

THE AMTAL RULE: TESTING TO DEFINE IN FRANK HERBERT'S *DUNE*

by

Adella Irizarry

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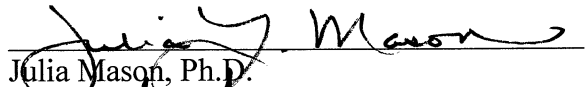
Adella Irizarry

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SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE:



Elizabeth Swanstrom, Ph.D.  
Thesis Advisor



Julia Mason, Ph.D.



Mark Scroggins, Ph.D.

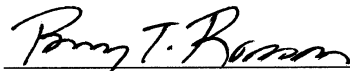


Andrew Furman, Ph.D.  
Chair, Department of English



(ON BEHALF OF)

Heather Coltman, DMA  
Interim Dean, Dorothy F. Schmidt College of Arts and Letters



Barry T. Rosson, Ph.D.  
Dean, Graduate College

July 19, 2013  
Date

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## ABSTRACT

Author: Adella Irizarry  
Title: The Amtal Rule: Testing to Define in Frank Herbert's *Dune*  
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In this project, I focus on the function of the “amtal,” or test of definition or destruction, in Frank Herbert's *Dune*. It is my argument that these tests “to destruction” determine not only the limits or defects of the person being tested, but also—and more crucially—the very limits and defects of the definition of humanity in three specific cultural spheres within the novel: the Bene Gesserit, the Fremen, and the Faufreluches. The definitions of “amtal” as well as “humanity,” like all definitions, are somewhat fluid, changing depending on usage, cultural context, and the political and social needs of the society which uses them. Accordingly, *Dune* remains an instructive text for thinking through contemporary and controversial notions about the limits of humanism and, consequently, of animalism and posthumanism.

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## I. INTRODUCTION: THE AMTAL RULE

The world of Frank Herbert's *Dune* and the subsequent novels in the series is so vast that Herbert includes a glossary of terms at the end of the first novel. Titled “Terminology of the Imperium,” it defines the term “amtal” or “amtal rule” thusly: “a common rule on primitive worlds in which something is tested to determine its limits or defects. Commonly: testing to destruction” (Herbert 513). In this project, I focus on the function of “amtal” in *Dune*. It is my argument that these tests “to destruction” determine not only the limits or defects of the person being tested, but also—and more crucially—the very limits and defects of the definition of humanity in three specific cultural spheres within the novel. The definitions of “amtal” as well as “humanity,” like all definitions, are somewhat fluid, changing depending on usage, cultural context, and the political and social needs of the society which uses them. Accordingly, *Dune* remains an instructive text for thinking through contemporary and controversial notions about the limits of humanism and, consequently, of animalism and posthumanism.

Paul Atreides, *Dune*'s protagonist, first encounters the amtal rule when he is fifteen years old and marooned with his mother, the Lady Jessica, on Arrakis, a planet comprised almost entirely of desert. Stilgar, a leader of the Fremen, who live a stealthy and secretive life in the deep desert of the planet, agrees to protect Paul and Jessica from Imperium hunters, but this is met with resistance from some within his tribe who are

jealous of Paul and Jessica's superior fighting abilities. Jamis, a hotheaded member of the tribe, challenges Paul according to the *amtal* rule: according to the ways of the Fremen, their dispute will be settled in the *tahaddi* challenge, a fight to the death. The winner of the challenge will receive most of his opponent's property as trophies, as well as become father to his opponent's children and, potentially, husband to his opponent's wife. Because the Fremen live secretive lives with no centralized government, their disputes are settled through tests such as these. These tests are also rites of passage: in order for someone to advance in Fremen society, he or she must pass various tests to determine his or her worthiness to be a member of the tribe. Failure of these tests may lead to death or, even worse, dishonor.

Tests of various “limits” (and, I would add, “definition,” as the *amtal* rule is said to test) are an important theme in *Dune*. The structure of the novel is based in literary drama of the ancient world—the young male hero must defeat a deadly enemy. In order to gain the skills to do so, he undertakes a journey to a foreign place where he gains wisdom enough to defeat his enemy and, usually, attain a higher social status. This wisdom is usually imparted through tests—tests of courage, skill, or morality which determine the hero's right to become a leader. The structure of *Dune* both adheres to this formula and subverts it; though Paul Atreides, the son of a noble Duke in stewardship of the planet Caladan and, later, Arrakis, is born to privilege and receives an exemplary education befitting a genius of the highest order, he still has much to learn about what it means to be a leader and ruler. When House Atreides is betrayed by their deadly enemies, House Harkonnen, and Duke Leto, Paul's father, is killed, Paul and his mother are cast

out into the deadly and dangerous world of Arrakis. As Paul later states, the Fremen have a saying about their planet: “God created Arrakis to train the faithful” (488). The challenges of life on this desert planet hone Paul into a leader and ruler, but one different than his father—a leader haunted by a specter of despotism that he despises but feels he cannot escape.

