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Dialogue of Cultures - Culture of Dialogue: from Conflicting to Understanding

CLOSING THE CULTURAL DISTANCE: F. HERBERT'S LITERARY VISION

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Abstract

The paper deals with the discourse functions of the literary texts by Frank Herbert. The study of his Dune novels is conducted in terms of literary dialogicity and cultural distance. Since both theories are based on understanding cross-cultural communication as a process of distancing and relating, they allow creating an integrated approach to the study of the text in the cultural context. The study of Herbert's text revealed the models of cultural development based on the main values used for measuring the cultural distance. The models are created by literary means: images, characters, and symbols. Four models of cultural isolation, monoculture, nurturing culture, and cultural hybridization reveal Herbert's visionary talent in defining the key issues of his time and offering the way for closing the cultural distance. The way of structuring the dialogue between the author and the reader reveals the tendency to create a scientific discussion, which can be seen in the polyphonic representation of ideas in Herbert's narration. The notion of cultural distance can be considered an axis of the Dune series organizing the plot and conflicts of characters. The study of cultural distance in the texts of Herbert proved the validity of the method combining literary and cross-cultural approaches to the study of a literary text.

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1. Introduction

The study of the text as the central unit of literary theory helped to understand the literary mechanism, which provides a powerful impact upon the reader. The tools of stylistic expressiveness, the framework of literary organization, individual stylistic choices of writers have long been the center of philological and linguistic attention (Boréus & Bergström, 2017; Muzny et al., 2017; Page et al., 2018). These studies presented effective methods of literary criticism and stylistic analysis, which gives an accurate picture of the linguistic arrangement and the literary merits of the text (Page et al., 2018). The language of the literary text is a complicated system, in which every element, starting from the sound and finishing with the supra-phrasal unit, is subordinated to the idea and message of the text (Nikitina, 2017). In this respect, the literary works of Frank Herbert are unique, since the ideology of his texts is complicated philosophical speculation about the most acute issues of modern life, an invitation for a dialogue about the fate of modern cultures (Herman, 2018; Shippey, 2016). The study of Herbert's text from the series of science-fiction novels *Dune* shows strong evidence that the axis of the novels is cultural distance as a cause of destructive conflicts, as well as the topic for writer's speculations and literary discourse with the reader through assessing the models of cultural development.

2. Problem Statement

Scientific discussion about the nature of the text shows the gap between traditional understanding of the text within the framework of style and viewing the text as a tool in a dialogue, in discourse (Page et al., 2018). The study of the literary framework and linguistic expression in synthesis brought to the creation of the generic system, in which peculiarities and preferences of various genres of drama, poetry, and prose have been very accurately described.

Different from that, modern studies of a literary text show it not in isolation, not within the narrow context of verbal expression, but in a broader contemporary context, in reference to the most important issues of modern life, where the text is seen as a unit of communication between the reader and the writer (Page et al., 2018). Its role in the contemporary environment is closely connected with its literary genre, ideology, and a set of textual categories (Boréus & Bergström, 2017). The focus of such studies is on the participation of the literary work in text activity, on the correlation of the texts (Page et al., 2018). Unlike the studies of the text as a product of the environment influencing the writer, the studies of the text in contemporary discourse focus on its influence on the surrounding life (Nesaria, 2015).

Still, there is a lack of knowledge about the mechanism of "reader-writer" interaction, as well as the role of the writer in shaping the ideas of his time. The study of the communicative aspect of the text is timely and important in application to the works of contemporary writers. This is evident if to look at the research of modern science fiction, which has a great influence on modern culture (Menadue & Cheer, 2017; Nikitina 2019). In this respect, the works of Frank Herbert are an open area of literary, philosophical, and cultural discoveries (Herman, 2018; Shippey, 2016; Weidenbaum, 2017). Accordingly, they demand new non-literary approaches to the study of the literary text from the areas of cross-cultural communication, social sciences and anthropology to come to new conclusions about its discourse functions. Present studies

of literature are developing these approaches, but they need further specification in reference to particular genres and writers.

3. Research Questions

The need to develop effective methods for studying the text within discourse brought the scientific community to several research issues. They deal with the dialogical, discursive nature of the text, with its polyphonic nature and with the discussion framework, which can be clearly seen in the works of science fiction genre.

