

Douglas Adams's "Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy" as a Representative of Cosmic Horror

Šoštarec, Dina

Undergraduate thesis / Završni rad

2018

Degree Grantor / Ustanova koja je dodijelila akademski / stručni stupanj: **Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences / Sveučilište Josipa Jurja Strossmayera u Osijeku, Filozofski fakultet**

Permanent link / Trajna poveznica: <https://urn.nsk.hr/urn:nbn:hr:142:619121>

Rights / Prava: [In copyright](#)/[Zaštićeno autorskim pravom.](#)

Download date / Datum preuzimanja: **2025-03-23**



Repository / Repozitorij:

[FFOS-repository - Repository of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences Osijek](#)



Sveučilište J. J. Strossmayera u Osijeku

Filozofski fakultet Osijek

Studij: Dvopredmetni sveučilišni preddiplomski studij engleskog jezika i
književnosti i filozofije

Dina Šoštarec

**“Vodič kroz galaksiju za autostopere” Douglasa Adamsa kao
primjer kozmičkog horora**

Završni rad

Mentor: doc. dr. sc. Ljubica Matek

Osijek, 2018.

Sveučilište J.J. Strossmayera u Osijeku
Filozofski fakultet Osijek
Odsjek za engleski jezik i književnost
Studij: Dvopredmetni sveučilišni preddiplomski studij engleskog jezika i
književnosti i filozofije

Dina Šoštarec

**“Vodič kroz galaksiju za autostopere” Douglasa Adamsa kao
primjer kozmičkog horora**

Završni rad

Znanstveno područje: humanističke znanosti

Znanstveno polje: filologija

Znanstvena grana: anglistika

Mentor: doc. dr. sc Ljubica Matek

Osijek, 2018.

J.J. Strossmayer University of Osijek
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
Study Programme: Double Major BA Study Programme in English Language and
Literature and Philosophy

Dina Šoštarec

**Douglas Adams's "Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy" as a
Representative of Cosmic Horror**

BA Thesis

Supervisor: doc. dr. sc. Ljubica Matek

Osijek, 2018

J.J. Strossmayer University of Osijek
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
Department of English
Study Programme: Double Major BA Study Programme in English Language and
Literature and Philosophy

Dina Šoštarec

**Douglas Adams's "Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy" as a
Representative of Cosmic Horror**

BA Thesis

Scientific area: humanities
Scientific field: philology
Scientific branch: English studies

Supervisor: Ljubica Matek, Ph.D., Assistant Professor

Osijek, 2018

ABSTRACT

This paper deals with all five novels from the original Douglas Adams's *Hitchhiker* series. The paper aims to show how and to what extent do the novels from the series belong to the cosmic horror subgenre of horror fiction, which was invented by H. P. Lovecraft. This goal will be achieved by firstly showing Adams's departures from conventions of science fiction genre to which Adams's works are traditionally said to belong. The paper then explores and analyses the definition of cosmic horror given by Lovecraft himself and a later theorist. Later, the paper focuses on more specific similarities between the works of two authors, such as similarities in the themes and ideas both writers tackle and the subtle similarities in the literary techniques they use, with emphasis on irony. Lastly, the paper will present the key philosophies which had a tremendous impact on the concept of cosmic horror subgenre itself, as well as Lovecraft's and Adams's literary works, namely nihilism and absurdism. The paper highlights the differences between the two authors as well, the main one being their different styles and tone of writing. Adams's humorous, satirical tone makes it somewhat more difficult to classify *Hitchhiker* series as a representative of cosmic horror, but the paper will argue that the implications and ideas presented are nevertheless equally dreadful as Lovecraft's.

Keywords: Douglas Adams, cosmic horror, H. P. Lovecraft, nihilism, absurdism.

