for the various different definitions in circulation (Stockwell 6-7). Very often, newer SF texts also pay homage to their predecessors by mentioning certain authors and their work in their new stories. Therefore, “[t]he SF text is both about its professed subject and also, always, *about SF.”* (Roberts, *Science Fiction* 89)

For example H.G. Wells in his *War of the Worlds* created the image of the archetypal Martian which has been developed and improved upon in science fiction all through the twentieth century. Many writers do not attempt to envision a new form of Martian, but rely on Wells' powerful model as a source, which should also be familiar to most SF readers. Those authors who do invent new types of Martian are also frequently aware of their roots and mention the “master” in their tales. For example, Robert Heinlein in his novel *Stranger in a Strange Land* (1961) introduces a main character who has grown up on Mars. He represents a novelty on Earth and one character discussing him asks another: “Are you familiar with the classics? Ever read H.G. Wells' *The War of the Worlds*?” (Heinlein 28) This shows a high awareness of the conventions of the genre while at the same time paying homage to an influential figure within it. However, such references also serve to create an air of authenticity upon which science fiction narratives depend so heavily. While Wells' book is rightly classified as fiction, Heinlein's tale is represented as “the real thing” via a reference to previous fiction, which includes nothing like the Martian customs described in the novel.

Arthur C. Clarke, a science fiction author who has gained fame due to his influence on actual science, frequently incorporates references to the science fiction genre into his narratives in order to set them apart from fiction and make them more believable. In his novel *Childhood's End* (first published 1953), in which the world is conquered and ruled by the alien Overlords, the narrator exclaims: “Countless times this day had been described in fiction, but no one had really believed that it would ever come.” (Clarke 10). Several pages later a wild theory about the origin of the Overlords is self-consciously dismissed by one of the characters: “'You,' said Stromgren, 'have been reading too much science fiction.'” (Clarke 17) Statements such as these are not only claims to authenticity, but also serve as inside jokes which habitual readers of science fiction will immediately recognise as such.

These are techniques that rely on the genre-consciousness of the reader explicitly. However, usually such knowledge on the part of readers is also assumed implicitly. As has already been mentioned, many *nova* are recurring so frequently in SF novels that it is sometimes impossible to tell which author invented them first. Examples of this, which will be mentioned in subsequent chapters, are for example faster-than-light travel or translation machines. Thus, the scientific environment of SF over the years has become increasingly detailed and elaborate due to its dense net of intertextual references to previously used tropes and *nova*.

While intertextuality thus clearly serves to enrich the imaginative SF universe, it can also account for lack of real innovation in numerous texts of the genre, which rely heavily on established tropes, as well as formulaic plots, characters and stylistic devices. A genre with such clearly defined boundaries and a restricted set of recurring themes is of course a ready target for genre parodies such as Douglas Adams's *Hitchhiker* novels. To gain a better understanding of SF both as an intertextual genre and a target for parody, it is necessary to briefly sketch out its historical development.

2.3. A short history of science fiction

Due to the limited space of this chapter, it is impossible even to give a half-complete history of science fiction. Entire books have been written on the subject, all of considerable length and taking various viewpoints[9]. It is impossible even to sum up previous findings in this short section. It will merely be attempted to represent some of the significant periods in the development of SF and introduce some thematic and stylistic characteristics of their representative texts. It is necessary to do this because of the high degree of self-consciousness and the frequency of intertextual reference in the genre. As parody itself is a form of intertextuality, it will sometimes be useful in the remainder of this paper to make reference to some specific developments in the history of SF. Furthermore, as this is a paper in English literature, the focus will be on Anglo-American SF.

The point at which science fiction was born is highly disputed within criticism of the genre. Whereas some critics see its roots in the tale of Gilgamesh or the literature of the Ancient Greeks, some position them in the time of the industrial revolution or the Gothic novel. Depending on which definition of science fiction is used, the range of representative texts will become broader or narrower.

---

[9] See for example Aldiss and Roberts (*History*), which are both very comprehensive histories of the genre. Suvin also offers a critical history of SF in his study *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*.

All histories of the genre give credit to the fact that there have been narratives very much like science fiction since ancient times. The Ancient Greeks had their protagonists travel to the moon and later this became a commonplace theme in literature; especially in utopian and satirical writing. Fantastic environments offer an ideal environment for the kind of estrangement that critical forms like satire and parody need to unfold their potential.[10] However, such narratives produced before the 19th century are often not regarded as science fiction due to the frequent occurrence of metaphysical or religious elements in them. Roberts however, does discuss those narratives as part of the SF-genre. For him, SF came into existence as the expression of a Copernican world view and the rise of Protestantism, which is centred around material premises as opposed to Catholicism, which concerns itself more with the supernatural (Roberts, *History* 341). Several other critics see SF as a product of the Enlightenment, in which, to simplify dramatically, reason gradually overtook religion as the ruling paradigm and made a materialist literature such as SF possible.

Aldiss sees the origin of the genre in the Gothic novel, more precisely, in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818). His is a hugely influential theory and indeed, most critics agree that *Frankenstein* was the first novel which incorporated all defining features of SF. Although the novel has been described as a reworking of Milton's *Paradise Lost* and is filled with a sense of wonder and glimpses of the Sublime, there is no supernatural god-figure in the novel. The action is exclusively based on (imaginary) scientific premises set in a realistic environment. In Shelley's novel, humankind has the potential for god-like creation. The terror in the novel always originates in humanity's own actions (Aldiss 26). Another writer of Gothic-fiction, though based in America, who has frequently been named the “founding father” of SF, is Edgar Allan Poe. He may not have written much SF, but established the sober tone that is still so prevalent in many SF narratives today. His terror too is usually rooted in the human mind rather than the supernatural (Aldiss 44).

Shelley's novel accompanies the Industrial Revolution, which, according to Broderick supposedly marks the beginning of the genre (Broderick qtd. in Roberts, *History* 1). The world was changed rapidly by the Industrial Revolution, which was accompanied both by a change in lifestyle as well as an increase either in enthusiasm for, or fear of, technological innovation. The main representatives of SF in the nineteenth century were Jules Verne and H.G. Wells, both variously named “the founding fathers of SF”. What they wrote was not science fiction in the contemporary sense of the word, but is usually called “scientific romance”, as it added a scientific element to the conventional adventure story. Verne is most famous for his *voyages extraordinaires*, which are adventure stories, but all deal with science fictional premises and technological innovations which are described in painstaking detail in order to match contemporary scientific findings. In contrast to Verne, who preceded him one generation, H.G. Wells used the science fictional *nova* not as props for his adventure stories, but as speculations about the future state of society. He was strongly influenced by Darwin as well as Marx, and several of his novels (such as *The Time Machine*, discussed above) fictionally develop their respective theories further. Today it is Wells rather than Verne who is seen as a great influence on SF as a whole (see Roberts, *History* ch. 7). Not only did he create some of the most enduring motifs of the genre, he also established most of its contemporary functions, that is, social criticism, the confrontation with alterity, extrapolation and even prediction, although he merely regarded his stories as imaginative thought experiments.[11]

---

[10] See Roberts, *History*, chapters 2 and 3 for a more detailed discussion of SF within these periods.

In the first half of the twentieth century, SF was primarily seen as the domain of the Pulps, that is, cheaply produced magazines most readers could afford, as opposed to books. Paperback SF only came to prominence in the 1950s. In this time science fiction also received the name under which the genre is still known. Hugo Gernsback, editor of *Amazing Stories*, one of the first SF magazines, coined the term “scientifiction” in order to refer to the stories published in his magazine (Parrinder, *Science Fiction* 14). Gernsback is another figure likely to be referred to as “the founding father of SF” by some groups within genre criticism. However, his role and reputation are rather controversial. It was him who helped “Hard SF” to become the prominent form within the genre for many years. In his editorials he frequently underlined the strict scientific element in the stories certified by him and also insisted on them having a didactic purpose. Although this supposed didacticism and predictive quality of SF was essentially a new element, Gernsback's ideas came to be very influential (Roberts, *History* 175-176). It was also him who named Poe, Verne and Wells as the predecessors of SF and thus established a “direct and acknowledged continuity between twentieth-century SF and the nineteenth-century tradition of the 'scientific romance'” (Parrinder, *Science Fiction* 2).

The 1940s and 1950s are frequently regarded as the “Golden Age” of science fiction and many authors from that period are still fondly remembered today. Roberts points out however, that the term “Golden Age” is of course not to be taken as a value-free description. According to him, the term was “[c]oined by a partisan Fandom, the phrase valorises a particular sort of writing: 'Hard SF', linear narratives, heroes solving problems or countering threats in a space-opera[12] or technological-adventure idiom” (Roberts, *History* 195). Which authors are seen to be most representative is as much a matter of dispute as is the relevance of the time period. Bloom in his book dedicated to “Golden Age”- writers names Arthur C. Clarke, Ray Bradbury and Fritz Leiber (Bloom 1995), whereas Roberts dedicates significantly more space to Isaac Asimov and Robert Heinlein (See Roberts, *History* ch. 10). The Golden Age is important also insofar as, despite its importance, it was by far not as productive as the SF scene today. Thus, SF “had a greater degree of coherence. It referred to a particular body of texts that were, specifically, founded in science and the extrapolation of science into the future.” (Roberts, *Science Fiction* 31)

---

[11] Wells famously predicted the atomic bomb in his text *The Interpretation of Radium* (1908) (see Roberts, *Hictory* 151).

The 1960s and 70s saw a rebellion against the established conventions of “Golden Age” SF, which was expressed in the so-called “New Wave”. Its main trademark was that it “reacted against the conventions traditional SF to produce avant-garde, radical or fractured science fictions” (Roberts, *History* 230-31). In other words, the New Wave put a new focus on style rather than narrative and tried to incorporate more obviously philosophical or critical ideas into the stories (Roberts, *History* 130-31). Representative texts are for example Robert Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land* (1961), Frank Herbert's *Dune* (1965) or Ursula LeGuin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969). If Golden Age SF can be said to represent the period of realism, with the New Wave modernism and postmodernism finally caught up with the genre. The most frequently discussed producer of the last kind in academia is perhaps Philip K. Dick.

The New Wave seems to have represented the last memorable turn in the history of literary science fiction and is also the period in which Douglas Adams produced his parodic radio series. What can be seen in the past few decades, according to Roberts, is a shift away from SF as a literary art form and towards its heightened popularity in other media. The SF film seems to be the most successful medium at the moment, although SF is also a popular mode for video games and graphic novels (Roberts, *History* 343). As regards our topic, Douglas Adams is by now mentioned with increasing frequency in histories and discussions of SF. Especially the influence the radio show had in the late 1970s is by now commonly acknowledged in academia. The next chapter will thus try to establish a connection between Adams' parody and the science fiction-genre.

---

[12] Space opera, according to Clute and Nicholls' *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, was based on terminology like soap opera and horse opera (Westerns) and “extended into sf terminology by Wilson T[ucker] in 1941, who proposed 'space opera' as the appropriate term for the 'hacky, grinding, stinking, outworn spaceship yarn'. It soon came to be applied instead to colourful action-adventure stories of interplanetary or interstellar conflict.” (Clute and Nicholls 1138)

3. The *Hitchhiker* series as genre parody

> It is important to emphasise that *Hitchhiker's Guide* is no way a spoof or parody of sci-fi, it is humorous science fiction which does what all good science fiction is supposed to do – explores the human condition and man's place in the universe – but does it with humour. (Simpson 95)

The present paper tends to disagree with this statement for obvious reasons. Under close scrutiny of the text it becomes evident that Douglas Adams subverts and distorts the classical tropes of science fiction at every turn. From his subversion of the typical SF plot and his antiheroes, his joyful celebration of apocalypses, paranoid androids and bug-eyed monsters right down to the most microscopic level of word coinage, the *Hitchhiker* novels include science fiction parody galore and it is the aim of this chapter to unmask this parody. It is important to note, however, that the *Hitchhiker* novels will not be dealt with at great length as parodying specifically existing SF texts. That they do not, with the exception of two or three instances of direct text parody, which will be discussed at a later point in the chapter. Rather, they parody the *discourse* of science fiction, its linguistic, narrative and thematic conventions, with which the chapter will therefore deal separately.

A notable aspect of the *Hitchhiker*-series is that it is *not* text parody, but genre parody and one notable aspect of genre parody is that it is not dependent on one specific text but solely on the conventions of a genre exemplified to a stronger or lesser extent by *all* of its texts. Since parody, as we have learned in chapter one, is double-coded and depends more strongly on the reader than most other literary forms, one of the text's encodings can simply be ignored by the reader. In the case of science fiction parody therefore, it is possible to read the novel both as a parody of the genre as well as one of its representative texts. It is therefore very well possible for Adams' novels to “explor[e] the human condition and man's place in the universe” while simultaneously laughing at it. How this is done will be analysed shortly, but first it may be useful to locate the *Hitchhiker* novels in their own historical context.

3.1. The **Hitchhiker's Guide** *and the science fiction field*

> For those who preferred their science fiction straight, Adams's book was a tough pill to swallow, for it refused, at least on the surface, to take either itself or its readers seriously. It was almost as if Adams were saying: “Look, science fiction is the biggest literary scam since the penny-dreadfuls. Ray Bradbury and Isaac Asimov may come across as latter-day literary saints, but they know as well as any true fan that it's all hokum but who cares? It's fairy tales for grownups with twice the malarky and half the depth.” (Whissen 113)

Adams' satire on SF may not be as biting as is portrayed here, but Whissen does have a point. In the Golden Age of Science Fiction, authors and fans became increasingly self-conscious regarding their genre and its supposed prophetic qualities were not only promoted by editors of pulp magazines, but also increasingly by critics and writers. Much of SF was preoccupied with offering new political and scientific models for the future, which reached its peak when the hippie-community of the 1960s made Robert Heinlein's science fiction novel *Stranger in a Strange Land* the basis of a cult celebrating free love and anarchy. Although the work seems clearly dated now, it obviously touched the nerve of its time (Roberts, *Science Fiction* 82).

Adams too seems to have contributed the right novel at the right time, as Whissen continues to point out. Kingsley Amis, quoted in the introduction, certainly was not alone in his yearning for more humour in the genre. Other writers were impatient with the genre's stiff conventions and pseudo-gravity and tried to establish it as a more literary category, a movement identified above as the New Wave of SF.

Adams' books certainly are not part of the New Wave in the traditional sense. As Whissen has pointed out, they clearly refuse to take themselves or their genre seriously; nor do they claim any literary value apart from that of treating the reader to a good laugh. Nevertheless, the *Hitchhiker* novels were incredibly popular with science fiction readers. Webb notes one incident of SF fans queuing in front of a science fiction store to attend a book signing by Adams. Legend has it that the queue was so long Adams himself was held off in traffic and was late for his own signing (Webb 146). Positive reactions seemed to clearly outweigh negative feedback, at least on the part of the SF community. So Adams' book was not so much “a tough pill to swallow” as an expression of appetite on the part of the readership for a more light-hearted approach to the genre.

Furthermore, as we have learned in chapter one, parody can fulfil various different functions. It can be, and in most instances is, critical of its target. However, parody can also pay homage to its source and help renegotiate boundaries that are felt to be too tight. While too much parody can be lethal for a certain literary mode (as it was with the melodrama in the 19th century), it can help create, promote and broaden literary genres. Adams' success clearly prepared the way for more “funny SF and fantasy” into the mainstream.[13]

Another supporting element at the time might have been the massive success of the first *Star Wars* film (1977). Simpson notes:

> *Star Wars* opened in the United States in May 1977. The excitement it generated for anything with a robot, spaceship or alien in it built up in the UK until the film opened in London at the end of December, and across the country in January 1978. *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* started less than six weeks later. The timing was opportune. (Simpson 95)

Star Wars, according to the science fiction website sfreview.net[14], firstly popularised the space opera genre and secondly successfully introduced some humorous elements into the science fiction plot. The humour may be different to that used by Adams, but it clearly showed a larger audience that humour could be integrated into a science fiction plot and contribute to the overall enjoyment of the story. The proof lies in the fact that Star Wars was to become one of the most successful SF films of all time.

Star Wars itself is often regarded as fantasy rather than pure science fiction, as it includes several metaphysical elements (such as “the force”) that were not satisfactorily explained within the scientific framework of the film's universe. It thus vaguely fits the fairy tale category. Concerning SF being “fairy tales for grownups with twice the malarky and half the depth” however, the *Hitchhiker*- series is positively acknowledged to have at least three times the malarky of regular SF, let alone fairy tales. As for the depth, opinions tend to differ. Adams has, as will be shown in the remainder of this chapter, taken up and subverted the conventions of science fiction on every possible level. Still, one of his novels' advantages is that they are *not* spoofs of just one particular text. Hence, Adams has been able to create his own science fictional world with its own microcosm and internal logic, as absurd as this universe may be. This is an important feature of much of “serious” science fiction and it is therefore possible for readers to read Adams' books as both funny if particularly eccentric science fiction novels as well as parodies of the genre.

---

[13] Terry Pratchett's success in the 1990s for example, is partly seen as a result of this development (Webb 289).

[14] See <http://www.sfreviews.net/hhguide.html>.

3.2. Parody regarding the text as a whole

This part of the chapter will be concerned with aspects of Adams' genre parody that can be found throughout the entire *Hitchhiker* series and that can therefore be said to determine the structure of the novels. This includes narrative perspectives, plot structure, characterisation and themes. All five novels make use of the same narrative style and the characters too remain constant, although some of them disappear in the last two novels. Adams' parodies of the traditional narrative techniques of SF serve to lay down the thematic and especially the ideological focus of his work to which other episodic instances of parody can be related. Form, in the *Hitchhiker* novels, reflects content and it is therefore vital to discuss the two separately.

3.2.1. "There was a point to this story, but it has temporarily escaped the chronicler's mind": narrative situation(s)

Suerbaum, Broich and Borgmeier argue that there are three major narrative techniques most prominently employed in science fiction. All of those also exist in mainstream fiction, but certain tendencies to use some more than others can be observed in SF. The three narrative situations, according to Stanzel's (4-5) model, are the authorial narrative situation, the figural narrative situation and first person narration. Of these, the figural and first person narrative situation dominate the majority of texts, as they focalise the action through the eyes of a character and can thus introduce the reader to the SF universe step by step. Furthermore, science fiction often shows a liking of quotation and reference, which is why "the book within the book" is a frequently occurring narrative device as well (Suerbaum, Broich, and Borgmeier 138-145).

Adams, to a certain extent, employs all of those narrative situations at given points in his novels. However, they are not always used in their traditional way but often subverted, creating exactly the opposite effect than what would normally be expected.

3.2.1.1. The self-conscious narrator

Above all action in the *Hitchhiker*- novels thrones an all-powerful, extremely outspoken omniscient narrator who can at no point be ignored. The major narrative situation in the novels can therefore unmistakably be identified as authorial. All novels start with a lengthy authorial introduction and the action is often interrupted by narratorial interludes and comments that digress from the main narrative, either to contribute to the creation of suspense or – quite to the contrary – to disrupt aesthetic illusion.

Suerbaum, Broich, and Borgmeier see the main advantage of employing an omniscient narrator in SF in the fact that such a narrator can provide background information at will and thus makes it fairly easy for the reader to enter the science fictional universe. However, it is also the most distant narrative situation that can be used and thus makes the familiarisation of the estranged, which always has to take place in science fiction, increasingly difficult. Hence, authorial narrative situations are not as common in SF as might be expected. If they do occur, they usually are employed in stories striving to evoke the illusion of an oral narrative or a chronicle of ancient events (Suerbaum, Broich, and Borgmeier 138). The purpose of such a narrator is to establish what is told as a chronicle handed down from generation to generation which first of all establishes it as a potentially true story as well as adding mythic qualities to the narrative.

Indeed, Adams' novel starts on a monumental note, like many chapters in his novels, for that matter. Like a chronicle or a fairy tale, it begins with a potentially epic exposition:

> *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-eight 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.* (5)

Soon it becomes clear that this is not a stereotypical narrator emulating an oral style of narration. All of the most important ingredients of Adams' narration are evident from this very first passage onwards. First of all, the slightly sardonic tone of narration is one of its most defining features. This omniscient narrator does not even pretend to be objective. He[15] freely evaluates every part of the story and is highly partial, as is indicated by his rather indifferent treatment of the planet Earth as well as its human population (see Antor 178; Van der Colff, “Douglas Adams” 92). Partiality is perhaps the most significant and also the most amusing aspect of the narrator, as it is a device that strengthens parody. Apart from that, the narrator also seizes every opportunity to demonstrate his power over the narrative. Sometimes towering over planets and even the whole galaxy, sometimes entering the minds of even the most minor characters, often digressing from the narrative and offering background knowledge that is encyclopaedic in scale, the narrator is in full control of the science fictional universe. Furthermore, the narrator also comments on narrative technique, illustrating the workings of suspense or his choice of background music,[16] most prominently in *So Long and Thanks For All the Fish*, where he famously explains: “There was a point to this story, but it has temporarily escaped the chronicler's mind” (611). The narrator is therefore omniscient, but unreliable at the same time. He clearly demonstrates the power to withhold information and advises the reader to make sense of the story by him- or herself.

---

[15] The narrator in this paper is considered as male, as the radio play, the television series, as well as the film use a male narrative voice which remains consistent throughout all incarnations of the franchise.

More precisely, the narrator of the *Hitchhiker* novels can be identified as a self-conscious narrator. Imhof identifies the self-conscious narrator as a characteristic ingredient of metafiction. The narrator is self-conscious, because he does not only comment freely on the events occurring on the story level, but also on his own craft – the act of narration itself (Imhof 36). As parody is seen as a tool of metareferentiality by postmodern critics in any case, such a narrator seems to be perfectly suitable to a parody of science fiction. Imhof specifies that the function of the self-conscious narrator is “chiefly to call attention, through a prodigious number of artistic strategies, to the artificiality of the text at hand; his main concern is always to make the reader realise: 'Well, this is fiction, is it not?'” (Imhof 37) While this is certainly true in many cases of narratorial interruption in Adams' fiction, it would be a mistake to reduce the role of the narrator solely to the function of exposing narrative artifice. Digressions and comments can serve both to uphold as well as withdraw aesthetic illusion and Adams' narrator demonstrates both these powers in the course of the narrative. On the one hand, such techniques can help create suspense by interrupting and delaying the main narrative, thus immersing the reader even more into the story. On the other hand, narratorial self-consciousness stresses the act of story telling itself and can potentially disrupt aesthetic illusion by exposing the artificiality of the text.