My discussion of what constitutes and defines “human” in the novel will revolve primarily around this theme of testing. Even though the glossary Herbert provides defines *amtal* as a symptom of a “primitive” culture, *amtal*—the notion of extreme testing—has a corollary in all sections of the various societies presented in *Dune*, even though it may be called something else. In *Dune*, many characters undergo tests—tests of will, tests of knowledge or skill, and tests of faith. My thesis is focused on Paul's tests because they are both essential to propelling the plot forward as well as useful for exploring larger themes within the story, such as the function of will, the difference between choice and destiny, the role of moral decisions, and the definition of humanity. Paul's tests in *Dune* have the function of defining what it means to be human within three different societies: the Bene Gesserit, the Fremen, and the Faufreluches. Each of the three following chapters will focus on the politics and social structure of one of these societies as illustrated by the tests which define it: the tests that the *amtal* rule defines as determining the limits or definitions of what it means to be human. By focusing on the politics and social structures of each society, I intend to show how those “rules” affect how each society defines humanity, and, in some cases, whether or not a person can be defined as human at all.



At various points in the novel, Paul is either initiated into or is a member of all three of these societies. As the novel progresses, he must learn to balance the three sides of himself, but this balance does not occur without both inner and outer conflict. Because each society has competing notions of what it means to be human, and because he must maintain membership of each society in some way (no matter how much the idea disgusts him, in some cases), Paul eventually must become a *synthesis* of all three. He becomes Paul Muad'Dib Atrides, the Lisan al-Gaib of the Fremen (a prophet known as “The Voice from the Outer World”), the Kwisatz Haderach (the male Bene Gesserit who is known as “The Shortening of the Way” or “the one who can be many places at once”), and, eventually, the Emperor of the Imperium. By adopting a persona as someone larger-than-life, a living god, Paul complicates and clarifies implicit assumptions about what it means to be human within these three diverse social and epistemological frameworks. This act causes friction within the Bene Gesserit, the Fremen, and the Faufreluches, friction which later causes visible cracks in these once concrete ideals. One of my main tools for exploring this argument will be how Paul's character blurs and pushes against boundaries of animal, machine, and human. In *Dune*, the Bene Gesserit make an enormous effort to keep these categories very separate, prizing what is human (according to their standard) above all else. Paul, as a child and student of a Bene Gesserit mother, is born and bred with this belief, but as the novel progresses, it becomes obvious to him that these boundaries are not as fixed as he has been led to believe.

Before I begin, however, I wish to give some clarification about the status and definition of “human” in *Dune*, because, within the novel, the term is inherently unstable

and extremely relative based on who is using it at the time. For example, Paul Atreides is born to privilege as the son of a Duke of the Faufreluches, the nobility-based caste system that organizes the human race in the universe of *Dune*. (I use the word “caste” in this thesis, rather than feudalistic system, to emphasize the Faufreluches' reliance on birth status, notions of purity, and subjugation, particularly the act of slavery, of those in lesser roles within the hierarchy by those in higher roles. Most critics choose the opposite.) The Faufreluches' motto is “A place for every man and every man in his place” (518). Though the human population ranges into the high billions and is spread throughout the universe, political and social power is confined to an extremely small number of people. In the Faufreluches caste system, one's social status is determined almost solely by birth. The caste system that governs the universe implies not only a rigid class structure, but a fundamentally dehumanizing one as well, since most of the universe's population is unable to gain access to specialized schools designed to “train human talents,” as the Bene Gesserit Reverend Mother Mohiam discusses at the beginning of the novel (a scene which I address in the first chapter of my thesis). These schools are designed to train either members of the nobility or others who have extraordinary talent to attain, usually, a huge measure of control over their emotions and instincts, and in some cases, an ability to obtain a higher state of consciousness. For many of these schools, training begins at birth or a very young age because they believe the necessary skills for maintenance of these “human talents” must be developed in childhood. Those who are not born into the right social caste may not only be denied these abilities based solely on genetics, but may also not begin training early enough to utilize them—thereby not allowing them access to true

“humanity” as the Bene Gesserit would define it. This issue of access is questioned more specifically when Paul and Jessica encounter the Fremen, an isolated but gifted people who show the ability to hone and train their talents in the ways that the Bene Gesserit demand, but would not fit into their strict definition of “human” based on their inability (and lack of desire) to train at “human” schools.

Unlike most of the people in the universe, Paul has had access to the finest education possible because of his social status. Not only has he been trained since birth as a Mentat—the specially-trained masters of logic, reason, and analysis, with exceptional memory and cognitive skills that, quite literally, take the place of artificial intelligence—he has learned the Way of the Bene Gesserit at his mother's knee. He is also a skilled fighter and military leader. But Paul's skills come from more than just careful and expensive training; he is also the result of a centuries-long breeding program by the Bene Gesserit. Thousands of years of careful genetic manipulation, controlled breeding, and forced sexual partnerships have resulted in his particular genetic makeup. With this in mind, Paul's journey to “becoming” human and then to redefining that definition is cast in a new light. Was Paul, indeed, as *born* a human as anyone could be, or did he *become* human? Paul's survival of the various tests he endures is, often, a direct result of his training and education, but is his genetic makeup the key to his ability to learn, comprehend, and practice those teachings at all? This is yet another idea I will return to in my third chapter; for now, this sense of moral ambiguity is a major theme in *Dune*, and one in which I will explore in detail in this thesis.

