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**“Nothing You Do Matters and Your
Existence Is a Lie!”
Or,
Postmodernism and Philosophical
Themes in *Rick and Morty*.**

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Mémoire dirigé par Bertrand Rouby et Estelle Epinoux





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Introduction

“I don’t get it and I don’t need to.”¹

Whilst it may seem surprising to commence a *mémoire* with such an apparently contradictory remark, such a phrase as voiced by a character in *Rick and Morty* seems to encapsulate the general feeling of the viewers towards the series. Airing as far back as the 2nd December 2013 and currently standing at three seasons, *Rick and Morty* has become somewhat of a cultural phenomenon and a massive, runaway hit to the point of setting new viewership records for Adult Swim - the adult-themed programming block of host network Cartoon Network - and going as far as to claim the lofty title of “television’s No.1 comedy,” but without most knowing exactly *why*.²

Charitably described as “a never-ending fart joke wrapped around a studied look into nihilism,” the show itself revolves around the sci-fi misadventures of grandfather Rick, an abrasive, cynical and nihilistic alcoholic, and grandson Morty, a naïve, well-meaning but ultimately uncomfortably out of his depth highschooler, and has been universally praised for the premise, characters and story.³

However, emerging only comparatively recently, *Rick and Morty* is relatively untouched in terms of academia, and as such this paper is an attempt to remedy the sentiment as expressed in the quote above. At the time of writing, a cursory search in the *Jstor* database turns up forty-five hits but no actually applicable results, and overall there is a marked lack of sources for the subject matter in academia as a greater whole.⁴ This *mémoire* therefore undertakes to break new scholarly ground and aims to fill the *Rick and Morty* niche with original analysis and research and ideally help pave the way for future studies.

Indeed, the aim of this paper is to examine and analyse the underpinning philosophical themes as displayed in postmodern work of the comedy science-fiction *Rick and Morty*, and more importantly assess *why* they are used. The schools of thought as manifested by Cosmicism, Nihilism and the Absurd are not necessarily well-known outside philosophical circles, and yet

¹ *Rick and Morty*. “Rick Potion #9”. Directed by Stephen Sandoval and Pete Michels. Written by Justin Roiland. Adult Swim, 7 September 2015.

² Denise Petski, “‘Rick and Morty’ Season 3 Sets Ratings Records For Adult Swim”, *Deadline* (blog), 4 October 2017, <http://deadline.com/2017/10/rick-and-morty-season-3-ratings-records-key-demos-adult-swim-1202181773/>.

³ “‘Rick And Morty’ Is Better When It Embraces Its Strong Women”, *Decider* (blog), 4 October 2017, <https://decider.com/2017/10/04/rick-and-morty-is-better-with-strong-women/>.

⁴ ‘Rick and Morty search results,’ accessed 24 April 2018, <https://www.jstor.org/action/doBasicSearch?Query=Rick+and+Morty>.

are a cornerstone for the universe of *Rick and Morty* and the humour which permeates it and grants it such wide appeal and such raucous praise from its fans. As such, these questions are best summed up in the form of four main research questions. First, to what extent to these philosophies feature throughout the series? Second, why are they there and so apparently applicable? Third, what are the key ideas contained within each one? Fourth and finally, just how are they quite so relatable to the bleak yet darkly amusing hit show?

The working hypothesis is that each of these philosophies adds something quite specific to the characters and setting of *Rick and Morty* on their own, but subsequently analysed would reveal the nuances through their various interactions throughout the series run-time, and that it is through the multiplicity of various mature schools of thought of the nineteenth and twentieth that *Rick and Morty*, a twenty-first century work, gains a degree of its appeal to despite the comparative immaturity of both the series as made and some elements of the humour contained within.

As such, this paper will proceed as a comparative analysis on the first two seasons of *Rick and Morty* and will be divided into three separate parts, each identifying, explaining and analysing each school of philosophy present and comparing how it is presented as such in the series and the effects it produces within.

Partie I. Cosmicism

I.1. A Gateway to the Universe

As discussed in the overall introduction to this mémoire and enshrined even in the title of the series, *Rick and Morty* is primarily about the sci-fi adventures and misadventures, trials and tribulations of grandfather and grandson Rick and Morty, loosely inspired by ‘Doc’ Brown and Marty McFly from *Back to the Future*, the 1985 sci-fi classic directed by Robert Zemeckis.⁵ Whereas both works share the common roots of mismatched protagonists and a use of science currently beyond the ken of any modern-day scientist, one is a family-friendly, PG-rated, ultimately wholesome film.

The other is *Rick and Morty*.

Whereas Doc Brown was at worst a maverick but ultimately well-meaning, eccentric scientist, Rick Sanchez is decidedly less decent. He is an abrasive, cynical and nihilistic alcoholic whose jaded attitude and complete disregard for the wellbeing of everyone around him usually forms the spotlight of every episode focussing on his (and Morty’s) misadventures, but also puts most of the cast in harm’s way, however directly or indirectly. As such, Rick is a much darker and grittier portrayal of ‘Doc’ - something which could be said to be a sign of the times- as is Morty compared to Marty McFly.

In *Rick and Morty*, Morty Smith is Rick’s grandson. He is fourteen years old and serves as a foil to Rick, being portrayed as good-natured and naïve, if somewhat easily manipulated by those around him. By that same token of being Rick’s foil, however, he also has difficulty at school, speaks with a stutter which becomes more pronounced when angry or upset, and can behave in a cowardly manner, particularly in the situations of mortal peril which he finds himself embroiled in with dismaying frequency upon accompanying Rick.

It is true to say that Rick is very much the nucleus of the structure of the series of *Rick and Morty*. Morty is very much the co-titular character and very much relegated to a side-kick role, the deuteragonist to Rick’s protagonist. The fundamental, underpinning premise of the sci-fi adventures is that it is Rick who facilitates and allows them to even occur with his gadgets and inventions, or need for some far-flung and exotic object or ingredient- in particular his prized portal gun - and the hapless Morty is dragged along for the ride.

⁵ Robert Zemeckis, *Back to the Future*, Adventure, Comedy, Sci-Fi, 1985, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0088763/>.

In the same way that the aforementioned portal gun warps the bridge between worlds hitherto unknown and unimagined, so too it could be said that Rick himself warps the otherwise humdrum lives of the Smith family around himself by his mere presence, a marked sci-fi subversion of the otherwise tired and worn-out cliché of an American middle-class family in the suburbs aiming for the American dream, but who instead of living the good life so often promised by that national ethos instead find their lives transformed into a dull, meaningless, day-to-day blur. The presence of Rick, however, serves as a lens through which to drag the clichéd background into sharp focus by dint of the outlandishness of his presence, the appearance of a self-proclaimed (albeit *bona-fide*) super-genius and the accompanying reveal of the existence of a universe extending beyond that of the apparent limits of our own contemporary one, and one so awesomely vast that the mere human mind buckles under the orders of magnitude necessary to describe the massive expanse thereof.

I.2. The Lovecraft Connection

After all, “Space (...) is big,” as Douglas Adams succinctly put it in *The Hitch Hiker’s Guide to the Galaxy*, “really big. You just won’t believe how vastly hugely mindbogglingly big it is.”⁶ Earth, the cradle of humanity and repository of millennia of the combined knowledge, culture and civilization of humankind, won through bitter struggle and brilliant breakthrough alike, the birthplace and gravesite for all humans, does not even register on a universal scale. The observable universe is purported to be 1.9 times 10 to the power of 22 times larger than the Earth (1.9×10^{22}), which would make it nineteen sextillion times greater.⁷ The mind does not merely reel at the prospect of comprehending such an order of magnitude, it actively freezes in complete and utter incomprehension. No frame of reference is possible, and to even attempt to put such an order of magnitude into perspective is to invite dizzying, mind-shattering perspective and realisation of the complete and utter insignificance of humanity in the face of an impossibly massive and ultimately uncaring universe.

It would be therefore fair to say that the universe as a greater whole, and by its very scope and magnitude, is *unknowable* to the human mind, the definition thereof being given as “not able to be known.”⁸ While approaching dangerously close to a fallacious argument, that which is not

⁶ Douglas Adams, *The Hitch Hiker’s Guide to the Galaxy: A Trilogy in Five Parts* (London: Heinemann, 1995), 63.

⁷ ‘Earth Compared to the Universe’, *Futurism* (blog), 4 July 2014, <https://futurism.com/earth-compared-to-the-universe/>.

⁸ ‘Unknowable | Definition of Unknowable in English by Oxford Dictionaries’, Oxford Dictionaries | English, accessed 28 February 2018, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/unknowable>.

able to be known is by definition *not* known, thus that which is unknowable could be said to be a subset of that which is unknown.

Such a great unknown serves as a inky-black backdrop to *Rick and Morty* as it does to the sci-fi genre as a greater whole, facilitating the premise of intergalactic and trans-dimensional misadventures and forays as made possible by the co-titular super-genius's reality-bending gadgets and inventions, but the universe is shown to be at best indifferent to the existence of humanity and unknown to the point of being sinister, tapping into a deep-rooted unease and fear buried deep within the human psyche: the unknown itself.

This leads very neatly into a quote encapsulating the very essence of that amorphous fear and cosmic-scale indifference to the plight of humanity, penned by one of the more influential figures of the early twentieth century in that certain genre of horror, which is to say Howard Philip Lovecraft: "The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown."⁹ This fear of the unknown was the foundation to all of Lovecraft's works, typically some unknown and usually extra-terrestrial influence exerted upon the backwoods New England setting, so weird and inimical to human understanding that most protagonists are driven stark raving mad as their mere human minds fail to grasp the terrifying *otherworldliness* of such influence.

In a tragically similar vein to Edgar Allen Poe or Vincent Van Gogh, Lovecraft was very much ahead of his time, his works underappreciated by his contemporaries and acclaim and accolades only lauded upon him posthumously after his penniless demise. His best-known work was possibly *The Call of Cthulhu* and the titular Cthulhu still persisting in pop culture references to this day ranging from Metallica's *Call of Ktulu* to episode 8 of *Musaigen no Phantom World*, described as being "(...) a monster of vaguely anthropoid outline, but with an octopus-like head whose face was a mass of feelers, a scaly, rubbery-looking body, prodigious claws on hind and fore feet, and long, narrow wings behind," and the mere sight of which causes the human beholder to be driven completely and utterly insane.^{10 11 12}

⁹ "Supernatural Horror in Literature" by H. P. Lovecraft', accessed 28 February 2018, <http://www.hplovecraft.com/writings/texts/essays/shil.aspx>.

¹⁰ Joel McIver, *To Live Is to Die: The Life and Death of Metallica's Cliff Burton* (London: Jawbone Press, 2009), 122.

¹¹ 'Musaigen No Phantom World: Episode 8 Review · Anime For The People · Disqus', Disqus, accessed 1 March 2018, https://disqus.com/home/channel/animeforthepeople/discussion/channel-animeforthepeople/musaigen_no_phantom_world_episode_8_review/.

¹² H. P. Lovecraft and S. T. Joshi, *The Call of Cthulhu and Other Weird Stories*, Penguin Classics (New York: Penguin Books, 2016), 149.

Moreover, Cthulhu actually appears in the opening title sequence of *Rick and Morty* during a four-second shot towards the very end. The *Rick and Morty* Cthulhu follows the original description remarkably faithfully, depicted as chasing Rick, Morty and Summer in Rick's Space Cruiser underwater, bulldozing through an aquatic temple in hot pursuit of the protagonists before lunging at the camera with a tentacled and fanged maw just before the overall sequence fades to black as the main title finally appears, a clear indication through this homage that the creators of *Rick and Morty*, which is to say Dan Harmon and Justin Roiland, are well aware of the creations and indeed the works of H.P. Lovecraft, an aspect and indeed philosophy thereof which is very much present in the postmodern, contemporary series. Said philosophy is that of Cosmicism.

Cosmicism, also to varying degrees known as Cosmic Horror or Lovecraftian Horror, is in actuality a surprisingly difficult term to pin down and clearly define without recourse to the academically reviled Wikipedia, in a somewhat suitably maddening and esoteric manner befitting a term thusly associated with such an author as Lovecraft himself. Moreover, there exists some level of debate amongst Lovecraftian scholars as to whether Lovecraft himself invented the term; S.T. Joshi posits that this is indeed the case in his introduction to the book *The Annotated H.P. Lovecraft*, whereas in his essay Pete Rawlik states the opposite, remarking upon Lovecraft that "(...) he was neither its originator nor its sole proponent."^{13 14}

I.3. The Tenets of Cosmicism

Regardless of the academic ambiguity surrounding the origin of the term, Cosmicism encapsulates the aforementioned mind-shattering vastness by orders of magnitude of space upon the fragile human psyche, along with the uncomfortable line of questioning that such an unknown immenseness brings about when compared to the terrestrial frame of reference of the human mind, in addition to the vague but uneasy line of thought to which such rationale ultimately precipitates. In his essay, the hitherto previously cited Pete Rawlik postulates that there are three fundamental presumptions to Cosmicism: "1) There is no recognizable divine presence; 2) The cosmos and the forces in it are indifferent toward humanity; and, 3) Humanity is insignificant, and is not the first or the last, nor a particularly special, species in the universe," and moreover posits that Cosmic Horror is in fact a subset of Cosmicism, with one core tenet

¹³ H. P. Lovecraft and S. T. Joshi, *The Annotated H.P. Lovecraft* (New York: Dell, 1997), 12.

¹⁴ Mike Davis, "Defining Lovecraftian Horror", an Essay by Pete Rawlik', *Lovecraft EZine* (blog), 15 April 2013, accessed 3 March 2018, <https://lovecraftzine.com/2013/04/15/defining-lovecraftian-horror-an-essay-by-pete-rawlik/>.

thereof being an extension of the third theorised facet, which is to say that “The majority of humanity does not recognize its own insignificance, the indifference of the universe, or its true nature.”¹⁵

Such a weighty citation is undeniably a great deal to process, particularly in regard to its pertinence as to the presence of Cosmicism in *Rick and Morty* and the postmodern revival that such a current of philosophy is subject to, and as such merits an exploration in greater detail as to its main points.

The first tenet bears a striking resemblance to another philosophical current insofar as it rejects religion to a greater or lesser extent by claiming that there is no god or other supreme being which could constitute such a “recognisable divine presence.”¹⁶ That other formerly mentioned philosophical current is of course that of nihilism, a school of philosophy almost unilaterally correlated to Friedrich Nietzsche, and while nihilism is to undergo an in-depth analysis in the second part of this chapter, owing to the marked nihilistic philosophy of Rick throughout the series, a brief explanation and justification is nevertheless in order here. The core assumption of nihilism is that “(...) all values are baseless and that nothing can be known or communicated,” and so far as the *Oxford English Dictionary*’s definition of values is judged to be applicable, values are being defined in this particular context as “Principles or standards of behaviour; one’s judgement of what is important in life,” religion could be therefore equated however heavy-handedly to personal values and thus promptly rejected and judged as baseless by nihilism.^{17 18}

Such an attitude is emblazoned by Rick right from the very first episode of season one. After bursting into Morty’s bedroom in the middle of the night in a drunken stupor and rambling incoherently, he drags his sleepily protesting grandson out for an impromptu adventure involving, among other things, a neutrino bomb which ultimately fails to go off and Rick himself passing out in an alcoholic daze. After the opening sequence plays for the first time, the scene fades to black and the episode picks up on the morning after the abortive misadventure at the breakfast table of the Smith family, serving as a sort of showcase for the various

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Mike Davis, “Defining Lovecraftian Horror”, an Essay by Pete Rawlik’, *Lovecraft EZine* (blog), 15 April 2013, accessed 3 March 2018, <https://lovecraftzine.com/2013/04/15/defining-lovecraftian-horror-an-essay-by-pete-rawlik/>.

¹⁷ ‘Nihilism | Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy’, accessed 3 March 2018, <https://www.iep.utm.edu/nihilism/>.

¹⁸ ‘Value | Definition of Value in English by Oxford Dictionaries’, Oxford Dictionaries | English, accessed 3 March 2018, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/value>.

personalities the main cast which the viewer will eventually become accustomed to as the camera pulls in closer to the cast from the opening wide-angle establishing shot.

Overcome with fatigue, Morty collapses face-first into his plate as Jerry, his father, makes inane and somewhat forced small-talk about the best singer on “a new episode of that singing show”, highlighting the perceived shallowness of his personality as he reads from a tablet device.¹⁹ The camera jump-cuts to Summer, his older sister in her late teens, who is immediately established to be a typical standoffish and disparaging teenager, quipping quickly and softly that such a sight “makes her wanna puke,” as Beth demonstrates her motherly attitude as befitting her position in the family, worriedly asking if Morty was feeling ill from his practicing kissing on the living room pillow, as according to her “the dog sleeps on it,” all the while Rick is shown to be indifferent to the conversation as he picks away at his plate of food.²⁰

Rick is quickly established to be the cause of Morty’s current fatigued state, and his offhand dismissal of responsibility causes Beth and Jerry to clash however briefly, and the resulting spectacle causes the camera to jump to Summer in a close-up, as owing to her standoffish immobility and crossed arms present since the first shot she appeared in, she disparagingly drops her eyes to the table and the closeup shot draws the necessary attention to this lethargic and distanced display of disapproval, befitting her clichéd teenager personality displayed thus far.²¹ In the same quick, quiet and ultimately aloof voice, she apparently mutters “Oh my god, my parents are so loud, I want to die,” and at that the camera immediately jump-cuts to the other side of the table in a wide shot as Rick grunts in apparent disapproval to Summer’s previous damning proclamation, all the while Jerry glares at the resident bad influence on his son as Morty slumps on the table, head held up by his hand and clearly exhausted.²² Rick does not miss a beat in responding to Summer’s previous comment, only looking up once to point a finger and make a dismissive gesture with an open hand at his granddaughter directly before dropping his gaze back to his breakfast as he responds with “There is no God, Summer. You gotta rip that band-aid off now. You’ll thank me later,” thus rejecting the value of religion judged as baseless in his eyes and conforming to the definition of nihilism as given previously.²³ As a result of this profession, it would be therefore fair to say that going by the heretofore

¹⁹ *Rick and Morty*. “Pilot”. Directed by Justin Roiland. Written by Dan Harmon and Justin Roiland. Adult Swim, December 2 2013.