Leaving aside the argument about a parody's metafictional properties, it can clearly be said that a self-conscious narrator is a powerful tool that ideally serves the playful and critical purpose of parody. The narrator's sardonic and unpredictable nature as well as his partiality remove him even further from the reader than his omniscience alone could allow. To relate those properties more clearly to the science fiction narrative: such a narrator does not contribute to the familiarisation of the strange. On the contrary, due to his aloofness, he estranges a familiar mode of narration as well as the reader's familiar environment. This is most clearly visible in the narrator's description of the planet Earth quoted above. A very prominent self-conscious narrator can force a parodic viewpoint upon the reader and prompt him or her to view his or her own familiar environment from a new and comic viewpoint. Such a narrator can also offer new insights into things that have previously been taken to be commonplace. How this is done is very much a matter of the perspective chosen by the author, a factor which will be discussed in the following section.

---

[16] See section 3.2.2.

3.2.1.2. Perspective

In the *Hitchhiker* novels the perspective the narrator takes varies greatly. Sometimes the narrator mercilessly hovers above the setting and seems himself universal in scale, sometimes he steps back and completely leaves the act of narration to the characters' dialogue or even internal monologues.

The possibility of being able to employ varying perspectives is one of the major advantages of an omniscient narrator. By positioning himself outside the story, he can give a complete overview and explain new elements in the plot from a detached perspective, whereas focalising parts of the story through one of the characters provides a means of identification for the reader which makes it possible for him or her to relate what is told to his or her familiar environment. According to Suerbaum, Broich and Borgmeier, authors of science fiction usually choose to have their narrator follow one of the protagonists and often step back entirely to have the reader watch the new environment that has been created through the character's eyes. This is again due to the familiarisation of the strange that has to take place in order to allow immersion. A truly omniscient narrator would create too great a distance between author and reader and thus would make the narration unbelievable or hard to follow (Suerbaum, Broich, and Borgmeier 140).

Another technique often employed by science fictional narrators is to narrow down the perspective step-by-step in order to arrive at the actual setting of the narrative while at the same time placing it in a monumental context. For example, Robert Heinlein in

Stranger in a Strange Land begins most of his chapters with a summary of events occurring both on Earth and on Mars and gradually arrives at the occupation of his major characters at the specific moment in the story. Adams employs the same technique fairly frequently. His expositions usually start with reflections on the scale of the universe and the galaxy or discussions of other alien races and their societies until they finally arrive at the main narrative, which is usually focalised through a major character, most frequently Arthur Dent. Often, those expositions also take on the form of a parody of exactly this kind of SF exposition:

> “Space,” [*The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*] *says*, “is big. You just won't believe how vastly hugely mind-boggingly big it is. I mean, you may think it's a long way down the road to the chemist, but that's just peanuts to space. Listen...”
> *and so on.*
> *(After a while the style settles down a bit and begins to tell you things you really need to know, like the fact that the fabulously beautiful planet Bethselamin is now so worried about the cumulative erosion by then million visiting tourists a year that any net imbalance between the amount you eat and the amount you excrete while on the planet is surgically removed from your body weight when you leave: so every time you go to the lavatory there it is vitally important to get a receipt.)*(53)

This exposition makes fun of other similar expositions in science fiction that first of all have to illustrate the vastness of space in order to create a suitable atmosphere for the epic tale that is about to be told. It is a parody because the exposition in this case is not narrated from a detached external perspective. The reader is even addressed personally and invited to compare the vastness of the universe to the way down to the chemist. It also includes a comment on the sensational style that is usually employed in such expositions. However, the narrator then does not resume the main narrative centred around Arthur Dent and Ford Prefect; he digresses from the narrative by relating a humorous anecdote about tourism on a distant planet that is absolutely irrelevant to the commencement of the main plot. It can be seen as just another demonstration of the narrator's omniscience.

Another sign of the narrator flexing his muscles is the varying focalisation through characters in the *Hitchhiker* novels. As has already been mentioned, focalising the narrative through a main character fulfils a purpose, namely making the new environment familiar to the reader. However, there are instances of focalisation through characters in *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* that have exactly the opposite effect and rather serve to alienate the reader while again offering an unconventional viewpoint on things that are taken for granted. The narrator of the *Hitchhiker's Guide* clearly has the power to slip into the minds of even the most minor characters, even if those personae do not represent intelligent beings or even characters in the strictest sense of the word. One famous example of exaggerated insight is the scene in which a sperm whale and a bowl of petunias are surprisingly called into existence in mid-flight over the legendary planet of Magrathea. The narrator makes a point to sympathetically record every thought the two beings have in their short lifespan before they eventually hit the ground. Especially much attention is paid to the whale's thoughts:

> 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?
> Calm down, get a grip now....oh! this is an interesting sensation, what is it? It's a sort of... yawning, tingling sensation in my...my...well, I suppose I'd better start finding names for things if I want to make any headway in what for the sake of what I shall call an argument I shall call the world, so let's call it my stomach.
> Good. Ooooh, it's getting quite strong. And hey, what about this whistling roaring sound going past what I'm suddenly going to call my head? 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. It must be something very important because there certainly seems to be a hell of a lot of it. Hey! What's this thing? This...let's call it a tail – yeah, tail. Hey! I can thrash it about pretty good, can't I? Wow! Wow! That feels great! Doesn't seem to achieve very much but I'll probably find out what it's for later on. Now, have I built up any coherent picture of things yet?
> No.
> Never mind, hey, this is really exciting, so much to find out about, so much to look forward to, I'm quite dizzy with anticipation.
> Or is it the wind?
> There really is a lot of that now, isn't there?
> And wow! Hey! What's this thing suddenly coming toward me very fast? Very, very fast. So big and flat and round, it needs a big wide-sounding name like...ow...ound...round...ground! That's it! That's a good name – ground!
> I wonder if it will be friends with me? (90-91)

Here the narrator completely steps back and represents the thoughts of the whale in direct discourse, without even using quotation marks to signal narratorial presence. The life and death of the whale, which is essentially a plot vehicle and a side-effect of the Infinite Improbability Drive, is showered with attention. Ironically, direct discourse is the closest a narrator can get into a character's mind, but it is only employed for representing the thoughts of the whale, hardly ever those of a protagonist. Reader expectations are subverted by granting a very minor character, who is not even a character to speak of, so much space and insight. The reader is bound to sympathise with the whale trying to grasp its short existence. This is the case, first of all, because animals' thoughts are not usually represented in a novel that takes itself seriously and secondly, because readers would expect a character whose existence is solely a device to drive the plot forward to be ignored by the narrator after it has fulfilled its purpose. The pathos with which it is treated certainly comes as a surprise. The passage is also another illustration of the narrator's power and arbitrariness. He demonstrates that he can call a whale into existence and even slip into its mind without having to offer an explanation. The passage continues as follows:

> Curiously enough, the only thing that went through the mind of the bowl of petunias as it fell was Oh no, not again. Many people have speculated that if we knew exactly why the bowl of petunias had thought that we would know a lot more about the nature of the Universe than we do now. (91)

Again no quotation marks are used for the comparatively short internal monologue of the bowl of petunias. This is an even more extreme example for a minor “character” gaining undeserved prominence. The narrator clearly shows that this is a universe in which bowls of petunias have significant thoughts that need to be related and thus reverses reader expectations of what should constitute a convincing narrative and its focus. Ironically, the bowl of petunias fulfils a much more significant role in the story than the whale. In *Life, the Universe and Everything*, Arthur encounters an unhappy creature named Agrajag, who claims to have died and reincarnated several times, each time having been killed anew by an inattentive Arthur Dent. As a result, Agrajag is set on taking revenge. It is revealed that one of his incarnations was that of a bowl of petunias called into existence above the planet of Magrathea (ch. 16). Finally, the thoughts of the bowl of petunias can be decoded and it turns out that not only did they foreshadow Agrajag's existence, they also proved the existence of reincarnation in Adams' fictional universe.

The narrator thus also serves to parody established forms of perspective that readers might expect in science fiction narratives. Perspective varies throughout the novels, but often serves to highlight the peculiar rather than the familiar.

3.2.1.3. The book within the book

If even more background information is required which needs to be narrated credibly, authors often employ the narrative tool of the book within the book that can serve as a kind of frame or core narrative or can be inserted episodically. The purpose of such reference and quotation is to make what is narrated appear plausible to the reader and uphold the illusion of scientific accuracy (Suerbaum, Broich, and Borgmeier 143). The most famous example of this in Golden Age science fiction is perhaps the "Encyclopedia Galactica" which fills out certain gaps in and is indeed the main object of the story of Isaac Asimov's *Foundation*-novels (1951 onwards). Frank Herbert in his monumental SF novel *Dune* (1965) attaches to the main narrative a detailed appendix providing additional information about the world of the novel, all quoted from imaginary reference works. Sometimes also, footnotes explaining background information are provided to uphold the illusion of a text dedicated to scientific fact rather than fantasy.

As the imaginary reference works are often presented as encyclopaedias or historical chronicles, they are usually written in an even more disinterested, sober and scientific style than the rest of the narrative. This state of affairs has been parodied before Adams' novels came into being. Kurt Vonnegut[17] in *The Sirens of Titan* (1959), for example, frequently quotes from the imaginary "Child's Cyclopedia of Wonders and Things to Do", which of course replaces the scientific style with a child-like discourse, explaining the most complex concepts in the most straightforward of terms. Douglas Adams takes this one step further. He invents a huge variety of imaginary reference works, some of which would not be expected to be found in a science fiction novel. The narrator quotes freely from travel guides, encyclopaedias and dictionaries of alien languages every time a point needs to be proven. The styles of these range from scientific to mock-scientific to colloquial. For example, the narrator frequently quotes from Asimov's "Encyclopedia Galactica", but heavily alters the style in which it was originally written, only maintaining the name of the book. In general, Adams is famous for combining a colloquial style with seemingly heavy scientific material. Often quotations from reference sources do not serve to drive the plot forward, but to digress from it. Also the footnotes that Adams sometimes employs usually have a digressive effect that shows off the knowledge of the omniscient narrator rather than fulfilling any other purpose in the story. One is reminded of the convention of "learned wit", which has been employed in parody at least since Laurence Sterne's *TristramShandy* (1759-1767) and serves to underline the playful character of the work, celebrating the power of the narrator (Imhof 177). Imaginary intertexts thus are characteristic features of both science fiction and parody texts, but they clearly fulfil opposing functions in each mode. In Adams' novels they are used both in a progressive as well as in a digressive fashion; their form, content and style, however, are always unconventional.

---

[17] Vonnegut was one of Adams' favourite writers (Adams, *The Salmon of Doub*t 63) and is one of the only SF writers who can clearly be identified as one of his influences.

The most important book within the book in the *Hitchhiker* novels is of course "The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy", after which the first novel is named and which is often not only a device to drive the plot forward and provide additional information, but also the main subject of the plot itself. In *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* it is pointed out directly that it is not only the story of the destruction of Earth and the adventures of a number of characters but that "*[i]t is also the story of a book, a book called* The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy" (5). The "Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy" is frequently described by the narrator as "*the standard repository of all knowledge and wisdom in the Universe"* (6) and it is stressed that it has quickly become more successful than the "Encyclopedia Galactica", because first of all "*it is slightly cheaper; and second, it has the words DON'T PANIC inscribed in large friendly letters on its cover.*" (6) So what distinguishes the *Hitchhiker's Guide* from previous written documents of knowledge is also the fact that it treats its readers gently and provides advice, which the classical encyclopaedic text of course does not do.

It is important to stress that "The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy" is indeed a travel guide, based, in Adams' (Introduction vi) own words, on a guidebook called *The Hitchhiker's Guide to Europe* by an Australian writer named Ken Welsh (Webb 59-60). It is not the purpose of a travel guide to be objective and weigh up different possibilities. Readers read travel guides because they seek information as well as recommendations suitable to their requirements or budgets. See for example this extract from the *Lonely Planet* travel guide to Scotland:

> There's something for all tastes, from sophisticated cities, fine food and malt whisky to wild mountain scenery and sparkling, island-studded seas. Wildlife watchers will find otters, eagles, whales and dolphins, while hill walkers have almost 300 Munros to bag. There's turbulent history and fascinating genealogy, castles and country pubs, canoeing and caber-tossing, golfing and fishing and all-round good *craig* (lively conversation). (Wilson and Murphy 16)

The style is enthusiastic, lively and entertaining; the reader is addressed compassionately and adjectives are not used sparingly as its main purpose is to appeal to readers and interest them in particular aspects of the country so that their holiday will be enjoyable. It is the purpose of a travel guide to make a given environment appear interesting and in part exotic. If a travel guide were objective, disinterested and scientific, it would completely miss its purpose. The “Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy” then, is used in the same way as an encyclopaedia, but *written* in the manner of a travel guide:

> [Golgafrincham] is a planet with an ancient and mysterious history, rich in legend, red, and occasionally green with the blood of those who sought in times gone by to conquer her; a land of parched and barren landscapes, of sweet and sultry air heady with the scent of the perfumed springs that trickle over its hot and dusty rocks and nourish the dark and musky lichens beneath; a land of fevered brows and intoxicated imaginings, particularly among those who tasted the lichens; a land also of cool and shaded thoughts among those who have learned to forswear the lichens and find a tree to sit beneath; a land also of steel and blood and heroism; a land of the body and of the spirit. (273)

If this extract is compared to the one taken from *Lonely Planet*, the parallels are obvious. The style combines information with advertisement, trying to arouse enthusiasm in the reader. Of course the idiom of a real travel guide is also parodied in this passage, but since it also serves as a mock science fictional reference work, the conventions of the genre are subverted. Like the “Encyclopedia Galactica”, the “Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy” is a reference work, but one that is in sharp contrast with all imaginary reference works traditionally quoted in science fiction stories. Using a guidebook rather than an encyclopaedia as a primary reference work therefore suits the parodic intent of the fiction. It underlines and supports the omniscient narrator's partiality, being a partial text type itself. This brings with it potential for both familiarising the strange and estranging the familiar at will, as has been pointed out above. Indeed, the narrator and the “Guide” sometimes cannot be told apart. Their style of narration is often similar and Peter Jones, the actor narrating the radio series is usually introduced as “the voice of the book” or simply “the book” (Webb 329).

However, the text type of travel guide does bear an indirect relation to science fiction and its history, which might not be completely clear at first glance. Travel is one of the primary themes in much of SF. After all, a change in environment is essential for the development of the science fiction narrative and one way of achieving this is to have the protagonist travel, usually in outer space or time. The corresponding text type is the travelogue, written in the first person, serving first of all to provide the illusion of first hand experience and secondly to make the tale more believable as it is narrated as a true story, usually by the character who experiences the events. Suerbaum, Broich, and Borgmeier point out that not only was science fiction inspired by imaginary travel narratives like Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), but also by actual travel writing, compiled in the time of discovery and colonialism. In a time in which the new and unfamiliar can no longer be found on Earth as globalisation progresses, the travel narrative has to be transported into space or into the future in order to still give new insight. The very first science fiction narratives were usually narrated as travelogues. Mary Shelley's characters all go on various journeys and tell their stories in the first person (Suerbaum, Broich, and Borgmeier 38). The two "founding fathers" of science fiction, Jules Verne and H.G. Wells, more often than not present their stories as travel writing and have their characters insist that what has come to pass is the truth as experienced by them. "Here ends a story to which no credence will be given even by those who are astonished at nothing. But I am fore-armed against human incredulity." Verne's (153) first person narrator in *Journey to the Center of the Earth* (1876) remarks in the final chapter; Wells' characters often end their tales on a similar note. While being often matter-of-fact in tone, travelogues are of course also immediate and partial while at the same time providing a handy structure along the lines of which the narrative can progress.

It could be argued therefore, that Adams turns the travelogue into the travel *guidebook,* thus maintaining a link to the history of science fiction or rather offering a parodic reference to it by linking it to a common form of text type that is not only used to make an environment exotic, but also to connect it to the familiar so that tourists or hitchhikers will find their way around the galaxy more easily. The function of the guidebook is of course in strong contrast to that of the travelogue. Where the latter offers linear progression and a clear narrative structure, the former has its information scattered all over the narrative and is anecdotal in nature. Rather than maintaining coherence and linearity, it contributes to the disruption of the plot, a feature which will be analysed in the next section.

3.2.2. Adams' disruption of the SF plot

The plot in Adams' *Hitchhiker* novels is one of the aspects of his works which has been regarded with comparatively much attention. Kropf has written an article on the subject, on which Antor, in a slightly longer article elaborates further. Such focus on plot is interesting, because Adams' novels do not offer much in the way of a straightforward or typical plot line. Perhaps, assigning meaning to the non-linear and disordered plot is part of the attraction of its study.

Kropf rightly recognises that Douglas Adams subverts the conventions of science fiction and proposes the term *mock science fiction* to categorise his writing. Like the mock epic, Adams' mock SF reverses both the form and ideology of its target genre (Kropf 62). This is done via subversion of components like characterisation and thematic aspects (both of which are discussed below), but also via the subversion of expectations with which readers approach the traditional SF plot. In the case of the SF narrative this is achieved primarily via the disruption of closure. Although the need for narrative closure can by no means be regarded as a defining feature of SF but is found in all literary genres, it can be said that closure has traditionally been a component of SF written in the dominant mode of “Golden Age” SF. Satisfying and clearly marked endings in fiction are an important point of orientation for the human mind and according to Kropf “reflect the universal human urge to impose patterns of order and meaning on experience by determining 'how it all turns out'” (Kropf 63). One trick authors employ in order to make readers read on is to promise an ending which will satisfy their curiosity. Especially postmodern authors (usually representatives of the New Wave as far as SF is concerned) are aware of this fact and frequently construct their narratives in a way that either denies closure or provides the reader with multiple endings to choose from. However, the kinds of texts experimenting with such endings represent a minority in mainstream fiction as in SF (Kropf 63). Kropf elaborates further that what can be found in SF usually is “ideational closure”, which provides the reader with “a kind of ideogram of the future towards which the present is moving” (Kropf 64) that is, if the narrative is set in the future. At any rate, due to the cognitive aspect involved in the SF narrative, stories always have to include endings that appear plausible in the light of “common sense” or at least be believable within the established boundaries of the text.

Adams' *Hitchhiker* novels, then, as opposed to what has been described above, “are a chronicle of aborted endings and inconclusive conclusions” (Kropf 64-65). First of all, the first novel begins with a motif usually reserved for the end in traditional SF: the destruction of Earth. Far from marking a new beginning, the disaster which is described rather conversationally anyway, only leads the human protagonists even further into chaos and confusion. This is indicated by their means of transport, the space ship Heart of Gold, which is explicitly powered by “improbability physics”. In the following novels, Arthur Dent returns to parallel versions of Earth, but always is either transported back into space against his will or the planet is promptly destroyed again. Revelations on which the novels are frequently based usually turn out to be anticlimaxes, such as the meaning of life in *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* ("forty-two", 120) or God's Final Message to his Creation in *So Long and Thanks for All the Fish* ("We apologise for the inconvenience", 610) (Kropf 65-66). Other examples for the disruption of narrative closure are the digressions and pseudo-quotations (discussed above) which constitute a considerable part of the narrative.

The most violent form such disruption can take are direct narratorial interventions. In *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, the Heart of Gold is followed by two atomic missiles and it looks like the journey will come to an abrupt and violent end. However, such a scene, if found in the middle of a novel, is usually filled with suspense and the promise of escape and resolution. This promise, though usually assumed implicitly by the reader, is made explicit by Adams' narrator:

> Stress and nervous tension are now serious social problems in all parts of the Galaxy, and it is in order that this situation should not be in any way exacerbated that the following facts will now be revealed in advance:
> The planet in question *is* in fact the legendary Magrathea.
> The deadly missile attack shortly to be launched by an ancient automatic defense system will result merely in the breakage of three coffee cups and a mouse cage, the bruising of somebody's upper arm, and the untimely creation and sudden demise of a bowl of petunias and an innocent sperm whale.
> In order that some sense of mystery should still be preserved, no revelation will yet be made concerning whose upper arm sustains the bruise. This fact may safely be made the subject of suspense since it is of no significance whatsoever. (82)

Here Adams addresses the expectations of his readers directly. What is being foreshadowed in the passage quoted above, namely that the situation will be resolved and none of the protagonists come to serious harm, is usually part of the expectations readers hold towards a traditional plot. Closure is traditionally promised implicitly by the author through his or her conforming to certain codes and conventions of story telling. By addressing those inbuilt expectations, Adams creates an effect which has exactly the opposite function: the promise of closure is given priority over the excitement provided by suspense, thus nullifying both. Furthermore, the reader is made to recognise that he or she is being led on by the storyteller and confronted with his or her own expectations.

Especially in the fourth volume of the *Hitchhiker* series, such narratorial interventions become more and more frequent. As compared to the other novels where the narrator usually relies on "Guide"- entries to provide background information and foreshadow upcoming events, in *So Long and Thanks for all the Fish*, this is often done directly, without an imaginary reference work to provide a barrier between the reader and the narrator and uphold the illusion of authenticity. At one point the narrator comments at length on Arthur's choice of music in a romantic scene:

> Mark Knopfler has an extraordinary ability to make Schecter Custom Stratocoasters hoot and sing like angels on a Saturday night, exhausted from being good all week and needing a stiff drink – which is not strictly relevant at this point since the record hadn't yet got to that bit, but there will be too much else going on when it does, and furthermore the chronicler does not intend to sit here with a track list and a stopwatch, so it seems best to mention it now while things are still moving slowly. (559)

While such comments may well be entertaining and help suspend the climax of the plot, they also serve to direct the reader's attention away from the science fictional environment and towards his or her own world. As this very direct way of commenting on events is also a new element in this particular novel, attention is more steadily drawn away from the story as such and towards the act of narrating itself. The narrator presents himself as even more self-conscious than in the three preceding novels and also expresses concern as to the validity of the actions narrated. The main reason for this might be that *So Long...* is not a science fiction novel in the strictest sense; it is above all a romance. The novel does not deal with intergalactic adventures on the large scale but is for the most part set on Earth. Indeed, it seems hard to identify a plot line in this particular novel apart from Arthur's growing relationship with Fenchurch, the love of his life. Apart from Ford and Marvin, none of the other major characters make an appearance and the story also comes to an abrupt and rather confusing end. The narrator seems to sense a great need to justify this change in subject matter to the reader. This is done via explanations of the narrative techniques used. Shortly before introducing the subject of sex, which has clearly not figured very prominently in the three preceding novels, the narrator remarks on his describing Arthur's going to the bathroom:

> It's guff. It doesn't advance the action. It makes for nice fat books such as the American market strives on, but it doesn't actually get you anywhere. You don't, in short, want to know.
>
> But there are other omissions as well, besides the toothbrushing-and-trying-to-find-fresh-socks variety, and in some of these people seemed inordinately interested.
>
> What, they want to know, about all that stuff off in the wings with Arthur and Trillian, did that ever get anywhere?
>
> To which the answer was, of course, mind your own business.