CONTENTS

Introduction	1
1. The conventions of science fiction genre	2
2. Cosmic horror	4
3. Themes and ideas	7
3.1. Cosmos as a threatening entity	7
3.2. Merciful ignorance	7
3.3. Merciful lack of self-knowledge	9
4. Irony – the effect and technique	11
5. Philosophy in the background	13
5.1. Nihilism	13
5.2. Absurdism	14
Conclusion	16
Works Cited	17

Introduction

Douglas Adams's *Hitchhiker* series is usually labelled as science fiction. However, the author frequently moves away from many of the conventions of science fiction and oftentimes even reverses them so as to mock them. His work therefore does share some characteristics with a prototypical science fiction work, but many of them are used in an unconventional way. Adams furthers this distinction by incorporating prevailing characteristics of a different genre, that is Lovecraftian cosmic horror subgenre of horror fiction to be precise, into his work. Because Adams abandons the traditional devices of science fiction and because he borrows from cosmic horror, it could be argued that the *Hitchhiker* series could be considered a representative of cosmic horror.

The aim of this paper is to put emphasis on the similarities between Lovecraftian cosmic horror subgenre and Douglas Adams's *Hitchhiker* series by exploring the similarities between the definition and descriptions of cosmic horror genre and Lovecraft's choice of themes, techniques and philosophies he propagates. In order to offer a more comprehensive overview, the paper will deal with all novels from the original Adams's series, namely *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, *The Restaurant at the End of the Universe*, *Life, the Universe, and Everything*, *So Long, and Thanks for All the Fish* and *Mostly Harmless*.

The first chapter will offer a brief introduction to the science fiction genre and analyse to what extent the *Hitchhiker* series could be considered mock science fiction. The second chapter will then delineate the cosmic horror subgenre as defined by Lovecraft himself and later theorists to determine the basis of further analysis.

The third chapter will focus on the similarities between Lovecraft's and Adams's choice of themes and ideas presented in their works. In the fourth chapter, the paper will discuss the use of irony in relation to the atmosphere of dread and despair and its effect on the reader. The fifth chapter will discuss the philosophies which influenced both authors, namely nihilism and absurdism.

1. The conventions of science fiction genre

The term science fiction covers a wide range of subgenres and is thus hard to define. However, there are certain conventions which science fiction literary works frequently deploy. Since the main concern of this paper is not to decide whether the *Hitchhiker* series is SF or not, but to point out its many similarities with cosmic horror, this chapter serves only as a brief outline of the conventions of science fiction which Adams reverses and mocks. In view of this, the paper points out that the traditional understanding of *Hitchhiker* series is at least open to question and that the departures from science fiction genre are often caused by Adams' intention to depict cosmic horror.

The hero of Adams's novels is an unlikely hero, Arthur Dent, whose heroic quest is confined to the search for a drinkable cup of tea (Kropf 62). Not only is he an unlikely hero of a science fiction genre, but his quest is always a trivial, undignified and unimportant one. Namely, Adams's main preoccupation is not to fill the novels with action and battles between races, so his hero need not be an intellectually and physically powerful individual. Adams's intentions were to portray a disorderly, meaningless universe in which it is not even possible to have a noble personal quest since all points of reference and supposed knowledge eventually reveal to be false.

Oftentimes Adams's characters find themselves in technologically and intellectually superior societies, like Magratheans or mice, but other worlds, civilizations and creatures in general are not depicted as in a typical science fiction work. There is nothing particularly different nor respectable about any of the societies. Not one society is described as a paradigmatic society, which is common in science fiction, and all are subject to Adams's ubiquitous irony. Each of those societies is revealed to be as absurd as another (Kropf 61) in a "universe [which] offers no detectable, rational pattern" (Kropf 67). By mocking all and every race in the universe, Adams accentuates his nihilistic philosophy which permeates the whole *Hitchhiker* series.

Science fiction usually strives to "provide closure in the traditional Aristotelian sense that it may end with a resolution of the tensions the plot creates among the characters" (Kropf 64). However, in Adams's work there is an absence of a true and definite conclusion or final clarification. This, for example, becomes apparent when one reviews the life of Agrajag. Agrajag is a creature who has lived through multiple lives in various different life forms, and his death was caused either directly or indirectly by Arthur Dent. When Agrajag faces Arthur Dent and demands to know the reason why Dent had killed him, Dent did not provide the reason because "it was a coincidence" (Adams 296). Lastly, Agrajag accidentally blows himself up before fulfilling his mission. Soon, he will take on his last life in which he will again indirectly be killed by Arthur. In

short, there is no resolution, especially not one for Agra-jag. As the man who kills him every time does not have a reason for it, nor is he even aware of doing it. It is clear that the reason for such deviations from science fiction conventions is Adams's omnipresent notion of an utterly meaningless, random and absurd universe by which he approximates one of the most common Lovecraftian themes.

