
Humanity in Frank Herbert's "Dune"

Fiction has created the opportunity for humanity to explore concepts in an experimental and safe arena. The Anthropocene has seen the adverse consequences of the human species experimentation, which is why it is essential for literature to be allowed the parameters for experimentation. This essay will establish Frank Herbert's *Dune* (2010) as a key text in literature about the Anthropocene. It explores our world by building a similar, yet dissimilar, world, which allows us experimentation and discussion on issues pertaining to the survival of our species and our world. This essay will establish the idea of the Anthropocene and discuss this idea in a literary context. This essay will use *Dune* (2010) as an example of how the Anthropocene is discussed in literature. The Anthropocene will be discussed in terms of ecology, geology, politics, economics, and evolution. This essay will argue that *Dune* (2010) creates a discourse on the human impact on the environment. It will be argued that human intervention initially created greater opportunities for the human species; however, through substantial environmental changes caused by humanity, conditions have become increasingly worse for the majority of peoples.

The Anthropocene refers to the epoch we are currently in. Savi (2017, p. 945) states that the Anthropocene is the result of changes on the environment caused by humans. These human caused changes have been so influential that they have significantly changed our geological and ecological environment (Savi 2017, pp. 945-6). Climate change is the primary concern for human survival (Savi 2017, p. 950). One reason for climate change is the over-mining of Earth's resources. Frank Herbert's *Dune* (2010) discusses the consequences of such events. Wealthy parties, whose interests are more aligned with power and domination, mine the planet of Arrakis for its spices. Their greed and struggle for power sees the planet of Arrakis, and its inhabitants, as property to be used as its owners wish. They neglect to think about the environmental consequences and put no serious thought into what happens when they have extracted all the spice from the planet. The people who consume the spice become addicted to it and they cannot survive without it. Eliminating the existence of the spice would be tantamount to mass murder and their own suicide. While the Empire wishes to mine the planet of its resources, the Freman want to turn it into a green and fertile land rather than the infertile desert planet it is.

Another environmental issue seen on the planet of Arrakis is the scarceness of water. Water is the equivalent of wealth on Arrakis. It is not easily obtained and thus, it is coveted. Ronny Parkerson (2010, p. 404) considers *Dune* (Herbert 2010) as an examination of ecology and 'the relation and interaction between organisms and their environment'. The Freman have a deep connection with their planet, which becomes the basis for their religion. Water, as a prized

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asset, becomes divine property of the people over the person. The Freman know they cannot survive the trials of the desert on their own, but that they must band together in order to survive.

They also have an advantage over the leaders and soldiers of the Empire, as they understand that the planet belongs to the worms and that the worms cannot be controlled. They are deific creatures that are to be respected and not hunted. This idea of hunting non-human species is one we see in the Anthropocene. Humans have hunted animals since their evolution and to such an extent that many species have become extinct from hunting practices or other human activities (Craig 2017). Melina Pereira Savi (2017) examines the role of fiction, stating that it allows us to explore boundaries using a 'thought experiment' (p. 956) system. Terrance Craig (2017, p. 15) goes as far as to suggest that literature has been an enabler of hunting practices, where humanity is revered and humans are the character of power. The worms in *Dune* (Herbert 2010) are feared by those not of Arrakis, which could be attributed to the worms' destructive behaviors or to the peoples' lack of understanding. Though the Freman do use the worms for their own desires, they respect the worms and this respect allows the two to live harmoniously and travel through the worms' territories unscathed.

Savi (2017, 955) discusses the consequences of environmental changes from the Anthropocene and identifies displacement as being an issue of climate change. The Freman are driven out of their homes and into the desert of Arrakis where the Empire dare not venture. There is the implication of the Freman being lesser than the Empire due to socio-economic differences. The Empire possesses wealth and power, whereas the Freman are living in sub-par conditions with little wealth except for their water holdings and their unmatched knowledge about the environment. The Empire is not interested in the water, but they need the Freman for their knowledge. However, this fact is not enough to prevent their displacement.

Heather Eaton and Lois Ann Lorentzen (cited in Savi 2017, p. 950) discuss the idea of ecofeminism, which is the concept that approaches environmental issues in relation to women. There are three sections to the debate: women are the most affected demographic of environmental issues; the idea of women as body, or nature, and men as mind; and because women are more adversely affected by environmental issues, they possess the most knowledge and expertise, which in turn, makes them more likely to find the solutions to these issues (Savi 2017, pp.950-1). We see these ideas about women and the environment throughout *Dune* (2010). There is the idea that a woman's role in society is one of reproduction. As Lorenzo DiTommaso (1992, p. 317) states the Bene Gesserit are known to possess great intelligence in political matters, their primary purpose is to produce intelligent offspring. While *Dune* (2010) does reject some gender roles, it largely mimics them. Though the Bene Gesserit are recognized as being intelligent, they are labeled witches for this intelligence. This is in contrast to the Mentats whose intelligence for computation and analytics is celebrated and their cunning is praised, even when it is averse to the desired outcome.

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Dune (2010) also creates discussion about the evolution of humanity to a greater, more intelligent species. There is the idea of becoming more than human (DiTommaso 1992, p. 317). The specialized training of the Bene Gesserit and Mentats along with the privileged training of The Guild (mathematics and navigation) is evidence of the Empire's move towards bettering the human race. The purpose of the Bene Gesserit is to produce the *Kwisatz Haderach* who will be super-human. This individual will possess unrivalled intelligence and influence. Paul Atreides is the *Kwisatz Haderach* and has the ability to be in 'many places at once' (Herbert 2010, p. 20). The *Kwisatz Haderach* is the person who will destroy the Empire's 'imperialist globalization' (Williams 2002, para. 4) and bring with him a new world of emancipation from state and true freedom. This idea of creating a greater being is detrimental to the human species as it is now; it would mean an end to the species and an end to the Anthropocene.

Frank Herbert's *Dune* (2010) is a significant text in the discussion of the Anthropocene and what we as a human species can do to create a better world for ourselves, while leaving its resources intact for the next generation. The text discusses our mining practices and our excessive use of natural resources. It emphasizes the consequences of extreme mining of these resources and what happens if we use all that are available to us. Like the reliance on spice in *Dune* (2010), humanity relies on Earth's natural resources for our own survival. When these run, the human species will soon follow. Climate change is a growing concern and we have already seen adverse outcomes from this change. Not only have there been significant ecological and geological issues, there have also been negative socio-economic outcomes, which has seen power residing with the wealthy while the poor are displaced and controlled. We also see disparity between men and women, particularly surrounding knowledge and the perception of those with knowledge. The Bene Gesserit are a symbol of female intelligence, whereby society labels it wrong deeming the woman's place as being in the birthing bed. There is also the idea of humanity destroying itself by its need to become something better, something greater, and something more intelligent. Literature allow us to explore possibilities and experiment with scenarios in a harmless and controlled environment. It gives us the opportunity to enter into discussion and come up with solutions for humanity's problems.

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