> And what, they say, was he up to all those nights on the planet Krikkit? Just because the planet didn't have Fuolornis Fire Dragons or Dire Straits doesn't mean that the planet just sat up every night reading. (668)

Here the narrator comments freely on reader expectations and the development of plot, including gaps that can be deliberately left open by the author to be filled by the readers themselves. Even the literary market is mentioned. It becomes increasingly evident that this narrator is to be identified with the author of a story rather than a distant, science fictional chronicler of actually occurring events.

After a justification of the eroticism introduced into the story has been presented in this way, the narrator goes on to suggest: “Those who wish to know should read on. Others may wish to skip on to the last chapter which is a good bit and has Marvin in it” (569). The narrator seems to know very well that romantic scenes for many are not the main reason for reading a science fiction novel and also that Marvin is one of the more popular characters of the *Hitchhiker* novels. He clearly engages in a dialogue with the reader not only about the act of writing a story, but about the act of writing a *Hitchhiker* story and the expectations one is met with when doing so. The suggestion to skip the romantic part is repeated in greater detail in the next chapter when Arthur proceeds to removing Fenchurch's dress in mid-flight:

> Fenchurch tried some little swoops, daringly, and found that if she judged herself right against a body of wind she could pull off some really quite dazzling ones with a little pirouette at the end, followed by a little drop which made her dress billow around her, and this is where readers who are keen to know what Marvin and Ford Prefect have been up to all this while should look ahead to later chapters, because Arthur now could wait no longer and helped her take it off. (571)

Not even a new sentence is started to give this piece of advice to the reader. If the preceding three novels in the series played with reader expectations regarding the classic science fiction plot, in *So Long...* this is done in order to disrupt expectations of a classic *Hitchhiker* plot. Thus, if genre parody can signal exhaustion of genre conventions, in this novel it clearly signals exhaustion of the conventions of Adams' very own franchise. The fourth *Hitchhiker*- novel is not as much a parody of science fiction as of itself. Judging by the unusually aggressive behaviour of the narrator, the lack of an engaging plot, as well as the increasingly frequent comments on plot development and narrative technique, *So Long...* can also be read as a metanarrative about writing a *Hitchhiker*-novel and perhaps the author's increasing dissatisfaction with the expectations the parody itself has raised.

Adams himself has named *So Long...* his least favourite novel and it was also in general not very well received (Simpson 268). Readers who might have immersed themselves in the plots of the first three novels repeatedly find aesthetic illusion broken and their expectations suspended. Most familiar characters are missing from the story and Arthur turns from being an everyman character into an individual who has no desire to leave Earth and go on a space adventure, thus displeasing readers (Gaiman 195).

Mostly Harmless, the fifth and last novel of the series, is more strongly reminiscent of the first three novels. The narrator remains in the background and there is again a more clearly mapped out science fiction plot. *So Long...* can be seen as a failed experiment in the series that tried to renegotiate the relationship to itself as well as its readers. What it shows, however, is that the *Hitchhiker* series does not only play with reader expectations regarding the representative plot structure of science fiction novels. If exhausted, it does not hesitate to rebel against itself as well.

As a conclusion to this section we should return to what Kropf has pointed out about mock science fiction reversing the *ideological* function of the SF narrative. Kropf suggests that the disruption of plot in Adams' novels and the use of self-referentiality by the unreliable omniscient narrator serve to reflect the sense of confusion and aimlessness that fills the entire series of novels. Although the narrator presents himself as omniscient and powerful, he too can sometimes only remark “[t]here was a point to this story but it has temporarily escaped the chronicler's mind”. This can be taken to be a statement about the god-like narrator of fiction in which closure is regarded as a requirement. The author-narrator in Adams' work is as incompetent as the god existing in the *Hitchhiker* universe. At times he can only refer the reader to more interesting passages and rely on him or her to find meaning in the story on his-or her own. This in turn subverts the ideological construction of science fiction: the strong belief in a sense of purpose and an ordered nature of the universe based on observable laws. In Kropf's words, the “'Hitchhiker' novels […] are an instance of art imitating nature where nature has no order and where God and his counterpart, the creating artist, both must apologize for the mess things are in” (68). Adams' mock-science fictional universe is presented as chaotic and random, which is therefore reflected in the novels' plots, but also its characters as will be shown in the following section.

3.2.3. Mock science fictional antiheroes: the characters of the *Hitchhiker's Guide*

> He was a splendid specimen of manhood, standing a good two inches over six feet, broad of shoulder and narrow of hip, with the carriage of the trained fighting man. His features were regular and clear cut, his hair black and closely cropped, while his eyes were of a steel gray, reflecting a strong and loyal character, filled with fire and initiative. His manners were perfect, and his courtliness was that of a typical southern gentleman of the highest type. (Rice Burroughs v)

This description is taken from Edgar Rice Burroughs' introduction to John Carter, the hero of his *Martian Chronicles*, which he started in 1912 with *A Princess of Mars*. Written in traditional pulpstyle and full of familiar clichés, the passage is not exactly an admirable piece of science fiction writing. Captain Carter is, however, an example able to stand in for countless science fictional heroes as they were to appear in classical SF novels up to and including the New Wave: masculine, handsome, athletic, approachable yet mysterious, capable of impossible deeds, ready to go where no man has gone before to fight green men and bug-eyed monsters, rescue half-naked maidens and gain their (often courtly) love.

For Parrinder, this type of hero that appears so frequently especially in Golden Age and magazine SF, is to be attributed to the romance-genre from which science fiction has borrowed large portions of style. He quotes Northrop Frye, who had to say the following about the hero of romance:

> If superior in degree to other men and to the environment, the hero is the typical hero of romance, whose actions are marvellous but who is himself identified as a human being. The hero of romance moves in a world in which the ordinary laws of nature are slightly suspended: prodigies of courage and endurance, unnatural to us, are natural to him, and enchanted weapons, talking animals, terrifying ogres and witches, and talismans of miraculous power violate no rule of probability once the postulates of romance have been established. (Frye qtd. in Parrinder, *Science Fiction* 49-50)

It is easy to rediscover Captain Carter's characterisation in this definition. Although he is human, he fits perfectly well into the science fictional environment that has been created for him. Brave, muscular, sword-wielding men that are altogether too perfect would seem awkward, displaced and perhaps even ridiculous were they thrown into a contemporary shopping mall or underground station. However, in the fantasy world all those attributes are of great use to them and they are both shaped by and help shape (save, change for the better) the world they inhabit. This is a good starting point for a discussion of Arthur Dent, Adams' protagonist, as he is all too human but does not seem to fit into his SF environment at all. Let us contrast Burroughs' description of Captain Carter with Arthur Dent's first appearance in the novel:

> He was about thirty […], tall, dark-haired and never quite at ease with himself. The thing that used to worry him most was the fact that people always used to ask him what he was looking so worried about. He worked in local radio which he always used to tell his friends was a lot more interesting than they probably thought. It was, too – most of his friends worked in advertising. (7)

As can be seen, the only thing Arthur Dent and John Carter have in common is the fact that they are both tall, dark-haired and – as is later revealed in Burrough's novel – of approximately the same physical age. Arthur's appearance does indeed show great potential for establishing him as a stereotypical hero of romance. However, this potential is soon destroyed by the unusual description of his character. Far from being at ease with the science fictional environment he shall be thrown into shortly, he does not even seem to be quite at ease with his own environment, let alone himself. Furthermore, his narrator does not seem to take Arthur very seriously at all and his role in the story is not justified by any of his characteristics. The description of Arthur Dent quoted above is preceded by a description of Arthur's house, which is described in a similar fashion as the human character (approximately 30 years of age, etc.). However, as it precedes Arthur's characterisation, it is not the object that is described like a human, but the human that is described like an object. If not as an object, Arthur tends to be described via his evolutionary ancestors; he is more likely to be referred to as an “ape descendant” or a “carbon-based life form descended from an ape” than a “splendid specimen of manhood”. Such descriptions may be based on solid scientific findings, but they do nothing to underline Arthur's special status or justification as a protagonist. The narrator does not seem to have much sympathy for his main protagonist, he usually tends to sympathise with some of his most alien and grotesque characters (see above). It is Arthur's status as an outsider (not only is he the only human left in the universe, he is also often disregarded by his own narrator) as well as his striking characterisation as an everyman-character that set him out as the perfect antihero of an anti-plot.

Arthur Dent is a lens representing familiarity through which the reader can view the fantastic science fictional environment since everything is as alien to Arthur as it is to the reader. The everyman-story has ancient origins that are rooted in religious mystery plays, as Adams himself has pointed out in an interview (Simpson 93). An everyman-character comes to represent all of humankind; every reader is addressed and supposed to draw morals from the things that happen to this character. However, this everyman becomes a major target of the sardonic narrator's mischief. Signifying the smallness of human minds and perceptions when faced with the infinite realities of the universe, Arthur is also the battleground on which Adams' satire can unfold all of its sharpness. Suerbaum, Broich, and Borgmeier point out that popular literature is in general not expected to represent round characters but rather a representation of “modern man” (130). Sanders takes up the argument that the characters in SF are usually not individuals but stand in for collectives or themes (131). Arthur almost matches this stereotype, but he is just a little too eccentric to serve as either mirror or wish-fulfilment device for the reader. Rather than acting as a mirror, Arthur acts as a lens that highlights some features but distorts others. If Arthur represents humanity, he is representative of its insecurities and lack of knowledge or priorities. Arthur is not a science fictional hero who consciously shapes his environment and whose character is shaped by it. All he does is react to the improbably fantastic things that are happening around him. Usually these reactions take on unsuitable forms. Arthur stubbornly insists on his own ideas of comfort, which is expressed by his major motivation on his intergalactic journey – the search for a proper cup of tea.

This everyman is accompanied by Ford Prefect, an alien from a planet in the vicinity of Betelgeuse, who has taken on the name of a car, because he mistook those vehicles to be the dominant life form on Earth upon his first arrival. According to Adams himself, he “needed to have someone from another planet around to tell the reader what was going on, to give the story the context it needed.” (Adams, “Introduction” vii) Ford fulfils and shares this function with the narrator and “The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy”, for which he is a researcher. He is good-natured, fun-loving, ever-optimistic, incapable of sarcasm and indeed seems to know a lot about hitchhiking through the galaxy. On the other hand, he also exhibits all characteristics of a stereotypical hitchhiker on holiday: his main motivations for going on all those adventures are not a genuine search for knowledge, but sex and alcohol.

Zaphod Beeblebrox, the President of the Galaxy and Ford's cousin, shares the latter's love for alcohol and women. He is an exaggerated parody of the selfish, unthinking politician and playboy who would do everything for fame, completely disregarding everyone else in the process. He is convinced to be the most important being in the universe. The Total Perspective Vortex, which has been designed to show individuals their own insignificance when faced with the universe, for him only mirrors himself as its centre (see *The Restaurant at the End of the Universe*). Although he seems confident, he does have a dark side. Some of his memories have been blanked out by himself and he therefore very often does not know what he is doing. In *Life, the Universe and Everything* he even gets manically depressed for a period of time, yet he does not change significantly and eventually is left alone with his own mania.

By his side is Trillian, the only female character to speak of in the novels and one of two humans yet left alive in the universe. However, her role is very marginal. She does not get much dialogue, though when she does, she usually turns out to be the most sensible and intelligent of the group. In *Life, the Universe and Everything*, she even saves the universe single-handedly, because all other characters are not capable of doing so. Still, the gender relations in the novels as illustrated by Trillian's character are rather bleak. Trillian, as Webb has pointed out, is mainly a projection of male desires rather than a round character of her own (249). In *Mostly Harmless* she evolves, gets a prestigious job as a news announcer and renounces men. However, as a result her teenage daughter Random Dent gets alienated from both her parents and brings Earth to the brink of destruction once more in the last novel of the series. Arthur and Trillian never have a romantic or physical relationship in the novels (though they do in the film). However, in *Mostly Harmless*, Trillian decides that she would like to conceive a child and as Arthur is the only human male left in the universe and has donated DNA on several occasions in order to afford flight tickets, his DNA is her only option. Arthur and Trillian thus come to embody a myth quite common in science fiction: they are the new Adam and Eve, cut out to re-establish humanity – and seem to fail miserably. *Mostly Harmless ends* with the destruction of Earth, this time with all major characters on it. Eoin Colfer tried to end the story more satisfactorily in *And Another Thing...* and indeed it is him who first attempts to convincingly sketch out Trillian's character, establishing her as a round character through insights and internal monologues.

On the whole it can be said therefore that Adams in part maintains a stereotypical science fiction tradition: lack of characterisation and focus on ideas. Ford and Arthur are explicitly defined as narrative vehicles and at least Ford and Zaphod can be said to be parodies in themselves. However, the characters are significant in so far as they help subvert the expectations readers have of the SF narrative: they are not driven by heroism and a love for the common good but always almost solely by selfish motivations, as ridiculous as these motivations may sometimes seem to be. Neither of them is superior to any of the supporting characters, quite to the contrary. Apart form Zaphod, all of them are uncannily aware of their own insignificance in the face of “Life, the Universe and Everything”; Zaphod himself is so convinced of his own significance that it rather underlines the others' insecurity. Again this way of characterisation can be said to have ideological implications; the pure thirst for knowledge, sense of justice and will to conquer so often found in SF is not present in Adams' characterisations, which again subverts the traditional science fictional world view.

3.2.4. Parodying the themes and motifs of science fiction

Although the science fiction field is extremely productive, it restricts itself to a rather limited range of recurring themes and motifs. Frequently occurring examples might be aliens, spaceships, or time travel. Potentially, these tropes can work as symbols to voice some kind of thematic concern. However, many of them, such as the ones mentioned above, have already been exhausted and are by now nothing more than simple plot devices. Although some authors are indeed original in inventing new science fictional themes, some of these are by now so well established that they have even been incorporated into many popular definitions of the genre.

Douglas Adams takes advantage of this existing network of intertextuality and the convention of recycling of themes in SF. The themes and the mechanisms by which they are made to function in a narrative are very well rooted in the readers' knowledge of the genre. They therefore represent ready targets for parody. As will be shown in the remainder of this chapter, Adams frequently isolates the original meanings of established SF tropes and turns them into their opposites. His science fictional *nova*, it can be said, no longer function as a means of estrangement, but as a means of othering the familiar, which is so often the case in parody. The familiar, in this case, is ironically exactly the kind of *novum* that in “serious” SF serves to establish the alien premises of the story. Since it is impossible to analyse every single instance of such parody, the themes and tropes will be presented in five main thematic groups.

3.2.4.1. Adams' aliens

A main feature of many science fiction narratives is the encounter with some alien race or a member of this alien race. These beings are sentient and organic in nature, but introduced into the narrative as a *novum*, that is, as a means of estrangement and thus as Other. Like technological aliens such as androids and artificial intelligence (discussed below), alien encounter SF is a variation on the theme of the self-Other encounter. This is the case, because

> any meaningful act of defamiliarization can only be relative, since it is not possible for man to imagine what is utterly alien to him; the utterly alien would also be the meaningless. To give meaning to something is also, inescapably to "humanize" it or to bring it within the bounds of our anthropomorphic world-view. This means that we can only describe something as "alien" by contrast or analogy with what we already know. (Parrinder, "Characterisation" 150)

The extent of otherness inherent in imaginary alien lifeforms can therefore vary accordingly. Some SF texts consciously represent their aliens as pure evil and ultimate Other in order to underline the exploration of what it is to be human, others make their aliens stand in for specific features of humanity itself.

In Adams' SF the representation of aliens is not usually symbolic but literal, which distinguishes it from other similar narratives. Adams' aliens almost always represent caricatures of elements found in the reader's empirical world. None of the aliens are therefore represented as evil, but as humorous distortions of human features, which prompts the reader to recognise him-or herself in the Other.

One main way in which this is done is by exterminating humanity to begin with and thus isolate the remaining human protagonists. Arthur Dent may be a point of identification for the reader, but in the SF universe at large, he is the Other, surrounded by life forms infinitely more advanced than himself. Everything in the narrative points towards the insignificance of actual human beings when confronted with their Others. Arthur himself is never taken seriously by his fellow travellers and generally regarded as a less advanced life form. If he has anything useful to contribute at all, he is usually met with contempt:

> "Oh," said Arthur brightly, "you mean we've traveled in time but not in space."
> "Listen, you semievolved simian," cut in Zaphod, "go climb a tree will you?"
> Arthur bristled.
> "Go bang your heads together, four-eyes," he advised Zaphod.

> “No, no,” the waiter said to Zaphod, “your monkey has got it right sir.” (232)

Aliens in this universe are clearly outnumbering and usually outwitting humanity. The dominance of the human intellect, so often underlined in traditional science fiction, is reversed again. This is not to say that Adams' aliens are actually wiser than Earthlings, as is the case in other archetypal SF narratives such as Clarke's *Childhood's End*; they are simply more evolved and in control of more powerful technology.

The alien race of the Vogons best exemplifies the representation of the Other in Adams' novels. Although they are described as typical science fictional bug-eyed monsters, their defining features are distinctly human. They may be humanity's main nemesis in the novels, but they are not represented as evil but as humourless, unimaginative, bad-tempered and bureaucratic. Indeed, they represent several familiar Earth-discourses (see discussions of bureaucracy and literary criticism below) which are estranged through their science fictional appearance. The Vogons thus hold up a mirror to humanity and force readers to discover their own everyday practices in those of an alien race (Van der Colff, “Douglas Adams” 14). In general, Adams' aliens always mirror an extremely familiar feature of Earth culture in an equally extremely distorted way. This feature may be abstract or material in nature. The *Hitchhiker* universe is populated with anthropomorphic mattresses, superintelligent shades of the colour blue and even “ballpointoid” life forms. Despite the more than apparent silliness implied in such depiction, it is remarkable how well many of the aliens' societies have been worked out, although there are often only mentioned in passing and do not serve to advance the plot:

> Somewhere in the cosmos […] along with all the planets inhabited by humanoids, reptiloids, fishoids, walking treeoids and superintelligent shades of the color blue, there was also a planet entirely given over to ballpoint life forms. And it was to this planet that unattended ballpoints would make their way, slipping away quietly through wormholes in space through a world where they knew they could enjoy a uniquely ballpointoid life-style, responding to highly ballpoint-oriented stimuli, and generally leading the ballpoint equivalent of the good life. (99)

Humanoids, fishoids and reptiloids are already commonly accepted creatures in science fiction stories. However, Adams here parodies both the concepts of making aliens resemble known animals as well as the act of word formation (discussed below) used to name them. Whereas the *-oid* suffix estranges a familiar creature, the stems of the words are always known so that the estranged can be related back to the “real world”. Adams exaggerates this convention by extending the *-oiding* of known elements to include inorganic ones. It is obvious how this kind of parody works. The same technique has already been discussed in connection with Rose's theory of parody: a familiar element is combined with an unfamiliar concept (colours or ballpoints as alien) and thus causes ironic distance as well as a humorous effect. A similar effect is also achieved in stylistic terms; although Adams' aliens are openly imaginative constructions, combining concepts impossible to reconcile with alien life or sometimes even life at all, they are still explained in the pseudo- scientific idiom of the SF- narrative. Since the reader's reality is mirrored again, the existence of a society of ballpoints also humorously answers the question as to where ballpoints lost in our own world could be found. Many of the alien races in Adams' novels function according to similar principles. In appearance or name they are frequently parodies of SF conventions (the Vogons are classical bug-eyed monsters), in the description of their lifestyles and societies they tend to be parodies of human discourses. The multi-coded nature of such a parody thus appeals to both SF readers and readers of mainstream literature.

To sum up it can be said that in depicting his aliens, Douglas Adams makes open use of the self-as-Other trope often found in SF. Since the concepts upon which the aliens are based have been imported almost literally from familiar objects and discourses, this is no longer strictly a matter of scholarly interpretation but leads to an immediate humorous effect. By being so obvious, this technique also ridicules some of science fiction's symbolism. Firstly, humans are clearly portrayed as inferior, and secondly, the aliens themselves embody elements of humanity, be they abstract or material. The confrontation with alterity in the *Hitchhiker* novels is therefore always a good-natured appeal to laugh about one's own self. This is also illustrated in the use of other tropes of alterity, that is, androids, robots and artificial intelligence.

3.2.4.2 . "Your Plastic Pal Who's Fun to Be With": Androids, robots and artificial intelligence

Androids, robots and artificial intelligence are not only props and gadgets in science fiction. In some of the best SF novels they serve as vehicles for the reflection on what it is to be human and the nature of reality. Like aliens, they can also serve as metaphors for alterity if portrayed through their difference to humans. Although we are nowadays so familiar with different forms of technology, in science fiction this specific kind of technology can take on an estranging effect. According to Roberts, this effect lies in the combination of the technological and the organic, which is personified in androids and cyborgs (robots that are part machine and part organic). They come to symbolise the body, which is often a suppressed element in SF due to the favour given to material and technological innovation, and therefore translates the familiar element of the body into the coldness and unfamiliarity associated with machines. In this estrangement lies the potential for a large array of symbolic representation (Roberts, *Science Fiction* 146-147).