2. Cosmic horror

As Howard Phillips Lovecraft, the founder of cosmic horror noted in his essay, “the oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown” (Lovecraft, “Supernatural horror in Literature”). Hence, cosmic horror could be said to be a subgenre of horror fiction which puts the emphasis on the fear of the unknown, but it should also be vaguely defined as fear of nothing in particular and everything in general. The term is modified by the adjective “cosmic” which has many different implications and possible usages. The English noun “cosmos” comes from Greek word “kosmos” meaning order, orderly arrangement. It became synonymous to the word “Universe” because the Universe is seen as an orderly construction and is often described as being in opposition to Chaos which preceded the harmonious Universe as we know it. However, cosmic horror subgenre presents the idea that the Order is constantly threatened by Chaos and that Chaos can win any time, thus destroying any knowledge people thought they had about the Universe, laws of Nature, and ourselves. That is what is horrific about this subgenre, and what explains the second part of the term.

Lovecraft's works are prime examples of what exactly cosmic horror is. In one of his essays, Lovecraft defines this horror subgenre and thus makes a distinction between cosmic horror and other subgenres of horror fiction:

A certain atmosphere of breathless and unexplainable dread of outer unknown forces must be present; and there must be a hint, expressed with a seriousness and portentousness becoming its subject, of that most terrible conception of the human brain—a malign and particular suspension or defeat of those fixed laws of Nature which are our only safeguard against the assaults of chaos and the daemons of unplumbed space. (“From Beyond”)

In his works, Lovecraft evokes the aforementioned atmosphere by mere suggestion and suspension rather than by clear, direct and detailed depictions of the objects of fear. The typical Lovecraftian technique of characterization of the object of fear is the very lack of it. Lovecraft labels the fearful entities as “unnameable” and “indescribable” (Murray and Corstorphine 158). On the one hand, the indescribability may imply that the monsters themselves are not the focus of Lovecraft’s stories. On the other hand, it also suggests that the rational mind is inadequate to comprehend what lies beyond the world as we know it, or rather the world we are used to. Considering these implications and the definition of cosmic horror Lovecraft provided, it could be concluded that the origin of the reader's dread is to be found in an implication of a certain philosophy and world-

view, and not in the existence or appearance of monsters. Consequently, the focus of the story is not on the “daemons of unplumbed space” but on the failure of the fixed laws of Nature. It is the conception that absolute chaos might ensue at any given moment which makes a literary work a part of the cosmic horror genre.

Therefore, the lack of any creatures which could be regarded as monsters in Adams’s *Hitchhiker* series should not be regarded as an argument against it being representative of cosmic horror. Even though the *Hitchhiker* series swarms with creatures whose anatomies may well be considered repulsive, they do not exactly stimulate fear in the reader. When Adams describes Prostetnic Vogon Jeltz as having “dark green rubbery skin (...) thick enough for him to play the game of Vogon Civil Service politics” (33), the reader may feel disgust, and eventually amusement, but not fear. However, much like in Lovecraft’s works, the themes in the series and the ideas which Adams tries to present are the real objects of fear, even when they are delivered in a humorous way as in Adams’s case. Consider another definition of cosmic horror:

Cosmic horror ... amounts to an experience of the cataclysmic horror that the human subject experiences once it cognizes the finitude of its existence and realizes that, contrary to a humanist view which posits human life as intrinsically meaningful in relation not only to itself but to the cosmos, there is neither anything distinctive nor significant about being human. (Ralickas 298)

Thus, the term cosmic horror, besides being a subgenre, also refers to a certain type of feeling one may experience, be it from reading a literary work, scientific research or from questioning one’s own existence in everyday life. Ralickas’s definition of cosmic horror subgenre shows that its main aim is to evoke that very feeling. It also supports the proposed thesis that cosmic horror is a result of sudden realization of a particular fact related to human existence rather than a result of being faced with horrible creatures. Ralickas emphasizes the insignificance of the humankind as the cause of the cosmic horror. This, however, does not undermine the original thesis that cosmic horror is produced by Chaos constantly threatening Order because in this case the Chaos plays out in the very mind of the human being whose complete knowledge suddenly goes down the drain.