First of all, modern literary research is preoccupied with understanding the text as a rightful participant of contemporary life; there is a constant interaction or, in other words, a dialogue between the reader and the writer via the text (Muzny et al., 2017, Nesaria, 215). This was first indicated by Bakhtin, who understood literary work not only as a form of communication, but as a form of consciousness, thus, pointing at the intrinsic internal dialogical qualities of literary phenomena (Bakhtin, 1981). According to Bakhtin, the dialogical nature of the text aims at bringing the answer in search for truth, though it can probably be not achieved within the discourse (Bakhtin, 1981). In view of this, it is necessary to discover how science fiction texts of F. Herbert introduce the discussion of modern cultural issues through meaningful cooperation between the reader and the writer.

Second, the text study is moving in direction of poly-cultural, polyphonic nature of the text. It can be understood through the term of "heteroglossia", which draws attention to the social and cultural context for the dialogue between the reader and the writer (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 526). Heteroglossia is realized in voices and opinions of different cultures leading to understanding the issue better. Literary text is an ideal form of heteroglossia since it is polyphonic in its essence: through the multitude of various viewpoints, change of narration focus, it is possible to imitate a real life dialogue in the polyphony of voices (Codó, 2019). In reference to the works of F. Herbert, the present research is focused on the way of organizing heteroglossia: whether it is exercised through the strong statement of a single truth, or it is introduced as the process of cognition through discussion.

In addition to these issues, the text as a dialogue tool ignores stability but chooses the unexpected in understanding the morals and the logic. Bakhtin spoke about the carnival framework when he meant this (Bakhtin, 1981). Such an approach is the cognitive mechanism of dealing with contemporary issues and speculating about new, sometimes shocking and unexpected solutions (Eun, 2019).

In this respect, the literary works of science fiction are very good examples. They create new, unexpected worlds, present pure cognitive experiments to imagine other ways of existence and thinking; the works of great science fiction writers are distinguished by an original way of thinking. Many science fiction writers - Isaak Asimov, David Brin, Frank Herbert, Arthur Clark - extended their scientific discussion to the literary world (Menadue & Cheer, 2017). The research question for studying this aspect in Herbert's works is the way Herbert experiments with stereotypes and the issues of modern cross-cultural communication inviting the reader into a scientific discussion. To understand the works of F. Herbert in this context, it is necessary to supplement literary methods with other scientific methods.

4.   Purpose of the Study

The present study is focusing on the literary texts of Frank Herbert, one of the most influential writers of our time and a participant of contemporary discussions about the future. His science-fiction novels of the *Dune* series found response of contemporary thinkers since they offered a chance to consider acute modern issues: ecological, political, cultural, psychological, etc. (Weidenbaum, 2017). The purpose of the present study is to reveal the importance of cultural models, which were created by F. Herbert in the literary texts of Dune with images, characters and locations, for the dialogical framework of his texts and for understanding his vision in the sphere of cross-cultural communication.

Herbert's writings reflect the tendency to place the challenges for modern cultures, cross-cultural and technological problems in the center of scientific discussion and literary reflection in one of the most popular genres of science fiction (Menadue & Cheer, 2017). Besides, science fiction writers attempt to compare and critique different cultures dominated by technology. Shippey (2016) called this literary process "cultural engineering" speaking particularly about Frank Herbert and his vision of the present and future of the contemporary world (p. 90).

Literary studies show that Herbert's alternate universe of *Dune* offers a lot of references to modern reality with its mixture of cultures and technology. Thus, Weidenbaum (2017) spoke about accurate representation of modern religions: Herbert depicted religions of the future as a mixture of Christianity, Buddism and Islam traditions, reconstructed and imitated secular texts and inspiring personalities. The search for hybrid religions in the modern world is explained by Weidenbaum (2017) as the need to start a discourse of spiritual philosophies in the contemporary environment. Kennedy (2016) noted that the language of his books creates a multi-cultural linguistic context with Christian names of the main characters, Arabic names of the Fremen, Greek names from Kaladan creating a poly-cultural, poly-ethnic background. The attempts to look into the literary mechanism of Herbert's influential texts through the lens of non-literary approaches (religious, social and cultural) showed the complexity of ideas and literary structure. Further studies of *Dune* novels through the method, which combines literary analysis with the intercultural approach, can help to deepen understanding of the writer's visionary heritage.

5.   Research Methods

While literary discussion is searching for the means of providing communication in literary discourse, communication theory is mostly preoccupied with the practical problems arising in interaction and the ways to eliminate them. Modern globalizing trends clearly reveal the cross-cultural nature of such problems (Beugelsdijk, Kostova, et al., 2018). At present, there is a disagreement between the achievements of technologies, which enable businesses and organizations to communicate globally, and cultural obstacles (Buil et al., 2012). In the context of communication, the flow of information can be negatively affected by cultural differences, bias and prejudices (Beugelsdijk, Kostova, et al., 2018). Even if the communicants are oriented to tolerance and understanding, cultural ignorance can be an aggravating factor (Azar & Drogendijk, 2016).