In many cases robots do not serve as a contrast to humanity but are often presented as the essence of what it is to be human. This is the case, for example, in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. The character of the Monster in her novel is often seen as the prototypical cyborg. It is created as a *tabula rasa*, capable of sympathy and suffering. It only becomes evil due to the neglect of its creator. It is therefore also a pedagogical point that is made in the novel. In *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* (first published 1968), Philip K. Dick confronts his human protagonist with a group of androids that can only be distinguished from real humans by their incapability for feeling empathy. A very effective scene in the novel is the one in which Rick Deckard, the main bounty-hunter protagonist, is taken to a fake police station operated by androids who make him believe that he is himself an android with a modified memory. Deckard is then aided by another bounty hunter who is plagued by doubts whether he may not be an android himself. In *Ubik* (first published 1969), another of Dick's novels, the author introduces intelligent doors which have to be paid in order to open and also engage in lively discussions with their owners. They come to signify an extreme consumer culture in which machines have become more powerful than humans and due to people's reliance on technology are the safeguards of capitalism (Roberts, *Science Fiction* 149). Portraying machines with human-like qualities thus raises questions of identity formation and the relationship to the body that would not be as effective were they not voiced through a symbolic Other.

In Adams' *Hitchhiker* novels, this theme is again greatly exaggerated. Unlike Dick's androids, Adams' machines come to represent types that stand in for specific human characteristics, rather than being round characters in their own right. The personalisation of machinery so common in SF is parodically distorted. Intelligent machines in Adams' novels are experienced as annoyances, because they bring out the worst in humanity (usually by accident) by focusing only on one individual characteristic. Nevertheless, the estrangement created through the use of machines in place of humans remains in effect, which provokes amused reactions in readers.

The imaginary Sirius Cybernetics Corporation is famous in the novels for creating machines with Genuine People Personalities (GPPs). However, these machines only exhibit one greatly exaggerated personality feature each. Most of the corporation's technological *nova* can be found on the space ship with the telling name “Heart of Gold”. As in Dick's *Ubik*, doors can talk, but not to demand capital. They have been programmed to sigh with joy or utter thanks each time they open or close, thus underlining their status as commodities. Eddie, the ship's computer, is so absurdly cheerful it regularly costs the human protagonists their nerves. They are frequently faced with dangerous or unpleasant situations, which are usually completely underestimated by the computer. When two atomic missiles come flying towards the ship above the planet Magrathea, Eddie, who is unable to avert the catastrophe, resorts to intoning the popular song *You'll Never Walk Alone* in order to cheer the crew up (87-88). Machines thus come to be less helpful exactly *because* they have human-like personalities. Though intended as commodities, they start to develop human needs and feelings such as boredom. This is illustrated by the existential elevators (also referred to as “Sirius Cybernetics Corporation Happy Vertical People Transporters”) in *The Restaurant at the End of the Universe*. Bored with going up and down, they now need psychological counselling. Individual elevators try to convince customers of the benefits of going sideways instead, which usually makes it impossible to get to the desired floor without engaging in a lengthy argument with the elevator in question. Both Eddie's insistence on being friendly as well as the elevators' distracting neuroses represent cases of machines rebelling against their masters. This is not the result of malfunction, but simply a misinterpretation of the human character on the part of the Sirius Cybernetic Corporation which manufactured the machines in question. At any rate, the machines in Adams' universe have of course been built to serve mankind, as is traditional in SF. This they do but almost seem to take a childlike pleasure in annoying their owners to pieces in the process.

With the development of artificial intelligence also comes the development of artificial neuroses affecting this intelligence, at least in the case of the *Hitchhiker* novels. This joke is personified by Marvin, the Paranoid Android. He can be seen as being based on one of the most influential robot-tropes in existence in SF, that introduced by Isaac Asimov. Together with John Campbell he invented the “three laws of robotics” as a basis for his robot-stories. They read as follows:

> (1) a robot may not injure a human being or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm;
> (2) a robot must obey the orders given it by human beings except where such orders would conflict with the First Law;
> (3) a robot must protect its own existence as long as such protection does not conflict with the First or Second Law. (quoted in Roberts, *Science Fiction* 158)

Asimov's robots are therefore, as Roberts goes on to point out, driven by a strong ethic code and "governed in the first instance by a desire to preserve and aid human life" (*Science Fiction* 159) Adams, in introducing his robots, again uses Asimov's "Encyclopedia Galactica" in order to define them: "*The* Encyclopedia Galactica *defines a robot as a mechanical apparatus designed to do the work of a man. The marketing division of the Sirius Cybernetics Corporation defines a robot as 'Your Plastic Pal Who's Fun to Be With.'*" (63-64) Marvin, in contrast, hates everything including his own existence, but most of all human life. However, due to his function as a mechanical servant, he cannot act upon this contempt except through sarcastic and insulting comments powered by his "irony circuits" (see page 65). The three laws of robotics are never mentioned explicitly. However, it seems evident that Marvin has to serve his masters no matter whether he likes it or not, although he usually directly proceeds to switching himself off once a task has been fulfilled. He also seems incapable of doing any harm except perhaps verbally. His harmlessness is an inbuilt feature not stemming from an ethic code but from his own depression and boredom:

> Marvin regarded [the intelligent door] with cold loathing while 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*. (65)

Marvin simply cannot be motivated to fulfil even the most basic task voluntarily; he only follows orders. On several occasions it is therefore Marvin who saves the day; not to aid his human masters but to find an outlet for his sorrow. For example, he has a talent for either boring or depressing other machines to death by telling them the story of his life, which leads to the defeat of the Krikkitmen in *Life, the Universe and Everything* as well as the collapse of a bridge in the same novel. Marvin's miserable state of mind is not even his own fault. He characterises himself as a "personality prototype" (65) built by the Sirius Cybernetics Corporation to test the new GPP element. The result is an immensely intelligent and superior robot which, however, not only possesses a Genuine People

Personality but also a “Genuine People Personality Disorder[...]” (Roberts, *Science Fiction* 161), that is, chronic depression. Despite his rather unpleasant personality, Marvin is an eternal favourite of *Hitchhiker* fans and has become a cultural icon. This may be the case because in combining familiar human features with that of a machine, a humorous contrast is created and the reader sees an ironic difference allowing him or her to laugh about human flaws. Roberts observes that “the glory of Marvin's characterisation is that he pursues the expression of his depression with machine-like rigour, so that he not only adds human characteristics to his machineness, he adds machine characteristics to his human traits. He is a potently thorough blending of machine and man.” (*Science Fiction* 162)

Like Adams' aliens, his robots and machines represent human personality traits. However, unlike the aliens, the machines cannot escape or improve their character, because it is imprinted on their electronic minds. They are forced to be either cheerful or depressed; the annoyance they create is often involuntary. Despite the obviously parodic elements present in the various machines, part organic, part mechanical, they still address a traditional theme of SF: the difference between machines and humans. Unlike the human characters, the machines are unable to alter their fate and thus follow it with mechanical determination, even if it is just constituted by being depressed. However, the intelligent machines in Adams' novels also subvert a popular SF theme. Sanders points out that robots often come to “symbolise conformity and anonymity” (Sanders 144); Eddie and especially Marvin do the exact opposite. They clearly stand out as two of the most memorable characters in the novels, mainly because of their clearly defined personalities. Also, they are both clearly nonconformist. While Eddie is not particularly helpful, because he misunderstands the expectations humans have of machines (instead of technical help he offers moral support), Marvin revels in his disobedience. Conformity and anonymity is not a feature of Adams' machines. Rather, they come to be representative of human quirks. The humour created by the subversion of this theme comes form the unusual assumption in the narrative that this kind of quirky individuality can be mechanically imitated.

3.2.4.3. “Not impossible, just very, very improbable”: Adams' parody of the technological novum

As has already been mentioned, a distinctive feature of all science fiction narratives is the introduction of at least one new and defamiliarising element – a *novum*. This *novum*, as has been pointed out, serves to mediate the estrangement happening in SF in a cognitive way, that is, it has to be plausibly explained. Douglas Adams often makes fun of exactly this kind of pseudo-scientific argumentation. His inventions are often based on already existing SF technology that is improved upon. Frequently, his technological *nova* are also very imaginative in themselves, despite their intended ridicule. The author seems to celebrate the process of inventing plausible pseudo-scientific explanations for the most obviously bizarre devices.

One very good example for this is Adams' take on space travel. Faster-than-light travel is a common enough trope in SF, although it is, at least according to current scientific findings, impossible. Amis elaborates:

> The fact is [...] that to reach any but the nearest stars would take several hundred years even if one travelled at the speed of light, in the course of doing which one would, if I understand Einstein's popularisers correctly, become infinite in mass and zero in volume, and this is felt to be undesirable. (Amis 73)

Still, this does not keep science fiction authors from trying to overcome Einstein in the writing of their stories. The argument that the SF-narrative always has to be based on actual scientific findings can therefore be dismissed in these cases. Travel to other planets and even galaxies is still too attractive an option to disregard. Adventure stories easily gain in exoticism if they are set in unknown environments. Especially the space opera-genre heavily relies on dreams of faster-than-light travel. Thus, writers have developed several more or less plausible ways of getting around Einstein. Again Amis sums up:

> [M]ost commonly, the author will fabricate a way of getting around Einstein, or even of sailing straight through him: a device known typically as the space-warp or the hyper-drive will make its appearance, though without any more ceremony than “He applied the space-warp” or “He threw the ship into hyper-drive”. (Amis 20)

Originally, devices such as the hyperdrive or the space-warp may have had to undergo the same procedures as any SF-*novum*: plausible scientific explanation. However, these are motifs by now so familiar to the reader that they do not have to be explained anymore. They have almost become props of a parallel universe constituted by the totality of SF texts, as they appear with equal frequency in literature, film or video games, often without credit being given to their origin.

In Douglas Adams' Hitchhiker- novels, travel through hyperspace is mentioned and sometimes also undergone by the characters. However, it is already regarded as slightly outdated and has experimentally been replaced by yet even quicker, if slightly eccentric devices. One of them is the famous Infinite Improbability Drive, which so far is only in operation in one star ship, namely the Heart of Gold. According to the narrator, “[t]he Infinite Improbability Drive is a wonderful new method of crossing vast interstellar distances in a mere nothingth of a second, without all that tedious mucking about in hyperspace.” (60) As the name suggests, its basic principle is improbability and the ship functions by passing through all points in the universe simultaneously just to arrive at the most improbable one, which usually happens to be exactly the place the ship's operators want to go. A special characteristic of the Infinite Improbability Drive is that it is not based on Einsteinian theories of space and time, but on the fictional SF-*novum* of hyperspace, which it parodies. Like the hyper-drive, the Infinite Improbability Drive is impossible, or at least improbable according to recent scientific findings; however, it celebrates this fact. The Infinite Improbability Drive is not just thrown into the story as a plot-device, but is painstakingly explained within the context of the *Hitchhiker* universe:

> The principle of generating small amounts of *finite* improbability by simply hooking the logic circuits of a Bambleweeny 57 Sub-Meso Brain to an atomic vector plotter suspended in a strong Brownian Motion producer (say a nice cup of tea) were of course well understood – and such generators were often used to break the ice at parties by making all the molecules in the hostess's undergarments leap simultaneously one foot to the left, in accordance with the Theory of Indeterminacy. (60)

This description of the mechanism and history of the Drive carries on for well over a page, with additional information thrown in later via dialogue. In it, Adams uses the same techniques used so frequently by science fiction writers. He either relates the new mechanism to known science or invents professional-sounding new theories on which it may be based. These are pseudo-scientific in nature, but in *sounding* scientific give to the description an air of cognitive processability and therefore plausibility. In the case of the Infinite Improbability Drive however, description serves a different purpose as is illustrated by the carefree colloquial style used. As the novel is clearly coded and therefore read as a humorous work of science fiction, the reader already knows that this *novum* is probably not to be taken seriously. This is further illustrated by its name as well as familiar and unscientific elements (such as the nice cup of tea) used in describing it. The Infinite

Improbability Drive can clearly be identified as parodic. What Adams does in describing it in so much detail is to lay bare this same technique in “serious” science fiction. The Drive ridicules the process of cognitive estrangement in SF, which demands plausible explanations for impossible technology. The impossible has to be explained in such a way that it is presented as merely highly improbable. The name “Infinite Improbability Drive” can therefore be seen as explanatory of what is being parodied.

Adams employs the same technique again in *Life, the Universe and Everything*, in which he introduces the Bistromathic Drive. It is again a mechanism which can overcome Einstein and even the well-established hyper-drive. Like that of the Infinite Improbability Drive, its humorous and parodic purpose is clearly visible. However, the principle of this drive is not physics, but a peculiar form of mathematics, called Bistromathics.

> Just as Einstein observed that space was not an absolute, but depended on the observer's movement in space, and that time was not an absolute, but depended on the observer's movement in time, so it is now realized that numbers are not absolute, but depend on the observer's movement in restaurants. (355)

And so on; the description of the mechanism continues for almost two pages. The basic principle of the Bistromathic Drive is that every ship driven by it includes an exact replicant of a small Italian bistro, the random processes occurring in which operate the ship (345-346). Again, the *novum* establishes a bizarre connection between a familiar element (small Italian bistros), sophisticated science (Einstein) and the reasoning of science fiction.

Adams' imaginative *nova* consciously celebrate pseudo-science and gleefully revel in their own imaginary nature. However, all this is done in the matter-of-fact tone of science fiction narration. In doing this, Adams lays bare a technique evident in much science fiction: most SF *nova* are of course purely imaginary, but they come alive via linguistic construction. They are what Suerbaum, Broich and Borgmeier call “Atrappen aus Sprache”, (“linguistic dummies”) (20). SF *nova* do not actually have to function in real life, although especially Hard SF lays claim to such exactitude. The main instrument for the creation of an air of authenticity is the author's mastery of scientific language, which will then be identified by the readers through inclusion of familiar concepts such as Einstein's. Adams' parody of science fiction's linguistic deception is humorous, because the scientific language is in conflict with the devices themselves, which, more often than not, run contrary to the common sense of the reader.

Adams' novels include a multitude of similar *nova* which are either “explained” in detail or merely mentioned in passing to create a science fictional frame. Still, Adams has actually been credited with making predictions about future technology as it is expected from serious science fiction writers. For example, it has been claimed that by inventing the "Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy", Adams not only predicted the twenty-first century e-book, but also the enormous impact the internet would have on human life. The "Guide" itself is often seen as a fictional predecessor of *Wikipedia*, an encyclopaedia edited online by its users (See Doctorow). As can be seen therefore, Adams' technological *nova* offer a wide range of imaginative and humorous concepts that can be inspiring despite their frequent parody or sheer disregard of scientific exactness.

3.2.4.4. "The Ends of the Earth": apocalypse as entertainment

Disasters and apocalypses of any kind are some of the most frequently recurring themes in science fiction. H.G. Wells already established the two most common forms of the disaster scenario before SF had even been established as a genre. In *The War in the Air*, Earth is wrecked by a war against Germany, in *The War of the Worlds*, he invented the now so popular theme of alien invasion (Suerbaum, Broich, and Borgmeier 102).

Stockwell identifies the apocalypse as one major archetype of science fiction. In it, changes which are often so prominently thematised in SF can be accelerated in order to observe their results. Apocalypses can be brought about by outer forces such as invasion from space, but very often they are also caused by humanity itself. A complete destruction of Earth occurs seldom, however. Usually the disaster is averted by a heroic act or by sheer luck (Wells' Martians in an opportune moment die suddenly of a flu virus against which they are not resistant) (Stockwell 215-16).

Adams plays through all possible apocalyptic scenarios in his novels and usually they function extremely well without being averted. The *Hitchhiker* novels start with the successful destruction of Earth and every time it seems like the Earth has been reconstructed or rediscovered, it is destroyed yet again by the Vogons. The novels also include the demise of various alien planets and civilisations, some of which are only conversationally mentioned in passing by the narrator. For example the population of Golgafrincham is reported to have been eradicated due to a disease caused by a dirty telephone speaker after all telephone sanitisers have been exiled because of their apparent uselessness.

The apocalypse may have didactic purposes in some science fiction. Sometimes the world is destroyed by human fault, violence and the inability to control new technology, overpopulation or pollution. However, very often the supposed message of the apocalyptic event is not even addressed directly or its didacticism hinted at in detail. It can be said that a large portion of SF texts employ the theme of the apocalypse solely for sensationalist purposes: suspense can be heightened to an almost unbearable extent and the extreme situation described can offer a diversion from the everyday life of the reader by presenting him or her with something extreme and out of the ordinary (Suerbaum, Broich, and Borgmeier 107).

Adams parodies this sensationalism by exaggerating it to previously unknown heights in *The Restaurant at the End of the Universe*. Milliways, the Restaurant at the End of the Universe, is located in a loophole in time and it is therefore possible for all costumers frequenting the restaurant to watch the end of the universe every evening and afterwards be transported back into their own time unharmed. The experience can be repeated and it is regarded as one of the things one should have seen, ironically, at least once in one's life. The evening at the end of the universe is moderated by an announcer who addresses the audience's hunger for excitement directly:

> “So, ladies and gentlemen,” he breathed, “the candles are lit, the band plays softly and the force-shielded dome above us fades into transparency, revealing a dark and sullen sky hung heavy with the ancient light of livid swollen stars, I can see we're all in for a fabulous evening's apocalypse!” (223)

The announcer imitates the Gothic, mysterious style that is often employed in the pre-apocalyptic narrative, clearly trying to create suspense. But of course, everybody is assured of being in a safe, controlled environment where nothing can happen to them, just like the readers of end-of-the-earth narratives.

In Adams' universe, even the end of the world has been trivialised and robbed of all its horror. We are made to laugh about it, as about all other things that we would usually find shocking; in Adams' universe, even the end of everything can serve as a joke. According to Baxter, who analyses the role of the apocalypse in SF, “Adams' humor helped demythologize a rather dismal trope; we don't have to accept the end of things, and if we laugh at it, maybe we can do something about it” (Baxter 131).

3.2.4.5. “To explore the human condition”: Adams' parody of science fiction's self-image and didacticism

As has been mentioned in the theoretical part, much of SF claims to offer alternatives to conventional ways of thinking about the world and offer solutions, which is part of science fiction's self-image. Science fiction's depictions of alternative universes can be bleak or optimistic, but they usually expect the reader to draw some kind of moral from them. Philosophical allusions occur very often and SF can therefore be clearly seen as a didactic literature. The philosophical appeal of SF has also been defined in other ways as has been illustrated in chapter two. Hugo Gernsback made didacticism one of his missions in the publication of his SF-magazines. Science fiction often shows human kind in the face of adversity, confronted with new environments and crises that have to be overcome to define its status in the universe anew. How can the alienated human define his or her identity? What good is religion in a technologically advanced world? These are some of the questions that science fiction often wishes to address.

Adams, as opposed to other science fiction writers, seems to provide one soberingly clear answer in his themes and especially his characters: the futility of it all. God is dead or at least gone for good and has left behind one rather unhelpful message to his creation (“We apologise for the inconvenience”), the ultimate answer to Life, the Universe and Everything is revealed, but the question is forever lost. At every turn the reader is reminded of humanity's insignificance and the associated impossibility of getting answers for the most fundamental of questions, or even identifying the questions as such. This, it has been shown above, is also illustrated on the discourse level via narrative technique and characterisation. As disillusioning as this theme of futility may be, it is not out of place in a comic narrative, quite on the contrary: the human readers are forced to either laugh about themselves and learn to cherish the small things in life or perish sulkily like Marvin does.

Interestingly, a large part of the literary criticism concerned with Adams' writing discusses questions of philosophy in the *Hitchhiker* novels. For example, van der Colff convincingly identifies strong themes of existentialist philosophy in Adams' writing, which is exemplified by its “absurd heroes” and their existential mechanical counterparts. These, she shows, are in accordance with the teachings of French philosophers Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre. Brochhausen identifies Wittgenstein' philosophical ideas in the characters' quest for the ultimate question to the answer 42 and Caillava even traces the spiritual philosophy of Zen-Buddhism in the episode featuring that same number. Whether such philosophical allusions have been incorporated into the narrative deliberately remains uncertain. Adams himself denied any consciously included philosophical motives in his novels as he told a graduate student planning on writing a thesis on philosophical themes in the *Hitchhiker* series (Gaiman 218).

Rather, it can be argued, Adams' play with philosophical ideas can be seen as a reversal of exactly this philosophical claim in science fiction. The characters find out that a computer named Deep Thought has been constructed to calculate the answer to the ultimate question of Life, the Universe and Everything. Initially, real philosophers protest against the building of such a machine:

> "We are quite definitely here as representatives of the Amalgamated Union of Philosophers, Sages, Luminaries and Other Thinking Persons, and we want this machine off, and we want it off *now*!"
> […]
> "You must let the machines get on with the adding up," warned Majikthise, "and we'll take care of the eternal verities, thank you very much. You want to check your legal position, you do, mate. Under law the Quest for Ultimate Truth is quite clearly the inalienable prerogative of your working thinkers. Any bloody machine goes and actually *finds* it and we're straight out of a job, aren't we? I mean, what's the use of our sitting up half the night arguing that there may or may not be a God if this machine only goes and gives you his bleeding phone number the next morning?"
> "That's right," shoutet Vroomfondel, "we demand rigidly defined areas of doubt and uncertainty!" (114-115)

Far from offering actual philosophical theory in itself, this passage represents a parody of the *discourse* of philosophy and might therefore also have been discussed under discourse parody were it not so significant for SF itself. By using the familiar idiom of workers' unions, Adams makes the humorous point that philosophical questions of universal importance might only have the purpose of providing a class of professional thinkers and intellectuals with jobs as there will never be clear answers for the questions with which they are concerned anyway. More philosophically speaking, it could also be argued that the search for the answers is actually an end in itself, rather than a means to an end.

Despite the philosophers' protest, Deep Thought, after several million years of calculation, finally reveals the Answer. However, it is anticlimactically unsatisfying and therefore extremely funny. The answer is revealed to be 42, which cannot be translated into a meaningful concept by the humans (or humanoids) who constructed Deep Thought.[18] The reason for this is that they have failed to actually ask the question connected to the answer. Thus, another supercomputer is constructed which, in a programme taking several million years to complete, shall calculate exactly this answer. As is revealed later, the new supercomputer is nothing else than the planet Earth and humans but a component of its programme. As the planet Earth is destroyed by the Vogons and Arthur Dent the only human survivor, he is hunted by two Magratheans who want to extract the Answer from his brain cells. The Magratheans are not humans but mice, which are subsequently presented as the most intelligent life form on Earth. They have been experimenting on humans rather than the other way around. This again illustrates the insignificance of human minds as represented in Adams' science fiction.