It can be concluded that, when discussing cosmic horror, one should consider a certain atmosphere of fear of Chaos as constitutive for the subgenre. This is the most general definition that can be given, and there is a set of more specific conventional themes which produce this very effect and that are used by both Adams and Lovecraft. Therefore, abominable and dreadful creatures such as Lovecraft’s Cthulhu, Shoggoth or Nyarlathotep should not be regarded as a

necessity for a work to be a representative of cosmic horror. As supported by Lovecraft's own and Ralickas's later definition and depiction of cosmic horror, it is more a specific view of the world and the way it operates which produces dread than anatomies of beings. This is also what makes cosmic horror subgenre so unique among other subgenres of horror fiction which heavily rely on disgusting and fearful concrete images, instead of relying on eliciting feelings by outlining abstract notions.

3. Themes and ideas

Having established that what constitutes cosmic horror is a sense of constant battle between Chaos and Order, and the possibility of Chaos' triumph, then what is left to examine are the themes and ideas which awake that sense in the reader. The aim of this chapter is to list the themes typical of Lovecraft's work and show that they are also tackled in Adams's *Hitchhiker* series, contributing thus to the similarities in the works of the two authors.

3.1. Cosmos as a threatening entity

The first important subject of cosmic horror is cosmos itself. The Universe is almost personified into a threatening being which looms over humans in two ways. Firstly, humans are intimidated by its tremendousness and its painful indifference. Secondly, the Universe is a vast and unexplored space with infinite possibilities. It is unknown territory, so having to live in it is frightening which is why Lovecraft treats the Universe as an endlessly expanding abyss (Omidasalar 8). In Lovecraft's case, the Universe is inhabited by many hazardous creatures. In Adams's case, the main cause of danger is randomness of the Universe. If the Universe operated based on established and known laws, beings in it could predict future events, prepare for them and act accordingly. However, Adams's claim is that there is no higher reason for anything nor could the Universe ever be completely explored so that we could find the reason even if one existed. The point is that despite the connotations of the Greek word "kosmos", the Universe is clearly not a place of order but rather one of disorder and chaos, or at least it seems that way to humans.

3.2. Merciful ignorance

The theme of merciful ignorance and forbidden knowledge implies that "there are species of knowledge only by ignorance of which humankind can maintain even the semblance of well-being" (Murray and Corstorphine 159). The most depressed character in the whole series is Marvin the Paranoid Android. Even though Marvin is a robot, he is modelled after humans, thus having GPP – Genuine People Personality. He is, however, cursed by having an enormous brain. His depression is therefore at least in part a result of the knowledge he possesses.

Similarly, in *Life, Universe and Everything*, Arthur Dent meets Prak, a former witness in some trial who was institutionalized when Dent met him. Prak was being given truth serum by a surgeon when white robots came in trying to steal Argabuthon Sceptre of Justice. The robots jogged the surgeon's arm and Prak was given "much too much" (Adams 460). When he was asked to "tell the Truth, the whole Truth and nothing but the Truth" (Adams 460) at the trial, he started

saying “terrible things, incomprehensible things (...) things that would drive a man mad” (Adams 460). In an attempt to describe the hazardousness of Prak’s knowledge, Adams describes the isolation he was put in: “Steel walls were erected around it [the court], and, just to be on the safe side, barbed wire, electric fences, crocodile swamps and three major armies were installed, so that no one would ever have to hear Prak speak” (Adams 461). Adams’s point is that we should think of our limited cognitive powers as a blessing. Prak is very similar to Lovecraft’s character of Crawford Tillinghast from the story “From Beyond”. After designing the electrical machine which allowed Tillinghast to see the world beyond ours and after he had “seen truth”, as Tillinghast himself described it, he became disfigured, cruel, and picked up the habit of twitching. In the end, Tillinghast dies and the narrator is left under the impression that he and the missing servants were murdered by the creatures from beyond. Lovecraft’s message could be that playing God and seeking knowledge which does not belong to humans comes with a price which first led Tillinghast to madness and then death.