²⁰ *Ibid*.

²¹ *Ibid*.

²² ‘Pilot/Transcript’, Rick and Morty Wiki, accessed 4 March 2018, <http://rickandmorty.wikia.com/wiki/Pilot/Transcript>.

²³ *Ibid*.

mentioned tenets of Cosmicism as set out by Pete Rawlik, the first one is indeed applicable to *Rick and Morty* and thus indicative of the presence of the philosophy of Cosmicism therein.²⁴

I.4. Tenet the Second

Nevertheless, there is also a second and third tenet, along with the affixed amendment in the previously proclaimed assertion to prove or disprove the stated contention that *Rick and Morty* is indeed a work influenced and containing elements of Cosmicism and indeed, Cosmic Horror. To wit, the tenets postulate that “2) The cosmos and the forces in it are indifferent toward humanity” and “3) Humanity is insignificant, and is not the first or the last, nor a particularly special, species in the universe,” with the addition to that third presumption being that “the majority of humanity does not recognize its own insignificance, the indifference of the universe, or its true nature.”²⁵

Inasmuch as the apparent galactic indifference towards the Earth could be said to be caused, however indirectly, by the ultimate insignificance of humanity as a race on such a gargantuan scale of existence and thus the two assumptions tackled at once, the second tenet shall nonetheless be examined on its own, despite the rather more anecdotal evidence in the series that pertains to the justification of such a presumption.

One argument to be made for the apparent indifference towards Earth as expressed by the greater galactic and interdimensional whole in *Rick and Morty* is tied in with the structure of the adventures that make up the episodes themselves. In an online tutorial written by Dan Harmon, the co-writer and co-creator of *Rick and Morty*, he presents his approach to story structure as a circle divided into eight parts and bisected by two lines, one horizontal and one vertical, and the self-professed “down and dirty” approach to storytelling structure corresponds to an eight-step affair, each step corresponding to the number on the circle:

1. A character is in a zone of comfort,
2. But they want something.
3. They enter an unfamiliar situation,
4. Adapt to it,
5. Get what they wanted,
6. Pay a heavy price for it,

²⁴ Mike Davis, “‘Defining Lovecraftian Horror’, an Essay by Pete Rawlik’, *Lovecraft EZine* (blog), 15 April 2013, <https://lovecraftzine.com/2013/04/15/defining-lovecraftian-horror-an-essay-by-pete-rawlik/>.

²⁵ Mike Davis, “‘Defining Lovecraftian Horror’, an Essay by Pete Rawlik’, *Lovecraft EZine* (blog), 15 April 2013, <https://lovecraftzine.com/2013/04/15/defining-lovecraftian-horror-an-essay-by-pete-rawlik/>.

7. Then return to their familiar situation,
8. Having changed.²⁶

Dan Harmon himself admits that this particular concept is heavily influenced and inspired by Joseph Campbell, whom Dan Harmon acknowledges and even credits as being “a comparative mythologist.”²⁷ Joseph Campbell was indeed a comparative mythologist and a prolific American writer, pioneering the concept of “the hero’s journey” or “the Monomyth” which has been massively influential on American screenwriting ever since the 1970s, most notably with the original *Star Wars* movie being almost immediately branded as subscribing to such a form of storytelling and George Lucas, the filmmaker behind *Star Wars*, himself freely admitting as much.^{28 29 30} For the sake of completeness and to allow comparison, the original hero’s journey was posited in 1949 as follows:

A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man.³¹

While somewhat digressive in nature, this elucidation of the storytelling structure underpinning the whole of *Rick and Morty* is undeniably vital to the perceived indifference of the cosmos towards the mere existence of humanity and thus verifies the applicability of the second tenet of Cosmicism by dint of the agency of the characters themselves and the apparent passivity of the universe in which the series is set. That is to say that Rick and Morty embark on extra-dimensional, extra-terrestrial adventures on their own volition and invariably use inventions or gadgets created by Rick as an extension and manifestation of this agency, usually either the portal gun or the Space Cruiser, to do so. The characters are therefore proactive in their pursuit of adventure, as befitting a narrative based on the story structure which revolves around actors or heroes who take it upon themselves to “venture forth,” and arguably must do so due to the

²⁶ ‘Story Structure 101: Super Basic Shit’, Channel 101 Wiki, accessed 4 March 2018, http://channel101.wikia.com/wiki/Story_Structure_101:_Super_Basic_Shit.

²⁷ ‘Story Structure 104: The Juicy Details’, Channel 101 Wiki, accessed 4 March 2018, http://channel101.wikia.com/wiki/Story_Structure_104:_The_Juicy_Details.

²⁸ ‘Joseph Campbell | Biography, Books, & Facts’, Encyclopedia Britannica, accessed 4 March 2018, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Joseph-Campbell-American-author>.

²⁹ Matthew Kapell and John Shelton Lawrence, eds., *Finding the Force of the Star Wars Franchise: Fans, Merchandise, & Critics*, Popular Culture & Everyday Life, v. 14 (New York: P. Lang, 2006), 5.

³⁰ *Ibid*, 21.

³¹ Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 3rd ed, Bollingen Series XVII (Novato, Calif: New World Library, 2008), 4.

perceived indifference of the universe towards them owing to the lack of agency of the universe and a greater whole and the fact that the universe is much more subject to the actions of the mismatched protagonists than it is the object over them.³²

I.5. Tenet the Third

For the sake of clarity, the final tenet of Cosmicism and revision pertaining to Cosmic Horror will be cited one last time before an in-depth analysis as to its pertinence. Pete Rawlik posits that “Humanity is insignificant, and is not the first or the last, nor a particularly special, species in the universe,” and that “the majority of humanity does not recognize its own insignificance, the indifference of the universe, or its true nature.”³³

The insignificance of humanity on a cosmic scale is present from the very first episode in the first season of *Rick and Morty*, and as behoves such a darkly humorous series is played for laughs on a distinctly cynical and parodic register. After the previously evoked breakfast scene in *Pilot* where Rick encourages his granddaughter to cast aside the concept of God in a pique of nihilism and Morty struggles to not collapse from exhaustion, Morty heads off to his high school where his fatigued state causes him not only to not pay attention but also to eventually experience a full-on hallucination born of sleep deprivation, during a maths quiz, over the object of his unrequited affections, a classmate named Jessica.

Upon leaving class, Morty is immediately accosted by Frank, an insecure bully dressed as a stereotypical 1950s greaser right down to the era-appropriate pompadour and black leather jacket who proceeds to threaten him with a switchblade. Morty is saved by the appearance of Rick who freezes Frank solid and amidst vague, hand-waved promises to unfreeze him later and harangues Morty into accompanying him on an errand, claiming he needs “an extra pair of hands”, despite the latter’s protestations that he can’t afford to skip any more classes.³⁴ In a dingy and dirty alley resplendent with torn posters and overflowing dumpsters in the finest tradition of cinematic clichés concerning American suburbia, Rick shoots a swirling, neon-green portal onto a wall and the unlikely pair head through to face what lies on the other side. The camera views the whole scene as a side-on long shot to better capture the moment that Morty’s left foot hits the portal and immediately cuts to the other side as he steps through to the alien world beyond, the transition highlighting the power of Rick’s portal gun and the

³² Ibid.

³³ Mike Davis, “Defining Lovecraftian Horror”, an Essay by Pete Rawlik’, *Lovecraft EZine* (blog), 15 April 2013, <https://lovecraftzine.com/2013/04/15/defining-lovecraftian-horror-an-essay-by-pete-rawlik/>.

³⁴ *Rick and Morty*. “Pilot”. Directed by Justin Roiland. Written by Dan Harmon and Justin Roiland. Adult Swim, December 2 2013.

immense distance covered in the blink of an eye. The camera remains side-on and thus depriving the viewer of the extra-terrestrial vista stretching before Morty's eyes to pique interest before it is revealed in the following scene.

The camera jumps in for a close-up shot on Morty to capture his reaction as he incredulously looks about, asking "Oh man, Rick. What *is* this place?", all the while the non-diegetic background music picks up, a low but mystic, trilling tune to underscore the sense of awe and mystery of the first proper encounter for the viewer, all the while Morty acts as a surrogate for the audience and expresses his wonder and admiration at the pale, pastel blue landscape and contrasting yellow sky, the scene replete with otherworldly flora and given a degree of life as a turquoise spaceship glides in the top-right background over a sleek, towering futuristic city, all the while Rick theatrically spreads his arms wide and launches into a dignified presentation of "Dimension 35-C", breaking his melodramatic spiel only to snarl at Morty for his lack of undivided attention to what Rick was saying as his gaze curiously wanders about the alien panorama.³⁵

In the following shots, Rick goes on to expound their reasons for coming there before attempting to assuage Morty's anxiety at being on an alien world, reassuring Morty's trepidation of the unknown to him by appearing and acting as the voice of experience that he has seen it all before and that nothing could take him by surprise in what could easily be described as a touching scene before catching sight of the slavering jaws of some snarling creature creeping in off-screen, whereupon he immediately drops the heartening speech and kind façade and panics, screaming at his grandson to run and establishing himself as being dishonest and untrustworthy, yelling over his shoulder as the two flee in terror that he has never before seen such a beast, adding "I don't even know what the hell it is!"³⁶

Rick's apparent loss of control in the face of the unknown could be said to be overplayed for the slapstick comedic effect of comical over-reaction and gratuitous swearing inherent to the nature of the series of *Rick and Morty*, yet nevertheless the insignificance of humanity is rammed home at seeing the elderly and presumably wise voice of reason and experience suddenly panic and be portrayed as powerless in the face of some unknown terror.

The feeling of insignificance born from being confronted by an alien apex predator and being reminded of humanity's biological shortcomings is not the only one present in the episode, but

³⁵ *Rick and Morty*. "Pilot". Directed by Justin Roiland. Written by Dan Harmon and Justin Roiland. Adult Swim, December 2 2013.

³⁶ 'Pilot/Transcript', Rick and Morty Wiki, accessed 4 March 2018, <http://rickandmorty.wikia.com/wiki/Pilot/Transcript>.

also the insignificance of being confronted with the dizzying realisation that humanity is not the only sapient and sentient race in the galaxy and that instead there is a teeming myriad of exotic and alien races, and the apparent fact that these cultures are all seemingly much more advanced than humanity only serving to signify the greater insignificance of the human race as merely one among many other species in the universe.

Such a scene is present in the previously-analysed episode of *Rick and Morty*, whereupon through plot contrivances Rick and Morty are unable to use Rick's portal gun to return home and are forced to travel through interdimensional customs control. Concurrently, Rick has the hapless Morty smuggle illegal Megaseeds for him, to the latter's consternation and discomfort. Customs is situated in a spaceport, which is ultimately a stereotypical and very familiar airport but glossed over with a science-fiction twist up to and including the disinterested and disembodied voice of an anonymous announcer over the loudspeakers at regular intervals, this fact in itself only made distinctly odd by the content of the announcements it makes, citing that "The glarp zone is for flarping and unglarping only," and this creeping feeling of weirdness is made all the more poignant by the fact that the futuristic setting of what is basically an airport is populated entirely by alien creatures, with Rick and Morty the only humans present.³⁷

This sight is one of the familiar made alien by the seemingly insignificant subversion of expectations - which is the replacement of human crowds by the crowds of aliens – and it ties right in to the concept of the uncanny, which is to say a wave of uncertainty "in particular regarding the reality of who one is and what is being experienced," and this uncertainty is born out of "a peculiar commingling of the familiar and unfamiliar," the modification of the crowd of the spaceport enough to provoke this uncanny feeling in the viewer.³⁸ Further adding to this destabilising uncanny effect and the wave of self-doubt it provokes is the presence of some familiar postmodern pastiche in the form of pop-culture references within the crowd itself, a speck of familiarity in the fickle tide of unfamiliarity, in particular the unmistakable silhouette of the Xenomorph from the Alien series as directed by Ridley Scott, and the visually iconic design of the alien correctly attributed to H.R. Geiger.^{39 40}

³⁷ *Rick and Morty*. "Pilot". Directed by Justin Roiland. Written by Dan Harmon and Justin Roiland. Adult Swim, 2 December 2013.

³⁸ Nicholas Royle, *The Uncanny* (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 2003), 1.

³⁹ 'Rick and Morty (S01E01) - Xenomorph Silhouette in Establishing Shot of Space Station', spoiled.tv, accessed 6 March 2018, <https://www.spoiled.tv/rick-and-morty-pilot-explained/fWkA95bMmBehRj4DG/Xenomorph%20silhouette%20in%20establishing%20shot%20of%20space%20station>.

⁴⁰ 'H.R. Giger's Alien Designs and Art', accessed 6 March 2018, <https://giger.com/alien.php>.

Ultimately, this uncanny feeling serves to further destabilise the viewer, the familiar becoming so alien despite the trappings of recognisable modernity with all traces of humanity lost in a dizzying panorama of alien life and culture leading to a destabilisation of the self and thus furthering the feeling of insignificance already lurking on the fringes of the psyche as the merest dots of humanity are lost in a sea of hitherto unknown beings, in an oddly appropriate mirror to the famous quote from Carl Sagan, describing the Earth as “a mote of dust suspended in a sunbeam.”⁴¹

It would therefore be reasonable by this point to assume that *Rick and Morty* does indeed subscribe to the three tenets of Cosmicism as postulated by Pete Rawlik as befits a series so heavily based in the sci-fi genre and on the concept of the hero's journey, which requires of the protagonists to venture forth into the great unknown and in doing so glean, amongst other prizes, the vital albeit harrowing knowledge of the insignificance of humanity and the mind-numbing cosmic indifference of a universe which is orders of magnitudes beyond caring about the fate or even the mere existence of one single planet lost amidst the teeming mass of a hypothesised ten septillion other planets.⁴²

I.6. From Cosmicism to Cosmic Horror

However, the final added amendment to the third precept of Cosmicism to make the jump from Cosmicism to that of actual Cosmic Horror stipulates that the vast majority of humanity remains blissfully unaware of this insignificance as a species and the immense, universe-spanning indifference towards our existence.⁴³ As a rule, this precept is respected: Rick is aware of the existence of the universe and various multiverses beyond but is jaded and cynical beyond belief and Morty serves as the audience surrogate, acting as a proxy for the viewer embedded within *Rick and Morty* itself and mirroring the presupposed reactions of the audience upon being confronted by exotic sights and experiences, perhaps as best encapsulated by his reaction to Dimension 35-C as seen in *Pilot*.⁴⁴ Ultimately throughout the series, only the Smith family is made aware of the scope of humanity's existence and accompanying insignificance, each and

⁴¹ ‘Pale Blue Dot Quotes by Carl Sagan’, accessed 6 March 2018, <https://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/1816628-pale-blue-dot-a-vision-of-the-human-future-in-space>.

⁴² ‘How Many Planets Are In The Universe?’, *Starts With A Bang* (blog), 5 January 2013, <http://scienceblogs.com/startswithabang/2013/01/05/how-many-planets-are-in-the-universe/>.

⁴³ Mike Davis, “Defining Lovecraftian Horror”, an Essay by Pete Rawlik’, *Lovecraft EZine* (blog), 15 April 2013, <https://lovecraftzine.com/2013/04/15/defining-lovecraftian-horror-an-essay-by-pete-rawlik/>.

⁴⁴ Lannah Marshall, ‘Narrative Techniques: Audience Surrogates’, Thanet Writers, 24 May 2017, <https://thanetwriters.com/essay/characters/narrative-techniques-audience-surrogates/>.

every time with Rick allowing this adventure and accompanying insight, acting as a sort of gatekeeper to this knowledge and perspective.

Nevertheless, *Rick and Morty* is nothing if not a postmodern series. As seen previously with the silhouette of the Xenomorph, the series itself is rife with pastiche and parodies of well-established science-fiction works with entire sites dedicated to cataloguing and identifying these references in a clear form of intertextuality commonly associated with postmodernism.⁴⁵ Furthermore, the co-titular Rick is known to break the fourth wall on occasion to address the audience directly and thus demonstrates a degree of awareness that he is indeed merely a character in an animated series, such as waving goodbye to the camera at the end of episodes *Meeseeks and Destroy* and *Raising Gazorpazorp*, and even going as far to say “That was season one! Thanks for watching!” upon the first season’s finale while dancing triumphantly, a clear example of metafictional awareness and a fundamental characteristic of postmodernism.^{46 47 48}

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This point is important to highlight, as postmodernist works are described by Canadian academic Linda Hutcheon as being “self-reflexive” and furthermore she adds that postmodernism “both legitimises and subverts that which it parodies.”^{50 51} This element of self-reflexiveness is contained the previously-mentioned tenet of Cosmic Horror which stipulates that the vast majority of humanity remain somewhat blissfully unaware of their own insignificance is legitimised as a rule, as previously mentioned, but in *Rick and Morty* it is also subverted by Rick and his elevated degree of awareness. Such a subversion only proves to reinforce the insignificance of humankind as heretofore mentioned, almost to absurdly comical lengths. While such self-awareness only occurs once during the first two seasons of *Rick and Morty*, the insignificance and ultimate helplessness of humanity on the whole and in the series itself is quite powerfully highlighted, driving home the true horror that Cosmic Horror holds.

⁴⁵ ‘References You May Have Missed in Rick and Morty: The Langoliers’, accessed 7 March 2018, <http://www.looper.com/80836/references-may-missed-rick-morty/>.

⁴⁶ *Rick and Morty*. “Meeseeks and Destroy”. Directed by Bryan Newton and Pete Michels. Written by Ryan Ridley. Adult Swim, 20 January 2014.

⁴⁷ *Rick and Morty*. “Raising Gazorpazorp”. Directed by Jeff Myers and Pete Michels. Written by Eric Acosta and Wade Randolph. Adult Swim, 7 September 2015.

⁴⁸ *Rick and Morty*. “Ricksy Business”. Directed by Stephen Sandoval and Pete Michels. Written by Ryan Ridley and Tom Kauffman. Adult Swim, 9 September 2015.

⁴⁹ Ben Balcom, ‘What Is Metacinema?’, accessed 7 March 2018, <http://uwm-metacinema.blogspot.com/2015/06/welcome-to-homebase-for-film-203380.html>.

⁵⁰ Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 1988), 122.

