

Doughnuts in Space: Orientalism in Frank Herbert's *Dune*¹

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Abstract

As a neglected genre in the academia, science fiction, silently but diligently, explored the frontier of intellectual horizon through ideas projected into the future in forms of stories woven around outer worlds in distant galaxies. In such endeavours, it relied heavily on world-building, whose foundation stones are alien races, cultures, and languages. In his novel, *Dune* (1965), American author Frank Herbert depicts the Other in the form 'Fremen'; the desert-dwelling tribal natives of the planet Arrakis, for his English-speaking audience, and to achieve such an alien effect, he utilizes the vocabulary of Middle-Eastern languages in his portraying of the alien folk of Fremen. This study analyses underlying reasons behind Herbert's choice of 'alien vocabulary' and his utilization of those words for the fictional nation-building in his novel, as well the translation of those words into the Turkish language in the Turkish edition of the novel; it being a language with a shared past with both of the languages aforementioned.

Keywords: Orientalism, pseudotranslation, world-building, *Dune*, science fiction

UZAYDAKİ TATLI ÇÖREKLER: FRANK HERBERT'İN *DUNE* ROMANINDA ORYANTALİZM

Öz

Akademide ihmal edilen bir tür olarak bilim kurgu usulca fakat özenle ve sebat ederek, uzak galaksilerdeki dış dünyalara dolanmış hikâyeler biçiminde geleceğe yansıtılan fikirlerle düşünsel ufkun sınırlarını keşfetmiştir. Bu uğraşında, temeli yabancı ırklar, kültürler ve diller olan dünya inşasından çoklukla faydalanmıştır. 1965 yılında yayımlanan romanı *Dune*'da Amerikalı yazar Frank Herbert *Ötekini*, İngilizce-konuşan okuyucuları için Arrakis gezegeninin kabile hayatı süren, çölde yaşayan 'Fremen'leri biçiminde tasvir eder ve bu yabancı etkiyi elde etmek için yabancı bir halk olan Fremenleri tasvirinde Orta Doğu dillerinin sözcüklerinden faydalanır. Bu çalışma Herbert'in "yabancı sözcükleri" seçiminin altındaki nedenleri, bu sözcükleri romanındaki kurgusal dünyanın inşası için kullanmasını ve bu sözcüklerin, romanın Türkçe baskısındaki çeviri hallerini inceler.

Anahtar sözcükler: Oryantalizm, sözdeçeviri, dünya inşası, *Dune*, bilim kurgu

1. WORLDS IMAGINED

1.1 Science Fiction and World-building

"Fiction is a kind of fact, although it takes some people centuries to get used to it." (Williams, 1988) This seemingly contradictory statement by Raymond Williams in defence of science fiction con-

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tains all the peculiarities of a literary genre which is generously liberal on its use of imagination in an effort to tell stories of unknown worlds and beings. Though its method of storytelling tended to fall into an all-too-familiar formulaic pattern in the early 20th century, post-war authors travelled light years above and beyond their forerunners. They transformed the non-existent land of those wonder stories, those *utopias*, those *nowheres*, into probably realities of distant, and not-so-distant futures.

One of those authors is Philip K. Dick, and in one of his attempts to define the genre, he offers “the essence of science fiction” as “the conceptual dislocation within the society so that as a result a new society is generated in the author’s mind, transferred to paper, and from paper it occurs as a convulsive shock in the reader’s mind, *the shock of dysrecognition*. He knows that it is not his actual world that he is reading about.” (Dick, 1995)

This attempt at world-building lies at the core of science fiction. And this is usually achieved by the extrapolation of an idea which is already existent in our mundanely earthbound world. Yet this foundation serves only as a starting point, and sooner than later, the author finds himself in a need to “invent persons, places, and events which never did and never will exist or occur” as he endeavours to “tell about these fictions in detail and at length and with a great deal of emotion.” (Le Guin, 2003)

But the journey never ends; and where author stops, the reader starts. If such an end-text is achieved by the author as a result of inventing places, events, persons, and interrelations amongst them, all of whom are built upon facts based upon the real world of experience, the reader stands lost in the midst of a heap of imaginative output, and requires a map. Alien sounding names, objects that do not adhere to the laws of physics, places unknown; all are in need of order, a semantic link established with the real world beyond the immediate text. So, it is no surprise that many works of science fiction – and almost all works of fantasy – include a geographical map bound with the book. Others include introductions which explain the alien world to the reader before he starts his journey into the text, appendices at the end of the book for the curious reader, which expand on the elements of this fictive world in details – mostly in form and style of an encyclopaedic entry – dictionaries that define and explain the alien words used as a part of the story for the philologically-minded readers, and even other stories to expand on, and explain the initial story exhaustively.