In the case of both authors, there is an underlying omnipresent premise that anyone who steals from the Tree of Knowledge is rightfully punished because there are some things which humankind should simply not know. It is not exactly clear why, but since the idea of blissful ignorance is an ancient one, it could be interpreted in alignment with religious interpretations, though this should not be understood as a claim that either Adams or Lovecraft wanted to introduce religious ideas in their works. However, in light of traditional interpretations, knowledge will hurt humans because they are too fragile to bear the truth, which here would probably relate to the chaotic nature of Universe in which there is no God acting as a surrogate parent for humans. In addition to this, it is also true for both authors that they create characters whose “search for knowledge and enlightenment brings forth something that ... is utterly beyond their understanding and control, and has no interest whatsoever in their existence” (Perwein 97).

3.2.1. Merciful lack of self-knowledge

It was already hinted above that cosmic horror is produced by realizing that the creatures from beyond or the Universe have “no interest” in humans. However, the theme of self-knowledge deserves to be examined more closely because it is of special importance to both authors. The danger arises when humans gain knowledge about their position in the Universe and their relationship to it. In comparison to the infiniteness of the Universe in both time and space, “we find our own place in it to be soul-crushingly evanescent” (Murray and Corstorphine 159). It is no wonder that the scientific development is accompanied by a rise in nihilistic beliefs. This is what both Adams and Lovecraft hinted at. According to Albert Camus, as explained by Amy Kind, the

claim that any mode of being is absurd has its source in the “the fact that the world is in principle unable to deliver on what we need from it; our desires for clarity and intelligibility can never be met” (Kind 87). Humans are in constant search for meaning but the indifferent and cold Universe does not offer any.

The mice in the *Hitchhiker* series had the Earth built so that they could finally understand the answer to the Ultimate Question of Life, the Universe, and Everything. However, the Earthlings also search for the same answer, but the surviving ones find out that “Earth and its civilizations are only an incidental and largely meaningless phenomenon in the greater scheme of things generated by a super-intelligent race of beings” (Kropf 66).

The usual escape from the vile recognition of one’s own insignificance is religion. However, Adams does not offer the easy way out. For example, Prak tells Dent the location of God’s Final Message to His Creation. After a hard and strenuous journey, Dent arrives at the location only to find out that the message was “We apologize for the inconvenience” (Adams 610). God has either abandoned the humankind or has always been indifferent to it. Adams even offers a logical proof that God does not exist. He does this by using the example of a Babel fish, fish which feeds on the brainwave energy of people around its carrier and thus enables the carrier to understand anything said to him in any form of language. Since the Babel fish could not have evolved by chance, it is a clear proof of God’s existence. But proof denies faith, and without faith God is nothing. Therefore, because of the Babel fish, God “promptly vanishes in a puff of logic” (Adams 42). It is true that Adams may have delivered his ideas in a humorous way, but the ideas themselves nevertheless have daunting implications.

However, the most persuasive example of this theme in *Hitchhiker* series is by far the Total Perspective Vortex. The Vortex is "the most savage psychic torture a sentient being can undergo" and the only thing which “can annihilate a man's soul ... For when you are put into the Vortex you are given just one momentary glimpse of the entire unimaginable infinity of creation, and somewhere in it a tiny little marker, a microscopic dot on a microscopic dot, which says 'You are here'" (Adams 187, 195). The Vortex overwhelmingly resembles the already mentioned Tillinghast’s machine. The purpose of the two is, of course, not the same. The main purpose of the Vortex is to give one an experience of his/her own position and importance (or the lack of it) in the Universe, while the purpose of Tillinghast’s machine is to show the world existing beyond our perception. However, both have a terrifying effect on those who dare to use them. Both show the dreadfulness of knowing the truth or having a complete understanding of the Universe and how insignificant and absurd human life seems to be.

4. Irony – the effect and technique

In one of his works of fiction, Lovecraft wrote: “From even the greatest of horrors irony is seldom absent. Sometimes it enters directly into the composition of the events, while sometimes it relates only to their fortuitous position among persons and places” (Lovecraft, “The Shunned House”). It would not be surprising if this definition was included in some of his essays on literature. Irony is often an underlying characteristic of works belonging to cosmic horror genre.