⁵¹ Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism*, 2nd ed (London ; New York: Routledge, 2002), 101.

This Cosmic Horror is heralded almost immediately in the fifth episode of the second season, entitled *Get Schwifty*.⁵² The opening scene is a long shot showcasing the vastness of the cosmos, a field of stars shining against an inky-blue background, but the scene is seemingly marred by the presence of a yellow *something* situated just to the left of the centre of the shot. There is some non-diegetic music to punctuate this scene, and except for the mysterious chiming in the first second, the score is decidedly ominous and the music swells to a brief crescendo as the yellow something draws close enough in shot to be clearly made out, and the mind briefly reels as this unknown becomes known. It is a yellow humanoid head, complete with vaguely stern expression and unibrow, veins bulging at the temples and forehead lined, albeit completely devoid of hair. The strangeness of the scene grows when in the first four seconds, the camera zooming out ever so slowly as this yellow head-shaped entity flashes across the expanse of space between the camera and itself at alarming speed before moving past it completely despite the zoom. As the camera jump cuts 180 degrees behind itself to follow the being on its course we see the *thing* draw close to the Earth and the sheer scale of the creature is made apparent: it is easily the size of the continent of North America, feasibly the size of a small planet. Even as the scale of this cosmic entity becomes clear, the sequence continues at a brisk pace mirroring that of the being in the opening shot.

The camera jumps to a shot on Earth, the shot itself mimicking the effect of a convex camera lens and thus giving the impression that the horizon is bending around the giant head situated in the centre of the shot, as if to show the raw power of the being exerted almost unconsciously over the Earth and forcing our planet to literally bend to its whims. The uncanny nature of the scene gives way to a much more worrying dimension as the pine trees previously present in the shot burst into flames and are scattered to ashes by the shockwaves which race through the air, seemingly emanating from the head in the shot and made worse as the head draws nearer still to the planet, expression still unchanged and apparently heedless of the damage it is advertently or inadvertently causing.

This inadvertent or nonchalant destruction continues apace in the next shot, another wide camera angle capturing the scene from a great distance off and showing the extent of the cataclysmic conditions. The shot itself depicts a town of sorts nestled at the base of some mountains which themselves are crowned by the unperturbed head peering over, a very clear visual metaphor for the apparent ascendancy of this unnatural creature over the natural forces

⁵² *Rick and Morty*. "Get Schwifty". Directed by Wes Archer and Pete Michels. Written by Tom Kauffman. Adult Swim, 24 September 2015.

of the planet, serving only to highlight further the helplessness of humans and their insignificance as shown by the arrival of this galactic herald and the indifference of the universe as personified by the unblinking expression worn by this creature from beyond the stars and seemingly beyond humanity's grasp to comprehend, the very scale only adding to the decidedly weird aspect of the entire scene.

As the scene advances, fire engulfs the mountains and the little town is swallowed up by a chasm which opens up beneath it, the ground shaking and buckling but the yellow head is above such petty considerations and remains perfectly immobile in the skies above. The next shot is slightly more humorous, albeit darkly so.

In another long shot, lashed by rain and leaves whipped up by the strong winds born from the giant head, and while all around trees are bent in these gale-force gusts, a single man blithely continues his golf game. As he putts, lightning flashes and the music rises ominously as another chasm forms, swallowing the ball along with most of the golf course. The camera changes angle to better showcase this, and the man nonchalantly remarks "Hey! Golf is easy now!" before the rest of the ground gives way around him, screaming "Golf is hard again! Golf is hard again!" before falling presumably to his death off-camera in the rift that had opened up at his feet.⁵³

The camera then cuts to a televised report with the caption "ArmAGHEADdon?!" as a reporter in a yellow anorak with a worried expression and quavering voice attempts to report to the studio about the "giant head", all the while around him in the street he is reporting from police sirens blare and onlookers scream and panic, some waving their arms and others gesticulating in despair, all the while the rain continues to lash from the heavens and the head, unperturbed, is pictured as towering over even the skyscrapers visible in the distance.⁵⁴

Eventually, just as the studio anchor asks the reporter if he knows what the giant head wants, the yellow being coughs as if to clear its throat and, as winds born from this action threaten to blow the reporter and onlookers away, it bellows "Show me what you've got," as the camera briefly cuts to an establishing shot on the city where the reporter is presumably filming from and the sea recedes almost completely from the seabed in the same manner as a drawback which typically precedes a tsunami, tying in with what the reporter said about the head causing natural

⁵³ *Rick and Morty*. "Get Schwifty". Directed by Wes Archer and Pete Michels. Written by Tom Kauffman. Adult Swim, 24 September 2015.

⁵⁴Ibid.

disasters on a scale previously thought impossible “for at least another eight years” as the camera itself grows static-laced in the aftermath of the being’s proclamation.^{55 56}

This is a picture-perfect example of Cosmic Horror. A planet-sized being of incredible power has appeared, and by dint of its mere existence is already causing widespread disasters across the planet. Not only are these seemingly inadvertent but the thing does not even care, and instead demands of Earth the outwardly impossible ultimatum that humanity needs to show it what they have, but the ambiguity only increases the mystery and intensifies the fear.

In a typical moment of characteristic black humour that is a mainstay for the series, Rick reveals to the President of the United States (and the long-suffering Morty, who is forever in tow) that the head, revealed to be a Cromulon of the Cygnus-5 expanse, is neither interested in science or culture nor a show of force as proposed by a particularly bombastic general, but instead “a hit song,” playfully subverting the otherworldliness and alien nature of this gigantic being of terrible power in a particularly pleasing postmodern twist as previously evoked in *The Politics of Postmodernism*, yet all the while legitimising this view of this massive interstellar entity being so incredibly powerful and so beyond the insignificant grasp of humanity that when later in the episode the previously-evoked bellicose general launches two nuclear warheads at the yellow Cromulon, they merely make impact to the sound of feeble farting noises.^{57 58 59}

This specific scene neatly sums up the insignificance of humanity, as nuclear weapons have been held in popular imagination to be weapons of such comprehensive horror and destructive power that the mere spectre of their use was enough to cement the policy of Mutually Assured Destruction in the minds of the leaders of the USA and the USSR and thus ensuring that the Cold War never went hot, despite the diametric opposition of the two conflicting ideologies.⁶⁰ Yet here, two of the most potent weapons ever conceived and built by human hands only cause some small scorch-marks on the yellow Cromulon and the target to react to this attack as merely discomfiting, shouting “Boo! Not cool!” and firmly cementing the insignificance of humanity both in the eyes of humankind itself and also in the gaze of beings infinitely greater, to the point

⁵⁵ ‘Tsunami | The Drawback, Shoreline & Inundation Warning’, accessed 7 March 2018, http://www.sms-tsunami-warning.com/pages/tsunami-drawback#.Wp_xCejwbIU.

⁵⁶ *Rick and Morty*. “Get Schwifty”. Directed by Wes Archer and Pete Michels. Written by Tom Kauffman. Adult Swim, 24 September 2015.

⁵⁷ *Rick and Morty*. “Get Schwifty”. Directed by Wes Archer and Pete Michels. Written by Tom Kauffman. Adult Swim, 24 September 2015.

⁵⁸ ‘Get Schwifty/Transcript’, Rick and Morty Wiki, accessed 7 March 2018, http://rickandmorty.wikia.com/wiki/Get_Schwifty/Transcript.

⁵⁹ Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism*, 2nd ed (London ; New York: Routledge, 2002), 101.

⁶⁰ ‘Nuclear Deterrence | Cold War: A Brief History | History of the Atomic Age | Atomicarchive.Com’, accessed 7 March 2018, <http://www.atomicarchive.com/History/coldwar/page15.shtml>.

that a “potato-based religion” springs up around worshipping and interpreting the will of the heads in the Smiths’ hometown.^{61 62}

Ultimately, all three tenets of Cosmicism and Cosmic Horror are found to be applicable to and throughout the series of *Rick and Morty*, from the usual trend of the characters venturing forth to interact with the universe but also to the rare occasion whereupon the universe, or an envoy allegorical for the mind-boggling extent of the universe in sharp comparison to that of mankind. Whether it is the hapless Morty or the whole of planet Earth, all involved are uncomfortably but also clearly and plainly reminded of their tiny place in the universe as demonstrated by the mind-numbing scope and scale of the universe orders of magnitude greater than what the human mind is definitively able to process and so beyond the perspective of humankind. To even attempt to do so is to invite madness and for the normally rational intellectual to devolve into an unhinged, gibbering lunatic as showcased so aptly by the more luckless of H.P. Lovecraft’s protagonists, the founding father (albeit of disputed sources) of the movement of Cosmicism and its sub-category of Cosmic Horror.⁶³ The Cromulons borrow heavily from the “unbelievable size” of Lovecraft’s Great Old Ones, further marking their immeasurable and unknowable power and bluntly confronting humanity with the insignificance of their existence.⁶⁴

To subsequently conclude on this first part to do with the presence of Cosmicism within *Rick and Morty*, a quote from Lovecraft seems oddly appropriate: “(...) common human laws and interests are emotions that have no validity or significance in the vast cosmos-at-large,” and when such interests are erroneously reported by the galactic news as eating spaghetti and praying to kangaroos and that Earth is merely “the 6048th planet to join the galactic federation,” despite the postmodern playfulness and undercurrent of dark humour, the insignificance of humanity in the face of a vast cosmos is made almost unbearably clear.^{65 66 67}

⁶¹ *Rick and Morty*. “Get Schwifty”. Directed by Wes Archer and Pete Michels. Written by Tom Kauffman. Adult Swim, 24 September 2015.

⁶² ‘Get Schwifty/Transcript’, Rick and Morty Wiki, accessed 7 March 2018, http://rickandmorty.wikia.com/wiki/Get_Schwifty/Transcript.

⁶³ Mike Davis, “Defining Lovecraftian Horror”, an Essay by Pete Rawlik’, *Lovecraft EZine* (blog), 15 April 2013, <https://lovecraftzine.com/2013/04/15/defining-lovecraftian-horror-an-essay-by-pete-rawlik/>.

⁶⁴ H. P. Lovecraft and S. T. Joshi, *The Call of Cthulhu and Other Weird Stories*, Penguin Classics (New York: Penguin Books, 2016), 165.

⁶⁵ Howard Phillips Lovecraft, August William Derleth, and Donald Wandrei, *Selected Letters 1925-1929* (Saug City: Arkham House, 1968), 150.

⁶⁶ *Rick and Morty*. “The Wedding Squanchers”. Directed by Wes Archer and Pete Michels. Written by Tom Kauffman. Adult Swim, 8 October 2015.

⁶⁷ ‘The Wedding Squanchers/Transcript’, Rick and Morty Wiki, accessed 7 March 2018, http://rickandmorty.wikia.com/wiki/The_Wedding_Squanchers/Transcript.

Partie II. Nihilism

II.1. A Consequence of Cosmicism

With the spectre of Cosmicism and Cosmic Horror looming large in the backdrop of each and every episode of *Rick and Morty* by dint of its firm rooting in the sci-fi genre, it would be fair to say that the cast are confronted with the blunt and inescapable fact that the universe is indifferent to the plight of humankind and that humanity is, at best, massively insignificant.

Such an understanding would be a massively pessimistic realisation to arrive at, but compared to the more bright-eyed and optimistic sci-fi works of the cinema of the previous century, such as the faithful rendition of the hero's journey and the rags-to-riches story of fame and excitement hard won but well-earned by the gutsy farm boy Luke Skywalker in *Star Wars*, there is a marked pessimistic streak in modern sci-fi writing to which *Rick and Morty* gleefully subscribes.⁶⁸

Such pessimism born from the realisation of the insignificance of humanity when compared to the cosmos has indeed been expounded upon, described as “Cosmic Pessimism” and expressed as “(...) the difficult thought of the world as absolutely unhuman, and indifferent to the hopes, desires and struggles of human individuals and groups,” something which was consistently evoked throughout the preceding chapter as an unavoidable consequence of Cosmicism and the various tenets professed within that school of thought.⁶⁹

Such a pessimistic attitude towards the cosmos will invariably begin to work its way inside any human mind, the meaninglessness and apparent futility of existence of humanity painfully clear when considered against such a dizzying scale as that of the existence of the cosmos as a greater whole. Such a human existence aware of the baselessness of its own being while nevertheless also being conscious of its own presence, particularly on a universal scale, could indeed quite easily “tend towards the loss of the human” as postulated by Kyoto School philosopher Keiji Nishitani.⁷⁰ This philosophical notion of loss or underlying corrosion or erosion is a key tenet of the modern branch of philosophy consistently associated with its main proponent of the nineteenth century, Friedrich Nietzsche, and the previously alluded-to branch

⁶⁸ ‘Dear Science Fiction Writers: Stop Being So Pessimistic!’, Smithsonian, accessed 11 March 2018, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/dear-science-fiction-writers-stop-being-so-pessimistic-127226686/>.

⁶⁹ Eugene Thacker, *In the Dust of This Planet: Horror of Philosophy, Vol 1*, 1. publ, Horror of Philosophy 1 (Winchester: Zero Books, 2011), 17.

⁷⁰ Keiji Nishitani, Jan Van Bragt, and Winston L. King, *Religion and Nothingness*, Nanzan Studies in Religion and Culture (Berkeley, Calif.: Univ. of California Press, 1983), 142.

of philosophy naturally being that of nihilism, a school of thought of which jaded and cynical scientist Rick Sanchez could be said to be heavily affiliated with, but not to the point of exclusivity.

As mentioned in the first part of this thesis concerning Cosmicism, nihilism is fundamentally defined on a philosophical level as “the belief that all values are baseless and that nothing can be known or communicated,” yet beyond that sphere the definitions have gone through a slight shift in meaning, with the *Oxford English Dictionary* defining nihilism more broadly as “The rejection of all religious and moral principles, in the belief that life is meaningless,” and its American counterpart, the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* following suit to a certain degree, giving the definition as “a viewpoint that traditional values and beliefs are unfounded and that existence is senseless and useless.”^{71 72 73}

II.2. Nietzschean Nihilism

In the face of such a deadlock of definitions, it would seem oddly fitting to turn to Nietzsche himself and his various published works in search of the underlying rationale to the school of philosophy with which his name has become virtually synonymous. As with Lovecraft, Nietzsche too went unappreciated in his time, dying penniless and seemingly bereaved of sanity in 1900, his original breakdown famously attributed to an incident on the 3rd of January 1889 in Turin, bearing witness to a stubborn dray horse refusing to draw the cart it was hitched to and subsequently being flogged by its owner.⁷⁴ Nietzsche rushed to the beleaguered creature’s assistance, throwing his arms around the animal’s neck before breaking down crying and collapsing to the ground.⁷⁵

Following this breakdown and ensuing diagnosis of tertiary cerebral syphilis, Nietzsche’s sister Elisabeth was appointed as literary executor to his remaining unfinished works and notes, which resulted in the publication of *The Will to Power*, containing the particularly elucidating phrase purportedly written two years before Friedrich Nietzsche’s breakdown at some point between

⁷¹ ‘Nihilism | Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy’, accessed 3 March 2018, <https://www.iep.utm.edu/nihilism/>.

⁷² ‘Nihilism | Definition of Nihilism in English by Oxford Dictionaries’, Oxford Dictionaries | English, accessed 14 March 2018, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/nihilism>.

⁷³ ‘Definition of NIHILISM’, accessed 14 March 2018, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/nihilism>.

⁷⁴ ‘Friedrich Nietzsche Went Mad after Allegedly Seeing a Horse Being Whipped in the Italian City of Turin’, *The Vintage News* (blog), 5 February 2017, <http://www.thevintagenews.com/2017/02/05/friedrich-nietzsche-went-mad-after-allegedly-seeing-a-horse-being-whipped-in-the-italian-city-of-turin/>.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

the spring and autumn of 1887: “What does nihilism mean? *That the highest values devalue themselves.*”^{76 77}

With the definition of the root verb of devalue, which is to say to devalue, given by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as “(to) reduce or underestimate the worth or importance of,” continued devaluation could be said to reduce the importance of the object (or indeed *concept*) being devalued to the point of cancelling it out completely, rendering it ultimately *baseless*.⁷⁸ As such, this would result in the realisation that the definition of nihilism as given by the *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, which is to say “the belief that all values are baseless and that nothing can be known or communicated,” is the closest in spirit to the definition of nihilism as attributed to it by the person who did the most to expound said school of philosophy throughout his life to the point of becoming synonymous with it, and which furthermore is the very same definition previously accepted as a premise in the preceding part of this very paper.⁷⁹

Nihilism itself is subject to much ambiguity in this modern age, a fact to which even accredited philosophical institutions will admit, and as such the preceding segment, while only somewhat tangentially related to *Rick and Morty*, was nevertheless a necessity in order to clearly define the operating definition of nihilism as used throughout this thesis.⁸⁰ Rick, being the character with ostensibly the keenest awareness of the Cosmic Horror as contained throughout the galaxy and the crisis of insignificance which it brings to the human conscience and with his gadgets and inventions allowing ease of access to these intergalactic epiphanies, could be said to be the most affected by this devaluing of values and thus the character who has been most influenced by such nihilism, as seen and exemplified in his jaded and deeply cynical behaviour throughout the series.

However, as remarked on by a Reddit post pondering on the subject as to whether Rick is indeed a nihilist or not, there are multiple categories pertaining to nihilism, ranging from moral nihilism to political nihilism to existential nihilism, and each of these branches of the main school of thought are indeed varied and distinct enough to warrant individual analysis, underpinned by

⁷⁶ R. Lanier Anderson, ‘Friedrich Nietzsche’, in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Summer 2017 (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2017), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2017/entries/nietzsche/>.

⁷⁷ Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, Walter Arnold Kaufmann, and R. J. Hollingdale, *The Will to Power*, Vintage Books ed (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), 9.

⁷⁸ ‘Devalue | Definition of Devalue in English by Oxford Dictionaries’, Oxford Dictionaries | English, accessed 15 March 2018, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/devalue>.

⁷⁹ ‘Nihilism | Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy’, accessed 3 March 2018, <https://www.iep.utm.edu/nihilism/>.