Thus, the study of cultural aspects in management brought to the introduction of the key concept to explain the reasons for cultural misunderstandings: cultural distance (Beugelsdijk, Ambos, & Nell, 2018).

In numerous studies, distances were viewed in geographical, institutional, economic, psychic, or linguistic terms (Beugelsdijk, Ambos, & Nell, 2018). The cultural distance was defined as difference between the countries, organizations, or persons, when communicants perceive each other through the stereotypes of their culture, which can lead to wrong interpretation of actions and behavior, including linguistic behavior (Beugelsdijk, Ambos, & Nell, 2018). Cultural distance is created by cultural ignorance, while cultural intelligence, awareness, decreases cultural distance.

At present, there are methods for measuring cultural distance based on cultural values and preferences (Beugelsdijk, Ambos, & Nell, 2018). Though there are disagreements about the selection of values and prioritizing them, the systems of measuring cultural differences can be traced back to Hofstede's system of values, which distinguished six dimensions of collectivism vs. individuality, power distance, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance, long-term orientation and indulgence vs. restraint (Hofstede et al. 2010). For example, Schwartz's hierarchy and mastery can be compared to Hofstede's power distance, while Globe's egalitarianism can be interpreted in terms of collectivism and individualism (Beugelsdijk, Ambos, & Nell, 2018).

The dimensional frameworks are flexible to serve different purposes of study; accordingly, it is necessary to choose the values, which correlate with the dialogical nature of literary discourse. For the present study, Hofstede's framework is supplemented by Inglehart's and Baker's (2000) value of the traditional opposed to the rational, and survival opposed to self-expression. To summarize the studies of different values, an integrated framework of cultural dimensions can include the opposition of the collective and the individual, the opposition of the hierarchical and the free, the secular and the rational, and gender orientation. These values are considered to be literary tools for organizing literary space colored by cultural specificity. The application of cultural distance and cultural values to his literary text is not quantitative, as in statistical studies for operational management, but serve as the key concept, which gives an opportunity to understand the literary process as dialogical communication of the writer with the modern world and the reader. It is based on literary analysis and interpretation.

6. Findings

Numerous scientists studying Herbert's texts noted the complexity and philosophical nature of his books (Herman, 2018; Shippey, 2016; Weidenbaum, 2017). The credo of the writer can be expressed in the citation from *God Emperor of Dune*: "The prophet utters fateful words" (Herbert, 1990c). Thinking about the contemporary multi-cultural world, Herbert created different models of cultural development. The planets of his fantastic multi-cultural empire were distanced by space, history, religion and culture coping with cultural distance in different ways.

6.1. Cultural isolation: the loss of humanity

Cultural distance is most vividly illustrated by the model of cultural isolation. Though this motive can be found in the storyline of any plane, Herbert creates a complete picture of cultural distance in referring to planets Ix, Thleilax, and Giedi Prime. The first planet survived an anti-techno revolution of the galactic empire and remained the only culture to continue its pursuit of technological advancement: it provides the

empire with force shields, weapons, navigation systems, etc. Though the whole humankind destroyed the machines as heresy, the world of the empire can not exist without them. The other mysterious planet is Tleilax, the inhabitants of which deal with genetic engineering. Giedi Prime, ruled by Harkonnen also needs secrecy due to amoral traditions pursued by its rulers. Herbert creates an atmosphere of secrecy and isolation in depicting these planets.

Though none of the planets is given its own storyline, they can be visualized due to the original characters created or living on these planets: mentats (people with modified brains), navigators (people with modified senses) and gholas (human clones). Herbert uses images of distorted physical appearance to show that the representatives of these cultures are different from the representatives of other cultures; they look strange and cause aversion. Isolated cultures are viewed with suspicion and distaste by other cultures: "loathsome habits of Guildsmen, of Tleilaxu and of gholas" (Herbert, 1990b, p. 89). In addition, Herbert codes isolation by the metaphor of physical distortion. For example, the ruler of Geidi Prime Vladimir Harkonnen is so obese that he cannot move without special technical devices, navigators look fish-like, Tleilaxu gholas have modified many-faceted eyes. Herbert attaches frightful symbols to each of these cultures: a torn body on a rack for Giedi Prime, a womb remnant of a woman for Tleilax.