Firstly, however, it should be clarified what irony is, and which types of irony are most frequently present in Lovecraft’s work in particular. Irony contains a “sense of dissembling or of hiding what is actually the case; not, however, in order to deceive, but to achieve special rhetorical or artistic effects” (Abrams and Harpham 184). Lovecraftian irony is the result of self-knowledge, that is of “ironically self-understood insignificance brought to light with the collapse of anthropocentric systems of privilege” (Burlson 158). As Burlson further noted, this effect is unprecedented in literature (159), but parallels could be drawn between this typical Lovecraftian irony and the concept of cosmic irony in traditional literary theories. The traditional cosmic irony “is attributed to literary works in which a deity, or else fate, is represented as though deliberately manipulating events so as to lead the protagonist to false hopes, only to frustrate and mock them” (Abrams and Harpham 186). The deviation from the traditional cosmic irony is in that false hopes arise as a result of misconceptions construed by humans themselves. People believe they are at the top of the hierarchy of all beings and their own sense of importance is believed to reflect the cosmos’ perspective on humanity as well. The irony therefore arises when human misconceptions clash with reality. The events taking place are not manipulated, but they often shame humans and their anthropocentric systems.

Adams’ works are certainly written in a more humorous tone, but the events that take place produce the same effect as in Lovecraft’s work. For example, *Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy* begins by describing the conflict between Dent and contractors who need to demolish Dent’s house to make way for a bypass. Only minutes later, Vogons arrive in their spaceship announcing that they will have to destroy the Earth to make way for a hyperspace bypass. This goes to show that not only is one human life insignificant, but rather the whole of it. While there may be humans who give themselves right to demolish people’s houses, there are much more powerful beings in the Universe who can demolish the very planet people live on. Thus, Vogons are used as a tool to mock the human race and its biased concepts while, of course, also mocking our bureaucratic systems.

This example can also be interpreted in terms of yet another type of irony, which is the unstable irony. Unstable irony is frequent in literature of the absurd where there is no fixed standpoint which is not itself undercut by further ironies (Abrams and Harpham 185). The result is a complete annihilation of truth, for there is nothing definite or immutable which could not later be revealed as only a deception. This technique is frequently deployed by Adams who uses it to further mock the characters. A good example of a mocked character by the use of unstable irony is Agrajag, who was already mentioned in this paper. Agrajag eventually built a Cathedral of Death which was to be the place where he will finally find out the cause and reason of Arthur's wrongdoings. It is not possible for Agrajag to accept Dent's story; he simply cannot believe that his deaths were pointless and absolutely random. The Cathedral of Death becomes the symbol of Agrajag's delusion and a hallmark of absurdity. He believed firmly that Arthur had a personal reason for this and all the facts supported this interpretation, because it simply seems impossible for every death to be a coincidence. Adams, however, does not offer any consolation and by the use of unstable irony, mocks Agrajag to the point where he is eventually indirectly killed by Arthur again.

5. Philosophy in the background

In this concluding chapter, the paper will provide an unequivocal analysis of the philosophies which influenced cosmic horror. These philosophical ideas became obvious when exploring themes in Lovecraftian literature, so this chapter will contextualize the influence of nihilism and absurdism on Adams's work.

5.1. Nihilism

Nihilism in Adams's work is metaphysical, epistemological and ethical. Ethical nihilism supposes that there is no ground to justify any absolute moral value ("Nihilism"), which means that all we are left with is a possibly functioning moral system, but still one which is predicated upon premises that are only relatively true. Since the whole moral system is a result of social agreement, it is rather difficult to justify one's quasi-obligation to adhere to the norms. Ethical nihilism is largely connected to epistemological one, which holds that no knowledge is possible ("Nihilism"), thus we can never have the knowledge of right or wrong either. Lastly, metaphysical nihilism claims that the world and human life do not have the meaning and value we suppose them to have ("Nihilism").

The characteristics of each type of nihilism can be found in the supposed meaning of life, the Universe, and everything. The answer which Deep Thought provided was 42, stating that the question posed was not clear enough for the answer to be understood. Adams declared that he simply wanted to include "an ordinary, smallish number" (Bignell) which should not be interpreted as a symbol bearing any deeper meaning. Therefore, it could be concluded that such an insignificant answer implies the insignificance of life, the Universe, and everything. If, however, this number does have any meaning, it will either take millions of years for humans to discover the right question, or that will not happen at all, which is in alignment with epistemological nihilism.