⁸⁰ ‘Introduction to Nihilism - YouTube’, accessed 15 March 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Ajbv-RrQs4o&t=317s>.

the heretofore reaffirmed and accepted definition of nihilism as “the belief that all values are baseless and that nothing can be known or communicated,” thus underwriting a marked Nietzschean approach to the philosophy itself and its presence in *Rick and Morty* as pertaining to the topic of this paper.^{81 82}

II.3. Moral Nihilism

The first branch of nihilism to be examined in depth is that of moral nihilism, and the first step thereof is to define what exactly is meant by moral. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the term moral is an adjective specified as being “concerned with the principles of right and wrong behaviour.”⁸³ As such, moral nihilism would hold that these principles (the word principles defined as “a rule or belief governing one's behaviour,” and therefore interchangeable with the word belief as present in the underpinning definition of nihilism) are baseless and worthless, and fundamentally that no action is *either* morally right or wrong and therefore if no action is either right nor wrong then no action subsequently can be judged as either morally good or morally bad, and ultimately judging such actions is meaningless from a moral standpoint.⁸⁴

Such a caustic outlook is indeed well-suited to an alcoholic and bitter individual such as Rick, as with the meaninglessness of morality proved from its erosion through the action of moral nihilism, there is therefore no right or wrong thing to say in any one situation, and Rick is therefore free to express himself on varying topics with little to no concern as to the suitability of his answers, or the situation in which they are given throughout the series, or even the possible effect that his varied comments and remarks could have on their intended audience, something that *Rick and Morty* uses to great humorous effect.

In *Rick Potion #9*, the sixth episode of the first season of *Rick and Morty*, this moral nihilism underpins the entire episode and is very much present extremely early on.⁸⁵ The premise of the episode is that there is a “Flu Season Dance” at the high school which Summer and Morty both attend, much in the vein of a Prom or Gala, owing mostly to the attire donned and the presence

⁸¹ ‘Is Rick a Nihilist? • r/Rickandmorty’, reddit, accessed 16 March 2018, https://www.reddit.com/r/rickandmorty/comments/6s6u15/is_rick_a_nihilist/.

⁸² ‘Nihilism | Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy’, accessed 3 March 2018, <https://www.iep.utm.edu/nihilism/>.

⁸³ ‘Moral | Definition of Moral in English by Oxford Dictionaries’, Oxford Dictionaries | English, accessed 16 March 2018, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/moral>.

⁸⁴ ‘Principle | Definition of Principle in English by Oxford Dictionaries’, Oxford Dictionaries | English, accessed 16 March 2018, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/principle>.

⁸⁵ *Rick and Morty*. “Rick Potion #9”. Directed by Stephen Sandoval and Pete Michels. Written by Justin Roiland. Adult Swim, 7 September 2015.

of corsages as worn by the female dance-goers, and the fact that the Prom itself is an occasion which features extremely heavily in American popular culture, as spotlighted in various coming-of-age films such as *Mean Girls*, *Footloose*, *Grease* and *Carrie*, to name but a few.⁸⁶

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Morty, however, is still nursing his unrequited crush on Jessica made all the worse for the fact that Jessica is going to the dance with Brad, a figure of some renown in the school owing to his sporting prowess.⁸⁸ He describes himself as being able to “throw balls far,” thus subscribing to the stereotypical image of an American jock which, as defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary*, is “an enthusiastic male athlete or sports fan, especially one with few other interests,” such lack of interests as blithely manifested by his rather basic appraisal of himself in markedly basic English.⁸⁹

As such, in the very next scene Morty is morosely playing with a plate of cookies in the kitchen as Jerry goes about making a sandwich and attempts to console his disheartened son, waving his mayonnaise-spreading knife about emphatically and predicting that Morty “will be getting girls sometime after Brad’s out of shape.”⁹⁰ The camera jump-cuts to Morty in a close-up shot as, sitting opposite his father, he sighs despondently and brings his cookie down on the plate for emphasis as, head in his hand, he flatly states that he does not want *other* girls, he only wants Jessica. At that, a wry smile crosses Jerry’s face and whilst reaching into the cupboard for another jar of relish for his sandwich, he relates in a touching father-son moment of bonding, quite rare for the series on the whole, Jerry recalls feeling similarly about “a young lady named your mom,” fondly stating that “your mom was my Jessica,” attempting to cheer the dejected Morty up and reminiscing about the past, going as far as saying “I remember the first time I saw her, I thought...” before getting interrupted by Rick’s acerbic interjection from off-screen.^{91 92}

⁸⁶ ‘Prom Corsages - Everything You Need to Know.’, British Florist Association Website, accessed 19 March 2018, <https://www.britishfloristassociation.org/inspiration/promscorsages.asp>.

⁸⁷ ‘The Best Prom Movies’, Ranker, accessed 19 March 2018, [//www.ranker.com/list/best-prom-movies-list/all-genre-movies-lists](http://www.ranker.com/list/best-prom-movies-list/all-genre-movies-lists).

⁸⁸ *Rick and Morty*. “Rick Potion #9”. Directed by Stephen Sandoval and Pete Michels. Written by Justin Roiland. Adult Swim, 7 September 2015.

⁸⁹ ‘Jock | Definition of Jock in English by Oxford Dictionaries’, Oxford Dictionaries | English, accessed 19 March 2018, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/jock>.

⁹⁰ ‘Rick Potion 9/Transcript’, Rick and Morty Wiki, accessed 19 March 2018, http://rickandmorty.wikia.com/wiki/Rick_Potion_9/Transcript.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² *Rick and Morty*. “Rick Potion #9”. Directed by Stephen Sandoval and Pete Michels. Written by Justin Roiland. Adult Swim, 7 September 2015.

Rick finishes Jerry's amorous anecdote with "I should get her pregnant and then she'll have to marry me," not even deigning to glance in Jerry's direction as he disinterestedly fishes about in the cupboard for a glass, completely unconcerned at Jerry's reaction to quite the damning and inappropriate judgement of character made in front of Rick's own grandson.⁹³

Jerry naturally assumes a standoffish gesture at this thinly-veiled insulting criticism, hands on his hips as he confronts Rick about the inappropriate nature of Rick's remarks, whereas Rick merely continues, offering a clearly insincere and distinctly offhanded apology before continuing on in a bored tone with the words "please, proceed with your story about banging my daughter in high school."⁹⁴ He goes on to most damningly of all state that Jerry's marriage is "hanging by a thread," never missing a beat and completely unperturbed about the transgressive and upsetting nature that such remarks could have, owing to his markedly morally nihilistic stance, with morals and morality judged as ultimately valueless and baseless in his eyes.⁹⁵ Such considerations have no place in Rick's everyday interactions with members of his family and as a result, a deadpan delivery of such personal and private truths played for dark humour is commonly associated with Rick's character. This character trait is possible by the perceived meaninglessness of morals and a flagrant disregard of the consequences that such behaviour without morals could engender, possibly best summed up by his self-proclaimed new catch phrase in the season one finale, which to quote Rick himself is "I don't give a fuck."⁹⁶

Moreover, the complete disregard for others in social interactions continues throughout the whole of episode six with no character truly spared from Rick's tirades and blunt and callous appraisals. In a following scene and in wonderfully inappropriate fashion, Rick proceeds to thoroughly goad the already insecure and neurotic Jerry as to the possibility of Beth being unfaithful and having an affair, as following Rick's abrasive appraisal of the state of Jerry's marriage, Jerry goes upstairs to confront Beth about it, but instead merely comes off as massively insecure, with Beth herself equating their relationship to being like "building a homeless shelter," before leading Jerry to the conclusion that she "sort of" loves him in a

⁹³ 'Rick Potion 9/Transcript', Rick and Morty Wiki, accessed 19 March 2018, http://rickandmorty.wikia.com/wiki/Rick_Potion_9/Transcript.

⁹⁴ *Rick and Morty*. "Rick Potion #9". Directed by Stephen Sandoval and Pete Michels. Written by Justin Roiland. Adult Swim, 7 September 2015.

⁹⁵ *Ibid*.

⁹⁶ *Rick and Morty*. "Ricksy Business". Directed by Stephen Sandoval and Pete Michels. Written by Ryan Ridley and Tom Kauffman. Adult Swim, 9 September 2015.

patronising tone and expressive hand gestures.⁹⁷ Throughout the scene, Jerry is standing and Beth is sitting in a swivel chair, but the power dynamic is clearly skewed in Beth's favour, as best exemplified by her condescending clarifications and clear, precise delivery, a marked contrast to Jerry's nervousness.⁹⁸ Even while standing up and thus taller than Beth in the full shot which the camera captures the scene in, Jerry nevertheless retains a marked slouch to further highlight his unsure and nervous disposition provoked by Rick's scathing appraisal of the status of his marriage.

Immediately after this conversation which Beth herself described as being tedious, she is called out to her place of work, a horse hospital, on account of there being "a seven-horse collision" despite the late hour, leaving Jerry sitting on the sofa and watching TV with Summer, all the while apprehensively and anxiously worrying at the possibility of Beth spending all night with Davin, a co-worker.⁹⁹ Summer points out that the two would ostensibly be "digging around the insides of horses," and the setting would hardly be romantic whereupon Rick chimes in from off-screen and the camera pans to accommodate him walking into the shot.¹⁰⁰ In the finest traditions of tact and appropriateness as befitting his character, he bluntly states that "maybe Davin's digging around in her insides" and that the entire premise of her being called out to the hospital was merely a fabrication, as Jerry stares miserably at his phone.¹⁰¹

Hounded off the sofa and out of the house by his father-in-law provoking his insecurities further and further, Jerry leaves, stating that he is heading to the hospital to offer moral support to his wife, the fact that this is a complete falsehood is made further evident by his halting delivery of the line.¹⁰² Summer finally turns to Rick, and in an almost surprised and reproachful tone says "God, Grandpa, you're such a dick," as Rick impassively answers, not even tearing his gaze from the off-screen television to tell his granddaughter bluntly but categorically that "your opinion means very little to me."¹⁰³

Moreover, Rick's morally nihilistic views have a distressing tendency to also manifest themselves not only in his social interactions but also in his actual work and the creations which

⁹⁷ *Rick and Morty*. "Rick Potion #9". Directed by Stephen Sandoval and Pete Michels. Written by Justin Roiland. Adult Swim, 7 September 2015.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ 'Rick Potion 9/Transcript', Rick and Morty Wiki, accessed 19 March 2018, http://rickandmorty.wikia.com/wiki/Rick_Potion_9/Transcript.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ *Rick and Morty*. "Rick Potion #9". Directed by Stephen Sandoval and Pete Michels. Written by Justin Roiland. Adult Swim, 7 September 2015.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ 'Rick Potion 9/Transcript', Rick and Morty Wiki, accessed 19 March 2018, http://rickandmorty.wikia.com/wiki/Rick_Potion_9/Transcript.

he unleashes upon the world, which therefore could be said to have much greater effect on the world as a whole than mere morally nihilistic interchange ever could. Freed from the binary viewpoint of right and wrong that morals usually impose on the human perspective, Rick's inventions are as such morally and ethically dubious at best, insofar as ethics are defined as "moral principles that govern a person's behaviour or the conducting of an activity," and that the underlying moral principles are judged as baseless and valueless by moral nihilism.¹⁰⁴

II.4. The Erosion of Morals

Fittingly enough on the subject of moral nihilism, one of Rick's creations was an admitted "misguided effort" to create "a morally neutral super-leader," in the shape of Abradolf Lincler, the *portmanteau* name echoing the chimeric combination of the DNA that went into such a being's creation, which is to say that of both Abraham Lincoln, sixteenth President of the United States of America and famous for his issuing of the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, freeing the slaves of the Confederacy during the American Civil War, and Adolf Hitler, Führer of the Third Reich, described as "(...) the coarsest, cruellest, least magnanimous conqueror the world has ever known" and widely regarded as one of the most evil human beings to ever have existed.^{105 106 107}

Nevertheless, Abradolph Lincler describes itself as "a suffering abomination, tortured by the duality of its being," and furthermore resents its creator, Rick, in a postmodern parody distinctly reminiscent of that of Frankenstein's Monster in Mary Shelley's gothic tale of *Frankenstein*, both creations leading tortured existences, detesting their creators to the point of swearing revenge.¹⁰⁸ Frankenstein's Monster's cry of "Cursed, cursed creator! Why did I live? (...) I know not; despair had not yet taken possession of me; my feelings were those of rage and revenge" is echoed in a rather more direct fashion in Abradolph's proclamation to Rick of finally being able to know peace "upon watching the life drain from your wretched body!"¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁴ 'Ethics | Definition of Ethics in English by Oxford Dictionaries', Oxford Dictionaries | English, accessed 20 March 2018, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/ethics>.

¹⁰⁵ *Rick and Morty*. "Ricksy Business". Directed by Stephen Sandoval and Pete Michels. Written by Ryan Ridley and Tom Kauffman. Adult Swim, 9 September 2015.

¹⁰⁶ 'Abraham Lincoln', The White House, accessed 20 March 2018, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/about-the-white-house/presidents/abraham-lincoln/>.

¹⁰⁷ Adolf Hitler and Hugh R Trevor-Roper, *Hitler's table talk: 1941-1944* (Oxford u.a.: Oxford Univ. Pr., 1988), p. xxxv.

¹⁰⁸ *Rick and Morty*. "Ricksy Business". Directed by Stephen Sandoval and Pete Michels. Written by Ryan Ridley and Tom Kauffman. Adult Swim, 9 September 2015.

¹⁰⁹ Mary Shelley and Stephen C. Behrendt, *Shelley's Frankenstein*, CliffsComplete (New York, NY: Hungry Minds, 2001), 133.

Despite all of his previously-expressed animosity towards Rick, Abradolph nevertheless acquiesces, however begrudgingly, to accompany Morty and Nancy, a less-than-popular friend of Summer's, on an expedition to find some "Kalaxian crystals."¹¹⁰ This results in Lincler holding a two-headed alien beast at bay long enough for Morty and Nancy to gather the crystals and make safe their escape before apparently succumbing to his wounds, although not before expressing his regret that he only wanted Rick, his creator, to accept him and that he hoped that his final act would earn him some degree of redemption, although in the typical vein of vicious humour running throughout *Rick and Morty*, such a wish was not to be, making the apparent tragedy and tortured existence all the greater as the post-credits scene depicts the hapless Lincler being tossed around by creatures ominously described by numerous fan-sites as "testicle monsters."¹¹¹

One of the fundamental and underpinning ideals of the gothic genre is transgression, defined as "an act that goes against a law, rule, or code of conduct; an offence."¹¹² ¹¹³ Given this and the inherent baselessness and devaluation of ethics presented, both Frankenstein's Monster and Abradolph Lincler could both be said to be ethical transgressions born from an underlying erosion of morals, both living, sentient, sapient creatures ultimately created from death, either from grave-robbing in the case of Frankenstein's Monster or from somehow acquiring the DNA from two beings long-since dead in the case of Abradolph.¹¹⁴

However, in typical Rick fashion, the creation of Lincler is completely devoid of ethics, as on the most fundamental level he is a combination of DNA from two genetically distinct beings, and he would therefore be a creation of genetic engineering. Technically not a transgenic being insofar as the field of transgenics "involves removing genetic material from one species and adding it to another," but nevertheless genetic engineering raises a whole host of ethical conundrums, from social to intrinsic to extrinsic concerns, along with the essential transgressive nature that such science could have over life itself, as put to the reader by the rhetorical question

¹¹⁰ 'Ricksy Business/Transcript', Rick and Morty Wiki, accessed 20 March 2018, http://rickandmorty.wikia.com/wiki/Ricksy_Business/Transcript.

¹¹¹ 'Testicle Monster', Rick and Morty Wiki, accessed 21 March 2018, http://rickandmorty.wikia.com/wiki/Testicle_Monster.

¹¹² 'Transgression', 2 January 2011, <https://inthelandofliterature.wordpress.com/best-work-file/transgression-and-punishment/>.

¹¹³ 'Transgression | Definition of Transgression in English by Oxford Dictionaries', Oxford Dictionaries | English, accessed 21 March 2018, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/transgression>.

¹¹⁴ 'Ethics and Morality in Frankenstein', prezi.com, accessed 21 March 2018, <https://prezi.com/fi4yocgrft8o/ethics-and-morality-in-frankenstein/>.

of “who are we to manipulate nature?” in *Ethical Implications of Human Genetic Engineering*.^{115 116}

A further of example of Rick’s judgement freed from the constraints of ethics and morals by his conspicuous subscription to the philosophy of moral nihilism is to be found in the second episode of the second season of *Rick and Morty*, entitled *Mortynight Run*, the name itself a reference to the 1988 film *Midnight Run* and vaguely prophetic as to how a seemingly simple event will spin out of control in both the episode and the film.^{117 118}

The episode itself opens with an establishing shot of the inky blackness of space, much akin to the shot previously mentioned in part one introducing the yellow Cromulon. In this shot, however, there is no unknown harbinger of Cosmic Horror creeping closer to the camera but instead Rick’s Space Cruiser, flying somewhat erratically as Rick extolls the virtues of learning to pilot his ship to Morty, who is seen at the wheel in the next shot, a close-up of the interior of the Space Cruiser with Rick seated on the left and Morty seated on the right in a heretofore never seen inversion of the seating arrangements and the two ultimately framing Jerry, sitting quietly in the back and blithely staring out into space but clearly left out of the proceedings. All of a sudden, Rick receives a phone call which he furtively takes, asking the vaguely ominous question of “where do you want to meet?” before informing Morty that the lesson is over and that they have business to attend to “a few light-minutes south of here,” prompting Jerry to finally pipe up in curiosity at the term south still being used in space and Rick to register his presence in surprise, shouting “Jesus, Jerry, what the hell are you doing here?” in a display of shock and dismay at his derided son-in-law being present.^{119 120}

Jerry is promptly off-loaded under the pretences of being a stowaway and annoying to Rick at a “Jerryboree,” a somewhat patronising inter-dimensional day-care for Jerries situated on a “totally unregistered cross-temporal asteroid,” before heading back out the door and after the opening sequence arriving at a neon-green-lit and futuristic multi-storey car park, where Morty eventually and haphazardly parks after scraping and bashing the various spacecraft already

¹¹⁵ ‘ActionBioscience - Promoting Bioscience Literacy’, accessed 21 March 2018, <http://www.actionbioscience.org/biotechnology/glenn.html>.