Indeed, what can be seen as a theme in Adams' novels, according to Clute and Nicholls, is a form of anti-intellectualism.[19] Adams' “philosophy” can be seen as critical of human arrogance and the belief that the meaning of life can actually be found; thus, as a critique of the purpose of philosophy itself. If the characters find happiness at all, they experience it in life's small pleasures, such as hot cups of tea, rather than their quest for answers which are too large for them.

Besides addressing those grand themes, Adams' novels also parodically mirror science fiction's hypothetical quest for meaning and spirituality. His novels are intertwined with philosophical allusions and finding the answer to some philosophical question (or rather the question itself) is often at the centre of the narrative. However, the question can never be found and the answer is revealed via the single most famous anticlimax in the history of science fiction. It would be easiest to see the number 42 as what it was originally intended to be: a joke. However, as Roberts points out, jokes always “depend on context, on the receptivity of people hearing them, as well as on the ingenuity and wit with which they provide unexpected leaps of discourse.'”(Roberts, “42” 61) In other words, the number 42 and all its apparent depth is so enduring, because it provides a reinterpretation of a doubly familiar philosophical discourse (doubly familiar, because of its cultural dominance as well as importance in SF) and thus disrupts the expectations readers may hold towards this discourse as well as a typical SF narrative and its purpose. Rather than preaching to the reader, philosophical allusions in Adams' novels serve to provoke him or her not to take seemingly important riddles too seriously. Such a use of anticlimax “enacts the fact that no matter how big and important you think your life is, or will be, the commonality of humanity is that death will let all that gaseous importance out at last in a great Bronx-cheer deflation.” (Roberts, “42” 62-63). At any rate, Adams' novels demonstrate a clear distrust in the power of human understanding by making it the target of much ridicule, as has also been observed by Antor.[20] This is in stark contrast with science fiction's mission which often places an enormous amount of trust in the human mind and the scientific progress associated with it.

---

[18] It should be mentioned that a similar motif has already been used much earlier in the history of SF by no other than the French philosopher Voltaire. In his proto-SF novel *Micromégas* (1750), the people of Earth are given a book which promises to hold the answers to all philosophical questions, but in the end it is revealed that it contains only blank pages (Roberts, *History*, 73). Again it is not clear whether Adams was familiar with this work.

[19] “Anti-intellectualism takes two forms in sf: a persistent if minor theme appears in stories in which the intellect is distrusted; more common are stories about future [dystopias] in which society at large distrusts the intellect although the authors, themselves intellectuals, do not.” (Clute and Nicholls 43-44)

3.3. Parody on the level of style and language

Whereas the last chapter has been concerned with identifying parody of SF-convention on the macro-level of the text, that is, parodic mechanisms which can be seen to determine the overall structure and thematic content of the narratives, this chapter will discuss the same on the level of language. Although it is problematic to generalise about the style of science fiction, some linguistic features occur more often than others. As Stockwell has pointed out, signs encoded in the language of the text prompt the reader to read it as SF rather than, say, detective fiction. Once readers gather more experience with reading SF, they will be able to identify more and various texts as SF- texts (Stockwell 7). However, only the first section of this chapter will be concerned to a certain extent with parodies of the style of SF and some of its representative texts. A full discussion of SF style and its parody would probably use too much space and lead to too many generalisations.[21] Rather, the largest part of this chapter will concern itself with the dispute regarding language as *novum*, that is, questions whether the SF author should alter his or her style in order to make it match the futuristic, science fictional environment. Being genre parodies, the *Hitchhiker* novels make some serious attempts at resolving these questions, thus taking part in the discussion regarding language and science fiction.

---

[20] “Dabei erkennt der Rezipient seine eigenen Probleme bei der Beantwortung solch philosophischer Grundfragen wieder und amüsiert sich über die satirische Dekonstruktion des menschlichen Reflexes, ultimativen Sinn stiften zu wollen, sowie über die Parodie jener Sorte von SF, die dies zu leisten vorgibt.” (Antor 188)

[21] For two excellent discussions of the language of SF see Stockwell and Suerbaum, Broich and Borgmeier. Furthermore, there already exists an MA dissertation on style and language in Adams' writing (see Bragina).

3.3.1. Parody of individual texts and styles

Although the *Hitchhiker* series can by no means be identified as a parody of just one particular text, it does include instances of text parody, quotation and intertextuality. This section will focus on examples of Adams parodying single science fictional texts, where such instances could be identified. Though not always linguistic in nature, text parody is included as a microtextual aspect, as the text parody does not affect the narrative as a whole, but occurs only in parts of it.

The first example would be the Vogons' memorable declaration that “Resistance is useless” when they capture Arthur and Ford on their spaceship. This, of course, is a parody taken from *Star Trek* of the Borg's famous catch phrase “Resistance is futile”. While the aliens in *Star Trek* can usually be said to personify certain qualities of humanity and thus serve as a mirror of the same, the Borg are the major exception to this rule. In their complete ruthlessness, lack of emotion and by abandoning all individuality to the group, they personify the ultimate Other and complete opposite of all that is human (Roberts, *Science Fiction* 166). The Vogons, on the other hand, may wish to possess the same qualities but ironically rather tend to come across as bad-tempered bureaucrats who even produce poetry (if only to torture their enemies). The phrase “resistance is useless” is not comic in itself and can simply be seen as a less elegant paraphrase of the “resistance is futile”-motif[22]. In the context of the Vogons, however, the phrase takes on certain comic qualities. Whereas the Borg are seen as a real threat using dramatic and slightly archaic language (*futile* as opposed to *useless*), the Vogons in the book are simply regarded as a nuisance. Hence, the phrase is to be taken literally not as a sign of the terrible power of the Vogons but as part of their characterisation as grumpy pragmatists.

Another phrase from *Star Trek* distorted in a quote from *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* appears on page 78:

> *Far back in the mists of ancient time, in the great and glorious days of the former Galactic Empire, life was wild, rich and largely tax free. Mighty starships plied their way between exotic suns, seeking adventure and reward among the farthest reaches of Galactic space. In those days spirits were brave, the stakes were high,*

---

[22] The phrase, according to Wikipedia, was also used in both variations in several episodes of *Dr Who*, neither of which was written by Adams, however. Whether the series influenced Adams or if he coined the phrase himself, remains uncertain. (http://ikipedia.org/wiki/Resistance_is_futile)

> *men were real men, women were real women and small furry creatures from Alpha Centauri were real small furry creatures from Alpha Centauri. And all dared to brave unknown terrors, to do mighty deeds, to boldly split infinitives that no man had split before – and thus was the Empire forged.* (78)

This is, first and foremost, a very direct parody of any stereotypical SF (or rather space-opera) prologue. All the defining elements are there: a Galactic Empire, exoticism, space travel, promises of heroism, aliens, adventure, and even sex. Although it is apparently set in the far future, it sentimentally looks back at a golden age in which such glorious things were still possible, using countless superlatives of awe and grandeur in the process. This technique of fictionally treating the future as history can be found in much of science fiction (Suerbaum, Broich, and Borgmeier 15). The purpose of such a prologue in a pulp SF magazine would be to awaken in the reader a desire to read on and find out about the rest of the story; except, of course, in Adams' novel it appears in the middle of the novel. This is obviously not the only parodic element in Adams' "prologue". The expected adjectives (*wild*, *rich*) are juxtaposed with an admittedly convenient aspect (*largely tax free)* that does have no place in a fantastic science fictional universe, is recognised as a reference to the real world and thus produces a humorous effect. Gender stereotypes of "real" men and women are also parodied by introducing small furry creatures from Alpha Centauri into the equation. The last sentence finally, is a direct parody of *Star Trek*'s archetypal title sequence which reads word for word: "Space... the final frontier. These are the voyages of the starship *Enterprise*. Its five-year mission: to explore strange, new worlds; to seek out new life, and new civilizations; to boldly go where no man has gone before." (qtd. in Westfahl 351) The Star Trek prologue itself embodies several central themes of SF: frontiers, new worlds, the confrontation with new life forms. Regarding these tropes it would not be particularly remarkable. What is very often noted about it however, is the phrase "to boldly go", a split infinitive which is regarded as bad language usage and therefore anathema to numerous grammarians of English (see Collins and Hollo 17). Adams parodies this controversial catch phrase by simply spelling it out and claiming that splitting infinitives is a very bold act indeed. The effect is again comic because it points to the world of the reader and discussions that occurred within it. This is contrasted with a science fictional context and serves as a kind of anticlimax to the otherwise epic prologue. This kind of parody can also be seen as a more obviously metatextual device as it points to the stylistics of *Star Trek* as well as to its own textual facts. The reader is therefore confronted directly with what is on the page and advised not to take it seriously. If knowledge of *Star Trek* is not given, either the contribution to the debate on split infinitives or the metatextual reference to the facts of the text will help the reader identify the piece as parody.

Some references to famous SF texts are more subtle and likely to be picked up only by fans of the genre. For example, in *Life, the Universe and Everything*, Marvin the Paranoid Android, sings himself the following lullaby:

> *Now I lay me down to sleep,*
> *Try to count electric sheep,*
> *Sweet dream wishes you can keep*
> *How I hate the night* (445)

This is firstly a variation on a popular children's bedtime prayer which should be easily recognised by readers.[23] Secondly, it also includes a reference to the title of Philip K. Dick's famous science fiction novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep*. The parody is not only double-coded by referring both to a prayer outside the text as well as to Marvin's personality within the text, but even triple-coded as another intertextual reference is made part of the structure of the poem. Thus, the parody is recognised by both readers of SF as well as readers not familiar with the genre. The former will also be able to appreciate a reference to one of the genre's most important writers.

There are many other instances of text parody and intertextuality in the novels. The examples quoted above stand in relation to the SF genre and have therefore been discussed in detail. It should be pointed out that Adams also incorporates intertextual references not linked to SF in any way. Usually it is music or literature that is quoted or referred to. Again this serves to establish a direct relationship to the world of the reader which aids discourse parody rather than genre parody (see chapter 4).

3.3.2. Creating the language of the future: the linguistic dilemma in science fiction

A large portion of SF texts are set in the future. However, the author of science fiction is always confronted with one basic dilemma when attempting a narration of the future world: language change that is bound to occur in the several thousands of years that lie between the time of the story and the author's own present and how to relate this change. After all, illustrating social change is a major reason for setting stories in the future rather than the present and according to Stockwell, social change inevitably brings about linguistic change which calls for a “vernacular of the future” (Stockwell 60).

---

[23] See appendix for the original.

Very few writers actually attempt to illustrate language change. One famous example is George Orwell's linguistic *novum* Newspeak in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* which attempts to illustrate language change. However, Orwell's language change is brought about not naturally but from above, illustrating the radical social transformation that has been imposed on the world by a totalitarian regime. Also, Newspeak is not used in the main text but only explained in the appendix. Still, it is an attempt at narrating the future which at least tries to face the dilemma. One writer actually making use of a futuristic vernacular is Anthony Burgess. His first person narrator tells the story of *A Clockwork Orange* (1962) in his own peculiar youth slang called *nadsat*, which includes American and Russian elements (Morrison ix). Apart from these few exceptions however, the majority of writers tends to negate or ignore the possibility of language change for the sake of simplicity. One unique aspect of SF language therefore is that, although the story takes place in the future and both the narrator and the assumed reader are supposedly located in a future environment, the author's language remains bound to its own present. Future events are related always with reference to the past (i.e. the present in which the text was written) (Suerbaum, Broich, and Borgmeier 16-17).

Douglas Adams is apparently very well aware of this dilemma and the problems with which it confronts the science fiction author. Therefore, in *The Restaurant at the End of the Universe*, he introduces a linguistic way of speaking about time travel via the introduction of new tenses into English which both addresses the problem and parodies other attempts to face the dilemma. According to the narrator, the main problem with time travel is thus:

> The major problem is quite simply one of grammar, and the main work to consult on this matter is Dr. Dan Streetmentioner's *Time Traveler's Handbook of 1001 Tense Formations*. It will tell you, for instance, how to describe something that was about to happen to you in the past before you avoided it by time-jumping forward two days in order to avoid it. The event will be described differently according to whether you are talking about it from the standpoint of your own natural time, from a time in the further future, or a time in the future past and is further complicated by the possibility of conducting conversations while you are actually traveling from one time to another with the intention of becoming your own mother or father.
> Most readers get as far as the Future Semiconditionally Modified Subinverted Plagal Past Subjunctive Intentional before giving up; and in fact in later editions of the book all the pages beyond this point have been left blank to save on printing costs.

> The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy skips slightly over this tangle of academic abstraction, pausing only to note that the term “Future Perfect” has been abandoned since it was discovered not to be. (213)

This passage parodies the fact that most time travel narratives are more concerned with practical aspects of time travel on the story level, like the possibility of changing the past. It also manages to address the main problem that lies on the discourse level: namely the SF author's problem of talking about time travel in a convincing manner, thematic aspects aside. Hence, a useful imaginary reference work is introduced that many SF writers would probably die to get their hands on if it existed in our real world. It seems to be dealing exactly with the questions facing the SF author: how to talk about the further future both from your own natural time or from the future time itself (if the narrator is located in a future environment). However, the passage also comments on the impossibility of applying the theory suggested in the reference work. The grammar of time travel is so complicated that half of the book's pages are simply left blank because nobody will read on anyway. This is illustrated by a parody of academic language and the language of grammar. The name of the one particular tense quoted is ridiculously long and complex. Up to this point, the dilemma of future language remains firmly rooted in the story level, serving as practical advice for time travellers in the *Hitchhiker* universe. For further illustration however, the tenses that are introduced in the imaginary book are applied by the narrator as the chapter goes on:

> To resume:
> The Restaurant at the End of the Universe is one of the most extraordinary ventures in the entire history of catering.
> It is built on the fragmented remains of an eventually ruined planet which is (wioll haven be) enclosed in a vast time bubble and projected forward in time to the precise moment of the End of the Universe.
> This is, many would say, impossible.
> In it, guests take (willan on-take) their place at table and eat (willan-on eat) sumptuous meals while watching (willing watchen) the whole of creation explode around them.
> This, many would say, is equally impossible.
> You can arrive (mayan arrivan on-when) for any sitting you like without prior (late fore-when) reservation because you can book retrospectively, as it were, when you return to your own time (you can have on-book haventa forewhen presooning returningwenta retrohome).
> This is, many would now insist, absolutely impossible.
> At the Restaurant you can meet and dine on (mayan meetan con with dinan on when) a fascinating cross-section of the entire population of space and time.
> This, it can be explained patiently, is also impossible.

> You can visit it as many times as you like (mayan on-visit re-onvisiting...and so on – for further tense correction consult Dr. Streetmentioner's book) and be sure of never meeting yourself, because of the embarrassment this usually causes. (213-214)

The result of the narrator's illustration is a kind of mock grammar, featuring a range of basically familiar but newly combined morphological elements such as inflection (*watchen, meetan*, etc.), auxiliary verbs (*mayan*, *willing*, *willan*, etc.), prefixes (*onvisit*, re-onvisiting, on-book, on-when, retrohome) and suffixes (returningwenta). Only the inflectional forms are invented, all other elements already constitute parts of the English language but are employed in a different way (with the exception of the prefixes *re-* and *pre-*). We can therefore speak of linguistic parody as traditional grammatical rules of word-formation are used and developed further with an added comic effect. The elements constituting the prefixes are also familiar as they are all used in describing aspects of time (*on*, *when*, *fore*, *retro*, *re-, pre-*). As can be seen, in order to describe future events faithfully the speaker would have to study a whole new set of grammar specially developed for the purpose and the narrator gives up the technique after a couple of sentences.

So much for referring to the future; the characters arriving at the end of the universe have a different problem entirely: what tense to use at the end of all creation when everything is past? “'At the end of the universe you have to use the past tense a lot,'” Zaphod explains, “'cause everything's been done, you know. Hi, guys,' he call[s] out to a nearby party of giant iguana lifeforms. 'How did you do?'” (217) Like most other science fiction authors therefore, Adams mostly narrates his novels in the past tense, treating the present as history which is reflected in the language. He also does not really comment directly on language change within the science fictional universe. The narrator's explanations can rather be seen as comments on the craft of narrating science fiction. The passages quoted above nevertheless show a high awareness of the role of language in representing the fictional world and are the best examples for pointing out that parody is not only destructive and ridiculing, but can also take an active part in addressing and trying to resolve existing contradictions and dilemmas within a genre.

3.3.3. The Babel fish and other impossibly useful devices: addressing issues of multilingualism and language variation in the space opera narrative

Another problem of a linguistic nature that science fiction authors often have to face is that of language variation and multilingualism in a globalised, or rather, “universalised” universe. Science fictional universes are populated by a number of different life forms that logically could be assumed to speak different languages, as languages change and develop in different contexts. A different physique (alien) and environment (different planets) as well as a social context much different to that on Earth is therefore bound to produce a number of different languages. However, very few writers actually attempt to invent a language for each alien race. Famous examples for texts that have chosen this path are for example Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* (Orkish, Elbish and other languages are mapped out in detail), *Star Trek* (Klingon has taken on a life of its own as fans have developed it into a working language (Roberts, *History* 275-76)) or to some extent *Star Wars* (works with subtitles to translate various alien languages for the viewer). If alien languages are established as foreign languages, they often have to be learned by the main characters, which spares the writer the trouble of having to include alien dialogue. As soon as the protagonist speaks the foreign language, dialogue can be fictionally “translated” into English. John Carter in Burroughs' *A Princess of Mars* unrealistically learns Martian within several days, which is explained by the largely telepathic way of communication that is typical of Martian. Robert Heinlein in *Stranger in a Strange Land* develops this idea further and has several of his characters learn Martian (including telepathy) within very short stretches of time, which consequently enlightens them. Other writers simply choose to ignore the problem altogether. In Asimov's *Foundation* series for example, the entire galaxy is populated by humans who all speak English as a lingua franca. Especially in the space opera narrative, which frequently takes protagonists on adventures to many a strange planet populated by alien races, the problem becomes apparent. Both not wanting to ignore the problem of language variation entirely and not being ready to invent ten different alien languages, many writers make use of an SF *novum* to find a way around the problem of linguistic mediation. Kinglsley Amis again characterises this *novum* in his *New Maps of Hell*:

> The idea of a translation machine, recalling the space-warp in being usually

> introduced by phrases like “He set up the translation machine,” differs from the space-warp in presenting a direct affront to common sense, for such a machine would clearly be foiled even by an utterance in Portuguese unless it had been “taught”. (Amis 21)

Translation machines have the advantage that they provide a way around the problem of communicating with aliens and at the same time do not have to be explained in detail anymore as they represent a well-established science fiction cliché with which readers are familiar and that can therefore be employed at will. However, they are of course a “direct affront to common sense”, as Amis points out, because they signal a rather primitive understanding of language. Stockwell too criticises this tool as it expresses the idea that language is simply a collection of words that can directly refer to things in the real world, whereas in reality this is of course impossible as we know at least since the emergence of structuralism and post-structuralism. Apart from the fact that such a technique would completely ignore the encodings of grammar, different languages emerge in different cultural environments and one would end up with complete gibberish using such a device (Stockwell 52). Apart from translation machines in *Star Trek,* Stockwell also discusses Adams' “Babel fish”, which is a parody of the aforementioned devices, to illustrate the problem. The Babel fish, according to *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*,

> is small, yellow and leechlike, and probably the oddest thing in the Universe. It feeds on brainwave energy received not from its own carrier but from those around it. It absorbs all unconscious mental frequencies from this brainwave energy to nourish itself with. It then excretes into the mind of its carrier a telepathic matrix formed by combining the conscious thought frequencies with nerve signals picked up from the speech centers of the brain which has supplied them. The practical upshot of all this is that if you stick a Babel fish in your ear you can instantly understand anything said to you in any form of language. The speech patterns you actually hear decode the brainwave matrix which has been fed into your mind by your Babel fish. (42)

Like any SF *novum*, the Babel fish does of course have to be described in a properly scientific manner. The fish is not a manufactured technological device and its existence in a science fictional universe not presented as completely impossible. It can be identified as a parody of translation machines, because again it combines an absurd idea with plausible-sounding description. However, although it parodies the concept, the Babel fish actually fulfils the same role as any translation device in SF; it spares Adams the trouble of having to invent all his alien languages because the text can be focalised through Arthur or

Ford who are both carrying a Babel fish. It also represents the same primitive understanding of language on which such inventions are based.

However, although Adams does not have to represent alien languages due to the convenience of his imaginary Babel fish, he does suggest new and humorous ways of writing *about* alien life forms in a matching vocabulary. In *Life, the Universe and Everything*, Adams introduces the idea that mattresses are actually intelligent life forms living in swamps that are killed, dried and then slept on by others. Since the idea of living mattresses is one so unconventional, the narrator makes use of new vocabulary to be in accordance with the mattresses' physique and lifestyle. When one of them tries to engage in a conversation with Marvin, this includes a large array of new verbs used to describe the mattress' activities: “The mattress folloped around. This is a thing that only live mattresses in swamps are able to do, which is why the word is not in common usage.” (350) However, what exactly is meant by “folloping” is left to the reader's imagination. Adams' narrator then goes on to describe the mattress' actions in more detail, for which reference to several imaginary dictionaries is necessary:

> The mattress globbered. This is the noise made by a live, swamp-dwelling mattress that is deeply moved by a story of personal tragedy. The word can also, according to the *Ultra-Complete Maximegalon Dictionary of Every Language Ever*, mean the noise made by the Lord High Sanvalvawag of Hollop on discovering that he has forgotten his wife's birthday for the second year running. Since there has only ever been one Lord High Sanvalvwag of Hollop and he never married, the word is only used in a negative or speculative sense, and there is an ever-increasing body of opinion that holds that the *Ultra-Complete Maximegalon Dictionary* is not worth the fleet of trucks it takes to cart its microstored edition around in. Strangely enough, the dictionary omits the word “floopily”, which simply means “in the manner of something which is floopy.” (351)

No matter how many dictionaries and alternative uses are cited, the reader can still not relate the word in question to a known sound. On the contrary, additional backup information makes making sense of what is described even more complicated, due to the reader's implied unfamiliarity with both anthropomorphic mattresses and the Lord High Sanvalvwag. This illustrates the fact that dictionaries can only provide useful information if their content, that is, lexical items, can be put into a relevant cultural context and related to something that is known. This argument is carried on as the narrator reports that the mattress “vollued (for the meaning of the word 'vollue' buy a copy of *Sqornshellous Swamptalk* […])” (351). The reader can of course not follow this suggestion, because he or she is not located within the science fictional universe in which the story is set, thus having to remain clueless forever. However, the narrator assumes that he has provided enough background information and cheerfully reports on the last page of the chapter: “The mattress flurred and glurried. It flolloped, gupped and willomied, doing this last in a particularly floopy way.” (354) The reader is taken for a ride which is underlined by the chapter ending with “the now familiar sound of half-crazed etymologists calling to each other across the sullen mire” (354).