These efforts to first surround the text with equally fictional secondary texts are aimed at creating inter-referring network of texts, a system of meaning which is fundamentally linked to the world-system in which the text was created. By placing the story in a web of secondary texts, the author, in a sense, feeds the central texts through this peripheral body of texts and allows the reader to travel within this network through these paths of reference, and allows him to find his own meaning of the central text.

Authors supporting their imaginary facts with their imaginary evidence is nothing new. In the “Preface to the First Edition” of the ground-breaking work *The Castle of Otranto*, Walpole claims to be a mere translator of an ancient Italian manuscript which was found “in the library of an ancient Catholic family in the north of England.” (Walpole, 2003a) Thus, Walpole plays with the minds of his Anglican audience by inventing a peripheral story about the origin of the text and linking it with the Catholic Italy to achieve his intention of evoking terror in readers. And he goes on to admit his inventiveness in his preface to the second edition of the same book. (Walpole, 2003b)

A similar path was followed by none other than J. R. R. Tolkien. In the “Prologue” to *The Lord of the Rings*, he provides a peripheral story to the primary text, claiming that it is actually a part of a manuscript called *The Red Book of Westmarch*, and then goes on to provide encyclopaedic details concerning hobbits – a group of people living in the Middle-Earth amongst whom lives the protagonist

of the novel; Frodo. In the prologue, Tolkien provides information on hobbits such as their eating habits, their love for smoking pipe and even the administrative structure of their homeland. (Tolkien, 1994)

1.2 World-building in *Dune*

These methods of surrounding and supporting the central narrative with secondary narratives were also used by Frank Herbert to develop his fictional universe in his debut novel *Dune*, published in 1965. Since then, the *Dune* universe has expanded with additional secondary narratives such as novels, adaptations in film, television series, and even board and video games. But for brevity I will limit my analysis to the first novel in the series, whose world-building, I believe, was built upon “an ontological and epistemological distinction made between ‘The Orient’ and ‘the Occident.’” (Said, 2003, p.2)

In *Dune*, the Padishah Emperor named Shaddam IV is the sovereign ruler of the known universe and his reign is supported by a league of feudal families (i.e. nobles) called Landsraad, whose areas of control are not only geographical regions on a single planet but entire planets or even star systems, and a guild named Spacing Guild, which as a monopoly on space travel. This three-way alliance is the foundation of the politico-economic structure of the universe and allows additional layers of intrigue amongst secondary elements of super-structure such as families, religious organisations and individuals. And within this universe, a desert planet known as Arrakis, is the source of a drug called *melange* (also known as ‘spice’) whose side effects include a longer life span, a heightened awareness and even prescience in some cases. This is where Herbert wants us to travel as readers. (Herbert, 1990)

And the paths of meaning, the formal links Herbert builds are trifold: a geographical map of the planet Arrakis, secondary, peripheral texts placed within and around the central narrative, and loanwords from the invented alien-language used throughout the story, which adds the impression of what Gideon Toury defines as *pseudotranslation* to the novel, making it “a text that purports to be a translation, but later turns out not to be such as it has no source text.” (Palumbo, 2009, p.96) Such a device adds another mode of dysrecognition to the work of speculative fiction, contributing to its alienness.

To briefly describe those elements of world-building Herbert utilized in *Dune*:

a) Geographical map: Even though the book borrows words from the language of native people of Arrakis (whom are called Fremen) when necessary, the naming of locations, and geographical elements such as *ridge, basin, depression, chasm*, etc. is all in English on the map, which gives the reader an assumption that the cartographer of this map was not a native but an off-worlder.

b) Secondary texts: The excerpts from imaginary texts such as *Collected Sayings of Muad'Dib*, *Manual of Muad'Dib*, *Muad'Dib: Family Commentaries*, *A Child's History of Muad'Dib*, *Dictionary of Muad'Dib*,² *Analysis: The Arrakeen Crisis*, are used as epigraphs to provide an insight to what each chapter will unfold, and to expand the *Dune* universe by implying the significance of what is happening within the immediate story and its connection to the greater world of the novel. These books are mostly credited to one of the minor characters in the novel; Princess Irulan, who also happens to be the future wife of the protagonist Paul Atreides, who will be known as “Muad'Dib” after being accepted by the indigeneous people of Arrakis.

² Muad'Dib is the new name adopted the protagonist of the novel Paul Atreides, after he is accepted by the native folk, the Fremen, of the desert planet Arrakis. In “The Terminology of the Imperium” provided as an addendum to the book defines Muad'Dib as: “Muad'dib: the adapted kangaroo mouse of Arrakis, a creature associated in the Fremen earth-spirit mythology with a design visible on the planet's second moon. This creature is admired by Fremen for its ability to survive in the open desert.”