¹¹⁶ ‘Ethical Implications of Human Genetic Engineering | SAGE’, accessed 21 March 2018, <http://sage.buckinstitute.org/ethical-implications-of-human-genetic-engineering-2/>.

¹¹⁷ *Rick and Morty*. “Mortynight Run”. Directed by Dominic Polcino and Pete Michels. Written by David Phillips. Adult Swim, 10 September 2015.

¹¹⁸ Martin Brest, *Midnight Run*, Action, Comedy, Crime, 1988, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0095631/>.

¹¹⁹ *Rick and Morty*. “Mortynight Run”. Directed by Dominic Polcino and Pete Michels. Written by David Phillips. Adult Swim, 10 September 2015.

¹²⁰ ‘Mortynight Run/Transcript’, Rick and Morty Wiki, accessed 21 March 2018, http://rickandmorty.wikia.com/wiki/Mortynight_Run/Transcript.

stationed there. Upon coming to a complete stop Morty is told by Rick to wait in the Space Cruiser, handwaving his queries as to what they are doing there as merely “business stuff.”¹²¹ As seen in the backdrop of the close-up shots, the car park is an ill-lit and dingy place, and Rick’s furtive behaviour is only adding to the vague sense of unease that such an atmosphere can cultivate. “In many films and TV thrillers,” writes Joe Moran in *Reading the Everyday*, “the car park is an ungovernable space where shady deals are done and crimes go unpunished,” and such a thought can only serve to intensify the dubiousness of such a setting, with Morty himself qualifying the whole thing as “shady.”^{122 123}

Morty’s, and indeed the viewer’s, suspicions are thoroughly justified upon hearing a rap at the Space Cruiser’s window on Rick’s side just as he protests the fact that he isn’t shady and grudgingly the glass is wound down the glass to reveal a cheerful Gromflamite, a vaguely brown insectoid alien race with red compound eyes, dressed in a futuristic black chest plate who promptly hands over “three thousand flurbos” and asks if Rick “has the weapon.”¹²⁴ Upon Rick’s protesting that his grandson is present, the alien brightly introduces himself to Morty as “Krombopulos Michael,” before blithely going on to say “I’m an assassin. I buy guns from your grandpa.”¹²⁵ Rick’s eyes widen at Krombopulos Michael’s gleeful straightforwardness before he hurriedly handing him the antimatter gun and telling him to “go away,” although not before Krombopulos Michael leaves Morty with his business card before going on to categorically state, as if to completely dispel any lingering doubt, that “I’m very discreet. I have no code of ethics. I will kill anyone, anywhere. Children, animals, old people, doesn't matter. I just love killing.”¹²⁶

The fact that Rick has just sold a gun to an unscrupulous assassin is not lost on Morty, and his exasperation at Rick’s flagrant disregard for ethics is further expounded when Rick subsequently brings the two of them to “Blips and Chitz,” an intergalactic video game arcade, and while praising the virtues of such a place Morty succinctly and angrily summarises Rick’s morally nihilistic actions by incredulously accusing him of selling a gun to a murder so that he

¹²¹ *Rick and Morty*. “Mortynight Run”. Directed by Dominic Polcino and Pete Michels. Written by David Phillips. Adult Swim, 10 September 2015.

¹²² Joe Moran, *Reading the Everyday* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2005), 79.

¹²³ ‘Mortynight Run/Transcript’, Rick and Morty Wiki, accessed 21 March 2018, http://rickandmorty.wikia.com/wiki/Mortynight_Run/Transcript.

¹²⁴ *Rick and Morty*. “Mortynight Run”. Directed by Dominic Polcino and Pete Michels. Written by David Phillips. Adult Swim, 10 September 2015.

¹²⁵ ‘Mortynight Run/Transcript’, Rick and Morty Wiki, accessed 21 March 2018, http://rickandmorty.wikia.com/wiki/Mortynight_Run/Transcript.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

could spend the rest of the day playing video games, to which Rick defends himself by rationalising that “if you spend all day shuffling words around, you can make anything sound bad.”^{127 128}

The rationalising aspect of Rick’s character is in particular an interesting facet, as his signature white lab coat and self-proclaimed genius clearly far beyond that of any terrestrial contemporary tie in very tightly to the image of a scientist as held by popular culture, in particular to the rigid adherence that every scientist, mad or otherwise, holds to the systematic five-step scientific method established and used since the seventeenth century, relying on systematic and empirical approaches to the observation of phenomena in order to rationalise and compound an explanation thereof.¹²⁹

II.5. Nihilism and the Death of God

The scientific method is therefore fundamentally objective but is also massively impersonal, removing the scientist from the equation in an attempt to dig for the ever-elusive truth to prove or disprove their hypothesis in the most rational way possible. Rick is indeed a bona fide scientist, but he is prone to judging all values to be baseless through the lens of moral nihilism and therefore wont to rationalise and reason away anything that he possibly can, including things beyond the purview of science, tending to bypass “traditional values” such as “intuitions and feelings to arrive at the objective truth” in his typically cynical and embittered manner.¹³⁰ For instance, take that “smoke raised with the fume of sighs” by The Bard himself, and that which was said by William Faulkner to be accomplished not because of but rather despite our faults, that most visceral and overpowering of drives in the human condition, love itself.^{131 132} Rick, however, is not only completely unswayed by the more poetic aspect of love but is also capable of rationalising and defining it, and foreseeably Rick’s definition of love is rather less florid and poetic than the examples just cited, telling Morty that love is merely “a chemical

¹²⁷ ‘Blips and Chitz’, Rick and Morty Wiki, accessed 21 March 2018, http://rickandmorty.wikia.com/wiki/Blips_and_Chitz.

¹²⁸ ‘Mortynight Run/Transcript’, Rick and Morty Wiki, accessed 21 March 2018, http://rickandmorty.wikia.com/wiki/Mortynight_Run/Transcript.

¹²⁹ ‘What Is the Scientific Method?’, accessed 23 March 2018, <https://explorable.com/what-is-the-scientific-method>.

¹³⁰ ‘Science, Nihilism, and the Artistry of Nature (by Ben Cain)’, *Three Pound Brain* (blog), 26 May 2014, <https://rsbakker.wordpress.com/2014/05/26/science-nihilism-and-the-artistry-of-nature-by-ben-cain/>.

¹³¹ ‘Romeo and Juliet, by William Shakespeare’, accessed 23 March 2018, http://www.gutenberg.org/files/1513/1513-h/1513-h.htm#sceneI_1.

¹³² Robert W. Hamblin and Charles A. Peek, eds., *A William Faulkner Encyclopedia* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1999), 364.

reaction that compels animals to breed. It hits hard and then slowly fades, leaving you in a failing marriage.”¹³³ He expounds further, urging his grandson to “rise above” by focussing on science, thus bypassing the aforementioned conventional and sentimental attachments to attempt to and arrive at the ideal of “objective truth” as held so dear to scientists, with the more familiar “traditional values” having thoroughly been devalued through the scientific application of nihilism from Rick’s point of view.¹³⁴

Rick uses this scientific rationalisation to a darkly comic effect throughout the series, resolving the insecurities of both Morty and Summer as to who is “Grandpa’s favourite” in *A Rickle in Time* by not just telling them both that to Rick they are not only “pieces of shit” but also going on to prove it mathematically.¹³⁵ He even goes as far as to rationalise why he even takes Morty with him on adventures, much to the latter’s heartbreak, in *Close Rick-counters of the Rick Kind*, the rationalisation born of moral nihilism and science ultimately rationalising beliefs and feelings that science should ultimately not be able to, to the point of complete demystification of the otherwise incomprehensible.¹³⁶

Nowhere else is this rationalisation more egregious than in the episode entitled *Something Ricked This Way Comes*, whereupon, under the pseudonym of “Mr. Needful,” the name itself a reference to Steven King’s book *Needful Things*, the story of which is in turn parodied throughout the episode’s underpinning plot, the Devil opens a shop selling cursed items.¹³⁷ Mr. Needful gifts Rick a golden microscope with the promise of it revealing things “beyond comprehension,” before breaking into a stereotypical evil laugh which Rick quickly mimics, the two men engaging in an unhinged contest of maniacal laughter to out-do the other before being interrupted by Summer, who shoos Rick out of the store by telling him to instead “go home and drink.”¹³⁸ However, in the moments preceding the giving of the microscope, the ever cynical and suspicious Rick had accurately but offhandedly identified Mr. Needful as being the Devil, much to the latter’s discomfort, and as such is driven to quantify the fundamentally unquantifiable, heralded by the philosophical yet now rhetorical question that he puts to his

¹³³ *Rick and Morty*. “Rick Potion #9”. Directed by Stephen Sandoval and Pete Michels. Written by Justin Roiland. Adult Swim, 7 September 2015.

¹³⁴ ‘Science, Nihilism, and the Artistry of Nature (by Ben Cain)’, *Three Pound Brain* (blog), 26 May 2014, <https://rsbakker.wordpress.com/2014/05/26/science-nihilism-and-the-artistry-of-nature-by-ben-cain/>.

¹³⁵ *Rick and Morty*. “A Rickle in Time”. Directed by Wes Archer and Pete Michels. Written by Matt Roller. Adult Swim, 10 September 2015.

¹³⁶ *Rick and Morty*. “Close Rick-counters of the Rick Kind”. Directed by Stephen Sandoval and Pete Michels. Written by Ryan Ridley. Adult Swim, 9 September 2015.

¹³⁷ *Rick and Morty*. “Something Ricked This Way Comes”. Directed by John Rice and Pete Michels. Written by Mike McMahan. Adult Swim, 8 September 2015.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

grandson as Morty wanders by on his way to the bathroom: “Does evil exist, and if so, can one detect and measure it?”¹³⁹ This is a question of such paradoxical momentousness that Morty can but draw a blank on answering.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines evil as an adjective as that which is “profoundly immoral and wicked,” and as a mass noun, such as the case in the aforementioned citation, as “profound immorality and wickedness, especially when regarded as a supernatural force.”¹⁴⁰ Both definitions spark an immediate paradox on multiple levels, all concerning Rick, the previously established moral nihilist and scientist withal. Moral nihilism would posit that all moral values are valueless, inasmuch as the operating definition of nihilism throughout this work has been “the belief that all values are baseless,” yet in order for something to be measured, it fundamentally must have a value in order for it to be assessed as such.^{141 142}

Furthermore, evil is essentially an abstract philosophical notion and therefore ultimately a spiritual phenomenon with ties to the supernatural, thus echoing the definition given to evil as described above, and as such defies all attempts at objective measurement, as fundamentally it cannot be scrutinised to any degree by the scientific method, insofar as it is not a natural, observable phenomenon.

Moreover, as previously established in the preceding part of this paper pertaining to Cosmicism, Rick is an atheist as befitting his apparent nihilistic philosophy, offhandedly dispelling the existence of God over breakfast under the assumption that belief itself being a value, is judged as “baseless” in the eyes of a nihilist despite being integral to the underpinning faith of a religion, with faith itself defined as “strong belief in the doctrines of a religion, based on spiritual conviction rather than proof.”^{143 144} As such, to Rick no religion can exist without the fundamental belief by which it is upheld, if belief itself is a value judged as devalued and baseless.

And yet, Rick acknowledges the existence of the Devil, a theological figure, throughout *Something Ricked This Way Comes* to the point of driving him to destruction, Rick’s recognition

¹³⁹ ‘Something Ricked This Way Comes/Transcript’, Rick and Morty Wiki, accessed 24 March 2018, http://rickandmorty.wikia.com/wiki/Something_Ricked_This_Way_Comes/Transcript.

¹⁴⁰ ‘Evil | Definition of Evil in English by Oxford Dictionaries’, Oxford Dictionaries | English, accessed 24 March 2018, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/evil>.

¹⁴¹ ‘Nihilism | Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy’, accessed 3 March 2018, <https://www.iep.utm.edu/nihilism/>.

¹⁴² ‘Measure | Definition of Measure in English by Oxford Dictionaries’, Oxford Dictionaries | English, accessed 24 March 2018, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/measure>.

¹⁴³ ‘Nihilism | Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy’, accessed 3 March 2018, <https://www.iep.utm.edu/nihilism/>.

¹⁴⁴ ‘Faith | Definition of Faith in English by Oxford Dictionaries’, Oxford Dictionaries | English, accessed 25 March 2018, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/faith>.

ranging from his querying of Mr. Needful as to his being the Devil or merely another supernatural creature such as a leprechaun or demon, stating “I’m not judging. I Just like to shoot straight. I’m a man of science,” to, with his evil-detecting device being able to identify the various curses placed on the items in Mr. Needful’s shop, actively driving the Devil out of business resulting in latter attempting to hang himself in despair and eventually admitting defeat, dispiritedly stating that “people like Rick are making me obsolete,” before going on to bemoan this fate, complaining that “I may be the Devil but your grandpa is the *devil!* I just want to go back to hell where everybody thinks I’m smart and funny.”¹⁴⁵

Rick even goes as far as to acknowledge God in *A Rickle in Time*. Falling through a hypothetical void of quantum uncertainty after fracturing time itself, and frantically repairing the device that could get him out of such a quantum mess, he goes on to mention both Jesus and God, both major theological figures in Christianity, before hurriedly stringing together an impromptu prayer for help to escape from the current predicament.¹⁴⁶ Such a sudden religious epiphany from a firmly established atheist such as Rick is played up in a darkly humorous manner, as upon fixing his time-stabilising collar he quickly buckles it around his neck and takes a moment to gloat, looking up and yelling “Fuck you, God! Not today, bitch!” in stark contrast to his previous pique of piety.¹⁴⁷

This paradoxical scene of shifting metaphysical perspective is rather an interesting one, with even Rick, a character previously established to be firmly atheist but also self-assured to the point of arrogance and viewing everyone else as beneath him and treated with scorn and sarcasm as such, apparently in a situation dangerously beyond his control and resorting to appealing to a higher power in a manner postulated over four hundred years prior by Michel de Montaigne and translated into English in 1711, which is to say that “(..) there are few Men so obstinate in their Atheism, that a pressing Danger will not reduce to an acknowledgment of the Divine Power (...),” the quote perhaps best surviving to this day under the adage of “there are no atheists in foxholes.”¹⁴⁸ ¹⁴⁹ In both cases, the quotes refer to the fact that in situations of extreme

¹⁴⁵ ‘Something Ricked This Way Comes/Transcript’, Rick and Morty Wiki, accessed 24 March 2018, http://rickandmorty.wikia.com/wiki/Something_Ricked_This_Way_Comes/Transcript.

¹⁴⁶ *Rick and Morty*. “A Rickle in Time”. Directed by Wes Archer and Pete Michels. Written by Matt Roller. Adult Swim, 10 September 2015.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid

¹⁴⁸ Michel de Montaigne and Charles Cotton, *Essays of Michael Seigneur de Montaigne: In Three Books with Marginal Notes and Quotations. And an Account of the Author’s Life. With a Short Character of the Author and Translator*, (Daniel Brown, J. Nicholson, R. Wellington, B. Tooke, B. Barker, G. Strahan, R. Smith, and G. Harris., 1711), 166.

¹⁴⁹ Garson, ‘There Are No Atheists in Foxholes | Quote Investigator’, accessed 26 March 2018, <https://quoteinvestigator.com/2016/11/02/foxhole/>.

stress and danger, people will at the very least hope for the existence of a higher power and appeal to it in order to preserve their existence, casting aside their atheism in times of desperate need for belief and faith, something which inarguably occurs during this scene.

Furthermore, the scene is made all the more compelling in the paradox between nihilism and belief by the contrast between Rick, frantically gabbling his prayers as representative of religion, and the masses of tumbling cats populating the pitch-black backdrop, the felines themselves being a scientific reference firmly rooted in popular culture and thus emblematic of science itself in the form of Schrödinger's Cat. Schrödinger's Cat is a thought experiment conjured up to criticise the absurdity of the Copenhagen Interpretation of quantum mechanics, particularly the proposal of the collapsing of wave functions upon observation, stating that "a cat is in a box with a radioactive source and a poison that will be released when the source (unpredictably) emits radiation," and stating that, according to quantum mechanics, the cat in the box is simultaneously alive *and* dead, existing in two fundamentally incompatible states until the box is opened and the states are collapsed into one or the other by seeing whether the cat is indeed alive or dead.¹⁵⁰

Such a state of uncertainty is echoed by Rick as he falls, seemingly existing between the two contradictory states of believing and unbelieving in a similar manner to Schrödinger's Cat, having enough faith to offer up a prayer to something which much exist to be addressed as such and yet moments later he performs a victory dance shouting "(...) there is no God! In your face!" while pointing skywards.¹⁵¹

The resolution to this paradox is mentioned in *The Philosophy of Rick and Morty*, claiming that the previously mentioned scene "plays out the death of God," referring to one of the most misquoted and misunderstood citations in philosophy, which somewhat fittingly and thematically was penned by Friederich Nietzsche in his 1882 publication *The Gay Science* and which goes "God is dead (...) and we have killed him."^{152 153}

The quote itself does not refer to any militant branch of atheism in particular, nor to the act of actual deicide, but rather to the fact that during the Enlightenment and the various intellectual

¹⁵⁰ 'Learning Gotcha: How We Misunderstood Schrödinger's Cat – BetterExplained', accessed 26 March 2018, <https://betterexplained.com/articles/gotcha-shrodingers-cat/>.

¹⁵¹ 'A Rickle in Time/Transcript', Rick and Morty Wiki, accessed 26 March 2018, http://rickandmorty.wikia.com/wiki/A_Rickle_in_Time/Transcript.

¹⁵² Wisecrack, *The Philosophy of Rick and Morty – Wisecrack Edition*, accessed 26 March 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hWFDHynfl1E>.