Adams here parodies the discourse of linguistics as well as the language of dictionaries in a series of wild cross-references. Nevertheless, the passage represents an attempt of using new words for the encounter with a new race. It also shows the impossibility for those not familiar with the alien race to understand what is being referred to. Such a parody reverses the effect of the Babel fish. Using new words in order to represent alien species is an attempt to describe the Other within its own cultural and physical context. However, the words used by Adams do not have actually existing concepts to follow; imagining activities corresponding to them is completely left to the reader. Thus, the coined lexical items are free to take on a multitude of different meanings depending on which context the reader prefers to put them, thus demonstrating a more modern understanding of language which is opposed to the more primitive one illustrated by the Babel fish.

3.3.4. Micro-parody: word coinage

Adams' novels can also be said to include instances on the most micrological level possible, that is, on the word level. Science fiction offers a multitude of neologisms, which have to be invented in order to describe new inventions and technological innovations. These new devices are often sensational-sounding and supposedly connected to actually existing scientific gadgets. “Pulp SF often disguises gaps in scientific knowledge by patching a technically-sounding invented word over a phenomenon”, Stockwell (82) observes. This practice originates in the fact that on the one hand, most SF texts strive to uphold an air of realism and authenticity and on the other hand still want to create a sense of wonder and exoticism in the reader. Neologisms in SF create a sort of narrative illusion and “signal to the reader that something very clever, advanced, and technological is happening” (Stockwell 117) In pulpstyle this is usually done by importing and slightly changing words from the natural sciences, but over the years words from the humanities and social sciences have become ready sources as well. Although some SF texts seem to overflow with neologisms, these words are often not as new as one might think. Only very few writers actually invent new words to refer to new concepts (Stockwell 117-18). Robert Heinlein's Martian word *to grok* is one example and has now entered everyday vocabulary. The Oxford English Dictionary defines its meaning as to “understand (something) intuitively or by empathy.” (OED, s.v. *grok*) However, usually authors try to create a sense of newness by combining known but previously unconnected words. Examples for this technique are numerous and have already appeared in this paper several times: hyperdrive, time machine, space-warp, etc. all represent new uses of familiar elements and by now constitute part of the classical SF vocabulary.

Since some of the mechanisms of word coinage occur so often in science fiction (hyper+adjective or verb, for example), they too represent a ready target for parody. Of course not all of Adams' neologisms can be said to be parodic. Sometimes they are simply used in a traditional science fictional manner and help to add detail to the story. However, some instances of word coinage can clearly be said to be parodic. One instance of how this is done has already been discussed above: Adams uses the *-oid* suffix (denoting resemblance) used in SF to describe new life forms such as humanoids or reptiloids, in order to create unlikely aliens such as treeoids or ballpointoids. In this case it is the combination of two opposed concepts that causes the humorous reaction: the familiar scientific suffix and the strange concept that some alien species may resemble trees or ballpoints. This of course also ridicules a technique of more unimaginative SF, which is to make a familiar object appear strange and sophisticated simply by adding an impressive suffix of Greek origin. Some of Adams' neologisms could indeed have been used in any SF narrative for the exaggerated use of words denoting great size. In describing an alcoholic drink called the Pan Galactic Gargle Blaster, itself a neologism made up of known words, Adams makes use of at least three more. To make the drink, the reader is told, it is necessary to mix Ol' Janx Spirit, Arcturan Mega-Jin and Qualactin Hypermint extract (17). The overuse of prefixes denoting size, such as *hyper-* or *mega-* simply serves to make what is described seem enormous, exotic, and slightly dangerous. The exotic effect is heightened by the use of invented places, which are never described or visited by any of the characters appearing in the novel. This popular SF technique is laid bare by combining the impressive-sounding prefixes with words semantically associated with harmlessness, such as mint.

In some instances the parodic intent behind the neologisms can only be identified in opposition to the narrative style. Stockwell analyses this in more detail in his discussion of the description of the Infinite Improbability Drive (passage quoted above):

> Phrases such as 'Bambleweeny 57 Sub-Meson Brain' combine the sort of numerical nomenclature and Latin-based specialist scientific words with a name blended from 'bamboozled' (deliberately fooled) and 'weeny' (small and childish), to undercut the seriousness of the usual computer-naming domain. This bathos is further developed by switching from multiple-word names ('atomic vector plotter') in a scientifically descriptive and formal register ('principle', 'generating', 'suspended') using real scientific terms ('Brownian motion'), to the colloquial ('say a nice hot cup of tea'). The connection of serious scientific research to sleazy parties mirrors this debasement, and the typical form of logical reasoning found in science fiction is used at the end to 'explain' the principle of infinite improbability. (Stockwell 116-117)

According to Stockwell, it is thus mainly a combination of serious-sounding scientific vocabulary, a colloquial tone of narration and use of more than light-hearted examples that make the passage parodic. The element creating the ironic distance on which parody relies thus can either be included into the neologism itself or be established in the sophisticated neologism's opposition to the conversational style or the silliness of the imaginary object it describes.

In Adams' novels it is made very explicit that science fictional *nova* are only props made of language rather than actually existing and scientifically observable new discoveries. They exist primarily in the reader's own imagination, their appearance is evoked only via linguistic description and the names they bear. Playing with established mechanisms of word coinage can therefore directly penetrate to the reader's imagination and create a humorous effect.

3.4. “We apologise for the inconvenience”: conclusion to chapter three

As could hopefully be shown in this chapter, Adams does not merely parody the genre of science fiction on one superficial level. His novels show a high awareness of how science fiction works, with regard to its narrative techniques, means of plot and character construction, themes, motifs and linguistic organisation. As was demonstrated, the function this multi-layered parody has can also vary greatly according to which level is observed.

The choice of narrative perspective, plot structure and characterisation mainly serves to subvert the expectations readers have of a classical SF narrative and disturb the sense of security guaranteed by less fragmented narratives. This serves to bring across a similar ideological point as the depiction of aliens, robots or philosophy, namely that human beings take themselves too seriously and repeatedly fail to make sense of the world. This theme is in stark contrast with the confident ideology so often represented in SF; that humankind can be the ruler of the universe and understand it according to scientific observation. At the same time, Adams incorporates enough humour into his narratives to make it all seem alright. Although the *Hitchhiker* novels are well thought out works of genre parody, they include inventions, alien life forms and characters that are original in their own right. Adams revels in stretching the boundaries of the genre by incorporating a multitude of intertextual references, parodic neologisms and even new grammatical forms. If traditional SF is a celebration of humankind's potential for technological and scientific advancement, Adams' parodic SF is a celebration of the human imagination. Not rationality is at the forefront of its thematic concerns, but humanity's unique ability to do away with scientific fact and replace it with something if not more useful, then at least more fun. Here is an author who despite using pseudo-science as a narrative vehicle, revels in the sheer fantasy of his creation. The genre's tropes are never imitated to be henceforth critically dismissed, but are at best exaggerated to be turned into something new and support the message that many readers still see in a series of novels originally only intended as good fun. This message is that “[t]he universe acts in accordance with laws over which it has no control. It has no imagination. Man does. And this imagination allows him to laugh at the whole universe the way John Donne's brash young lover eclipses the sun with a simple wink.” (Whissen 113)

4. Discourse parody in the *Hitchhiker* novels

> [A]s far as I was concerned, I wasn't sending up science fiction. I was using science fiction as a vehicle for sending up everything else.
> (Adams qtd. in Simpson 95)

This chapter will be concerned with Adams' distortion of cultural, societal, political and other norms that are taken for granted by making the reader see them in a different light. This phenomenon in Adams' work has been analysed as satire by critics such as Antor. However, as has already been pointed out, discourse parody, rather than symbolically pointing towards the target of its criticism, makes the target discourse part of its own structure and imitates it. In this chapter it will be argued that Adams does exactly that. While satire and parody certainly overlap in his work, he very often offers a critique of social and cultural phenomena by making their linguistic properties or simply their existence part of his science fictional universe. Some may occur only marginally, others come to be supporting elements of the plot and drive the action forward. It will also be argued that discourse parody is especially effective in a parodic science fiction novel. As the quote above illustrates, Adams himself was very well aware of this fact. Via the various SF *nova*, the targeted discourses can be transported into the most unlikely environments, which makes their underlying absurdities seem all the more obvious and humorous to the reader.

The principle underlying discourse parody in Adams' novel is, as Antor rightly observes, that "the microcosmic events on Earth [...] have a macrocosmic equivalent in the events regarding the galaxy as a whole." (Antor 193)[24] Discourses in the galaxy mirror discourses on Earth. Antor deduces from this coexistence of the familiar and the strange that the science fictional Other is robbed of its estranging features and becomes humorous, because it no longer poses a threat (193). However, in accordance with the theories of parody discussed above, it could be argued that the exact opposite is the case: by transporting the familiar into a science fictional environment, parody does what it can do best, that is, it estranges the familiar. Because the familiar is fashioned into an SF *novum*, self becomes other, reality becomes science fiction. What follows is a perspective that is humorous *because* it is estranged; it creates ironic distance. Forced to view familiar discourses in a science fictionally distorted light, the reader is prompted to recognise their hidden absurdities.[25] How this is put into practice will be analysed in the following sections.

Since Adams' novels include numerous instances of discourse parody[26] to which the author devotes varying amounts of space and attention, not all of them can be analysed in detail. The chapter will merely give some examples to illustrate by what means discourse parody can be combined with science fiction and the effects achieved by it.

---

[24] "Die mikrokosmischen Vorgänge auf der Erde haben [...] ein makrokosmisches Äquivalent in den Vorgängen, die die gesamte Galaxis betreffen."

[25] See Van der Colff ("Douglas Adams") for a discussion of absurdity and satire in Adams' novels.

[26] Most of them have been listed (under satire) and referenced by Antor (195-96).

4.1. *“Beware of the Leopard”: the discourse of bureaucracy*

The discourse of bureaucracy is one of Adams' major parodic targets. Especially in his first novel, bureaucratic proceedings – though in a hugely exaggerated form – are portrayed as confusing, pointless and incredibly destructive. Arthur's house and indeed the whole planet fall prey to their workings. The discourse of bureaucracy also represents a suitable starting point for this chapter, as it is one of the few discourses that are parodied both inside and outside the science fiction narrative of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy.*

In chapter 1, Arthur Dent finds out about the scheduled destruction of his home only one day before it is planned to take place and is obviously not very taken by the idea as he protectively positions himself in front of a bulldozer and starts a lively discussion with the council man Mr. Prosser:

> Mr. Prosser said, “You were quite entitled to make any suggestions or protests at the appropriate time, you know.”
> “Appropriate time?” hooted Arthur. “Appropriate time? The first I knew about it was when a workman arrived at my home yesterday. I asked him if he'd come to clean to [sic.] windows and he said no, he'd come to demolish the house. He didn't tell me straight away of course. Oh no. First he wiped a couple of windows and charged me a fiver. Then he told me.” (9)

Mr. Prosser here is using the matter-oft-fact language of bureaucracy as we would expect to hear it from any diligent council man. His air of reason is destroyed, however, by Arthur's revelation of his strange circumstances and the greed of the workman. Arthur is clearly being sarcastic and the reader does not yet know if his rant is to be taken seriously. However, the conversation carries on as follows:

> “But Mr. Dent, the plans have been available in the local planning office for the last nine months.”
> “Oh yes, well, as soon as I heard I went straight round to see them, yesterday afternoon. You hadn't exactly gone out of your way to call attention to them, had you? I mean, like actually telling anybody or anything.”
> “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 flashlight.”
> “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'." (9-10)

Although the council man maintains his sober, reasonable mode of discourse, he says nothing to deny that the plans were really "on display" under the circumstances described by Arthur. Mr. Posser's claim to transparency and lawfulness are systematically deconstructed by Arthur's description of his quest to recover the plans for the bypass. The humour does not only stem from the difference in register between the two characters, but also from the fact that "in the local planning office" is to be taken literally. One would normally expect to find the plans on display in one of the offices or in a public section. However, here we are reminded that a planning office is a rather large building also including a cellar, disused lavatories and the like in which we would not expect to find plans for motorway bypasses. Mr. Posser is telling the truth. He has not hidden the plans, he simply put them somewhere where nobody would care to look for them for want of light or even stairs. This conversation is a particularly exaggerated satire on bureaucratic widening of the truth and creating loopholes that keep normal citizens from achieving goals the establishment does not want them to achieve.

The same theme and even a copy of the linguistic discourse used by Mr. Prosser is then carried over into a science fictional context. Arthur's house is eventually demolished. However, the demolition of the house is followed shortly by the demolition of Earth by the Vogons to make way for an intergalactic hyperspace bypass. Shortly before the Earth is wiped out, Prostetnic Vogon Jeltz, who is in charge of the Vogon space fleet, makes the following announcement to the people of Earth:

> "*People of Earth, your attention please*," a voice said, and it was wonderful. Wonderful perfect quadrophonic sound with distortion levels so low as to make a brave man weep.
> "*This is Prostetnic Vogon Jeltz of the Galactic Hyperspace Planning Council,*" the voice continued. "*As you will no doubt be aware, the plans for development of the outlying regions of the Galaxy require the building of a hyperspace express route through your star system, and regrettably your planet is one of those scheduled for demolition. The process will take slightly less than two of your Earth minutes. Thank you*."
> […]
> "*There's no point in acting all surprised about it. All the planning charts and demolition orders have been on display in your local planning department in Alpha Centauri for fifty of your Earth years, so you've had plenty of time to lodge any formal complaint and it's far too late to start making a fuss about it now*."
> […]

> “*What do you mean you've never been to Alpha Centauri? For heaven's sake, mankind, it's only four light-years away, you know. I'm sorry, but if you can't be bothered to take an interest in local affairs that's your own lookout.*
> “*Energize the demolition beams*”
> Light poured out of the hatchways.
> “*I don't know*,” said the voice on the PA, “*apathetic bloody planet, I've no sympathy at all*.” It cut off. (25-26)

The Vogon starts out in the typical bureaucratic mode of discourse that has already been observed above with Mr. Prosser. He is even using the same words as the Earthling most of the time, just that the British planning council is transformed into the Galactic Hyperspace Planning Council which is located “only” four light-years away on Alpha Centauri. Earth bureaucracy here is mirrored in alien bureaucracy. Its setting is transformed and it is uttered by a bug-eyed SF monster, but the discourse remains familiar to the reader. The parody of bureaucratic discourse is strengthened through this technique as it is transferred into an even stranger setting where the reader would not expect to encounter it, like he or she would not hope to find motorway plans in the cellar. The alien would traditionally be expected to embody part of humanity as Other and indeed he does. He is humorously representative of bureaucrats. However, he is not conceived as frightful and alienating, because he first speaks in the familiar, sober mode of discourse of the bureaucrat and later becomes so annoyed by the ignorance of the Earthlings that he switches to a more colloquial, lower register. The situation described is no more ridiculous or impossible than that encountered by Arthur regarding his house. For a normal citizen tracking down building plans in the cellar of the planning department might be equally as impossible as finding them on Alpha Centauri. Arthur's ignorance on Earth is transformed into the ignorance of all of humanity when confronted with the Vogons. The technological superiority of the alien race is even reflected in the PA system they use and which is admired at great length by the narrator. The Vogon bureaucrats may know very well that humanity is not yet advanced enough to travel to Alpha Centauri, let alone regard the business of the whole galaxy (which they think is uninhabited excepting their own planet) as “local affairs”. Similarly, Mr. Prosser might not have expected residents to dig up the council's plans from the basement. What both of them have in common is that they operate from within the law – their plans are potentially transparent – but have the power to mask their deeds very effectively so that neither Arthur nor humanity can find out and complain about them before it is too late.

Bureaucracy is indeed used to characterise negatively the whole alien race of the

Vogons. The fictional “Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy” within the book says on the subject of Vogons that

> *[t]hey 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.* (38)

As the Vogons are recurring throughout most of the *Hitchhiker* novels and are seen as one of the greatest threats to the main character's well-being, it can be said that bureaucracy in Adams' novels is regarded if not as the root of all evil, then at least as that of most of it. The Vogons are indeed not evil, but they are sure to execute anything exactly as planned, disregarding all other life forms in the process. Therefore, when it is discovered in the two final novels of the sequence that Earth has only been demolished on one dimensional level, they make sure to destroy it on all other probability levels as well; not for a pure dislike of humanity, but simply to finish their business.[27] Only Eoin Colfer in his sequel to the *Hitchhiker*- series adds some truly diabolic qualities to the Vogon character, having them hunt down and try to destroy a small colony of survivors from Earth. Again they do it because it has to be done, but also seem to find some sadistic pleasure in it. However, it is not necessary to recreate the Vogons as ultimate science fictional Other. They are conceived and realised as a mirror to Earth bureaucracy that makes the reader all the more aware of – and laugh about – bureaucratic processes in his or her own environment via a science fictionally refashioned version of a familiar discourse.

4.2. The discourse of literature and literary criticism; or, a brief discussion of Vogon poetry

The discourse of literary criticism is a mode that many writers are all too familiar with. In many ways creative writing and literary criticism are dependent on each other. The critic needs the writer as an object of his or her study and the author depends on the critic to evaluate his or her work and to promote it. Writers parodying the discourse of literary criticism could therefore be said to “bite the hand that feeds them”. Still, parodies of this discourse appear very frequently, especially in the postmodern novel, as Korkut has pointed out, referring especially to the works of David Lodge and other “campus-novelists” (73). Korkut explains this tendency in postmodern fiction as both increasing self-consciousness of the novelist as well as an attempt to raise questions regarding the nature of literature and the role of its study in society. Through this, genre boundaries can be re-defined uniting the practices of literature and literary criticism (Korkut 73-74). Seen in this light, it is not surprising to find literary critical discourse parodied in a work of genre parody such as the *Hitchhiker* series. What is surprising however, is to find literary critical discourse parodied in a science fiction novel and even made an essential element of the SF-plot. After all, the genre generally does not enjoy the reputation of a particularly “literary” mode and is known for its particular dependence on the sustainment of aesthetic illusion. If Adams' novel is to be read as parody however, which by its nature is always metatextual, literary allusions are almost to be expected.

---

[27] In the film adaptation of *The Hitchhiker's guide to the Galaxy* (2005), which differs slightly from the novels, Arthur, Ford and Zaphod go to rescue Trillian from the Vogons in one of their office buildings, a scene which includes some more instances of discourse parody, which, for lack of space however, cannot be discussed here. It shall only be mentioned that the Vogons in the film immediately release Trillian as soon as Zaphod has signed a special “presidential release form” without showing any signs of grudge. Their bureaucratic nature is even enhanced by the fact that they diligently go on a lunch break before chasing after the president.

The prime example in the novels of a parody of literary discourse is of course Vogon poetry. Both the purpose of poetry and the context in which it naturally occurs are subverted by explicitly associating it with a particularly unpleasant alien race. First of all, making the Vogons extremely bad poets contributes to their characterisation which reflects part of humanity. Not only are they bureaucrats, they are also poor poets. These qualities are portrayed as negative as the Vogons are the ultimate evil in the first novel. Secondly, the way in which the Vogons employ their poetic skill (or lack of it) humorously questions the place of poetry in society as well as the problem of its evaluation. Here is what *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* has to say about Vogon poetry:

> Vogon poetry is of course the third worst in the Universe. The second worst is that of the Azgoths of Kria. 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 his own 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, leaped straight up through his neck and throttled his brain.
>
> The very worst poetry of all perished along with its creator, Paula Nancy Millstone

> Jennings of Greenbridge, Essex, England, in the destruction of the planet Earth. (45)

The passage is written in the sober, disinterested tone of an encyclopaedia- article, quoting book titles in italics and giving evidence for the “reception” of certain poems, not dissimilarly to the idiom of literary criticism. What makes it very partial however, is its claim that poetry can easily be evaluated in terms of badness. The second place is even awarded to the poetry of an entire alien nation. Science fiction writer Lawrence Watt-Evans has contributed a mock essay on Vogon poetry to *The Anthology at the End of the Universe* (2004) in which – although the piece is not to be taken seriously – he makes some useful points about the discourse of poetry in *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. One of these points is his puzzlement about there actually existing a definite means of evaluating poetry not in its positive aspects, but in its badness, indicated by the confident “of course” in the “Guide”-entry (Watt-Evans 66). Literary criticism is always partial to some extent and open to interpretation. However, the literary critic has to give some textual evidence to support his or her claim. The evidence given by the “Guide” is however not textual, but very graspable and physical. It is claimed that the quality of poetry can actually be experienced physically which can lead to painful experiences and even death.