Each of the three chapters of my project will focus on one specific society in

*Dune* and its epistemological framework. It is important to note that it is difficult, at times, to separate each society; as stated earlier, not only is Paul a member of all three societies at different points in the novel, each society is also deeply interconnected with every other one. My first chapter will focus on the Bene Gesserit, who define what they consider “human” at the beginning of the novel. At first, Paul is receptive to their ideas, but it later becomes apparent to him that the Bene Gesserit are unwilling to abandon their belief that a “human” has the right to use other, lesser people as she sees fit. My second chapter will focus on the Fremen of Arrakis. Their culture changes the entire dynamic of the novel. Although the Fremen appear to be primitive on the surface, both Paul and Jessica must be careful not to underestimate their abilities or the power of their beliefs. Both of them approach the Fremen, at first, as tools to be utilized for Paul to regain his lost status as a noble of the Faufreluches because of their strength, skill, and discipline: as they become more deeply involved with the Fremen and begin to integrate into their culture, Paul and Jessica develop a deep respect and even, in Paul's case, a love for them. Both Paul and Jessica abandon their preconceived notions about nobility and their limited definition of humanity in order to see the Fremen as another form of human worthy of both compassion and fear. Finally, my third chapter will focus on the Faufreluches caste system, and more specifically, the rite of *kanly*, or formal vendetta. The nobility use *kanly* as a means to settle disputes, much as the Fremen use the *tahaddi* challenge; unlike the Fremen, who fight hand-to-hand, the Faufreluches nobility conducts *kanly* using assassins and stealthy forms of betrayal. However, Paul's ascension as a formidable leader of a dangerous and fanatic people forces him to confront these rules head-on, and

examine exactly how he can both obey and subvert them.

The qualities that make *Dune* such an enjoyable novel to read—its layers and richness, its resistance to simplistic statements or interpretations—also makes it a challenge to explore. With this project, I intend to apply the critical theories of animal studies, posthumanism, and cyborg theory to the novel in order to make deeper connections between the events of the novel and current critical theories concerning the evolution of humanity both in science and literature. The complexity of *Dune* lends itself well to a range of critical approaches. However, my primary focus with this project is to perform a deep and close reading of the text, to delve into its complexity and, in doing so, create an interpretation that can be useful in light of these current critical approaches. Questions of defining and determining the limits of humanity are addressed very frequently in science fiction. As a foundational novel within the genre, *Dune* addresses this question in light of the end of the modernist movement in literature and art and the beginning of the major technological movements of the twentieth century, such as the space race and the dawn of artificial intelligence. *Dune* is interesting and important in the sense where the story straddles both the humanist and posthumanist movements. Unlike traditional humanism, which is focused on human agency and ability above all things, even religion, the universe of *Dune* is one in which the nebulous concepts of fate and destiny, combined with circumstances of birth and even of genetics, all play important roles. Agency through choice is somewhat limited, and religion remains a tool of spiritual determination and value (as well as manipulation, in some cases). And unlike posthumanism, the relationships between humanity and technology, particularly

cybernetics, is rarely addressed. In *Dune*, the technological singularity—the emergence of technologically-based superhuman intelligence—proposed by Vernor Vinge, Ray Kurzweil, and other futurists has indeed occurred, but with dire consequences that have affected nearly all aspects of human life in the universe. As I will address more fully in Chapter One, artificial intelligence and most forms of advanced technology have been banned from the universe, and even the usage of artificial limbs or prosthetics to improve life is highly suspect. Humans have no relationship with cybernetics; any ability a human has comes from his or her genetic makeup or is a product of environment or training. There is an emphasis on human “potential,” but this is not related to equality, and is in fact based in genetic and class elitism. In this way, *Dune*, as a product of a transitional period—the 1960s—and of transitional thinking, presents a unique (and to many critics, troubling) perspective on the future of humanity, a picture which is based in classical themes of nobility, heroics, fate, and destiny, and which continually calls the function of these concepts into question.

The scholarship of *Dune*, although vast for a science fiction novel, is usually based in several main themes: politics, ecology, religion, classical studies, or philosophy. Only recently, and likely in light of the posthumanist movement, have questions of the definition of humanity within the novel been explored. As stated earlier, part of the difficulty of examining *Dune* is its resistance to falling within established critical models since it is a transitional work, and its unusual near-absence of cybernetic technology makes it nearly unique amongst major science fiction novels. In the process of developing this thesis, I have found that animal studies, only very recently explored in

science fiction, has provided a useful, if imperfect, framework for exploring the particular themes in *Dune* I intend to address. I use animal studies as a means to contrast and problematize notions of “humanity” within the novel. The two major theorists I use are Cary Wolfe, whose species grid provides valuable insight into the relationship between classes of human beings, and Sherryl Vint, whose theories about “animal alterity” aid my analysis of human/animal relationships in the novel. I will also, briefly, use cyborg theory and Joan Gordon's “amborg” theory about the role of the human/animal interface to discuss the novel. The fluid boundaries of animal studies are useful in examining not only what it means to be human in *Dune*, but why some humans are animalized outside of traditional postcolonial theories. In her book *Animal Alterity: Science Fiction and the Question of the Animal*, Vint states the importance and usefulness of applying the tenets of animal studies to science fiction works:

[A]nimals are at the core of many of the questions central to [science fiction]: what does it mean to be human? [...] Correspondingly, the techniques and motifs of [science fiction] are instructive for thinking through the issues germane to [human-animal studies] [...]. Certain patterns have emerged from looking at how the two discourses come together: animals have long served as a foil for how humans define themselves, a pattern that persists in [science fiction], [science fiction's] interest in imagining the future or “next stage” of human identity frequently turns to images of animals, figured both as what we might become were we to construe our subjectivity otherwise and as a warning

that we can be displaced if we do not find ways to transcend our self-destructive qualities. (225)

Animal images are quite common in *Dune*, though they are unorthodox in relation to human-animal relationships in other works of literature, and even other works of science fiction. One of my main tools in exploring the human-animal relationship in *Dune* is Wolfe's species grid. Presented in his book *Animal Rites: American Culture, the Discourse of Species, and Posthuman Theory*, it uses the ideas of Jacques Derrida to create four distinct categories of "species":

1. The *animalized animal*: basically, the fundamental separation of animals and humans as justification for our use of them for food, clothing, and scientific research. Wolfe states that this distinction allows humans to commit violent acts against animals in this category.
2. The *humanized animal*: our practice of regarding certain animals, such as pets, livestock, or performing animals, as being more valued, spiritually and morally, than other animals because of either our bond with them or our perception that they possess human-like qualities. We tend to be more compassionate towards humanized animals and much more disturbed when they are abused.
3. The *animalized human*: humans who are endowed by other humans with animalistic qualities as to allow, as with animalized animals, violence or oppression to be committed against them. (This is a concept closely related with colonial practices and institutionalized racism.)
4. The *humanized human*: Wolfe states that the humanized human is "sovereign and



untroubled” (101).

Much of my thesis will work with Wolfe's final two categories, because the characters and societies in *Dune* often make distinct differences between animalized humans and humanized humans. By doing this, they often attempt to define what is human through *difference*—what humans are *not* like, rather than what they are like. However, my goal is more aligned with part of the amtal rule: not to test something to destruction or to determine its limits, but to find its *definitions*—in essence, understanding how the characters in the novel both attempt to define human and *fail* to define it entirely.

## II. CHAPTER ONE: THE BOX AND THE GOM JABBAR: THE TEST OF THE BENE GESSERIT

In the famous opening pages of *Dune*, Paul Atreides undergoes a mysterious test at the behest of Bene Gesserit Reverend Mother Gaius Helen Mohiam. Since birth, Paul's mother, the Lady Jessica, has been a member of the secretive Bene Gesserit—a quasi-religious sect of women who control and influence both politics and religion throughout the universe. The test Paul is about to undergo is a rite of passage for young female Bene Gesserit acolytes: it is rarely given to males.

Fifteen-year-old Paul is separated from his mother and asked by Mohiam to place his hand inside what seems to be an innocuous green metal box. As soon as he does so, the Reverend Mother states the rules of the test: Paul must keep his hand inside the box, no matter what happens, or he will die by her hand, which holds the gom jabbar, a needle laced with poison that Mohiam states, “kills only animals” (Herbert 8). Outraged and offended, Paul asks, “You dare suggest the Duke's son is an animal?” Mohiam replies, “Let us say I suggest you may be human” (8).

Paul's fear rises: if the alternative to withdrawing his hand from the box is death, what terrible thing lies inside? He begins to chant the Bene Gesserit “prayer,” the Litany Against Fear, to calm himself: *I must not fear. Fear is the mind-killer. Fear is the little-death that brings total obliteration. I will face my fear. I will let it pass over and through*

*me. And when it has gone past I will turn the inner eye to see its path. When the fear has gone there will be nothing. Only I will remain* (8). The Litany Against Fear is designed to link a rhetorical and biological function: a person chants the Litany to calm himself, and the Litany activates the biological functions necessary for that person to become calm. These devices are part of the Way of the Bene Gesserit, which, as I will explain, emphasizes self-control, self-discipline, and ensuring that the will always overrides instinct.

While the Litany successfully performs its function for Paul, his pain is increasing: he asks Mohiam the purpose of the test. She replies, “You've heard of animals chewing off a leg to escape a trap? That's an animal kind of trick. A human would remain in the trap, endure the pain, feigning death that he might kill the trapper and remove a threat to his kind” (9). She states that the test is designed to separate humans—who, according to the tenets of the Bene Gesserit, possess masterful cunning, control, and contemplation—from animals.