In addition, texts given as appendices to the central texts are titled “The Ecology of Dune”, “The Religion of Dune”, “Report on Bene Gesserit Motives and Purposes”, “The Almanak an-Ashraf” (with the provided pseudotranslation “Selected Excerpts of the Noble Houses”), and “Terminology of the Imperium” which includes 289 entries. These peripheral texts are written in the encyclopaedic, seemingly objective style and provide further details of the cultural, economic, ecological and philological phenomena of the *Dune* universe.

c) Pseudo-loanwords: Throughout the novel, the reader is exposed to pseudo-loanwords from the language of the indigenous people of Arrakis, known as Fremen, who are a group of people defined in *the Dune Encyclopaedia*³ as “the sole remnant of a people known as Zensunni Wanderers, originally followers of a ‘prophet’⁴ named Maometh.” (McNelly, 1984, p.314) These loanwords serve as the alien vocabulary in the world-building effort of the author.

These formal elements, used to weave the patterns of the fictional *Dune* universe, and the way they are utilized in the novel by Herbert, bring us back to the essence of the genre as suggested by Dick; the shock of dysrecognition.

2. WORLDS COLLIDING

2.1 Orientalism in *Dune*

But a better definition of what Herbert did when he used his methods of world-building for *Dune* would be *disorientation*, rather than dysrecognition. The author takes the reader far, far away in space and time and drops him somewhere around a desert planet called Arrakis, leaving him disoriented. The reader is left with various clues (maps, epigraphs, peripheral texts) to find a path along the book. And as he goes deeper into the story, he finds his orientation, then regains his identity, and his power.

Once the reader goes past this veil of disorientation, he is met with an all too familiar pattern. As Susan Basnett argues “the map-maker, the translator and the travel writer are not innocent producers of texts. The works they create are part of a process of manipulation that shapes and conditions our attitudes to other cultures while purporting to be something else.” (Basnett, 1993, p.99)

When examined with a critical lens, the façade of alienness that Herbert built reveals an Orientalist panorama. With its frontier as a desert planet called Arrakis (a lazy play on the Arabic word ‘dancer’)⁵ with its rich spice resource, waiting to be tamed and conquered by a Western man (i.e. the protagonist of the novel), the text exposes itself almost as a work of classical Orientalist study on the subject of an eastern colony of a European empire, with its focus on geography, language and its insistence on the ways and customs of the natives, its fixation on information as empowerment. The narrative places itself upon an east-west axis of our own world and empowers the reader with snippets of knowledge, works of cartography and xeno-anthropology as “knowledge of subject races ... is what makes their management easy and profitable; knowledge gives power, more power requires more knowledge, and so on in an increasingly profitable dialectic of information and control.” (Said, 2003, p.36)

We see this Orientalist alignment throughout the novel. Its plot with messianic undertones and describing the ‘white man’ as the saviour of the native people of this desert planet, akin to romantic travelogues of the assimilated (but only superficially) Westerners in the East, its artistically

³ It is worth noting that the *Dune Encyclopaedia*, which is a peripheral text to *Dune* novels, itself has a secondary text; namely an ‘Introduction’ which claims that the encyclopaedia itself was edited by an archaeologist named Hadi Benotto within the *Dune* universe.

⁴ The word is in quotation marks in the original text.

⁵ The same wordplay is visible in the Turkish language, as it is phonologically similar —rakkas

lacking but ideologically revealing stylistic choice in providing inner monologues only for the characters with Western-sounding names such as Paul, Jessica, Leto, Vladimir, and Gurney, its depiction of the natives of Arrakis (i.e. Fremen) with excessive sexual prowess and their orgies-as-ritual, the protagonist's imperative power to command through the use of the Voice (a supernatural talent) as "a way of taking hold of reality, language, and thought" (Said, 2003, p.227), and his power to command and control giant phallic objects, i.e. sandworms, literally going in out of a planet called "the dancer", the backstory of an official imperial planetologist enlightening the natives with his scientific knowledge, its condensation of everything Oriental into singular units with invented futures where Zen Buddhism meets Sunni Islam (*zensunni*), and where Mao Zedong meets Muhammad (*Maometh*), its verbatim use of words from Oriental languages such as *aba*, *aql*, *baraka*, *fiqh*, *ghanima*, *hajj*, *jihad*, *hajra*, *ilm*, *jubba*, *mahdi*, *ramadhan*, *ruh*, *selamlık*, *shahnama*, *shaitan*, *sirat*, *taqwa*, *ulema*, *yali*⁶ as examples of the alien language of Fremen, even the Bene Gesserit plan to infiltrate and modify the native civilization for its own gains, all point the reader towards a westward path.

