

Katharina Günther

'Well that about wraps it up for God'

Religious motifs in Douglas Adams Hitchhiker's Trilogy

Thesis (M.A.)

Bibliographic information published by the German National Library:

The German National Library lists this publication in the National Bibliography; detailed bibliographic data are available on the Internet at <http://dnb.dnb.de> .

This book is copyright material and must not be copied, reproduced, transferred, distributed, leased, licensed or publicly performed or used in any way except as specifically permitted in writing by the publishers, as allowed under the terms and conditions under which it was purchased or as strictly permitted by applicable copyright law. Any unauthorized distribution or use of this text may be a direct infringement of the author s and publisher s rights and those responsible may be liable in law accordingly.

Copyright © 2007 Diplomica Verlag GmbH
ISBN: 9783836609661

Katharina Günther

'Well that about wraps it up for God'

Religious motifs in Douglas Adams Hitchhiker's Trilogy

Katharina Günther

'Well that about wraps it up for God'

Religious motifs in Douglas Adams Hitchhiker's Trilogy

**Magisterarbeit
Universität Leipzig
Philologische Fakultät
Institut für Anglistik
Februar 2007**



Diplomica Verlag GmbH —
Hermannstal 119k —
22119 Hamburg —
Fon: 040 / 655 99 20 —
Fax: 040 / 655 99 222 —
agentur@diplom.de —
www.diplom.de —

Katharina Günther

'Well that about wraps it up for God'

Religious motifs in Douglas Adams Hitchhiker's Trilogy

ISBN: 978-3-8366-0966-1

Druck Diplomica® Verlag GmbH, Hamburg, 2008

Zugl. Universität Leipzig, Leipzig, Deutschland, Magisterarbeit, 2007

Dieses Werk ist urheberrechtlich geschützt. Die dadurch begründeten Rechte, insbesondere die der Übersetzung, des Nachdrucks, des Vortrags, der Entnahme von Abbildungen und Tabellen, der Funksendung, der Mikroverfilmung oder der Vervielfältigung auf anderen Wegen und der Speicherung in Datenverarbeitungsanlagen, bleiben, auch bei nur auszugsweiser Verwertung, vorbehalten. Eine Vervielfältigung dieses Werkes oder von Teilen dieses Werkes ist auch im Einzelfall nur in den Grenzen der gesetzlichen Bestimmungen des Urheberrechtsgesetzes der Bundesrepublik Deutschland in der jeweils geltenden Fassung zulässig. Sie ist grundsätzlich vergütungspflichtig. Zuwiderhandlungen unterliegen den Strafbestimmungen des Urheberrechtes.

Die Wiedergabe von Gebrauchsnamen, Handelsnamen, Warenbezeichnungen usw. in diesem Werk berechtigt auch ohne besondere Kennzeichnung nicht zu der Annahme, dass solche Namen im Sinne der Warenzeichen- und Markenschutz-Gesetzgebung als frei zu betrachten wären und daher von jedermann benutzt werden dürften.

Die Informationen in diesem Werk wurden mit Sorgfalt erarbeitet. Dennoch können Fehler nicht vollständig ausgeschlossen werden, und die Diplomarbeiten Agentur, die Autoren oder Übersetzer übernehmen keine juristische Verantwortung oder irgendeine Haftung für evtl. verbliebene fehlerhafte Angaben und deren Folgen.

© Diplomica Verlag GmbH

<http://www.diplom.de>, Hamburg 2008

Printed in Germany

Contents

	page
1. Introduction	4
2. Classification of The HG	7
2.1. A Short Introduction to Science Fiction as a Literary Genre	7
2.2. The HG as (Mock-) Science Fiction	8
3. Religious Themes in Science Fiction	13
3.1. The (Non-) Existence of God in Science Fiction	14
3.2. Creation of the World and Mankind in Science Fiction	19
3.3. Eschatology and Death in Science Fiction	21
3.4. The Meaning of Life in Science Fiction	26
4. For Zarquon's Sake or The HG and Religion	29
5. Does it Look as if the Universe is in Very Good Hands? or God in the HG	31
5.1. The (Non-) Existence of God	31
5.2. Humanoid Supreme Beings	34
5.3. Machines as Gods	37
5.4. The <i>Guide</i> as Holy Book and God	42
5.5. False Gods	44
5.6. God's Final Message to His Creation	45
6. The Great Green Arkleseizure or Creation in the HG	48
6.1. The Creation of Life	49
6.2. The Making of Earth	50
6.3. The Creation of Mankind by Ancient Astronauts	51
6.4. Artificial Universes	54