This quotation from Mohiam exemplifies the Bene Gesserit's definition of human. It is essential for the Bene Gesserit to separate so-called “human” qualities from what they consider animalistic behavior—behaviors based in instinct, desperation, and powerlessness. According to the Bene Gesserit, the key to being human is not necessarily being able to *escape* or *avoid* a trap, but an ability to understand that, sometimes, becoming ensnared can be beneficial—that being stuck in a trap enables one to know one's enemies, and hence “remove the threat” they hold. The box is this kind of trap: it tests whether or not a Bene Gesserit will succumb to her “baser” animal instincts or her

“nobler” human ones. Paul, stuck in the trap, is in agony; though he cannot see what is happening to his hand, he imagines his skin “curling black on the agonized hand, the flesh crisping and dropping away until only charred bones remained” (9). This language, reminiscent of meat cooking, reduces Paul's body to flesh and emphasizes not only the extreme pain of the test, but the function of pain in relation to the body itself. The power of physical pain lies in its ability to override the rationality of the brain, to kickstart instinct and immediate desire rather than calculation. Paul knows that if he succumbs to the pain and withdraws his hand from the box, he will die, and so he must control his impulse, even when it feels like his hand is being burned into ash.

Mohiam calls an end to the test, instructing him to take his hand out of the box and greeting him as “young human” (10). Paul withdraws his hand from the box and discovers that it is entirely unharmed, though the intensity of the pain is already ingrained in his memory. But Mohiam dismisses the terrible pain he has endured; she states that a human can “override any nerve in the body” (10), meaning that a human's will is stronger than any pain. She states that test is like sifting sand: “We Bene Gesserit sift people to find the humans” (10).

The distinction she makes between mere people and humans (along with her later distinction between animals, machines, and humans) is noteworthy, and key to the reader's understanding of the Bene Gesserit's epistemological standpoint. Mohiam states that the true objective of the test is “crisis and observation” (10)--not merely to inflict pain on the subject to determine how much the subject is willing to endure, but to watch the *actions* of that subject—to see how she or he acts under duress. According to the

Bene Gesserit, a true human would withstand pain, even at the risk of enduring the loss of a limb, for a greater purpose. All others, including those who would risk death to put an end to the torture, are merely animals.

But why is such a distinction between human and animal necessary? The answer to this lies in the prehistory of the novel: a traumatic event in the past that changed the nature of the universe itself, and makes the distinction between what is human and what is not necessary to some. As Jeffrey Nicholas states in his essay “Facing the Gom Jabbar Test” from *Dune and Philosophy: Weirding Way of the Mentat*, “The Bene Gesserit Gom Jabbar Test must be understood in light of the Butlerian Jihad. By looking at that jihad, we see how the notion of freedom goes hand-in-hand with the notion of humanity in Herbert's thought” (6). The Butlerian Jihad, or the Great Revolt between men and “thinking machines” that took place centuries earlier, resulted in an expulsion of all artificial intelligence from the known universe. When Paul asks Mohiam why the Bene Gesserit test for humans (and, also implied in that question, why there is a distinction to begin with), Mohiam answers, “To set you free” (11). She states, “Once men turned their thinking over to machines in the hope that this would set them free. But that only permitted other men with machines to enslave them” (11). Paul, in turn, quotes back a fundamental commandment from the Orange Catholic Bible, the main religious text of the universe: “Thou shalt not make a machine in the likeness of a human mind” (12). Mohiam counters that it should have said, “Thou shalt not make a machine to counterfeit a *human* mind” (12).

Again, here is another instance of emphasis between human and, in this case,

machine, with what is “human” superior to all. Paul has just endured a terrible and traumatizing test to determine his worthiness to be regarded as human, and so, in turn, to be given privileges associated with a human amongst the Bene Gesserit. (Mohiam even addresses Paul as “little brother” [Herbert 10], showing her regard for him by expressing a familial relationship.) Wolfe's concept of a *humanized human* in his species grid is similar to what the Bene Gesserit seek in their acolytes: they want human beings who are so advanced that their abilities give them the right to reign over all others, even if their social status within the Faufreluches does not indicate they can do so. With that right comes the right to *use* others—those they consider *animalized humans*—as they see fit. And the Bene Gesserit do so, consistently, as I will explain.

In her discussion with Paul after the test, Mohiam states that the Bene Gesserit school, amongst others, was established after the Butlerian Jihad to “train *human* talents” (12). She states, “The Great Revolt took away a crutch. [...] It forced *human* minds to develop” (12). Mohiam's stress on the term *human* is always her own; it suggests not only the difference between human and machine in this context, but a deep difference between what can be considered human versus what can be considered animal, as Wolfe's grid also suggests. Mohiam's language here suggests that machine is also comparable to animal and that they are *both* inferior to the human qualities she emphasizes. It also is implied that many people who otherwise would consider themselves human without the guidance of the Bene Gesserit are also merely animals. The amount of true humans in the universe is limited to those who have attended these schools to cultivate “human talents.” If this is true, then real humanity is accessible by a very limited few. One may not even be

inherently *born* human, but *become* human only through honing advanced abilities.

