

Jackson Lockhart

Professor John Miller

ENGL-461-01

10/15/21

Topic Proposal: *Dune* and the Nature of Humanity

Frank Herbert's classic 1965 sci-fi novel *Dune* poses many interesting questions. Can we truly change the future? Do we control religion, or does religion control us? In what ways do we shape the natural world, versus how the natural world shapes us? Is there a limit to human ambition? Most important of all these questions is: what does it mean to be human? How far can humanity advance while still remaining human? By examining *Dune* from a post-modernist, philosophical, and sociological perspective, it becomes possible to understand how a novel written almost 60 years ago, set in a future so far away that the history of Earth itself has been lost, still maintains such a level of relevance in our modern society, how it has affected the entire sci-fi genre, and possibly even provide an answer to the questions Frank Herbert presented. How could such an advanced society have socially regressed so far that once again, humanity is led by groups of inbred, feuding noble families. Sociologically, peoples such as the Fremen and the Bene Gesserit have obvious counterparts in our real world such as the nomadic Arabic peoples and the Catholic Church, others represent truth versus idealism, with the corrupt and power-hungry Harkonnens representing the ugly side of America, while the strong-willed Atriedes represent the ideals that America often fails to live up to. Analyzing the characters of *Dune* such as Paul Muad'dib, Vladimir Harkonnen, Shaddam IV, and the Lady Jessica from a post-modernist, philosophical perspective allows us to see the multi-faceted view, and pieces of answers, that Frank Herbert presented to his question of "what does it mean to be human?"

Because this is such a complex question, in my opinion, only the school of post-modernism can allow for a proper interpretation of the text, especially given the post-modernist themes and styles Herbert used when writing the novel. If we can interpret an answer to a question as grand as this in the pages of a sci-fi novel, it would help to cement the academic standing and canonical value of genre fiction, and encourage scholars to look everywhere and anywhere for material of value.