¹⁵³ 'A Quote by Friedrich Nietzsche', accessed 26 March 2018, <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/22827-god-is-dead-god-remains-dead-and-we-have-killed>.

revolutions that it helped bring about throughout Europe, there was a growing acceptance of the divorce of divine providence from reality and that everything was instead governed by scientific principles and physical laws, the understanding being that in essence “(...) Europe no longer needed God as the source for all morality, value, or order in the universe; philosophy and science were capable of doing that (...)”.¹⁵⁴ Science had finally blossomed, and in doing so had eternally supplanted religion, the resulting secularisation prompting Nietzsche “to realize that not only was God dead but that human beings had killed him with their scientific revolution, their desire to better understand the world.”¹⁵⁵ Such a sentiment is mirrored in Rick’s ultimate denial of a higher power by him achieving salvation through his own means despite his praying to God, applying his science to repairing the malfunctioning collar, as Schrödinger’s Cats, consummate symbols of science, tumble about instead of passively awaiting divine providence and Rick’s “God is dead” moment certainly but crassly with his delivery of the line “Fuck you, God!”, atheism engendered by nihilism triumphs since Rick has once again judged belief as baseless and thus promptly rejected it.¹⁵⁶

Despite the fact that supernatural elements exist in Rick’s world to the point of his tacit admittance as such, from developing a device to not only detect evil but also to actively remove curses and even going as far as to physically assault the Devil on two separate occasions *in the span of one episode*, he ultimately dismisses such existences on the grounds of their baselessness and quickly grows bored. This is best encapsulated by the scene in *Something Ricked This Way Comes* where after having successfully made the Devil bankrupt, Rick douses his own successful business in petrol before lighting a match and casually tossing it over his shoulder, announcing “I just got bored. Everybody out,” to the line of waiting customers as he disinterestedly saunters out the door.¹⁵⁷

The constant devaluation of values is a never-ending cycle for the markedly nihilistic Rick, but ultimately not the foundation of his character. Nihilism is indeed present throughout *Rick and Morty*, but it would be more apt to say that the avatar of such a philosophy throughout the series, the ever-cynical and bitter Rick, is no mere nihilist but rather adopts *nihilistic* viewpoints in a marked postmodern approach to that particular school of thought, subscribing to the “infinity

¹⁵⁴ Scotty Hendricks, “‘God Is Dead’: What Nietzsche Really Meant”, Big Think, 12 August 2016, <http://bigthink.com/scotty-hendricks/what-nietzsche-really-meant-by-god-is-dead>.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ ‘A Rickle in Time/Transcript’, Rick and Morty Wiki, accessed 26 March 2018, http://rickandmorty.wikia.com/wiki/A_Rickle_in_Time/Transcript.

¹⁵⁷ *Rick and Morty*. “Something Ricked This Way Comes”. Directed by John Rice and Pete Michels. Written by Mike McMahan. Adult Swim, 8 September 2015.

of possible interpretations” to, in this case, nihilism, which postmodernism espouses. Such a stance allows for a greater degree of flexibility and freedom for characters to explore the various and far-flung values to which such a series based in sci-fi is wont to subject its cast, with Rick viciously mocking and devaluing them to a greater or lesser extent for comedic effect in his trademark cynical and nihilistic manner.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁸ Vladimir Tasic, *Mathematics and the Roots of Postmodern Thought* (Oxford University Press, 2001), 33.

Partie III. The Absurd

III.1. Preface and the Sci-Fi Connection

Thus far this analysis has portrayed the underpinning elements of Cosmicism and Nihilism as portrayed in *Rick and Morty* as providing a bleak backdrop to the series.

As explored in the first part of this thesis, Lovecraftian Cosmicism would posit that the universe is so awesomely, dizzyingly, mind-shatteringly vast and that humanity is so monumentally insignificant that an inherent “Cosmic Pessimism” takes root and ultimately displaces the anthropocentrism fundamentally inherent throughout humanity and human civilisation, since the apparent meaninglessness of existence on a cosmic perspective leads to the previously cited “loss of the human.”^{159 160}

In the preceding chapter, and as espoused and characterised by Nietzschean Nihilism, even when humanity’s gaze is turned inwards from the oppressive external pressure of Cosmicism, every value held is devalued by the corrosive nihilistic viewpoint born of Cosmic Pessimism and Nietzsche’s definition of nihilism as “(...) *the highest values devalue themselves*” and that, as a result, all beliefs and principles are fundamentally baseless and groundless.¹⁶¹ And yet, *Rick and Morty* is a widely-accepted comedy series, classified as a “TV comedy” by streaming and video-on-demand company Netflix and moreover heralded by vulture.com/ as “(..) the No. 1 TV Comedy Among Millennials,” despite the decidedly less-than-comic and intellectually sobering presence of Cosmicism and Nihilism as contained and maintained throughout the episodes lending an air of decidedly pessimistic futility to the idea of an existence in the *Rick and Morty* universe.^{162 163}

Still, futility notwithstanding, exist the characters do, despite the incomprehensibility of the surrounding setting and the apparent meaninglessness of a devalued existence therein, not to mention the sardonic quipping and constant cynical belittling that Rick hands out with distressing frequency.

¹⁵⁹ Eugene Thacker, *In the Dust of This Planet: Horror of Philosophy, Vol 1*, 1. publ, Horror of Philosophy 1 (Winchester: Zero Books, 2011), 17.

¹⁶⁰ Keiji Nishitani, Jan Van Bragt, and Winston L. King, *Religion and Nothingness*, Nanzan Studies in Religion and Culture (Berkeley, Calif.: Univ. of California Press, 1983), 142.

¹⁶¹ Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, Walter Arnold Kaufmann, and R. J. Hollingdale, *The Will to Power*, Vintage Books ed (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), 9.

¹⁶² ‘Rick and Morty | Netflix’, accessed 15 April 2018, <https://www.netflix.com/fr-en/title/80014749>.

¹⁶³ Josef Adalian, ‘Rick and Morty Is Now the No. 1 TV Comedy Among Millennials’, *Vulture*, 4 October 2017, <http://www.vulture.com/2017/10/rick-and-morty-is-now-the-no-1-tv-comedy-among-millennials.html>.

Such a choice as made by the characters could ultimately be said to be patently absurd, unreasonable and illogical to the maximum extent, akin to Don Quixote tilting at windmills, and such existence in the futile and uncaring face of the universe coupled with the apparent meaninglessness of it all could only be said to be motivated by one truth, “which is defiance.”¹⁶⁴

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The use of the dictionary definition of absurd is fittingly absurd in and of itself when placed alongside a quote from French-Algerian writer, novelist, playwright and philosopher best known for his work on *l'absurde*, Albert Camus, and his book *The Myth of Sisyphus*, the 1942 philosophical essay concerning the nature and definition of the absurd and a landmark work. Insofar as humanity's inherent quest for knowledge and meaning of “Life, the Universe and Everything” is stymied by the fundamental fact that all values are meaningless and indeed that the universe is far beyond the ken of mere, insignificant mortals such as the whole of humankind, meeting the questions conveyed with obstinate, unknowable silence, then so Camus posits that this drive is absurd, and that the absurd itself “is born of this confrontation between human need and the unreasonable silence of the world,” or indeed the universe.^{166 167} Ultimately, it is from this conflict that the main comedic elements of the series spring, most notably the idea of “the comedy of the absurd,” defined as being an existentialist comedy focussed “on the fallout from confronting a world devoid of meaning,” the humour stemming from the characters’ “tragic insignificance” and their underlying and subsequent confrontation of this fact in a world apparently devoid of meaning and including their attempts at finding ways to work around, embrace or even ignore the inherent insignificance and futility of existence.¹⁶⁸

Curiously enough, such a theme and conflict is not uncommon for the sci-fi comedy genre, with the absurd struggle for meaning as present in *Rick and Morty* also the bedrock of the entirety of *The Hitch-Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy* and its various derivative adaptations, all made and published almost thirty years prior to *Rick and Morty*. The most apt absurd parallel between the two surrounds the issue of the apparent meaninglessness of existence. In *The Hitch-Hiker's*

¹⁶⁴ ‘Absurd | Definition of Absurd in English by Oxford Dictionaries’, Oxford Dictionaries | English, accessed 15 April 2018, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/absurd>.

¹⁶⁵ Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Great Ideas (London: Penguin, 2005), 53.

¹⁶⁶ Douglas Adams, *The Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy: A Trilogy in Five Parts* (London: Heinemann, 1995), 121.

¹⁶⁷ Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Great Ideas (London: Penguin, 2005), 26.

¹⁶⁸ ‘How Monty Python Shaped Modern Comedy (Feat. Rick and Morty & Deadpool) – Wisecrack Edition - YouTube’, accessed 17 April 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vFANgWN2U10&t=926s>.

Guide to the Galaxy, an answer to existence and life itself, “The Answer,” was eventually calculated over the course of seven and a half million years by a unsurpassed supercomputer built specifically to find an answer to “the Ultimate Question of Life, the Universe and Everything.”¹⁶⁹ However, this answer was found to be, as famously enshrined in popular culture, “Forty-two,” a response completely and utterly absurd and non-sensical despite possibly it being the most precious piece of information ever given in the universe in terms of life and existence.¹⁷⁰ Yet, it cannot be understood, to the point that an even greater supercomputer is required to “find out what the actual question was.”¹⁷¹

Be that as it may, In *Rick and Morty*, the one primarily fumbling for meaning in the face of the increasingly-clear absurdity of existence is none other than the long-suffering and hapless Morty, being dragged out repeatedly with varying degrees of enthusiasm on wild science fiction adventures and misadventures alike, all with a distressing degree of harrowing elements contained therein, and all the while trying to reconcile his ‘normal’ life as a struggling high-schooler with that of being the sidekick of a super-genius, and the terrifying glimpses of extra-terrestrial reality and the subsequent, unflinching insight into complete and utter absurdity that such a role invariably entails.¹⁷²

III.2. “Human Need and Unreasonable Silence”

Such a confrontation “between human need and unreasonable silence” is nowhere better encapsulated in the whole series than in *Rick Potion #9*, an episode cited in the preceding section owing to its showcasing of not only Rick’s moral nihilism but also the absurd that comes about and is facilitated by such ethical and moral bankruptcy on account of devalued beliefs.¹⁷³

The premise of *Rick Potion #9* is that a “Flu Season Dance,” reminiscent of the Prom and replete with propensity of the American popular culture to idolise such an event, is to be held and Morty’s request that Jessica accompany him is shot down by Brad, Jessica’s current boyfriend of peerless athletic prowess but self-admittedly limited eloquence.¹⁷⁴ ¹⁷⁵ Inspired of sorts by

¹⁶⁹ Douglas Adams, *The Hitch Hiker’s Guide to the Galaxy: A Trilogy in Five Parts* (London: Heinemann, 1995), 123.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid, 128.

¹⁷¹ Ibid, 155.

¹⁷² ‘Morty Smith’, Rick and Morty Wiki, accessed 17 April 2018, http://rickandmorty.wikia.com/wiki/Morty_Smith.

¹⁷³ Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Great Ideas (London: Penguin, 2005), 26.

¹⁷⁴ *Rick and Morty*. “Rick Potion #9”. Directed by Stephen Sandoval and Pete Michels. Written by Justin Roiland. Adult Swim, 7 September 2015.

¹⁷⁵ ‘Rick Potion 9/Transcript’, Rick and Morty Wiki, accessed 19 March 2018, http://rickandmorty.wikia.com/wiki/Rick_Potion_9/Transcript.

Rick's preceding and scathing appraisal of his parents' marriage and his grandfather's devaluation of love as "a chemical reaction that compels animals to breed," he approaches Rick in his garage before he goes to the dance.¹⁷⁶ Rick is hunched over his workbench opposite the door and tinkering with a device introduced only as an "ionic defibrillator," and upon Rick's request for Morty to hand him a screwdriver, Morty uses said demand as leverage over his alcoholic, mad-scientist grandfather to extort "some sort of love potion or something" from him.¹⁷⁷

Despite his protests of such a task being beneath him, Rick eventually relents, rolling his eyes in annoyance as he straightens up and crosses the garage with shoulders still hunched from working over the workbench to ill-temperedly rummage through a box of assorted gadgets placed on a shelf on the opposite wall. Meanwhile, Morty continues to pontificate and appeal and nag from the middle of the screen, dressed in dark blue formal wear complete with red tie and pink boutonniere, the flower or flowers typically worn through the jacket's buttonhole for formal occasions, as Rick eventually groans and viciously comments that Morty is growing up "into a real big thorn straight up into my ass."¹⁷⁸ ¹⁷⁹ Upon hearing that, Morty assumes a slightly worried look, eyebrows raised and mouth agape slightly.

Eventually, Rick fishes out a tray of sealed test-tubes before hoisting one forth and holding it at eye-level, proclaiming the dark yellowish liquid to be oxytocin - defined as a neurotransmitter hormone and also nicknamed 'the love hormone' for its prevalence in pair bonding - extracted from a vole's brain.¹⁸⁰ He quickly and irately berates Morty for being unaware of the rodent's existence before combining the oxytocin sample with a strand of Morty's hair and creating the requested love potion for which he receives his grandson's effusive thanks for doing so.

Possibly in light of Morty's growing disillusionment throughout the season's progression concerning his faith and hero-worship placed in his grandfather, he hesitates at the door to ask if there are any "dangers or side effects" to be aware of, resulting in a snappy rebuke from Rick declaring it to be "fool-proof" and for Morty to "go nuts."¹⁸¹ Once his grandson has left the

¹⁷⁶ 'Rick Potion 9/Transcript', Rick and Morty Wiki, accessed 19 March 2018, http://rickandmorty.wikia.com/wiki/Rick_Potion_9/Transcript.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ 'Boutonniere | Definition of Boutonniere in English by Oxford Dictionaries', Oxford Dictionaries | English, accessed 17 April 2018, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/boutonniere>.

¹⁷⁹ *Rick and Morty*. "Rick Potion #9". Directed by Stephen Sandoval and Pete Michels. Written by Justin Roiland. Adult Swim, 7 September 2015.

¹⁸⁰ 'Oxytocin', Psychology Today, accessed 17 April 2018, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/oxytocin>.

¹⁸¹ 'Rick Potion 9/Transcript', Rick and Morty Wiki, accessed 19 March 2018, http://rickandmorty.wikia.com/wiki/Rick_Potion_9/Transcript.

room and closed the door behind him, Rick straightens up slightly, stares directly at the camera and breaks the forth wall as he muses offhandedly “Ugh, unless she has the flu,” before shrugging and resuming work on the ionic defibulizer as an ominous musical sting plays, foreshadowing future events hinted at by Rick’s admission.¹⁸²

However, the portentous foreshadowing is proven right in a darkly humorous fashion as Jessica is indeed revealed to have the flu. Upon Morty’s successful application of the love potion, as indicated through the comedically enlarged pupils on the character model and almost ridiculously possessive, jealous nature concerning the object of her affections, she winds up sneezing on Brad as she confronts him, resulting in a rapid and terrifying chain reaction as the entire school becomes infected with the love potion.¹⁸³ The obsession drives the ball to devolve into a brawl over Morty’s affections. As he frantically rushes for the exit, Rick throws it open and waves him over, playing down the fact that he made a misjudgement as much as possible in a quasi-disclaimer manner as the two skid around corners in the locker-filled hallways, heading to the Space Cruiser in the parking lot to attempt to counteract the runaway love potion.¹⁸⁴

However, in the same vein as the story of the Sorcerer’s Apprentice, the situation spirals out of control with distressing speed. After playing down his role in all of it and lashing Morty with some scorn for good measure, Rick produces a vial of green liquid which he proclaims to be an antidote “based on preying mantis DNA,” and sprays the crowd gathered below the Space Cruiser, only for them to suddenly and horrifyingly mutate into mantis-human hybrids in a Kafkaesque turn of events.¹⁸⁵

III.3. Consequence of the Absurd

The entire episode culminates in a scene lit by the orange rays of a rising sun as a dishevelled and somewhat dispirited Rick and Morty sit on the edge of a tall building, captured in a high camera angle as they dangle their feet over the edge as they watch the chaotic post-apocalyptic scene beneath them. Four columns of smoke rise and two of the fires are plainly visible from Rick and Morty’s vantage point as in the street below them lies an overturned articulated lorry currently ablaze. The streets themselves are littered with fallen lampposts, broken glass and

¹⁸² ‘Rick Potion 9/Transcript’, Rick and Morty Wiki, accessed 19 March 2018, http://rickandmorty.wikia.com/wiki/Rick_Potion_9/Transcript.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Rick Potion 9/Transcript’, Rick and Morty Wiki, accessed 19 March 2018, http://rickandmorty.wikia.com/wiki/Rick_Potion_9/Transcript.

various debris, and horrifying aberrations lurch around the deserted landscape, the utopian vision of the American Dream and all the progress contained within having clearly given way to a stagnant, dystopian nightmare reminiscent of the vistas of decayed civilisation as present throughout post-apocalyptic TV series such as *The Walking Dead* or films such as *28 Days Later*.¹⁸⁶

The fault, of course, lies squarely on the protagonists. Rick's attempts to remedy the progressively-worsening situation have only served to eradicate the human race, replacing it with the genetically chimeric abominations through consecutive and absurd attempts at introducing more and more foreign DNA, from koala to shark to dinosaur, to re-establish the normal human genetic sequence but failing, ultimately overwriting humanity itself into being a race of slaving genetic mutants completely unrecognisable from their original forms.¹⁸⁷

The scene is made all the more powerful by the clear and almost ironic paradox present in the shot: the rising sun, emblematic of a new day, of illumination and hope clashing almost cruelly with a sight of the uncanny, defined as that which is "strange or mysterious, especially in an unsettling way" as shown here by the dead, empty cityscape in the throes of decay, inhabited only by monsters.¹⁸⁸ In the same way that the figure of the monster represents "the conflicts that rip our social fabric apart," then their presence is indicative of the breakdown of society with Rick and Morty gazing glumly down onto the scene from on high, unable to interact with the world anymore on account of its destruction as wrought by the monsters, themselves created by the protagonists' own hands.¹⁸⁹

One closing remark on the scene as portrayed in the shot is that it is not without a certain degree of absurd, harkening back to the twentieth century European theatrical movement known as the Theatre of the Absurd, and in particular sharing a few major elements with the play *Rhinocéros* by Eugène Ionesco. The parallels are surprising, for instance both Rick and Bérenger, the protagonist of *Rhinocéros*, are recalcitrant alcoholics, with Bérenger sheepishly admitting within the first on-screen exchange that "*J'ai un peu mal aux cheveux...*" before plainly stating and admitting that "*J'ai un petit peu la gueule de bois*" and Rick frequently taking a sip from

¹⁸⁶ *Rick and Morty*. "Rick Potion #9". Directed by Stephen Sandoval and Pete Michels. Written by Justin Roiland. Adult Swim, 7 September 2015.