The counterargument to Mohiam's perspective is that all “humans” do indeed have animal instincts—at heart, we are all animals in some way, and the Bene Gesserit's attempts to subvert the animalistic desires of humans instead of acknowledging them denigrates those desires. The gom jabbar test is designed to ensure this separation between human and animal by emphasizing the so-called human will over the animal instinct and flesh, but this distinction is based within outdated (at this point) ideas about the inherent nobility of humanity and the baseness and primitivity of animality. In light of the posthumanist movement, which acknowledges and even sometimes privileges our relationships with animals and our animal selves, Mohiam's perspective seems even more antiquated. The same argument can be applied for our “machine” selves: Paul has cultivated a machine-like identity in his Mentat training, and part of the way of the Bene Gesserit is to learn how to analyze data and adapt one's mannerisms, speech, and practices based on that data. To insist that all of these selves are separate and that the “human” self should be prioritized above the others shows the deep flaws inherent in the Bene Gesserit philosophy.

Of all the schools that cultivate human talents, the Bene Gesserit are by far the most important and prevalent within *Dune*. For them, the only humans that exist are either Bene Gesserit, or, like them, have been awakened to advanced powers and great responsibility. Everyone else is merely an animal; as Mohiam states, the poison of the gom jabbar can kill “only animals,” which implies that the Bene Gesserit are somehow immune to it. Thus, the Bene Gesserit define human according to their own abilities: the

reason why the gom jabbar kills only “animals” is because a Bene Gesserit has the ability to neutralize poisons within her own body through complete metabolic control, another ability related to their belief in self-mastery and that being essential to their definition of humanity. Unlike even people such as the nobility, where the fear and use of poison as an assassination tool is so prevalent that food and drink are checked at every meal, a Bene Gesserit cannot be poisoned. While this ability would be useful to others, it is rarely shared with anyone outside the Sisterhood (I say *rarely* because Jessica is an exception; she teaches Paul the Way of the Bene Gesserit, which is rarely taught to boys and is actually against the Sisterhood's laws). The Bene Gesserit keep all their secrets close, because secrecy is key to their power. And even though the Bene Gesserit sit close to the throne, controlling from the shadows all manner of political intrigue, their definition of “human” has little to do with nobility, though nobility is an essential part of the established class system. While it is true that most Sisters of the Bene Gesserit are of noble birth, based on how they operate within the political system, the women themselves are not supposed to know the identities of their parents unless they are the acknowledged daughters of nobles, such as the Padishah Emperor's five daughters. This implies that the Bene Gesserit operate *outside* the caste system as much as possible. Most acolytes join the Bene Gesserit with no knowledge of their origins, which, in essence, makes them all the same class. Rank is awarded not on blood, but on talent and accomplishment. These talents may be *connected* with genetic makeup (as Paul's are), but they are not based entirely on a member's birth status.

Because the Bene Gesserit acolyte often does not know her own parents, lack of



emotional attachment is another central tenet of their philosophy. Most would consider love bonds, particularly based in the family, as an essential component of being human and learning how to be human, but for the majority of the Bene Gesserit, the family structure is regarded as unimportant. Most Bene Gesserit, save for the acknowledged daughters of noble families, grow up at their school on Wallach IX, and their primary loyalty is to the Sisterhood rather than their families. Even the Bene Gesserit's use of the terms "Sister" and "Mother" is ironic, since those terms are applied to metaphorical sisters and mothers. In the opening pages of the novel, Jessica quotes another important lesson from her order: "I am Bene Gesserit, I exist only to serve" (23). Sisters of the Bene Gesserit do as they are told—they seduce whom they are ordered to seduce, and are sold as concubines for more significant and important attachments, as Lady Jessica was given to Duke Leto, Paul's father. Though marriage and the creation of family bonds is not strictly banned, service to the order is expected to come before these bonds: if the Sisterhood orders a Sister to bear a daughter, she is expected to bear a daughter, regardless of her own wishes or desires or those of her mate.

But in a rare streak of independence that defies the Bene Gesserit's value of service and obedience, Jessica gives birth to Paul rather than to a daughter, as she was ordered. Jessica is a noted rule breaker: extremely beautiful and intelligent with a streak of the femme fatale, as is typical of the courtesan archetype, she exemplifies the ability and desirability of the Bene Gesserit, but is willing to break their rules when it suits her. As stated before, not only does she defy the Sisterhood by bearing Paul out of love and attachment to Duke Leto (to whom she remains concubine, not wife), she also teaches her

son their ways, a practice that, if not outright banned, is certainly highly controversial. In his article “The Traditionalism of Women's Roles in Frank Herbert's *Dune*,” Jack Hand also discusses the various ways in which Jessica subverts her orders, but eventually comes to the conclusion that these subversions merely place her into a traditional role as devoted mate and mother, nurturing her own ambitions through the profound abilities of her son. I disagree with his assessment; Jessica's subversions occur primarily because of her *will*, which, as Paul's test shows, is honed to be exceptionally powerful by Bene Gesserit teachings. When Jessica bears a son instead of a daughter out of love for Leto, it is because she is loyal to her *own* wishes rather than subverting herself to any other person's will, male or female. Leto wanted a son, but Jessica was not obligated to bear him one; she *chose* to do so because she both had the ability *and* the will. Jessica's *choices*, both to bear a son and teach him the secret ways of her sect, run counter to the central tenet of blind obedience among the Bene Gesserit. They remind the reader that, in spite of the Bene Gesserit's desire to control their acolytes by taking away their autonomy through choice, this ability to choose, and perhaps make erroneous choices, is another aspect of being human that does not fit into the limited definition of human that the Bene Gesserit employ.