The reason for cultural distancing is a special system of values. A technological approach to development is the core issue of cultural differences. The main conflicts of the book are connected with promoting two ways of development, which can be described in the following citation: "What do such machines really do? They increase the number of things we can do without thinking. Things we do without thinking — there's the real danger." (Herbert, 1990c, p. 346). Thus, the war against the machines is the war against technological philosophy, which uses robotic or human devices to slow down human development. It isolates living beings by turning them into machines: the mentats brought up in Tlealax could be described as human machines for calculation, the navigators are human machines for navigating in space. This harmful attitude to planets can be illustrated by treating the Dune planet as an energy machine with its story of cultural and natural losses.

The philosophy of distancing and isolation is presented by specific cultural values, the support of a strong collective spirit and hierarchy with high power distance. For, example, the Tleilaxu inhabitants don't value names as an expression of individuality: the change of the human name into the name of a clone denotes the loss of human nature and the acquisition of a new collective status (the change of Idaho's name into Hayt after cloning). Rationality justifies any isolation: mentats with their "mechanical" look and "twisted" thinking feel different; navigators lose unnecessary contact with people in their navigating tanks. Besides, maximum distancing in personal communication becomes a value causing difficulties in personal interaction The feminine aspect of gender is viewed negatively by these cultures, while masculinity is shown as something distorted and inhuman. For example, the Tleilaxu breed people in special axolotl vessels, which turn out to be modified bodies of women turned into machines for breeding; the male rulers of Geidi Prime exercise sadistic practices. Isolated cultures are also characterized by restraint and uncertainty avoidance. These cultures cope with cultural distance by focusing on their inner life but they can not overcome it; Herbert does not give them any future in his galactic world.

6.2. From cross-culture to monoculture: the Golden Path

Another way of coping with cultural distance can be seen in depicting the model of cultural unification or monoculture. Herbert (1990c) devoted three *Dune* books to this model: Paul Atreides wins the empire, while Leto realizes the model of unification, called the "Golden Path" (p. 13). It is described as "rich peace with abundant harvest, plentiful trade, a leveling of all except the Golden Ruler" (Herbert, 1990b, p. 398). In fact, it is a despotic rule to implement the program of genetic and moral perfection at the expense of suppressing freedom and initiative by extreme cruelty. Leto as a tyrant immediately executes any person of opposition: for example, he kills Idaho's clone an innumerable number of times. This monocultural world is "an ecosystem in miniature" (Herbert, 1990b, p. 406).

The center of the narration about this model is Leto: Herbert underlines an exceptional role of the leader in closing the cultural gap. Leto has extraordinary abilities and exercises complete control over the Golden Path. Again, Herbert uses the idea of losing humanity: Leto looks like a giant worm with a human face and atrophied arms and legs. His bulky body is symbiotic co-existence of a human being and sandtrout. Herbert makes the main character merge with the powerful symbol of the book: the mighty and vulnerable sandworm. The rule of the individual is achieved by strict collective hierarchy and high power distance, in which the humankind as given the role of "one beast" (Herbert, 1990d, p. 306). Here every person has a role. Leto's experiment with Duncan Idaho, whom he constantly kills and revives through cloning are aimed at creating an ideal embodiment for traditions and restraint. Visibly, the new model closes the cultural distance through uniformity, but its weakness lies in the area of values: freedom and initiative are neglected; the Golden Path follows the previous despotic empire and finally collapses in an assault of young radical revolutionaries headed by his descendant Siona.

Herbert uses the motive of opposition and controversy in depicting the Golden Path. For example, Leto's invincible long-living body is an embodiment of such a cultural value as survival. At the same time, Leto understands that his transformation is the "likeness of death" since it means the loss of his human identity. The gender aspect of this cultural model is also depicted in opposition. Leto embodies masculinity in his decisiveness, bravery, and energy in a frightfully distorted form. The feminine aspect of gender is opposed to it, which can be seen in three important feminine images: his sister Ghanima, Siona as his assassinator, and Hwi as his secret dream of a woman. At the same time, Leto is surrounded by anonymous women worshippers supporting his rule. Though Leto is avoiding women as weakness; his defeat is connected with two women: Hwi and Siona.

Herbert alludes to despotic political systems of the contemporary world, to the countries behind the iron curtain. The model of monoculture can close the cultural distance but it can not survive in the real world. Herbert shows it very clearly by bringing Leto and his idealistic Golden Path to an end.

6.3. The search for a woman: nurturing culture

Herbert's persistent support of the balancing power of women is depicted in the cultural model of Bene Gesserit, an order of women with extraordinary abilities, who become a secret driving power for the galactic empire development in politics and economy.