This theory is further enhanced when Arthur Dent and Ford Prefect are captured by the Vogons and brought before their captain who decides to read some of his poetry to them before throwing them into space to die of suffocation. It is soon revealed that this is seen as a form of sadistic torture rather than a way of granting the prisoners one last pleasure:

> The prisoners sat in Poetry Appreciation chairs – strapped in. Vogons suffered no illusions as to the regard their works were generally held in. Their early attempts at composition had been part of a bludgeoning insistence that they be accepted as a properly evolved and cultured race, but now the only thing that kept them going was sheer bloody-mindedness.
>
> The sweat stood cold on Ford Prefect's brow, and slid round the electrodes strapped to his temples. These were attached to a battery of electronic equipment – imagery intensifiers, rhythmic modulators, alliterative residuators and simile dumpers – all designed to heighten the experience of the poem and make sure that no single nuance of the poet's thought was lost. (44)

This passage maintains that, not only can poetry be physically experienced, the experience can also be enhanced by electronic equipment. Several science fictional *nova* are introduced that have been especially designed for the better appreciation of poetry – from Poetry Appreciation chairs to alliterative residuators. This indicates that poetry is held in high regard in Adams' universe, though for dubious reasons. If it were not, technicians would not be bothered to design such equipment. Also, the Vogons' initial attempts at producing poetry were intended to strengthen their prestige in intergalactic society. This depicts art as something associated with cultural superiority and civilisation on the one hand, but also with a great deal of pretentiousness on the other. However, the definition of poetry as pleasure-giving is most cruelly subverted. It is turned into an instrument of torture. The whole passage serves to question comically the role of poetry in society: poetry signals cultural advancement but the audience does not seem to enjoy it in the least. It also satirises the dictates of literary criticism by suggesting a most definite way to evaluate bad poetry, that is, by experiencing unpleasant physical sensations. Such a satire would certainly not be possible outside the SF narrative. Adams employs the SF *novum* to comment on the problem of literary evaluation. The parody also seems to be based on an assumption that only alien life forms can physically feel poetry as Arthur himself seems to be immune to the effects of bad poetry on one's physical health. This has also been observed by Watt-Evans who explains Arthur's immunity by his coming from the same planet and even the same country as the universe's worst poet (69).

The Vogon reads Arthur and Ford his poem[28] and while Ford is writhing in pain, Arthur makes an attempt at discussing the alien's poem, hoping that he will let them go if his work receives a positive reception:

> Arhur said brightly, “Actually I quite liked it.”
> Ford turned and gaped. Here was an approach that had quite simply not occurred to him.
> The Vogon raised a surprised eyebrow that effectively obscured his nose and was therefore no bad thing.
> “Oh good...” he whirred, in considerable astonishment.
> “Oh yes,” said Arthur, “I thought that some of the metaphysical imagery was really particularly effective.” [...]
> “Yes, do continue...” invited the Vogon.
> “Oh...and, er...interesting rhythmic devices too.” continued Arthur, “which seemed to counterpoint the...er...er...” he floundered.
> Ford leaped to his rescue, hazarding “counterpoint the surrealism of the underlying metaphor of the ...er...er” He floundered too, but Arthur was ready again.
> “...humanity of the...”
> “*Vogonity*,” Ford hissed at him.
> “Ah yes, Vogonity – sorry – of the poet's compassionate soul” - Arthur felt he was

---

[28] It will not be quoted here, but can be found in the appendix for further reference.

> on a homestretch now - “which contrives through the medium of the verse structure to sublimate this, transcend that, and come to terms with the fundamental dichotomies of the other” - he was reaching a triumphant crescendo - “and one is left with a profound and vivid insight into...into...er...” (which suddenly gave out on him). Ford leaped in with the coup de grace:
> “Into whatever it was the poem was about!” he yelled. Out of the corner of his mouth: “Well done, Arthur, that was very good.” (46-47)

Here we have literary critical discourse parodied most directly. Arthur and Ford speak in the idiom of literary criticism like students of English literature in an exam situation. However, the context is highly exaggerated. Their discourse is empty, there is no graspable sense to it; they say a lot without actually saying anything at all, which seems to be exactly what is expected of them. Presenting a particularly impressive piece of literary criticism may save their lives, but making an impression does not seem to be connected with actually providing a statement about the Vogon's poem. Rather, they try to mask their lack of opinion by delivering a speech in highbrow academic jargon that tackles all the points of poetic evaluation (imagery, rhythmic devices, etc.) without actually connecting them to the poem in question. There is also a change in register towards academic language. Arthur and Ford use considerably more words of Latin or Greek origin than they normally would (*sublimate*, *transcend*, *dichotomies*, etc.) and Arthur even scholarly avoids a self-reference, substituting the pronoun “one” for “I” and thus laying claim to truth and objectivity. The passage represents the language of literary criticism as elitist and devoid of substance, simply being there to impress those less educated. On the other hand, literary criticism in this scene becomes a matter of life and death. If their piece of criticism fails, Arthur and Ford will die. While literature and literary criticism surely have a valued place in our own reality, they cannot claim to be of as great an importance as in Adams' SF universe. This contributes to the comic effect as it again estranges the reader through a change of context while mirroring a familiar discourse.

However, the joint favourable evaluation of the Vogon's poem does not have the planned effect:

> The Vogon perused them. For a moment his embittered racial soul had been touched, but he thought no – too little too late. His voice took on the quality of a cat snagging brushed nylon.
> “So what you're saying is that I write poetry because underneath my mean callous heartless exterior I really just want to be loved,” he said. He paused, “Is that right?”
> Ford laughed a nervous laugh. “Well, I mean, yes,” he said, “don't we all, deep down, you know...er...”

> The Vogon stood up.
> “No, well, you're completely wrong,” he said, “I just write poetry to throw my mean callous heartless exterior into sharp relief. I'm going to throw you off the ship anyway. [...]”
> A steel door closed and the captain was on his own again. He hummed quietly and mused to himself, lightly fingering his notebook of verses.
> “Hmmm,” he said, “*counterpoint the surrealism of the underlying metaphor....*” He considered this for a moment, and then closed the book with a grim smile.
> “Death's too good for them,” he said. (47-48)

It seems astonishing that the Vogon has actually discovered a point in Ford's and Arthur's review. He is also momentarily impressed by the critics' performance but cannot be misguided. It seems that Ford and Arthur have interpreted too much of their own desire for freedom and humane treatment into the Vogon's poem, but that this interpretation cannot hold when directly confronted with the author's own viewpoint; at least not when the author clearly is in a position of power and has one strapped to a chair. The poem's author also concludes the scene with the words “[d]eath's too good for them.” Whether he does this because their discourse has been without substance or whether he sneers at the idea of literary criticism in general remains unclear.

What can be observed here is that Adams comments on the purpose of literary criticism in a variety of ways that combine parody, satire and science fiction. He adds a new comic dimension to literary appreciation by introducing the *novum* of potentially deadly “physical poetry”, supported by a number of imaginary electronic devices. He also imitates the familiar idiom of literary criticism in a science fiction world, completely changing its context and purpose. In this universe, literary criticism becomes a matter of life and death. However, it is presented as empty, pretentious and devoid of all meaning. Both poetry and its criticism only serve to uphold appearances and at best annoy the audience. At least in this scene, they are reduced completely to acts of performance.

4.3. The discourse of politics and economics

Douglas Adams cannot be said to target one particular political system in his novels. Rather, the target is social and thus political *organisation* and the means of economic production associated with it. On the various different planets Adams invents, we find satires of constitutional monarchies, presidential elections, communism and capitalism, usually in anecdotal form or by means of digression to map out alien environments. Again these forms of organisation and exchange are not alternative visions as would be expected in SF with a social *novum*, but again all too familiar. Social organisation in the *Hitchhiker* universe always mirrors social organisation in our own reality. However, this mirror is distorting; the science fictional environment again serves to estrange the familiar discourses and reveal their underlying contradictions. Thus, politics in the Hitchhiker-novels is more often than not portrayed as incompetent, if not completely pointless.

Usually politics in the *Hitchhiker* galaxy is not representative of historical political states or occurrences, but rather of fears people who experience politics from the outside might hold. One such fear, namely that politicians may not hold any actual power, but be controlled and corrupted by corporations or other mysterious entities, is addressed in the description of the President of the Galaxy's role:

> The President in particular is very much a figurehead – he wields no real power whatsoever. He is apparently chosen by the government, but the qualities he is required to display are not those of leadership but those of finely judged outrage. For this reason the president is always a controversial choice, always an infuriating but fascinating character. His job is not to wield power but to draw attention away from it. (28)

This passage shows disillusionment with politics and the political decision-making process. Many readers who in their time may have encountered Earth-politicians elected for their style and entertaining potential rather than their skills may be able to identify this disillusionment. The main difference is that in the *Hitchhiker* galaxy this is not speculation but a known fact on which the representation of the people seems to be based. No-one knows who holds the actual power.[29] Zaphod Beeblebrox, the President of the Galaxy who accompanies the heroes, is himself a parody of a politician (as has been pointed out above). If it were not for his title, the reader would immediately forget his important role in the Galaxy. Zaphod hardly ever talks about politics or is concerned about the well-being of the Galaxy. All he cares about is himself and how he could accumulate more fame, money and expensive gadgets (Antor 195). Politics is unmasked as a man-made discourse rather than a system of natural rules. See for example this passage taken from *Mostly Harmless*, in which democracy is compared to astrology:

---

[29] The crew of the Heart of Gold meet the real ruler of the Universe in *The Restaurant at the End of the Universe*. He turns out to be an ancient man living in a lonely hut together with his cat. He himself is not aware that he rules the Universe as he lives completely in the here-and-now, takes nothing for granted and tends to forget everything he has experienced after a few minutes.

> "*I* know that astrology isn't a science," said Gail. "Of course it isn't. It's just an arbitrary set of rules like chess or tennis or – what's that strange thing you British play?"
> "Er, cricket? Self-loathing?"
> "Parliamentary democracy. The rules just kind of got there. They don't make any kind of sense except in terms of themselves. But when you start to exercise those rules, all sorts of processes start to happen and you start to find out all sorts of stuff about people. [...]" (649)

The quote shows a high awareness of the nature of discourse: although the rules are constructed, they can have very real effect on the humans applying them. Indeed, sticking to the *rules* of discourse sometimes seems more important in Adams' depiction of politics than the actual purpose of politics.

The discourse of economics is more frequently parodied in the *Hitchhiker*-novels. The parodies all mirror economics on Earth, making use of the same linguistic idiom, but greatly simplify or exaggerate it. Page five of the *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* offers an introduction to Earth and its population seen from above, that is, the narrator at this moment is not associated with the planet in any way. The result is the following:

> *This planet has – or rather had – a problem, which was this: most of the people living on it were unhappy for pretty much of the time. Many solutions were suggested for this problem, but most of these were largely concerned with the movement of small green pieces of paper, which is odd because on the whole it wasn't the small green pieces of paper that were unhappy*. (5)

This description ridicules the concept of money by viewing it from afar in a disinterested fashion and reducing money to its purely superficial features. Viewed by an outsider, all that money seems to be is indeed just small green pieces of paper. Money is unmasked as a discursive construct to which meaning has been appointed in order to organise daily life. Its symbolic quality is only understood by the inhabitants of Earth. Using a space opera narrative in which the galaxy is globalised and there are various different planets to visit, Adams can parodically uncover economic constructs on the large scale as well as on the small scale.

Money as an organisational principle is again attacked in *The Restaurant at the End of the Universe*, in which Ford and Arthur encounter the crew of the B Ark. They have been sent away from their native planet of Golgafrincham to colonise a new planet. However, it is soon revealed that the so-called evacuation ship only holds "[h]airdressers, tired TV producers, insurance salesmen, personnel officers, security guards, public relations executives, management consultants, you name it" (269), seemingly unproductive members of the middles class Golgafrincham wanted to rid itself of. The planet that they strand on is revealed to be prehistoric Earth and the Golgafrinchams immediately proceed to colonising it by forming committees for basic inventions such as a way of making fire or the wheel. However, the committees, that is, politics, as well as the people's fixed professions get in the way of progress. For example, after months the Golgafrinchams have still not figured out how to make fire, the reason of which is explained to Ford:

> "When you've been in marketing as long as I have you'll know that before any new product can be developed it has to 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."
> […]
> "And the wheel," said the Captain, "what about this wheel thingy? It sounds a terribly interesting project."
> "Ah.," said the marketing girl, "well, we're having a little difficulty there."
> "Difficulty?" exclaimed Ford. "Difficulty? What do you mean, difficulty? It's the single simplest machine in the entire Universe!"
> The marketing girl soured him with a look.
> "All right, Mr. Wiseguy," she said, "you're so clever, you tell us what color it should be." (295-296)

Capitalism and economic specialisation on Golgafrincham (which again of course mirrors Earth) has been developed so far that it now actually stands in the way of basic development ensuring survival. The Golgafrinchams have a social structure based on discussion and consent, but it keeps them from getting to the bottom of things and see their defining features. The people identify so much with their individual jobs that they are now unable to escape their role in the system of economic production. Fire, as Van der Colff points out, "has not even been produced yet, and already the Golgafrincham corporate realm wants to turn it into a commodity" (Van der Colff, "Douglas Adams", 100) Again, sticking to the required socially constructed *discourse* is given priority over the survival of the species. The Golgafrinchams offer a perfect starting point for Adams to parody all most basic discourses of human social organisation. Since they have to start anew on a different planet, they have to redevelop new principles of organisation or adapt their old ones. This includes discussions of development addressed above as well as nationalism and war (297) or inflation and fiscal policy (299). The Golgafrinchams are humanity in a nutshell and do exactly the same thing humans do on Earth, but in an extreme environment and greatly exaggerated fashion. The parody thus again combines the familiar discourses of politics and economics with the unfamiliar concepts of alien colonisation and time travel. On prehistoric Earth, the meaninglessness of seemingly advanced discursive practices is addressed. Indeed it is later revealed that the Golgafrinchams extinguished prehistoric humans and thus replaced them, becoming the ancestors of contemporary humans. Ford and Arthur, despite representing (for once) practicality and reason, do nothing to resolve the situation. Both decide to separate and leave the Golgafrinchams in peace.

Despite the occurrence of parody targeting the discourse of politics, Adams' novels cannot be said to represent one particular political ideology. Characteristically, the discourse parody offers criticism of certain practices but no solutions, which distinguishes it from science fictional forms of utopian or dystopian fiction. Deconstruction is an end in itself. According to Macleod "[s]cience fiction is essentially the literature of progress, and the political philosophy of sf is essentially liberal." (MacLeod 231). This is why SF tends to represent, either consciously or unconsciously, a Western liberal understanding of politics, based on humanity's power over nature and the belief in history as progress. Such a belief is also due to the firm faith in scientific progress so often voiced in SF. Again Adams subverts this understanding. It has already been pointed out above that development in Adams' novels is not equated with progress and that human understanding is frequently confronted with its limits; evolution is essentially an anarchic force. Especially in the Golgafrincham-incident it becomes clear that political and economic advancement is not equated with progress on the large scale. Politicians' roles and purposes are questioned, as is the nature of money, stock markets, inflation, and related concepts. Adams ridicules political and economic processes and often unmarks them as ridiculous in contrasting them with the tribal and unordered state of nature. Ironically though, this is exactly a characteristic of a Propperian scientific world view stating that "[a]ny idea is there to be attacked". (qtd. in MacLeod 231) Whereas other SF writers deem it necessary to incorporate Western liberal ideas into their fiction (Robert Heinlein is the prime example), Adams parodically attacks political ideas simply to show that it can be done and that nothing is sacred, which can be seen as a major democratic principle (MacLeod 231).

4.4. *“Please do not push this button again”: the discourse of technology*

> We are stuck with technology when what we really want is just stuff that works. (Adams, *The Salmon of Doubt* 115)

As science fiction stories, the *Hitchhiker*- novels are naturally filled with technology and pseudo-technology of all kinds. In Adams' universe there are devices for anything and everything, from multi-use towels to sunglasses that turn black once a dangerous situation emerges. This has already been discussed in the context of science fiction genre parody. However, the discourse of technology is also parodied on a very real level that can be related to our everyday reality and merely uses SF as a vehicle to make statements about the way our society depends on technology.

Classic science fiction often deals with technology as a carrier of evil forebodings. The idea of the creation rebelling against its creator can be dated back at least to *Frankenstein* and has frequently been resurrected in other incarnations ever since. Other writers explicitly celebrate technological possibilities and how they might improve the human condition in the far future. However, Adams addresses and satirises the role of technology in the here and now.

Some of Adams' new and improbable devices are directly based on “real-world” technology, others are ridiculously alien and far-fetched. However, of whichever category the technology in the *Hitchihker* series may be, it is the way in which the characters confronted with the various technological *nova* deal with them that is most telling of the message this discourse carries. Computer scientist Mike Byrne brings this message to the point in his article on the image of technology in the *Hitchhiker's Guide*:

> Adams has a great talent for seeing a different kind of high-tech world, one not characterised by either dehumanization and fear or ideal perfection, but rather characterised by annoyance. Maybe this is an alternate form of dystopia; not dark slavery or warfare with the machines, but a huge increase in the small daily annoyances we have engineered for ourselves. (Byrne 3)

Many of the technological devices in the *Hitchhiker* novels are parodies of real-world technology that mirror problems and annoyances users face with these exact devices. For example, many of Adams' technological *nova* come with countless innovations and new features that often conceal their lack of function or hinder the device's performing the task it was originally intended to perform. Some innovations are simply there for the sake of innovation; illustrating a readiness for progression and experimentation on the part of the company who built them, but completely disregarding the needs of those who actually have to use the devices in question. One major example would be the Sirius Cybernetics Corporation's machines with Genuine People Personalities. These have already been discussed as parodies of the SF *novum*, but they can also be related to the reader's day-to-day environment. It is made evident more than once in the story that everybody using the GPP- robots, computers and elevators has absolutely no need for the personality-element being there. Marvin is usually an annoyance and Eddie, the cheerful ship computer, regularly has to be soothed or threatened into fulfilling his major tasks. The same is true for the existential elevators, that cannot be convinced to go to the requested floor if they locate any danger on it. These are classic examples for innovation backfiring to the inconvenience of the users and, in this case, also that of the devices themselves.

The novels are full of technology that is simply too innovative and complex to function properly. In one particular scene in *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy,* Arthur Dent struggles with the Heart of Gold's meal dispenser in order to acquire some tea:

> The way it functioned was very interesting. When the *Drink* button was pressed it made an instant but highly detailed examination of the subject's taste buds, a spectroscopic analysis of the subject's metabolism and then sent tiny experimental signals down the neural pathways to the taste centers of the subject's brain to see what was likely to go down well. However, no one knew quite why it did this because it invariably delivered a cupful of liquid that was almost, but not quite, entirely unlike tea. The Nutri-Magic was designed and manufactured by the Sirius Cypernetics Coroporation whose complaints department now covers all the major landmasses of the first three planets in the Sirius Star system. (83)

In this case the narrator knows exactly how the machine functions, but cannot deduce from these functions the actual task of the mechanism, as the end product is always the same. The complex and sophisticated science which seems to have been involved in creating the Nutri-Majic merely seems to be there to confuse and mock the customer, which is illustrated by the company's by now immense complaints department. In other cases the exact opposite is true: the characters do not know how certain devices function, but rely on them heavily. In *Mostly Harmless*, Arthur Dent admits that he does not have the slightest idea how any of Earth technology works. Although he has been relying on it all of his life, he could not explain or rebuild any of it, thus failing to contribute to the wellbeing of the universe in a meaningful way. The only task, he says, he might be capable of performing independently, is making sandwiches. This argument is resurrected humorously later in the novel as Arthur really finds employment as a deeply respected, tribal sandwich- maker on the planet of his exile. It is also a planet that has not yet developed any advanced technology. This can be read as a comment on contemporary society: we have come to rely so heavily on technology that we are helpless without it.

Sometimes also, design gets in the way of function. In *The Restaurant at the End of the Universe*, the major protagonists are lured into hijacking a spaceship because of its elegant, sleek design. This is revealed to have been the wrong choice, as design is really the only thing this particular ship excels in. Its sole purpose is to be steered into the sun via autopilot as the climax of a rock concert. The characters also fail to deactivate the auto pilot, because of the aesthetically pleasing interior of the ship:

> “It's the wild color scheme that freaks me,” said Zaphod whose love affair with the ship had lasted almost three minutes into the flight. “Every time you try to operate one of these weird black controls that are labeled in black on a black background, a little black light lights up black to let you know you've done it.” (246)

This scene illustrates in an exaggerated way the confusion of a person trying to operate a machine when no manual is to be found. It also parodies the often irrational workings of design and what happens if they are given priority over function.

Thus, Adams' fiction is less concerned with predicting the role that technology may or may not play in the future, but with making statements about the annoyance it already creates. This is done by making the devices, their descriptions and the characters' reactions to them mirror those in the everyday world. One major advantage of doing this in a science fiction environment is that this parody can be greatly exaggerated in a world that is full of technology by definition. The opinion expressed in such a parody is that technology should help people, not frustrate them. Although machines have been designed to aid our everyday lives, we now spend a great deal of time trying to repair them or find out how they function. The control has already been shifted from the part of the humans to that of the machines. Adams parodies machines with useless features, useless design and the companies trying to sell those innovations. He also parodies the language of technology and what users make of it. These jokes, according to Byrne, are not only funny because of the wit and word-play involved, but also “because they'll always hit a little too close to home.” (10)

Conclusion

This paper supports the position that Adams' *Hitchhiker*- novels represent works of genre parody as well as science fiction novels due to the double-coded nature of parody. Adams' novels are therefore also works of science fiction. However, because of their parodic content, they are simultaneously works *about* science fiction which evaluate the genre, its formal, thematic and stylistic conventions and ideological implications in a certain way; sometimes playfully, sometimes – as some critics claim – destructively. Whichever evaluation is prominent is certainly a matter of approach and point of view. It is true that especially in ideological terms, Adams' parodic subversion of the science fictional world view may sometimes be sobering. Instead of heroic mankind ruling and colonising the universe we find a group of isolated human(oid) beings wandering aimlessly through a chaotic, unordered and absurd galaxy. This science fiction novel is not driven by a search for meaning and a belief in progress, but by an urge to deconstruct. While this certainly goes against the enlightened belief in the power of the human mind, it also creates an environment in which it is easier to laugh about oneself. Indeed, the importance of Adams' novels in terms of genre parody is simply that they proved in a time when such proof was most needed that science fiction does not have to take itself so very seriously to establish itself as a literature. In fact, Adams' comic refunctioning of the SF genre proved to be more successful than most of its more serious varieties and helped to put SF on the map for a larger audience. Although they subvert the conventions of science fiction, Adam's novels are ultimately a part of the same genre they often seem to ridicule; they created something new out of the rusty conventions of science fiction and showed the world on a large scale that science fiction is ultimately a literature of the imagination that should be celebrated rather than stereotyped. One critic saw in Adams' parody a sign of “the end of British science fiction”[30], but for many readers, reading *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* seems to have been a liberating experience. The proof lies in the cherished place the novels still have in popular culture as well as in the number of people they influenced[31].