2.2 *Dune* in Turkish: Torn, Translated

All of the elements I have listed above and their implications do not seem to hinder the sense of wonder Turkish readers might get from this particular work of science fiction, as the book has always been in demand since its publication in Turkish, translated twice, published by three different publishers in the last fifteen years. The copy of the second Turkish translation of *Dune* (translated by Dost Körpe, originally published in 2015) I have on my shelf is the third impression, printed in 2017. Though it might seem to indicate a successful performance for a book, *Dune* is not an exception. Science fiction is a genre imported and incorporated into the Turkish literary system through translations almost exclusively. There were only four original science fiction novels written in Turkish up to 1950s. On the other hand, between the years of 1875 and 2013, the number of first translations is 439, the number of retranslations is 512, and the number of reprints is 357. Together, they occupy 66% of the total production. (Koçcak *et al.*, 2017)

These numbers, I believe, besides bearing witness to a somewhat dense fog upon the imaginations of my fellow countrymen, are the results of what Even-Zohar calls "a turning point, crisis" (Even-Zohar, 2000) in the Turkish literary system. It is a sign, or rather a symptom of an identity crisis born out of the "assumptions that [...] the indigenous culture is incompatible with modernization and must be abandoned or abolished, and that society must fully Westernize in order to successfully modernize." (Huntington, 1996, p.73)

Soon after the proclamation of the republic in 1923, Mustafa Kemal, who was the victorious commander of the Turkish Independence War and also the first president of the country, 'created a new Turkey out of the ruins of the Ottoman empire' and set out to redefine "the national, political, religious, and cultural identity of the Turkish people." (Huntington, 1996, p.144) These efforts created a chasm between the nation's past and its future, uprooting it. Although it might seem frightening, I think, it also carries in itself a liberating essence through dislocation, disorientation and a potential for rejuvenation. And, though disproportionately massive when compared, I must admit it bear an uncanny resemblance to a science fiction story.

When we, as Turks, rejected Mount Hira, and in turn are rejected by Mount Olympus, as it is sometimes said, we "infected our country with a cultural schizophrenia which has become its continuing and defining characteristic." (Huntington, 1996, p.154) And out of all the translated works of

⁶ The listed words exist in the Turkish language as: *aba*, *akıl*, *baraka*, *fıkıh*, *ganimet*, *hac*, *cihat*, *hicret*, *ilim*, *cübbe*, *mehdi*, *ramazan*, *ruh*, *selamlık*, *şahname*, *şeytan*, *sirat*, *takva*, *ulema*, *yali*

science fiction, I claim, this “cultural schizophrenia” manifests itself most vividly in the Turkish translations of *Dune*.

All of the words I quoted above from the native language of Fremen might sound foreign, or even alien to Western readers – maybe except for the word *jihad* – but that is hardly the case for the Turkish audience. You can find all of the words in a non-specialized Turkish dictionary, albeit with Turkish spellings, and they are parts of the everyday language in Turkey; more than ever before because of the recent events in the domestic, regional, and global political theatres. And if you happen to be from a strictly secular family with no religious inclinations and have never heard any of them before, you are to hear most of these words in school as a part of the curriculum. Of all the places in the universe to encounter them in a story about alien races from far away galaxies is disorienting, to say the least.

But all this takes a comical turn, when, as a Turkish reader of *Dune*, you encounter the word *baklava*. For those who maintain a healthy lifestyle, baklava is “a Near Eastern pastry made of many layers of paper-thin dough with a filling of ground nuts, baked and then drenched in a syrup of honey and sometimes rosewater.” (Dictionary.com, 2021) To provide a cultural perspective; the exact opposite of the case of having alien cultures eating *baklava* would be an American reading a science fiction story about aliens and finding out that they dip them in their coffee before taking a bite of their doughnuts.

The Turkish reader of *Dune*, who is out to explore the galaxies in his search of a sense of wonder and exploration through the appreciation of science in literature, when confronted with all these familiar words and faces throughout the text, time and again, finds himself where he started; at home, and repeats what Mr. Kurtz said a century ago: “The horror! The horror!” (Conrad, 1999)

Yet all is not yet lost for the Turkish audience. The dangerously enticing and surprisingly fruitful chasm still stands in the grand panorama of the psyche, and the Turkish translators of science fiction wander, reigning supreme as the *shai-hulud* (the eternal one), the great sandworm of the deserts of Arrakis, swimming freely in the barren sands, yet bound to drown in water. After all, fiction is a kind of fact, and it takes time to get used to it.

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