7.	The Restaurant at the End of the Universe or Eschatology & Afterlife in the HG	56
7.1.	The Restaurant at the End of the Universe	57
7.2.	The End of the Earth(s)	59
7.3.	Afterlife	59
7.4.	Immortality	62
7.5.	Reincarnation	64
7.6.	The Death of Arthur Dent	66
8.	42 or The Meaning of Life	69
8.1.	The Meaning of Life in the Five major Religions	69
8.2.	Insignificance of Man	71
8.3.	Everybody's Quest for Answers	75
8.4.	Aliens – Bringers of Knowledge?	76
8.5.	The Quest of Arthur Dent	79
8.6.	Answers	85
8.7.	The Dangers of Knowledge	88
9.	Conclusion	90
10.	Bibliography	94

1. Introduction

The story of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* is the story of Life, the Universe and Everything. Initially broadcasted as a radio series on BBC Radio 4 in 1978 it was such a success that its author, Douglas Adams, eventually ended up not only publishing the story with a slightly modified plot in book form but also creating four sequels until 1992.¹ The story was taken up by other media which resulted in the creation of a TV series in 1981, stage shows, a movie in 2005, a computer game, comics, towels and a lot more. Today the 'H2G2' has reached a cult status that few other Science Fiction works boast².

The plot of the HG is mostly confusing and full of curious ideas wherefore a complete summary is not possible at this point. However, the following paragraph will give the unacquainted readers an idea of the story.

“There are of course many problems connected with life, of which some of the most popular are: *Why are people born? Why do they die? Why do they want to spend so much of the intervening time wearing digital watches?*” (Hitch: 139; emph. by Adams) The *Trilogy in Five Parts* is the story of Arthur Dent and his quest for the answers to these problems. After the destruction of Earth the only surviving Englishman Dent hitchhikes through the width of time and space, finds out the answer to the ultimate question, dines at the Restaurant at the End of the Universe, saves the world, falls in love with a woman whose feet cannot touch the ground, is worshipped by birds and sandwich-lovers, is enlightened by God's final message to His Creation and finally meets his fate on STAVROMULABETA. The ape-descendent Dent is accompanied by Ford Prefect, owner of a copy of the most remarkable book ever to come out of the Great Publishing Houses of Ursa Minor Beta: *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* – an encyclopaedia that sells so well mainly because it has the words DON'T PANIC written in large friendly letters on the cover. Other companions are Marvin, the paranoid android, Trillian, the sole surviving woman from Earth and Zaphod Beeblebrox, the former Galactic President.

The author of this humorous work of Science Fiction was born as Douglas Noel Adams on March 11th 1952 in Cambridge, UK, and died on May 11th 2001 in Santa Barbara, California. Whilst studying English in Cambridge he joined the Footlights Society, a comedy group

¹ This thesis will refer to the whole *Trilogy in Five Parts* as HG or Trilogy; the individual books will be referred to as follows: *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*: Hitch.; *The Restaurant at the End of the Universe*: Rest.; *Life, the Universe and Everything*: Life; *So Long and Thanks for all the Fish*: So Long; *Mostly Harmless*: Mostly; the encyclopedia 'The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy' in the novels will be termed *The Guide*.

² Especially the World Wide Web with its almost infinite space offers countless opportunities for cult followers. A good link list is provided at http://www.informatik.uni-freiburg.de/~diesch/douglas_adams.html

which is also closely connected to Monty Python. Adams' initial career aspiration was to become a comedian yet he seemingly never displayed a great talent as an actor so his plans to follow the paths of Monty Python's members had to be changed. Before the breakthrough with the HG he worked for the BBC where he created, among others, some episodes of Doctor Who. After his first success he worked as freelance writer and published besides the HG series the *Dirk Gently*-series and non-Science Fiction works like *The meaning of Liff*; *The Deeper Meaning of Liff* and *Last Chance to See*³.