This discovery leads to existential despair which is most prominently displayed in Marvin. Besides being cursed with too much knowledge, Marvin is also deprived of opportunities to use his intelligence to full capacity by being given only trivial tasks. This leads to Marvin feeling useless, purposeless and mistreated, much like humans do if nihilistic views are accepted and internalized. Ethical nihilism is best displayed in the character of Zaphod Beeblebrox, who is the perfect candidate for the President of the Galaxy since he had been sentenced to ten years in prison for fraud and had served only two. The President is someone who simply needs to draw attention

from people in real power, so the main quality a presidential candidate should have is talent for causing trouble rather than values we label as moral or ethical.

5.2. Absurdism

The *Hitchhiker* series also tackles the problem of the absurdity of human existence, and the way in which absurdity is presented here mostly coincides with the explanation provided by philosopher Thomas Nagel. According to Nagel, as explained by Kind, absurdity is caused by the collision of the so called internal and external perspective of an individual. Internal perspective is the one “within which we ordinarily operate as we live our lives” (Kind 87). This means that people take their lives seriously and each one of us has his/her own hierarchy of values. What is on top of this hierarchy is what we care about the most and is the most meaningful to us. On the other hand, the external perspective is a perspective on ourselves from a position of, for example, a higher being. It relates to our ability to transcend ourselves without which we would not be able to even imagine how we are perceived by a superior entity. From this perspective, people have a hard time finding the very meaning of their lives, let alone, for example, the meaning of a certain career they are pursuing. The ideas originating from absurdism are present throughout Adams’ work, starting with the very beginning of the *Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy* when Dent’s house and Earth are about to be destroyed to make way for bypasses, which was already discussed in the paper.

Chappell, however, argues that absurdity arises from mortality and that is because we have infinitely long list of things we want to do and finite amount of time and, even if we complete everything we wish to do, still it will not matter after we are dead, not to us, not to the world in centuries to come (105). Therefore, the problem of absurdity would be solved if we knew how to achieve immortality. Adams does not share this view. He created a character called Wowbagger the Infinitely Prolonged who, as his names suggests, is immortal or infinite in relation to time. Adams explains that he became immortal by accident, so he did not know how to cope with his immortality: “The merry smiles he used to wear at other people’s funerals began to fade. He began to despise the Universe in general, and everybody in it in particular. This was the point at which he conceived his purpose, the thing that would drive him on (...) forever. It was this. He would insult the Universe” (Adams 317). Being immortal clearly does not free Wowbagger from absurdity of his own existence nor does he stop questioning the purpose of his life just because his existence is infinite. No matter how ridiculous, he devises his own purpose, indicating that all rational life forms need something which will offer their lives not only meaning, but a fixed and

firm point in relation to which they will orientate. By depicting this amusing character, Adams actually departs from aforementioned Ralickas's definition of cosmic horror subgenre. Ralickas restricted the experience of cosmic horror to only finite life forms who cognize their finitude. It could be, therefore, concluded that Adams takes cosmic horror a step further, suggesting that life is absurd regardless of its duration. In an extreme absurdist fashion, Adams implicitly advocates that it would be better if there was nothing at all.

However, Kind believes that Adams also proposes a possible solution or at least a temporary antidote to absurdity, as many philosophers tried to do as well. She claims that Adams recommended that we lose ourselves in activities that appeal to us which may not offer an escape from absurdity, but it is at least a way to ignore it (Kind 96). Kind argues that this attitude is supported by Slartibartfast. After Dent becomes excited at the prospect of something existing outside the Universe which would explain the happenings within it, Slartibartfast cuts him off (Kind 95): “‘Perhaps I'm old and tired,’ he continued, ‘but I always think that the chances of finding out what really is going on are so absurdly remote that the only thing to do is to say hang the sense of it and just keep yourself occupied’” (Adams 127).

So, the same philosophies which form the base of cosmic horror are present in Adams's *Hitchhiker* series as well. Adams even proposes that there are no life forms whose existence is justified because none of them have any real purpose or cosmic relevance. His only remedy for existential despair is keeping yourself occupied and avoiding the issue.