---

[30] “The end of British science fiction, in a welter of empty gesture and Douglas Adams-style parody, perhaps confirms Ballard's insight, now practically a cliche, that the space age has been over for a long time.” (Ruddick 180)

[31] Yahoo named its translation software Babelfish after Adams' prototype (Wroe xviii). Acclaimed Scottish mainstream- and SF writer Ian Banks incorporated *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* into his novel *Walking on Glass* (Simpson 139). The famous English band Radiohead based their album *OK computer* on ideas from Adams' novels and its title song *Paranoid Android* is a tribute to Marvin. According to Simpson (338) there is now even an asteroid called Arthurdent. There are countless other traces of the

Adams' novels helped unleash the full potential of science fictional imagination showing that even the end of the universe can be a source of entertainment.

The mechanisms of discourse parody surely helped introduce Adams' science fiction novels to a larger audience. Here it is not science fiction that is criticised, but here it can unfold its full potential as a mode. SF as an estranged literature creates a distance between the reader and the world portrayed wide enough to accommodate other forms that in turn can make use of this distance: irony, satire and parody (see Suerbaum, Broich, and Borgmeier 122). In the special case of Adams' novels, science fiction serves to familiarise the estranged whereas parody estranges the familiar. Parody translates familiar discourses into the science fictional environment almost literally, whereas the various SF *nova* that have been installed symbolically point back at Earth culture and society. Aliens, spaceships and robots in the *Hitchhiker* novels usually have an unfamiliar exterior that would serve to alienate the reader were not their characteristics so human-like and familiar. This is combined with discourse parody, which uses the science fiction context to defamiliarise everyday linguistic and cultural practices. Conventional perception is subverted; the reader is forced to identify with the Other rather than his or her own established and accepted discourses. What is more, the Other can be said to be the reader him-or herself to begin with. The clueless protagonist, the partial narrator and the human-like SF *nova* that operate within the science fiction framework all serve to distance readers from the commonplace and prompt them to laugh about themselves. The world as we find it can be stranger than anything presented in science fiction; Adams' books bring this to our immediate attention. Nick Webb affectionately phrases it this way:

> There ought to be a unit of pleasure to describe that moment when a joke or a sudden insight makes you see something clearly in a way you had never thought of before. In Douglas's honour such moments should be calibrated in Adamses, using the S.I. System. Femto-adamses for tiny but amusing surprises, right up to Tera-adamses for sickening lurches in world view. *His ability to stand sideways on to the world, and think “that's bloody peculiar” informs all his writing*[32]. He urged us to think differently, to take our eyes out for a walk. (Webb 19)

This remark effectively sums up the combined effect of science fiction and parody in Adams' writing. The formal qualities of both modes are suited best to make the reader “stand sideways on to the world” and make him or her see things in a different light.

Hitchhiker's Guide in popular culture that cannot all be named here.

[32] Emphasis added.

Appendix

1. Full text of *Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep*

Now I lay me down to sleep,

I pray the lord my soul to keep;

if I die before I wake,

I pray for God my soul to take.[33]

2. Abstract from *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* featuring a piece of Vogon poetry

The Vogon began to read – a fetid little passage of his own devising. '*Oh freddled gruntbuggly...*' he began. Spasms wrecked Ford's body – this was worse than even he'd been prepared for.
'*?...thy micturations are to me/ As plurdled gabbleblotchits on a lurgid bee.*'
'Aaaaaaarggggghhhhhh!' went Ford Prefect, wrenching his head back as lumps of pain thumped through it. He could dimly see beside him Arthur lolling and rolling in his seat. He clenched his teeth.
'*Groop I implore thee*,' continued the merciless Vogon, '*my foonting turlingdromes*.'
His voice was rising to a horrible pitch of impassioned stridency. '*And hooptiously drangle me with crinkly bindlewurdles,/ Or I will rend thee in the gobberwarts with my blurglecruncheon, see if I don't*!' (46)

---

[33] According to Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia. 8 August 2010 <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Now_I_Lay_Me_Down_To_Sleep>.

Bibliography

Primary sources

Adams, Douglas. “The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy”. 1979. *The Ultimate Hitchhiker's Guide*. New York: Wings, 1996. 1-144.

----. “The Restaurant at the End of the Universe”. 1980. *The Ultimate Hitchhiker's Guide*. New York: Wings, 1996. 145-310.

----. “Life, the Universe and Everything.” 1982. *The Ultimate Hitchhiker's Guide*. New York: Wings, 1996. 311-470.

----. “So Long and Thanks for All the Fish”. 1985. *The Ultimate Hitchhiker's Guide*. New York: Wings, 1996. 471-612.

----. “Mostly Harmless.” 1992. *The Ultimate Hitchhiker's Guide*. New York: Wings, 1996. 627-815.

Secondary sources

Fiction

Asimov, Isaac. *Foundation*. 1951. New York: Bantam, 2004.

Bradbury, Ray. *Fahrenheit 451*. 1952. New York: Ballantine, 1991.

Burgess, Anthony. *A Clockwork Orange*. 1962. London: Penguin, 2000.

Burroughs, Edgar Rice. *A Princess of Mars*. 1912. New York: Ballantine, 1963.

Clarke, Arthur C. *Childhood's End*. 1953. New York: Ballantine, 1990.

Colfer, Eoin. *And Another Thing...Douglas Adams' Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy: Part Six of Three*. London: Penguin, Michael Joseph, 2009.

Dick, Philip K. *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*. 1968. London: Orion, 2010.

----. *Ubik*. 1969. London: Orion, 2000.

Fielding, Henry. *Joseph Andrews and Shamela.* London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1973.

Heinlein, Robert A. *Stranger In a Strange Land*. 1961. New York: Ace, 2003.

Herbert, Frank. *Dune*. 1965. New York: Ace, 1990.

Huxley, Aldous. *Brave New World*. 1932. Stuttgart: Reclam, 1992.

Le Guin, Ursula K. *The Left Hand of Darkness*. New York: Ace, 1969.

Lem, Stanislaw. *Solaris*. 1970. London: Faber & Faber, 2003.

Orwell, George. *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. 1949. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974.

Pohl, Manfred and C.M. Kornbluth. *The Space Merchants*. 1952. London: Orion, 2003.

Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein*. 1818. London: Penguin, 2003.

Sterne, Laurence. *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman.* Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 2009.

Tolkien, John R.R. *The Lord of the Rings*. London: Unwin, 1979.

Verne, Jules. *Journey to the Center of the Earth*. 1876. New York: Dover, 2005.

Vonnegut, Kurt. *The Sirens of Titan.* 1959. London: Orion, 2004.

Wells, Herbert George. *The Time Machine*. 1895. New York: Dover, 1995.

----. *The War of the Worlds*. 1898. New York: Dover, 1997.

----. *The War in the Air and Particularly How Mr. Bert Smallways Fared While it Lasted*. Leipzig: Tauchnitz, 1909.

Non-fiction

Adams, Douglas. “Introduction: A Guide to the Guide: Some Unhelpful Remarks From the Author”. 1986. *The Ultimate Hitchhiker's Guide*. New York: Wings, 1996. vi-xi.

----. *The Salmon of Doubt: Hitchhiking the Galaxy One Last Time.* London: Pan, 2003.

Aldiss, Brian Wilson. *Billion Year Spree: the History of Science Fiction*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1973.

Amis, Kingsley. *New Maps of Hell: A Survey of Science Fiction*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1960.

Antor, Heinz. “Satire und Science Fiction in den Unterhaltungsromanen von Douglas Adams.”*Unterhaltungsliteratur der achtziger und neunziger Jahre*. Ed. Dieter Petzold and Eberhard Späth. Erlangen: Universitätsbibliothek, 1998. 173-199.

Baxter, “Lunching at the Eschaton: Douglas Adams and the End of the Universe in Science Fiction.”*The Anthology at the End of the Universe: Leading Science*

Fiction Authors on Douglas Adams' Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy. Ed. Glenn Yeffeth. Dallas: BenBella, 2004. 125-132.

Bethke, Bruce. “The Secret Symbiosis: T*he Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* and Its Impact on Real Computer Science.”*The Anthology at the End of the Universe: Leading Science Fiction Authors on Douglas Adams'* Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy. Ed. Glenn Yeffeth. Dallas: BenBella, 2004. 35-46.

Bloom, Harold (ed. and introduction). *Science Fiction Writers of the Golden Age.* New York: Chelsea House, 1995.

Brochhausen, Mathias. “DON'T PANIC It's the Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus.” *Philosophy Now 58* (Nov./Dec. 2006): 13-14.

Byrne, Mike. “Beware of the Leopard.” *The Anthology at the End of the Universe: Leading Science Fiction Authors on Douglas Adams'* Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy. Ed. Glenn Yeffeth. Dallas: BenBella, 2004. 1-10.

Caillava, Marie-Catherine. “The Zen of 42”. *The Anthology at the End of the Universe: Leading Science Fiction Authors on Douglas Adams'* Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy. Ed. Glenn Yeffeth. Dallas: BenBella, 2004. 83-95.

Collins, Peter and Carmella Hollo. *English Grammar: an Introduction*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000.

Clute, John and Peter Nicholls (eds.). *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*. London: Orbit, 1993.

Dentith, Simon. *Parody*. London: Routledge, 2000.

Doctorow, Cory. “Wikipedia: A Genuine H2G2-Minus the Editors.” *The Anthology at the End of the Universe: Leading Science Fiction Authors on Douglas Adams'* Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy. Ed. Glenn Yeffeth. Dallas: BenBella, 2004. 25- 34

Gaiman, Neil. *Keine Panik! Mit Douglas Adams per Anhalter durch die Galaxis.* München: Heyne, 2002.

Genette, Gérard. *Palimpseste: Die Literatur auf zweiter Stufe*. Trans. Wolfram Bayer and Dieter Hornig. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1993.

“Grok”. *The Oxford English Dictionary*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Claredon Press, 1989.

Gunn, James (ed.). *The New Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*. New York: Viking, 1988.

Hutcheon, Linda. *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox.* New York and London: Methuen, 1984.

-----. *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms*. London: Methuen, 1985.

Imhof, Rüdiger. *Contemporary Metafiction: A Poetological Study of Metafiction In English Since 1939*. Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1986.

Korkut, Nil. *Kinds of Parody from the Medieval to the Postmodern*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2009.

Kropf, Carl R. “Douglas Adams's 'Hitchhiker' Novels as Mock Science Fiction”. *Science Fiction Studies Vol. 15, Issue 1* (Mar 1988): 61-70.

Le Guin, Ursula. Introduction. *The Left Hand of Darkness*. New York: Ace Books, 1969.

MacLeod, Ken. “Politics and Science Fiction.” *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction.* Ed. Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. 230-240.

Malmgren, Carl D. *Worlds Apart: Narratology of Science Fiction.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991.

Mendelsohn, Farah. “Introduction: Reading Science Fiction.” *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction*. Ed. Edward James and Farah Mendelsohn. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. 1-12.

Morrison, Blake. Introduction. *A Clockwork Orange.* By Anthony Burgess. London: Penguin, 2000.

Parrinder, Patrick. “Characterization in Science Fiction: Two Approaches 2. The Alien Encounter: or Ms Brown and Mrs Le Guin.” *Science Fiction: A Critical Guide*. Ed. Patrick Parrinder. London: Longman, 1979. 148-161.

-----. *Science Fiction: Its Criticism and Teaching*. London: Methuen, 1980.

Roberts, Adam. *Science Fiction*. London: Routledge, 2000.

-----. “42”. *The Anthology at the End of the Universe: Leading Science Fiction Authors on Douglas Adams'* Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy. Ed. Glenn Yeffeth. Dallas: BenBella, 2004. 47-64.

-----. *The History of Science Fiction*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.

Rose, Margaret A. *Parody: Ancient, Modern, and Post-Modern*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

Ruddick, Nicholas. *Ultimate Island: On the Nature of British Science Fiction.* London: Greenwood Press, 1993.

Sanders, Scott. “Characterisation in Science Fiction: Two Approaches. 1. The Disappearance of Character”. *Science Fiction: A Critical Guide*. Ed. Patrick Parrinder. London: Longman, 1979. 131-147.

Scholes, Robert. *Structural Fabulation: An Essay on Fiction of the Future.* Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press.

Shelley, Percy B. Preface. 1818. *Frankenstein*. By Mary Shelley. London: Penguin, 2003: 11-12.

Simpson, Mike J. *Hitchhiker: A Biography of Douglas Adams*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2003.

Stanzel, Franz Karl. *A Theory of Narrative.* Trans. Charlotte Goedsche. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.

Stockwell, Peter. *The Poetics of Science Fiction*. Harlow: Pearson, 2000.

Suerbaum, Ulrich, Ulrich Broich and Raimund Borgmeier. *Science Fiction: Theorie und Geschichte, Themen und Typen, Form und Weltbild*. Stuttgart: Reclam, 1981.

Suvin, Darko. *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979.

Van der Colff, Marilette A. "Douglas Adams: Analysing the Absurd". Unpublished MA dissertation University of Pretoria, 2007.

-----. "Aliens and Existential Elevators: Absurdity and Its Shadows in Douglas Adams' Hitch Hiker Series." *Literator Vol 29, Issue 3* (Dec. 2008): 123-138.

Watt-Evans, Lawrence. "A Consideration of Certain Aspects of Vogon Poetry". *The Anthology at the End of the Universe: Leading Science Fiction Authors on Douglas Adams'* Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy. Ed. Glenn Yeffeth. Dallas: BenBella, 2004. 65-72.

Waugh, Patricia. *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction.* London: Routledge, 1984.

Webb, Nick. *Wish You Were Here: The Official Biography of Douglas Adams*. New York: Ballantine, 2006.

Westfahl, Gary (ed.). *Science Fiction Quotations: From the Inner Mind to the Outer Limits.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005.

Whissen, Thomas Reed. *Classic Cult Fiction: A Companion to Popular Cult Literature*. New York: Greenwood Press, 1992.

Wilson, Neil and Alan Murphy. *Scotland*. London: Lonely Planet, 2008.

Wroe, Nicholas. Prologue. 2000. *The Salmon of Doubt: Hitchhiking the Galaxy One Last Time*. By Douglas Adams. London: Pan Books, 2003. xvii-xxxi.

Online sources

BBC - The Big Read - Top 100 Books. 2003*. 8 August 2010* <http://www.bbc.co.uk/arts/bigread/top100.shtml>.

"Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep". *Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia*. 8 August 2010 <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Now_I_Lay_Me_Down_To_Sleep>.

Page, Benedicte. "Colfer is New Hitchhiker". *Bookseller 9/19/2008, Issue 5350*. <http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail?vid=5&hid=15&sid=d15e9641-b773-46d2-a4bf-7437579b274d%40sessionmgr4&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#db=hlh&AN=34589705%23db=hlh&AN=34589705>.

"Resistance is Futile." *Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia*. 8 August 2010 <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Resistance_is_futile>.

"The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy." *Sfreview.net: Science Fiction and Fantasy Book Reviews*. 8 August 2010 <http://www.sfreviews.net/hhguide.html>.

Other media

Star Wars: Episode IV – A New Hope. Dir. and Screenplay by George Lucas. 20th Century Fox, 1977.

The Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy (Television series). British Broadcasting Corporation, 1981.

The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy. Screenplay by Douglas Adams, Garth Jennings and Karey Kirkpatrick. Dir. Garth Jennings. Touchstone Pictures, 2005.

The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy, the Complete Radio Series. Written by Douglas Adams. Produced by Simon Brett, Geoffrey Perkins. BBC Audio, 2005.

German summary

Als Douglas Adams 1979 seinen ersten Roman, *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, veröffentlichte, stellte dieser einen ungewöhnlichen Fall im Feld der Science Fiction dar, denn er war einer der erfolgreichsten Versuche, das Genre durch Humor zu bereichern. Noch heute erfreuen sich der Roman, sowie seine vier Nachfolger, *The Restaurant at the End of the Universe*, *Life, the Universe and Everything*, *So Long and Thanks for All the Fish*, sowie *Mostly Harmless* großer Beliebtheit, was nicht zuletzt daran erkennbar ist, dass im Jahr 2009, acht Jahre nach Adams' Tod, durch Eoin Colfer, einen anderen Autor, ein weiteres Sequel veröffentlicht wurde.

Das Ziel dieser Arbeit ist es zum Teil, diese große Popularität zu erklären. Sie untersucht das Zusammenspiel von Science Fiction und Parodie im Werk von Douglas Adams, um zu beweisen, dass verschiedene parodistische Mechanismen in den Romanen operieren, die jeweils verschiedene Zielgruppen ansprechen können. Dies geschieht zunächst durch theoretische Bemerkungen zu Parodie und Science Fiction, welche dann auf die Primärtexte angewendet werden. Dabei lassen sich zwei Hauptformen der Parodie in Adams' Werk gesondert erwähnen, nämlich die *genre parody* (Genreparodie) und die *discourse parody* (Diskursparodie). Adams' Romane sind einerseits klar Parodien des Science Fiction- Genres, andererseits wird an zahlreichen Stellen in den Romanen auch Parodie mit Science Fiction verknüpft, um einen stärkeren humoristisch-kritischen Effekt zu erzeugen.

Als Genre des *cognitive estrangement* konfrontiert die Science Fiction den oder die LeserIn häufig mit fremden neuen Umgebungen, Innovationen oder Gesellschaftsentwürfen. Diese sogenannten *nova* dienen häufig als Symbole, die auf reale Probleme in der Welt des Autors hinweisen sollen. Die beste Science Fiction hat daher großes satirisches Potential. Aufgrund dieser Einführung von Neuerungen in die Handlung ist Science Fiction auch ein stark intertextuelles Genre. Autoren neuer Romane zitieren häufig Erfindungen und Konventionen, die auf ältere Texte innerhalb des Genres zurückgehen. Da SF daher über ein ungewöhnlich gefestigtes System von Klischees und Konventionen verfügt, bietet sie sich natürlich als Opfer von Parodien an, da diese selbst eine Form von Intertextualität darstellen. Dies lässt sich durch Anwendung von Genretheorie, sowie durch Vergleiche mit anderen kanonischen SF Texten feststellen.

Dabei wird klar, dass Adams die Konventionen des Genres auf allen Ebenen des Textes parodiert und nicht nur die linguistischen, sondern auch die thematischen und ideologischen Gepflogenheiten der Gattung in ihre Gegenteile verzerrt.

Anders als Science Fiction- Romane entfalten Parodien ihr satirisches Potential nicht symbolisch sondern überaus direkt, indem sie ihr Ziel imitieren oder transformieren. Vertraute Diskurse werden imitiert und durch Übertreibung, Verzerrung oder unbekannte Zusammenhänge verfremdet. Im Fall von Douglas Adams ist dieser fremde Zusammenhang ein Science Fiction- Universum, das zum Großteil von außerirdischen Lebensformen bevölkert wird, da die Erde selbst zerstört worden ist. LeserInnen werden durch das SF- Umfeld ihrer eigenen Umgebung entfremdet, fühlen sich jedoch ständig durch die Diskursparodie daran erinnert, welche die Diskurse von Bürokratie, Literaturkritik, Politik etc. imitiert und verzerrt zurückwirft. Dies ermöglicht es dem Leser oder der Leserin, sich selbst als das Fremde wahrzunehmen, personifiziert durch den einzig menschlichen Protagonisten, gesehen durch die Augen eines allwissenden auktorialen Erzählers. Die Parodie wird durch das Science Fiction-Umfeld verstärkt, indem sie die Menschheit als klein, schwach und unbedeutend darstellt. Gleichzeitig weisen die zahlreichen SF *nova* symbolisch auf Kultur und Gesellschaft auf der Erde hin. Das Entfremdete wird durch Science Fiction familiarisiert, während das Vertraute durch die Diskursparodie entfremdet wird. Daraus ergibt sich ein verdrehtes Weltbild, das thematisch oft etwas ernüchternd ausfallen mag (in den Romanen finden sich Themen wie Apokalypsen, überwältigende Technologie oder die Sinnlosigkeit alles Seins). Durch die humorvolle Art der Parodie wird dies jedoch nicht als unangenehm empfunden, sondern kann zum Lachen und Nachdenken anregen und dürfte mit ein Grund dafür sein, wieso sich Adams' Romane auch heute noch so großer Beliebtheit erfreuen.

Curriculum Vitae

Eva-Maria Haslauer, Bakk. phil.

Geburtsdatum	16. Februar 1987
Geburtsort	Klagenfurt
Staatsbürgerschaft	Österreich
Familienstand	ledig
E-Mail	eva.haslauer@gmail.com

Ausbildung

09/2009 - 01/2010	Auslandssemester an der University of Aberdeen, Vereinigtes Königreich
10/2005 - 04/2010	Studium der Japanologie, Universität Wien. Abschluss als Bakk. phil.
seit 10/2005	Studium der Anglistik und Amerikanistik, Universität Wien
2005	Matura, BRG Feldkirchen
09/1997 - 06/2005	BRG Feldkirchen
09/1993 - 06/1997	Volksschule 3, Feldkirchen

Berufserfahrung

seit 04/2009 bzw. 05/2010	Museumspädagogin, Museum für Völkerkunde, Wien
03 - 06/2009	Museum für Völkerkunde, Wien, Ostasienabteilung
08/2006	Volksbank Feldkirchen
07/2004	Stadtgemeinde Feldkirchen, Umweltabteilung
07/2003	Stadtgemeinde Feldkirchen, Bibliothek

Auslandsaufenthalte

09/2009 – 01/2010	Auslandssemester, University of Aberdeen, Schottland
07 – 08/2008	Cheshire, England
07 – 09/2007	London und Hampshire, England

Sprachkenntnisse

Deutsch (Muttersprache)

Englisch (fließend in Wort und Schrift)

Italienisch (Maturaniveau)

Japanisch (Grundkenntnisse)