Since this thesis will analyse spiritual themes in his work, it is useful to point out Adams' attitude towards religion. Adams was brought up as a Christian. His father was even "[...] studying for a postgraduate degree in theology with a view to taking holy orders [...]" (Simpson: 7) but gave up eventually. As an adolescent Adams was Sacristan for some months and received a special Prize for Service in chapel. His interest in religion continued and "[...] on the strength of an essay on the revival of religious poetry, he won an exhibition to study English at Cambridge" (Gaiman: 8). However, after he finished school, Adams turned away from religion and became a radical Atheist: "If it turned out that there was a god, I would feel I'd been the victim of a monumental confidence trick, [...] I'd feel that the universe was playing silly buggers. I'll wait and see but I won't lose any sleep over it" (Adams quoted in Simpson: 243). In Winter 1998/99 Adams gave an interview to *The American Atheist* on the subject of religion. An extract will leave no question concerning Adams' personal ideas about the subject:

I really do not believe that there is a god. [...] I am a radical Atheist, just to signal that I really mean it, have thought about it a great deal, and that it's an opinion I hold seriously. [...] I don't accept the currently fashionable assertion that any view is automatically as worthy of respect as any equal and opposite view.[...] There is such a thing as the burden of proof, and in the case of god, as in the case of the composition of the moon, this has shifted radically. [However,] I am fascinated by religion. (That's a completely different thing from believing in it!) It has had such an incalculably huge effect on human affairs. What is it? What does it represent? Why have we invented it? How does it keep going? What will become of it? I love to keep poking and prodding at it. (<http://www.americanatheist.org/win98-99/T2/silverman.html>)

This suggests that in contrast to other Science Fiction works there will not be any attempts to convert the readers of Adams' work to Christianity or any other religion but that there will be reflections on religious themes in the HG.⁴

³ more about Douglas Adams in his biographies: Gaiman, Neil (1993). *Don't Panic: Douglas Adams & The Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. London: Titan Books Ltd.; Simpson, M.J. (2003). *Hitchhiker: A Biography of Douglas Adams*. London: Hodder and Stoughton.; Webb, Nick (2003). *Wish You Were Here: The Official Biography of Douglas Adams*. London: Headline.

⁴ The contents of this paragraph are taken from the following sources: Currier: "Adams, Douglas"; Gaiman: *Don't Panic*; Silverman: "Life, the Universe, and Everything": *An Interview with Douglas Adams*; Simpson: *Hitchhiker*; www.zz9.org/dna

It is the aim of this thesis to analyse appearances of religious motives, ideas or traditions in the five novels that belong to the HG-trilogy and to interpret their function in the works.

In order to provide a base for an evaluation, the volumes have to be classified in terms of belonging to a literary genre. Adams' works will be included in the literary category of Science Fiction (SF), which will be essential for the functional interpretation in the subsequent analysis as well as for the comparison with other SF novels.

Since religion is a popular subject among SF authors, the presentation of certain themes will be split into four categories which will recur in the analytical part. First of all, the question of the existence of a god will be treated, followed by the representation of creation myths. Thirdly, there are different versions of eschatological ideas to be considered and finally, the quest for the meaning of life will be looked upon.

Subsequent to the theoretical part, religious motives in *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* will be studied according to the mentioned categories. Eventually, the results of this analysis will be summarized in a conclusion.

There may be a remote chance, that the attentive reader of this thesis will “[n]ever again [...] wake up in the morning and think: Who am I? What is my purpose in life? Does it really, cosmically speaking, *matter* if I don't get up and go to work? For today we will finally learn once and for all the plain and simple answer to all these nagging little problems of Life, the Universe and Everything!” (Hitch: 149; emph. by Adams)

“But there is a certain amount of uncertainty about it” (Life: 193-4).