Conclusion

Adams's *Hitchhiker* series exhibits many features typical of cosmic horror subgenre of horror fiction. The themes which Adams dealt with in the series are stock themes in Lovecraft's literary works. Moreover, both authors drew the same conclusions from the subjects they explore. For example, both consider the lack of knowledge and self-knowledge merciful, and regard cosmos as a threat to humankind. Both portray the Universe as more similar to Chaos than to Cosmos, since it lacks harmonic order and since the supposed fixed laws of Nature can easily be defeated. These conclusions have origins in the philosophies both Lovecraft and Adams propagated in their works, namely nihilism and absurdism. Nihilistic and absurdist view of the world and life itself are implied to be inevitable if one is faced with the vastness of the Universe, in comparison to which people are but insignificant specks. Without God, who is absent in both Lovecraft's and Adams's works, the Universe seems to be completely indifferent to our presence, offering us no meaning, guidance or purpose. The main difference between Lovecraft's and Adams's works is in the atmosphere they create. Adams writes in a humorous tone and satiric manner, mocking everything and everyone, while the ideas that are truly dreadful in his work are delivered in an extremely subtle or extremely humorous way. Therefore, it could be argued that while Lovecraft aims to achieve an atmosphere of dread, terror and anxiety, Adams' produces a milder version of it, one closer to the philosophical term "existential despair". By the use of irony, especially the unstable one, Adams emphasizes the sheer absurdity of the whole Universe and everything in it even more. Adams's *Hitchhiker* series should be regarded as belonging to cosmic horror subgenre due to the many features shared with Lovecraft's works, while also taking certain ideas even a step further. There is no need for appalling and frightening creatures like Cthulhu in Adams's Universe since its total randomness, unlawfulness and vastness are more than in opposition to human expectations and hopes of meaning, creating roughly the same effect which Lovecraft aimed at.

Works Cited

- Abrams, Meyer Howard and Geoffrey Galt Harpham. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. 10th ed. Cengage, 2012.
- Adams, Douglas. *The Ultimate Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. Del Rey, 2002.
- Bignell, Paul. "42: The Answer to Life, the Universe and Everything." *The Independent*, 6 Feb. 2011, www.independent.co.uk/life-style/history/42-the-answer-to-life-the-universe-and-everything-2205734.html. Accessed 24 June 2018.
- Burleson, Donald R. *Lovecraft: Disturbing the Universe*. The University Press of Kentucky, 1990.
- Kind, Amy. "Life, the Universe, and Absurdity." *Philosophy and The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, edited by Nicholas Joll, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, pp. 75 – 101.
- Kropf, Carl R. "Douglas Adams's 'Hitchhiker' Novels as Mock Science Fiction." *Science Fiction Studies*, Mar. 1988, www.jstor.org/stable/4239859?read-now=1&seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents. Accessed 10 June 2018.
- Lovecraft, Howard Phillips. "From Beyond". *The H. P. Lovecraft Archive*, www.hplovecraft.com/writings/texts/fiction/fb.aspx. Accessed 25 May 2018.
- . "Supernatural Horror in Literature". *The H. P. Lovecraft Archive*, www.hplovecraft.com/writings/texts/essays/shil.aspx. Accessed 25 May 2018.
- . "The Shunned House." *The H. P. Lovecraft Archive*, <http://www.hplovecraft.com/writings/texts/fiction/sh.aspx>. Accessed 17 May 2018.
- Murray, Chris and Kevin Corstorphine. "Co(s)mic Horror." *New Critical Essays on H. P. Lovecraft*. Edited by David Simmons. Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, pp. 157 – 193.
- "Nihilism". *The Blackwell Dictionary of Western Philosophy*, 2004.
- Omidasalar, Alejandro. "Posthumanism and Un-endings: How Ligotti Deranges Lovecraft's Cosmic Horror." *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 7 Jun. 2018, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/jpcu.12681>. Accessed 10 June 2018.

Perwein, Christian. "From Poe to South Park: The Influence and Development of Lovecraft's 'Cosmic Horror' in American Culture." *Hrčak*, www.hrcak.srce.hr/200185. Accessed 6 June 2018.