Paul, too, questions this tenet of obedience. At the beginning of the novel, Mohiam cajoles Paul into taking the test by calling into question his obedience to his mother, who has expressed to him how important the test is to her. Obedience itself is a act (arguably conscious, or arguably conditioned) of submitting the independent will to a higher person or purpose, and the test measures this in abundance: obey the rules of the

test by conquering the pain through sheer control of will, or die. There is much talk among Jessica, Paul, and Mohiam about slavery and obedience—humans were once slaves to machines but are now “free,” Paul must obey both Jessica and Mohiam, Jessica was once Mohiam's servant, and the Bene Gesserit, as a whole, are taught to regard service above all other tasks. Therefore, when Jessica states “I am Bene Gesserit, I exist only to serve” (23), it is deeply ironic, as Jessica serves now only when it benefits her or her son.

But the Bene Gesserit believe that power lies in obedience, which is why they value it so highly. Near the end of Mohiam's visit, she gives Paul another idiom: “That which submits rules” (26). To expand what she means, she states, “The willow submits to the wind and prospers until one day it is many willows—a wall against the wind. That is the willow's purpose” (27). The meaning of this idiom addresses many of the beliefs of the Bene Gesserit: that, in order to prosper, one must submit herself to the role demanded of her, that there is always a purpose higher than one's own desires, and, lastly, that the power of survival lies not in forcibly seizing power (because once power is seized, there is always the problem of keeping it), but always outnumbering and outmaneuvering one's enemies. The power of the Bene Gesserit relies fundamentally in the obedience and service of its acolytes; even after they become independent adults, a Sister of the Bene Gesserit is expected to place her service to the Sisterhood above all other attachments, even those of love and family. The Bene Gesserit are a collective; though their members are *capable* of choice, their capacity for independence is psychologically and philosophically minimized through idioms such as those related by Jessica and Mohiam.

One could argue, as Hand does, that the Bene Gesserit's philosophy towards power subverts them into a traditionally feminine role: most of the evidence in the book supports the Faufreluches being fundamentally patriarchal (however, just because no female nobles are featured as characters in the novel does not mean that they cannot exist), and typically, the Bene Gesserit exert power through influence rather than aggression: choosing to be the power behind a throne rather than sitting on the throne themselves. But I see the Bene Gesserit's relationship with power as something deeper. Though they do emphasize traditionally feminine characteristics such as obedience and self-control, these qualities are not just limited to women, and insisting this is so does an injustice to women. Paul has been taught to value many of these same qualities—he is the son of a Duke and so will inherit his father's duties and responsibilities, for which he has been prepared for his entire life. There is no question that Paul will become Duke after his father; all of his education and training has revolved around him becoming a powerful Duke both capable of maintaining (or, perhaps, even increasing) his family's status in the caste system as well as being an inspiring and respected leader. Paul's father is intelligent, charismatic, and generous; he has earned the love of a woman as formidable as Lady Jessica as well as the devotion of his men, and Paul is expected to follow in his footsteps. But, by being born into the Faufreluches nobility, Paul must sacrifice any desire or wish that is not relevant for the role he is expected to assume as an adult. Like his mother, he too “exists to serve” his House, his legacy, and his social system.

But there is something deeper in Paul's perception, possibly cultivated and encouraged by the loving relationship between his parents, that pulls him away from the

Bene Gesserit permanently, in spite of his training and many of the qualities he values. During her initial meeting with Paul, Mohiam states that one of the reasons why the Bene Gesserit order was founded was because there were “[...] 'those who saw the need of a thread of continuity in human affairs. They saw there could be no such continuity without separating human stock from animal stock, for breeding purposes.' The old woman's words abruptly lost their special sharpness for Paul. He felt an offense against what his mother called his *instinct for rightness*” (12). Paul's disgust at her words is significant; Mohiam's talk of “stock” and “breeding” dehumanizes people and the relationships they cultivate, implying that every human's main purpose, no matter what their status, is nothing more than to breed. Though this is somewhat true *biologically*—after humans have had children, there is little purpose for them to exist except to give those children enough skills to survive into adulthood—it is not true on a *humanistic* basis. Paul perceives that *all* humans are not merely “stock” to be bred, but are autonomous and deserve to choose whom they have children with (as he chooses later in the novel). Though Paul has been extensively schooled in the Way of the Bene Gesserit, he is not loyal to them in the way they demand their acolytes to be, and attitudes such as those extolled by Mohiam actively repulse him. Jessica, obviously, has noticed her son's strong moral streak and labeled it his *instinct for rightness*, suggesting that she approves of it. (It is also key to note Jessica's use of the word *instinct*: according to the Bene Gesserit, instinct is something to be suppressed in favor of will or intellect, since instinct is associated with animalistic behavior.) This passage marks the beginning of Paul's separation from the Bene Gesserit, which deepens over the course of the novel. For

reasons which I will explore more thoroughly, Paul is immensely valuable to the Bene Gesserit, and his distrust of them will have repercussions that are far more severe than a young Duke merely disregarding some of his education.