The values associated with femininity and masculinity are reconsidered by Bene Gesserit. Women of Bene Gesserit behave beyond any gender stereotypes. They don't care for family or feelings, don't

behave in a traditional feminine way of obedience and don't take inferior positions to men unless they have a secret mission of Bene Gesserit. This culture is based on free, resourceful and powerful women, who are a recognizable emblem of the twentieth-century feminine liberation. Bene Gesserit value individual initiative; they have a hierarchy based on respect, on the rational evaluation of personal achievement and self-expression. This is the culture with low power distance.

This initiative culture easily integrates into any system since Bene Gesserit women are nurturing culture themselves. Bene Gesserit are implanting culture and religions on the galactic planets. In the *Dune* book Jessica and her son recognize the results of this implanting when they meet Freemen and their culture. Elements of mythology, beliefs and prophecies are woven into the cultural identity of different peoples uniting them. Bene Gesserit women are real cultural engineers, who help to close the cultural distance. In this respect, the citation "how much is the prophet shaping the future to fit the prophecy?" can be interpreted as a proactive approach of Bene Gesserit women (Herbert, 1990a, p. 277). Though Herbert begins the book with their failure in the genetic program, he finishes the narration with the emphasis on Siona as a vivid representative of liberated women; he places the future of the new world in women's hands: Siona will have to create a new culture in the future.

6.4. Cultural hybrid

Though Herbert's books contain accurate and convincing depictions of three cultural models (isolated cultures, monoculture and nurtured cultures), the books of *Dune* are not centered around them. Herbert puts a special focus on the cultural model embodied in Fremen, who imbibe different religions and cultures during their long migration. Their significance is underlined by the main characters with Fremen background: Aliya, Leto, Siona etc. Fremen culture uses the fragments of Bene Gesserit cultural engineering, the elements of contemporary religions (Christianity, Islam, Buddhism); its folklore is archetypical and can be alluded to many contemporary cultures. By imbibing the necessary elements into their culture, the Fremen created a new hybrid culture that stood the test of times. For example, the major change of Dune ecology from desert kind to a floral one and back again was a serious test for Fremen culture. Herbert views a hybrid of cultures as a solution for the cross-cultural gap.

The hybrid culture is based on several important values, which are not one-sided but flexible in their duality. Here, collectivity goes along with individual contribution and initiative. Both masculine and feminine aspects are valued equally: the emotional, irrational, passive power of a female Fremen character Chani is balancing a rational and energetic power of her husband Paul. Herbert creates a rich traditional background for this culture: historical chronicles, folklore, and language to make it realistic. At the same time, he gives the Fremen rational pragmatic philosophy. The main value of this culture is survival, that is why killing for water in the desert is justified. Along with that, crying is sacred since the waste of water in tears is a precious gift for the dead.

Fremen culture is associated with the main symbol of the books: spice. This is a special substance giving the Fremen a special vision of life. This element connects all the planets, all the characters and all the events, since it plays the main role in social, economical, cultural and personal aspects of the galactic life. In the same way, the Fremen are universal components of the galactic society. They perform innumerable roles (warriors, prophets, teachers, etc.) surviving wars, prosperity, despotic rule or scientific

experiments. Cultural hybrid is the model, which can cope with the cultural distance through cultural exchange, harmony, dynamics of adjusting to the changes of life and preservation of a cultural identity.

7. Conclusion

Though the present attempt to interpret Herbert's literary text through cross-cultural theory can not be considered complete or undisputable due to the depth of Herbert philosophical visionary texts, the limitations do not prevent finding cultural distance and cultural values to be the axis of Herbert's literary creation.

Herbert creates a convincing literary picture of acute communication problems in a contemporary poly-cultural world in four cultural models, based on the notion of cultural distance and cultural values: isolation, monoculture, nurturing culture and hybrid culture, with the focus on the latter. By involving the reader in the conflicts and oppositions of these models and their representatives, the writer does not offer any ready-made decision but rather invites the reader to consider and discuss these problems.

The mechanism of creating a dialogue with the reader is based on cultural preferences. Each model is characterized by a set of important cultural values, presented neither insistently nor simplistically. Herbert organizes his communication with the reader in a scientific mode: objective, argumentative and with minimum emotions. He presents different values in opposition and complexity, in dynamics of the historical narration. Herbert's own opinion could be seen in their significance for the future: only hybrid culture and nurturing culture are given an opportunity for the future in his fictional world. His vision of the future is mediating in cultural conflicts and active cultural exchange between cultures. Herbert's vision of the future media technologies, Internet culture, gender and genetics is created by convincing literary tools: strong characters, fictional details of culture and language, memorable images and symbols. The author involves the reader into the future of our world; stresses the importance of closing the cultural gap.

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