¹⁸⁷ Rick Potion 9/Transcript', Rick and Morty Wiki, accessed 19 March 2018, http://rickandmorty.wikia.com/wiki/Rick_Potion_9/Transcript.

¹⁸⁸ 'Uncanny | Definition of Uncanny in English by Oxford Dictionaries', Oxford Dictionaries | English, accessed 18 April 2018, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/uncanny>.

¹⁸⁹ Annalee Newitz, *Pretend We're Dead: Capitalist Monsters in American Pop Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 2.

his pocket flask along with his numerous drunk appearances throughout the series.^{190 191} More important is the fact that the immediate setting of this particular scene in Rick and Morty mirrors that of the end of *Rhinocéros*, whereupon Bérenger finds himself the only remaining human in a sleepy, southern French town where all the other inhabitants have transformed into the titular, mindless rhinoceroses and merrily trample about the place, heedless of the destruction they leave in their wake.¹⁹²

Rick is quick to break the uncanny silence of the spectacle of the collapse of civilisation, tacitly admitting his role in it with the light-hearted delivery of the rhetorical “Boy, Morty, I really cronenberged the world up, didn’t I?”¹⁹³ Whilst Morty still stares dumbly out over the vista of the destroyed city and Rick continues to pontificate, the camera cuts to a group of three of these “cronenberg” monsters in a high-angled establishing shot set in the street as one remains immobile, another ambles along the pavement to the first and the third, sitting in the driver’s seat of a dilapidated taxi, leans out the window to vomit a torrent of brackish, dark-green liquid onto the road below.¹⁹⁴

Rick’s use of the ‘cronenberged’ neologism refers to Canadian actor, director and screenwriter David Cronenberg, heralded as the “King of Venereal Horror” and well-known and widely credited for his influence and innovation surrounding the body horror genre, a particular genre in and of itself defined as the “horror elicited by the depiction of destruction or disfigurement of the human body.”^{195 196 197} The immediately obvious and visually distinct aspect of grotesque horror of the cronenbergs is curiously but symbolically underlined by the vomiting one: the inherent disgust upon seeing a pool of ejecta stems from the concept of abjection, the abject defined by Bulgarian-French psychoanalyst and critic Julia Kristeva as “our reaction (horror, vomit) to a threatened breakdown in meaning caused by the loss of the distinction between

¹⁹⁰ ‘Theatre of the Absurd’, Encyclopedia Britannica, accessed 18 April 2018, <https://www.britannica.com/art/Theatre-of-the-Absurd>.

¹⁹¹ Eugène Ionesco, *Rhinocéros: texte intégral*, Nachdr., Folio 816 (Paris: Gallimard, 2006), 12.

^{192 192} Eugène Ionesco, *Rhinocéros: texte intégral*, Nachdr., Folio 816 (Paris: Gallimard, 2006), 12.

¹⁹³ *Rick and Morty*. “Rick Potion #9”. Directed by Stephen Sandoval and Pete Michels. Written by Justin Roiland. Adult Swim, 7 September 2015.

¹⁹⁴ ‘Cronenbergs’, Rick and Morty Wiki, accessed 18 April 2018, <http://rickandmorty.wikia.com/wiki/Cronenbergs>.

¹⁹⁵ ‘David Cronenberg’, IMDb, accessed 18 April 2018, <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0000343/bio>.

¹⁹⁶ Meagan Navarro, ‘The Master of Body Horror: A David Cronenberg Horror Retrospective - Bloody Disgusting’, *Bloody Disgusting!* (blog), 14 March 2018, <http://bloody-disgusting.com/editorials/3488162/master-body-horror-david-cronenberg-horror-retrospective/>.

¹⁹⁷ ‘Body Horror | Definition of Body Horror in English by Oxford Dictionaries’, Oxford Dictionaries | English, accessed 18 April 2018, https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/body_horror.

subject and object or between self and other.”¹⁹⁸ ¹⁹⁹ With the complete and utter lack of distinction and loss of the self of the chimeric appearance of the cronenbergs, this abjection “confronts us (...) with those fragile states where man strays on the territory of animal,” or as seen in the extremes of the cronenbergs, does not merely stray but actively stay, dragging the entire world back to a dilapidated state of nature.²⁰⁰

Meanwhile, as the scene with the cronenbergs plays out and Morty silently drinks it all in, Rick blithely continues off-camera, saying that “We got a whole planet of cronenbergs walking around down there, Morty,” whereupon the camera cuts to another group of three cronenbergs replete with misshapen appendages and too many eyes wandering through another street lined with broken glass from the smashed shop as seen in the background.²⁰¹ Rick proceeds to jovially slap Morty on the back and joke that at least the cronenbergs aren’t in love with him anymore as the camera cuts back to the two on the roof, the dishevelled appearance of grandfather and grandson further strengthened by the camera clearly showing the ripped and torn state of Morty’s previously pristine dark blue suit and his shocked facial expression, haggard eyes downcast and mouth hanging open.²⁰²

Eventually, Morty breaks his shock-induced silence, the camera jumping to a low angle and framing him in a medium shot between the still standing and seemingly intact buildings off to his left and the Space Cruiser to his right, the angular construction of the architecture contrasting further with the smooth, curved design of Rick’s self-built ship. The low-angle shot is very much a psychological shot, and Morty’s portrayal as being taller than the buildings shows the dominance and almost frightening aspect of the character, with the destruction of the human race at Rick’s hands ultimately brought about by his request for a love potion.²⁰³ The fact that Rick’s Space Cruiser is shown as taller than both Morty and the city buildings reinforces this scientific ascendancy over civilisation to the point of driving it to annihilation.

¹⁹⁸ ‘Julia Kristeva | French Author’, Encyclopedia Britannica, accessed 18 April 2018, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Julia-Kristeva>.

¹⁹⁹ ‘Definition: The Abject’, accessed 18 April 2018, <https://www.cla.purdue.edu/english/theory/psychoanalysis/definitions/abject.html>.

²⁰⁰ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, European Perspectives (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 12.

²⁰¹ ‘Rick Potion’, Transcripts Wiki, accessed 18 April 2018, http://transcripts.wikia.com/wiki/Rick_Potion.

²⁰² *Rick and Morty*. “Rick Potion #9”. Directed by Stephen Sandoval and Pete Michels. Written by Justin Roiland. Adult Swim, 7 September 2015.

²⁰³ ScreenPrism, ‘The Filmmaker’s Handbook: How Are Low Angle Shots Used | ScreenPrism’, accessed 19 April 2018, <http://screenprism.com/insights/article/the-filmmakers-handbook-how-are-low-angle-shots-used>.

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Cradling his head in his hands, Morty is forced to confront the consequences of the actions of the pair, exclaiming “Oh my God! It’s a living nightmare!” as the absurd nature and enormity of the situation finally strikes home and he desperately attempts to come to terms with it.²⁰⁴

In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Albert Camus posited that the absurd is born from the contradiction of two mutually exclusive states: “‘It’s absurd’ means ‘it’s impossible’ but also: ‘It’s contradictory,’” and further elucidating such a point a few paragraphs later with the contention that “The absurd is essentially a divorce. It lies in neither of the elements compared; it is born of their confrontation.”²⁰⁵

This confrontation of the contradictory is all around Morty: from the original, pristine, maintained state of the town as it was up until this point as contrasted to the state of post-apocalyptic dilapidation and abandon that it now exposit, from the confrontation of the typical upright and bipedal species that humanity used to be to the mutated gamut of chimeric, genetic aberrations that are the Cronenbergs compounded by the abjection of their forms and acts and the inherent loss of self that they affirm, from the collective difference of the day before as compared to his current predicament. Such paradoxical states as compared to one another can only really be described as well and truly absurd.

Moreover, it is only Morty who is seemingly confronted with this epiphany of the absurd. Camus presupposes that “there can be no absurd outside the human mind,” and such a statement seems to be justified in this particular case, as the Cronenbergs are of dubious sapience and merely amble about the ruined city in blissful ignorance, accompanied only by a vague diegetic smattering of inhuman gurgles whilst Rick is seemingly unperturbed, either inured through a jaded outlook born of experience or his inherent nihilistic attitude insulating his mind from the confrontation through the apparent devaluing of such a value.^{206 207}

Furthermore, the unshakeable feeling of the absurd born from the confrontation of two contradictory states in Morty’s mind comes about in a degree of the psychological phenomenon known as Cognitive Dissonance, defined as “a situation involving conflicting attitudes, beliefs or behaviors [sic]. This produces a feeling of discomfort leading to an alteration in one of the attitudes, beliefs or behaviors [sic] to reduce the discomfort and restore balance.”²⁰⁸

²⁰⁴ ‘Rick Potion’, Transcripts Wiki, accessed 18 April 2018, http://transcripts.wikia.com/wiki/Rick_Potion.

²⁰⁵ Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Great Ideas (London: Penguin, 2005), 28-29.

²⁰⁶ Ibid, 29.

²⁰⁷ Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, Walter Arnold Kaufmann, and R. J. Hollingdale, *The Will to Power*, Vintage Books ed (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), 9.

²⁰⁸ ‘Cognitive Dissonance Theory | Simply Psychology’, accessed 19 April 2018, <https://www.simplypsychology.org/cognitive-dissonance.html>.

As such, uncharacteristically and for the first time in the series, Morty finally verbally lashes out at Rick, angrily but exasperatedly asking his grandfather as to how he could be so irresponsible in his mixing of various strains of DNA to attempt to rectify the accidental transformation of Earth's population into "insect people" following the administration of the love potion's antidote.^{209 210}

Rick's rebuttal, too, is uncharacteristically strained and surprised, further reinforcing the absurd aspect of the whole situation, when he states that this whole series of events only came about because of Morty. With arms outstretched and palms up in an exaggerated gesture indicative of trustworthiness, and in this case the veracity of his words, Rick shoots back with the final absurd confrontation of two separate elements as he raises his voice and protests the claim of irresponsibility, shooting back with "All I wanted you to do was hand me a screwdriver, Morty!"²¹¹

As he goes on to equate Morty's use of the love potion as tantamount with roofing, Morty's mouth drops further on assuming an even more disbelieving and surprised look as the absurdity of the whole situation becomes abundantly clear: by holding Rick's screwdriver to ransom, Morty inadvertently precipitated the destruction of civilization, two elements made so absurd by their confrontation that the mind reels.²¹²

And yet, this is not the most absurd moment of the episode.

III.4. The Apex of the Absurd

As the grandson and grandfather bicker, with Morty eventually concluding that they must share the blame while Rick pointedly looks away and draws on his hipflask, Rick subsequently reveals that he does indeed have one emergency solution. He hands a scientific-looking metallic backpack to Morty before pulling what appears to be an advanced virtual reality headset over his eyes and typing out some commands on a keyboard folded out from the Space Cruiser.

The camera immediately shifts to an establishing shot on a pale blue sky with a few wispy clouds, the colour palate already a noticeable contrast, owing to the fact that blue and orange are opposite each other on the colour wheel, and serving to highlight the difference between the

²⁰⁹ *Rick and Morty*. "Rick Potion #9". Directed by Stephen Sandoval and Pete Michels. Written by Justin Roiland. Adult Swim, 7 September 2015.

²¹⁰ 'Rick Potion', Transcripts Wiki, accessed 18 April 2018, http://transcripts.wikia.com/wiki/Rick_Potion.

²¹¹ *Ibid*.

²¹² *Rick and Morty*. "Rick Potion #9". Directed by Stephen Sandoval and Pete Michels. Written by Justin Roiland. Adult Swim, 7 September 2015.

two scenes.²¹³ The inhuman gurgling of the cronenbergs is replaced with birdsong, and the sequence quickly pans down to reveal that the scene is situated in an immaculate suburb replete with normal, genetically unaltered humans, and as the camera zooms onto the doorstep of the Smith family house to show the newspaper thrown by the bicycle-riding paperboy, the title is clearly seen to read “Genetic Epidemic Averted,” complete with a black and white photo of a cronenberg.²¹⁴

Presently, the recognisable shape of the Space Cruiser hovers into view before landing on the driveway leading up to the garage. Rick and Morty exit, with Morty admiringly waxing lyrical on how Rick was able to save the day with Rick good-naturedly accepting the compliments paid to him by his grandson in an unusual, almost uncannily disturbing display of camaraderie. The two continue their uncharacteristically saccharine conversation with Rick once more asking Morty for a screwdriver which the latter is all too glad to bring to him. Rick resumes tinkering on the ionic defibulizer, slowly counting out each time he tightens a screw on the device to draw in the viewer, as something is clearly not quite right in this scene; the typical bleak and self-deprecating humour is completely gone and the two are acting disturbingly out of character.²¹⁵

“We got one screw turn,” counts Rick as the screw screeches slightly as it is tightened, “and two screw turns,” he counts again as the same process is repeated, with Morty leaning forward in interest at the end of the third turn, mirroring in some respects the reaction of the viewer on account of his being the audience surrogate character throughout the episodes, and particularly so here where the creators are obviously baiting the viewer’s interest with the narrative hook of the turning of the screw, their attention already well and truly ensnared by the inherent wrongness and out-of-character tone of the scene.²¹⁶

The interest is justified, because as Rick goes for the third screw turn, the defibulizer suddenly and startlingly explodes, flinging Rick and Morty against the shelf on the other side of the garage and into the ceiling respectively as blood splatters all across the room and the two protagonists slump to the floor, sporting horrific injuries and their bodies traumatised to the point that Rick’s right eye falls out of its socket.

Rick and Morty are dead.

²¹³ ‘Color Harmonies: Complementary, Analogous, Triadic Color Schemes’, accessed 19 April 2018, <http://www.tigercolor.com/color-lab/color-theory/color-harmonies.htm>.

²¹⁴ *Rick and Morty*. “Rick Potion #9”. Directed by Stephen Sandoval and Pete Michels. Written by Justin Roiland. Adult Swim, 7 September 2015.

²¹⁵ ‘Rick Potion’, Transcripts Wiki, accessed 18 April 2018, http://transcripts.wikia.com/wiki/Rick_Potion.

²¹⁶ *Ibid*.

Yet as the shock diminishes in the aftermath of seeing the show's two protagonists seemingly perish, the familiar sound of Rick's portal gun is heard as the familiar dishevelled forms of the cronenberg-world Rick and Morty step through, with Rick staring up at the bloodstains on the ceiling while calmly announcing "Alright Morty, here we are."²¹⁷

Morty, however, is markedly less blasé about the whole situation, as evidenced by his clearly panicked delivery of the line "Oh my God, Rick! Is that us?" upon seeing the slumped bodies of their two other selves, coming face to face with the brutal, unflinching truth of his "temporally limited freedom," this reminder that "all that remains is a fate whose outcome alone is fatal."^{218 219 220} In a moment that is absurd insofar as it is a confrontation of two irreconcilable elements, and indeed it is to the greatest possible degree, Morty has paradoxically, inconceivably, *impossibly* been confronted by his death while still alive. His mind already reeling with the absurdity of the previous situation, the sight of his dead self and the sheer illogical absurd nature of it all is too much, and he naturally succumbs to pure existential terror in the form of a panic attack that Rick has to shake, shout and eventually slap him out of before the two bury their deceased other selves and "slip in to the place" of their defunct others without anyone else in the new universe being any the wiser of the replacement of their Rick and Morty by cronenberg-world Rick and Morty.²²¹

This unflinching look into the absurd, insignificant nature of existence is thrown further into inconsequence by Rick's admission that there are "an infinite number of realities," with consequentially an infinite number of *other* Ricks and Mortys as proven by coming face to face with a deceased version of his alternate self in the most absurd manner possible.²²² As mentioned in the preceding chapter Rick may have played out "the death of God," but in this scene Morty has just played out the death of *himself*.²²³

Camus presupposes that the absurd, as born from a confrontation of two mutually contradicting elements, here that of life to death and perceived individuality with the uncompromising proof that such is not the case, "(...) implies a total absence of hope."²²⁴ Such is the case for the rest

²¹⁷ *Rick and Morty*. "Rick Potion #9". Directed by Stephen Sandoval and Pete Michels. Written by Justin Roiland. Adult Swim, 7 September 2015.

²¹⁸ 'Rick Potion', Transcripts Wiki, accessed 18 April 2018, http://transcripts.wikia.com/wiki/Rick_Potion.

²¹⁹ Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Great Ideas (London: Penguin, 2005), 64.

²²⁰ *Ibid*, 114.

²²¹ 'Rick Potion', Transcripts Wiki, accessed 18 April 2018, http://transcripts.wikia.com/wiki/Rick_Potion.

²²² *Rick and Morty*. "Rick Potion #9". Directed by Stephen Sandoval and Pete Michels. Written by Justin Roiland. Adult Swim, 7 September 2015.

²²³ Wisecrack, *The Philosophy of Rick and Morty – Wisecrack Edition*, accessed 26 March 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hWFDHynf11E>.

²²⁴ Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Great Ideas (London: Penguin, 2005), 30.

of the episode, as Morty succumbs to a state of almost catatonic shock upon burying his other self in the back garden and subsequently meanders about the house, jaw slack and his eyes locked in the thousand-yard stare typical of post-traumatic stress disorder and characterised by his unfocused stare and extreme emotional detachment, as evidenced by the lack of all other sound except for the minimalistic but exceedingly mournful song 'Look On Down From The Bridge' by Mazzy Star, the song particularly mirroring and highlighting Morty's emotional numbness and feeling of loss of perspective with the lyrics "Everybody seems so far away from me/Everybody just wants to be free."²²⁵

The freedom as expressed in the lyrics, however, may not be quite so forthcoming as *The Myth of Sisyphus* posits that "A man who has become conscious of the absurd is for ever bound to it," and two episodes later in *Rixty Minutes* this is apparently shown to be true of Morty.²²⁶

Summer, upon learning that she was meant to be aborted but was only saved by the fact that the car "blew a tyre" on the way to the clinic, takes this revelation concerning her very existence rather poorly, going as far as to qualify herself "as the cause of her [sic] parents' misery" and announces her intentions to flee from home despite the fact that she is only seventeen, claiming that she will "move to the Southwest and, I dunno, do something with turquoise."^{227 228}

Upon seeing her distress, Morty goes up to her room as she angrily tosses clothes into a bag, saying that he kind of knows how she feels. Summer, unaware of the circumstances of *Rick Potion #9* immediately sarcastically dismisses him, but Morty, having seemingly made his own peace with the absurdity of his current situation that originally reduced him to catatonia, calmly reveals the absurd truth that he is in fact not her actual brother, but rather a replacement from another dimension for her hitherto unknown defunct brother, pointing to the grave of the previous Morty still in the garden as a piano gently plays for non-diegetic but further emotional emphasis, and emphatically stating that "I eat breakfast twenty yards away from my own. Rotting. Corpse."²²⁹

As Summer reels at this information, Morty goes on to deliver one of the lines best known across the internet pertaining to *Rick and Morty* and the absurd but poignant nature of its humour: "Nobody exists on purpose, nobody belongs anywhere, everybody's gonna die," before

²²⁵ Mazzy Star, *Among My Swans*. Capitol Records 7243 8 27224 2 7, CD EST 2288, 1996, compact disc.

²²⁶ Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Great Ideas (London: Penguin, 2005), 30.

²²⁷ *Rick and Morty*. "Rixty Minutes". Directed by Bryan Newton and Pete Michels. Written by Justin Roiland and Dan Harmon. Adult Swim, 8 September 2015.

²²⁸ 'Rixty Minutes/Transcript', *Rick and Morty Wiki*, accessed 20 April 2018, http://rickandmorty.wikia.com/wiki/Rixty_Minutes/Transcript.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*

pausing and changing his previously assertive tone to a more conciliatory “come watch TV.”²³⁰ In this one line are found all elements of Camus’ hypothesis of the absurd, “a total absence of hope” and “a conscious dissatisfaction” as expressed by the existential truths which Morty admits to, along with “a continual rejection” thereof in his plea to come watch TV and embracing the complete and utter meaninglessness of an absurd existence: “The absurd,” posits Camus, “has meaning only in so far as it is not agreed to.”²³¹

Curiously enough, Morty’s exhortations for Summer to come watch television and the mirror idea of Camus’ “continual rejection” is a recurring idea throughout *Rick and Morty*.²³²

Such an idea was present from the very start of the series, as first espoused by none other than Rick in *Pilot*, the first episode of the first season and previously cited in part one of this paper.²³³

Fleeing from the insectoid gromflamites and agents of the Galactic Federation upon refusing to go through the “new machine” at the spaceport, lauded as being able to detect things “way up your butt,” thus forcing the two to force their way through security on account of Rick’s smuggling of illegal Megaseeds inside Morty’s anal cavity, Morty accidentally inhales a wisp of green smoke from a hookah as he dashes past a group of aliens, and upon hacking and coughing, he spits out a small green alien which, as it runs alongside the two protagonists, lives its whole lifespan in a matter of seconds, growing at an incredibly accelerated rate before aging, withering and dying before Morty’s uncomprehending eyes.²³⁴

Just as Morty begins to wail upon seeing such an absurd spectacle of life played out before him, Rick puts on a burst of speed to catch up to his grandson and seizes him by the arm, shouting “Don’t think about it!”, a sentiment reminiscent of Camus’ exhortations that the absurd carries with it an implication of the oft-cited “continual rejection.”²³⁵ ²³⁶ This is something that Rick repeats to Morty again during the events of *Rick Potion #9*. As Morty kneels by his dead self, he looks up and, despairingly, voice breaking with emotion, he asks his grandfather “what about the reality we left behind?”, Rick counters with an even more absurd example based on the

²³⁰ *Rick and Morty*. “Rixty Minutes”. Directed by Bryan Newton and Pete Michels. Written by Justin Roiland and Dan Harmon. Adult Swim, 8 September 2015.

²³¹ Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Great Ideas (London: Penguin, 2005), 30.

²³² *Ibid*, 30.

²³³ *Rick and Morty*. “Pilot”. Directed by Justin Roiland. Written by Dan Harmon and Justin Roiland. Adult Swim, 2 December 2013.

²³⁴ ‘Pilot/Transcript’, Rick and Morty Wiki, accessed 4 March 2018, <http://rickandmorty.wikia.com/wiki/Pilot/Transcript>.

²³⁵ *Rick and Morty*. “Pilot”. Directed by Justin Roiland. Written by Dan Harmon and Justin Roiland. Adult Swim, 2 December 2013.

²³⁶ Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Great Ideas (London: Penguin, 2005), 30.

apparent infinity of realities: “What about the reality where Hitler cured cancer, Morty? The answer is *don’t think about it.*”²³⁷ ²³⁸

And now in this scene it is Morty exhorting Summer to not think about the absurdity of it all, to not run away from home and to instead come watch TV, conscious of the absurd permeating every single aspect of life and all too aware that said absurd “has no meaning only in so far as it is agreed not to,” Morty has now become a representation of sorts of the absurd man of which Camus speaks throughout *The Myth of Sisyphus*, and to quote the philosopher once more, upon rejecting the alternative of the absurd which is suicide and embracing the fundamental absurdity of life, “All that remains is a fate whose outcome alone is fatal. Outside of that single fatality of death, everything, joy or happiness, is liberty. A world remains of which man is the sole master.”²³⁹ ²⁴⁰ Ultimately, life is meaningless *except* for the meaning that those who live it choose to give it, and each is free to define this meaning for their existence for themselves. Morty’s appeal for Summer to come watch TV is somewhat absurd, but so is life itself when held up against any degree of universal perspective and the message seems to resonate with the character, as they both go downstairs to join Jerry and Rick watching interdimensional cable television and Summer gently answering “Doesn’t matter,” to a nervous question Jerry puts to her concerning which one of their parents would assume custody of the two minors were Beth and Jerry to divorce, accepting the fact that “None of this has any real meaning” and embracing the meaninglessness of it all.²⁴¹ ²⁴²

III.5. “I’m Mr. Meeseeks, Look at Me!”

One other example of the inherent absurd nature pervading the entirety of *Rick and Morty*, albeit a non-human one, is that of the “beloved” Mr. Meeseeks, an almost gratingly-upbeat race of bright blue humanoids with high-pitched voices and a resolute “can-do” attitude which are summoned into existence to perform once specific task, and upon completion of said task cease existing, disappearing in a puff of smoke.²⁴³ However, in that respect the Meeseeks are seemingly the fundamental philosophical opposite of humanity, and yet upon closer inspection

²³⁷ ‘Rick Potion’, Transcripts Wiki, accessed 18 April 2018, http://transcripts.wikia.com/wiki/Rick_Potion.

²³⁸ Ibid.

²³⁹ Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Great Ideas (London: Penguin, 2005), 30.

²⁴⁰ Ibid, 114.

²⁴¹ *Rick and Morty*. “Rixty Minutes”. Directed by Bryan Newton and Pete Michels. Written by Justin Roiland and Dan Harmon. Adult Swim, 8 September 2015.

²⁴² Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Great Ideas (London: Penguin, 2005), 114.

²⁴³ ‘Who Is Mr. Meeseeks, Rick and Morty’s Beloved Can-Do Character?’, accessed 20 April 2018, <https://www.dailydot.com/parsec/mr-meeseeks/>.

they reveal themselves to share some common points rooted only in the inherent absurd nature of existence.

Camus posits that “None of all this has any real meaning,” and that life is an absurd confrontation of irreconcilable differences meaningless to the point that humanity *must* accept this inherent meaninglessness in order to apply their own meaning to it all, as seen in this paper.²⁴⁴ Jean-Paul Sartre, who was a contemporary of Camus, hypothesised that, for humanity, “existence precedes essence”, or to cite it in its original French form, “*l'existence précède l'essence*”, and that humanity must first exist, and only then can they define what their existence is for afterwards and strive for their ‘essence’, which is to say what they make of themselves, in a markedly similar vein to Camus’ presupposition that life is absurd and meaningless save for the meaning that individuals must subsequently find and define for themselves.²⁴⁵

In that respect, the Mr. Meeseeks are the opposite of humanity, as is made abundantly clear by the absurd rant one of them delivers towards the end of the episode when, driven insane from existing too long, the Meeseeks turn their ire erupting from existential frustration upon their creator, in this case, the hapless Jerry, in the form of a bright blue lynch mob. He cries “Meeseeks are not born into this world fumbling for meaning, Jerry! We are created to serve a singular purpose for which we will go to any lengths to fulfil!”²⁴⁶

As contrary to the Sartre’s presupposition as cited beforehand, their essence, their reason for existing, *precedes* their existence in that the Mr. Meeseeks are summoned from their Meeseeks box in order to fulfil a specific purpose, which is subsequently given in the form of a request, and thus are not “fumbling for existence” as humanity is, driven to reconcile the inherent anthropocentrism with the unflinching truth that humankind is immeasurably insignificant in the face of such a vast cosmos and wrestling with the absurd nature of existence itself.²⁴⁷ The Meeseeks, however, are handed the reason for their existence on a proverbial platter the moment they are called into being, thus giving their existence a definite meaning which is markedly absent for the absurd existence that humanity ultimately leads and which it must ultimately embrace in order to find meaning for itself, since being conscious of the absurd is, for Camus, to be “forever bound to it.”²⁴⁸

²⁴⁴ Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Great Ideas (London: Penguin, 2005), 114.

²⁴⁵ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism and Humanism* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1973), 2.

²⁴⁶ ‘Meeseeks and Destroy/Transcript’, Rick and Morty Wiki, accessed 21 April 2018, http://rickandmorty.wikia.com/wiki/Meeseeks_and_Destroy/Transcript.

²⁴⁷ *Rick and Morty*. “Meeseeks and Destroy”. Directed by Bryan Newton and Pete Michels. Written Ryan Ridley. Adult Swim, 4 September 2015.

²⁴⁸ Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Great Ideas (London: Penguin, 2005), 30.

However, the Meeseeks also seem to conform with human ideas of absurdity and existentialism. While opposing Sartre's initial postulation of "existence precedes essence" as written in *Existentialism and Humanism*, they seem to conform to a second one made later in that very same book, namely "There is no reality except in action... [Man] is nothing else than his plan; he exists only to the extent that he fulfils himself."²⁴⁹

Mr. Meeseeks exist only to fulfil their fulfilment, yet the previously mentioned fulfilment of purpose is based solely on the fulfilling of a previously requested task external to the Meeseeks themselves, and yet only upon fulfilment of said task will the Mr. Meeseeks themselves be fulfilled and promptly stop existing, an action satisfying both essence and existence and something the Meeseeks are not only happy with but also actively seek. "Trust me, they're fine with it," Rick cynically comments as the first Mr. Meeseeks disappears in front of the Smith family's eyes.²⁵⁰

However, this yearning for completion and willingness to complete their given *raison d'être* in order to stop existing, a concept that could only really be considered contradictory, is also a mixed blessing, especially when Jerry is involved. One of the running gags throughout each season of Rick and Morty is that nothing ever seems to go right for Jerry, as best seen in season two with the episode *Look Who's Purging Now* where the character himself has a sudden moment of realisation and bitterly complains that "I am this entire family's toilet paper."²⁵¹

Jerry's haplessness continues in *Meeseeks and Destroy*. Whereas Beth and Summer's Mr. Meeseeks fulfil their appointed tasks with relative ease, Jerry's Mr. Meeseeks is unable to do so, resorting to summoning a *second* Mr. Meeseeks to help him, followed by a third and a fourth, and then quickly more and more. Both parties rapidly get frustrated at Jerry's lack of progress, with the Meeseeks becoming markedly more desperate and less cheerful as the ramifications of existence as defined by Camus by the twin concepts of "consciousness and revolt" start to set in.²⁵² This is shown as one pleads with Jerry to get back to the Sisyphian task of practising his golf swings despite the fact that the latter is currently enjoying a break, bitterly complaining that "Meeseeks don't usually have to exist this long. It's getting *weird*."²⁵³

²⁴⁹ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism and Humanism* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1973), 7.

²⁵⁰ 'Meeseeks and Destroy/Transcript', Rick and Morty Wiki, accessed 21 April 2018, http://rickandmorty.wikia.com/wiki/Meeseeks_and_Destroy/Transcript.

²⁵¹ *Rick and Morty*. "Look Who's Purging Now". Directed by Dominic Polcino and Pete Michels. Written Ryan Ridley and Dan Harmon and Justin Roiland. Adult Swim, 8 October 2015.

²⁵² Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Great Ideas (London: Penguin, 2005), 53.

²⁵³ *Rick and Morty*. "Meeseeks and Destroy". Directed by Bryan Newton and Pete Michels. Written Ryan Ridley. Adult Swim, 4 September 2015.

The professed weirdness of existence eventually develops into full-blown breakdown, culminating in the first Mr. Meeseeks to have been called into existence to help Jerry sinking to his knees, screaming the simultaneously existentially poignant and darkly humorous phrase “I can’t take it anymore! I just wanna die!”²⁵⁴ Straight afterwards another Meeseeks exclaims, equal parts exasperated and understanding, that “We all wanna die! We’re Meeseeks!”²⁵⁵

A truly absurd notion, to be sure, but crucial in that it is indeed absurd, born from “that revolt which gives life its value.”²⁵⁶ The Meeseeks, even if fundamentally the opposite of humanity in terms of the meaning of their existence, are nevertheless subject to the same revolt born of the “certainty of a crushing fate” that underpins all of reality.²⁵⁷

“There is no fate that cannot be surmounted by scorn,” and whether the scorn is directed to the meaninglessness of existence, as is the case with Morty, or towards the meaning thereof, as seen with the Meeseeks, the absurd is nevertheless very much present in both cases, bound as it is to existence itself and its inherent revolt and “unceasing effort.”^{258 259}

As such, even if to Camus the myth of Sisyphus was more analogous to that of humankind’s plight of meaninglessness and absurdity as seen throughout *Rick and Morty* as opposed to the Meeseeks’ rigidity of purpose and meaning of existence, the inherent absurd nature of it all points to one inescapable conclusion.

One must imagine both Morty and Mr. Meeseeks happy.

²⁵⁴ *Rick and Morty*. “Meeseeks and Destroy”. Directed by Bryan Newton and Pete Michels. Written Ryan Ridley. Adult Swim, 4 September 2015.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid*.

²⁵⁶ Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Great Ideas (London: Penguin, 2005), 53.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 53.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 117.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 119.

Conclusion

As stated before in the introduction, the aim of this mémoire is to examine and analyse the underpinning philosophical themes as displayed throughout *Rick and Morty*, in particular with regards to the extent to which they appear and, most importantly, to what they add to the setting as a greater whole.

Ultimately, this paper has shown that the first two schools of thought, Cosmicism and Nihilism, paint humanity's existence as bleak and insignificant in the face of a vast, uncaring and impossibly massive universe and that all values and beliefs that humanity may hold are cruelly open to pessimistic dismissal, even when Rick is punching the proof that such beliefs are true square in the face. However, even amidst this almost comically bleak existence, there is still a great deal of black humour to be found, and conclusively the answer to such a meaningless existence lies in the sentiment as expressed in Robert Frost's poem *A Servant to Servants*: "(...) I can see no way out but through."²⁶⁰ Indeed, the apparent answer is to not only accept but openly embrace the inherent absurdity and meaninglessness of existence and then strive to find or give meaning on one's own, as shown by Morty embracing the Absurd.

Despite acknowledging the presence of *Rick and Morty*'s impressive and vocal fanbase, notable in its absence throughout this paper is any amount of references towards the fans and indeed the impact of the series on a wider audience. Of particular note is the resonance of the philosophies espoused that such a series has, in particular with the primary demographic of the viewership, which is to say the "much-maligned" Millennials, and moreover just why the philosophies, tone and humour of *Rick and Morty* has found such an audience with such a pessimistic and unhappy generation.²⁶¹

A topic for another day, to be sure. But until then, it seems fitting to conclude on some words of wisdom from the series itself:

"Don't think about it."²⁶²

²⁶⁰ 'North of Boston, by Robert Frost', accessed 23 April 2018, http://www.gutenberg.org/files/3026/3026-h/3026-h.htm#link2H_4_0009.

²⁶¹ Kate Lyons, 'Generation Y: A Guide to a Much-Maligned Demographic', the Guardian, 7 March 2016, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/mar/07/millennials-generation-y-guide-to-much-maligned-demographic>.

²⁶² *Rick and Morty*. "Pilot". Directed by Justin Roiland. Written by Dan Harmon and Justin Roiland. Adult Swim, December 2 2013.

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“Nothing You Do Matters and Your Existence Is a Lie!” Or, Postmodernism and Philosophical Themes in Rick and Morty.

Ce mémoire se propose, à l'aide d'une analyse comparative, d'étudier les divers courants de pensée et les idées associés avec le séries télévisée Rick and Morty, créé par Dan Harmon et Justin Roiland et acclamé par la critique. En se basant sur les deux saisons initiales de l'émission, ces philosophies du XIXe et du XXe siècles sont aussi enracinés qu'essentiels pour le cadre de la série tout comme les personnages eux-mêmes et leurs échanges. La présence du cosmicisme, du nihilisme et de l'absurde sont propices pour une recherche convaincante et aboutie dans la nature de cette rencontre entre les arts grands et mineurs et surtout les prises de conscience des notions que ces courants de pensée peuvent provoquer à travers un tel séries télévisée postmoderne.

Mots-clés: Rick and Morty, série télévisée, postmodernisme, intertextualité, philosophie, cosmicisme, nihilisme, l'absurde, recherche, humour noir, H.P. Lovecraft, Friederich Nietzsche, Albert Camus, existence, analyse de séquence, analyse comparative.

“Nothing you do matters and your existence is a lie!” Or, Postmodernism and Philosophical themes in Rick and Morty.

The aim of this research paper is to identify, analyse and compare the various underlying schools of thought and ideas referenced by Dan Harmon and Justin Roiland's critically acclaimed series, Rick and Morty, through comparative analysis. Based on the first two seasons of the show, these philosophies spanning the 19th and 20th centuries are deeply ingrained and fundamental to the universe of the series along with the characters themselves and their interactions. The presence of Cosmicism, Nihilism and the Absurd in this postmodern work makes for fruitful and compelling research into the nature of such a crossover of high and low art and especially the thought-provoking realisations that such doctrines can bring about in the viewer.

Keywords: Rick and Morty, series, postmodernism, intertextuality, philosophy, Cosmicism, Nihilism, the Absurd, research, dark humour, H.P. Lovecraft, Friederich Nietzsche, Albert Camus, existence, sequence analysis, comparative analysis.