The Bene Gesserit offer the reader the first definition of humanity in the novel, but, as I have explored in this chapter, this definition is narrow, elitist, and simplistic. In spite of its attempt to segregate and emphasize what is most “human” from what could be considered base and animal, it betrays many of the qualities that humanists value most: individual liberty and agency, freedom of choice, and self-sufficiency. As the novel progresses, the Bene Gesserit's definition of human will be tested, redefined, and, in the end, nearly destroyed—the true test of the amtal rule.

### III. CHAPTER TWO: JAMIS AND THE MAKER: THE TESTS OF THE FREMEN

Paul's test in the opening pages of *Dune* is the first example we see of the amtal rule, though it is not outwardly labeled as such. The test is designed to define and determine who has what the Bene Gesserit consider to be “human” qualities, and those few who pass the test are welcomed into the ranks of human beings. But the qualities that most readers consider human—our capacity to make self-determined choices (and mistakes), our ability to learn from those choices, and our ability to form bonds of love, friendship, and loyalty, are actively discouraged under the Bene Gesserit's definition of humanity. Their “human” is a person who has advanced abilities but uses those abilities to serve the often dubious aims of others, without question or choice. As the novel progresses to the planet of Arrakis and the Fremen culture is introduced, the Bene Gesserit definition of human established in the opening pages of the novel is problematized. The Fremen are the most important society encountered in *Dune*. Both Paul and Jessica see them as simple, initially, but realize that that apparent simplicity cloaks a deep and rich culture that has become highly disciplined through living in an environment that no one else could survive. Though the Fremen do suffer from colonial oppression, the role of power in their culture is much more complex than a simplified relationship between colonizer and colonized. The objective of this chapter is to explore the rules of that power structure and, in doing so, understand what the Fremen value in

their definition of humanity. In my last chapter, I explored the Bene Gesserit's limited and elitist definition of human; here, I will expand the Bene Gesserit's definition using a culture that both the Bene Gesserit and the Faufreluches have dismissed as being unimportant. The tests that I will discuss in this chapter—Paul's “tahaddi challenge,” which initiates him into the tribe of Sietch Tabr, and his sandride, which solidifies his place as a Fremen—demonstrate different ways of being human.

It is difficult to understand the Fremen without first understanding their relationship with their planet, Arrakis. In spite of its dangerous desert environment, Arrakis is regarded as the most valuable planet in the universe because it is the only place where the spice melange is made and mined. Use of spice is essential for anyone who needs to ascend to a higher state of consciousness—namely, the Bene Gesserit Reverend Mothers, who rely on what they call Other Memory, or the consciousness of their matrilineal ancestors, for guidance, and Guild Navigators, who are able to fly starships by using a limited form of prescience, known as “folding space.” This form of travel is the only means of sustaining trade and diplomacy amongst people scattered throughout the universe. Because spice is necessary for the Bene Gesserit and the Spacing Guild to function, and because addiction amongst the wealthy is prevalent, the spice trade is a highly prized commodity, and the House in control of it is both immensely powerful and vulnerable.

Though Arrakis is necessary for society in *Dune* to function, there appears to be little interest in the planet aside from spice. House Harkonnen, who have been stewards of Arrakis for centuries and in charge of the spice mining operations at the beginning of the novel, often refer to the native Fremen as scum (the same term which they also use towards their



slave population). Unlike traditional models of colonized populations, though, House Harkonnen makes little effort to conquer or enslave the Fremen, though they do subjugate and abuse those who dwell in the cities of Arakeen and Carthag in any way they can, mostly economically. The Fremen have a reputation as fierce fighters, with women and children equally as formidable as men; any attempt to capture them for questioning or labor has failed, and, whenever a battle has occurred, the Fremen have decimated both Harkonnen soldiers and the greatly feared Imperial Sardaukar army. Likely because of this fear of the Fremen, almost nothing is known about why spice exists or how it is made. The Fremen bribe the Spacing Guild with spice to keep the skies of Arrakis clear of satellites to insure their movements and activities cannot be tracked. The spice, the most valuable substance in the universe, is everywhere on Arrakis, and so the Fremen are extremely rich in interplanetary terms, even if that wealth is not made manifest in their daily life. One gets the sense that the spice mining operations happen because the Fremen *let* them happen, rather than them being a colonized population subject to the will of others. (Their name is even suggestive of this, as it sounds very much like “Free Men.”) But this is not to say that the Fremen work in harmony with their planet's colonizers—they despise the Harkonnens and even mistrust the Atreides family when they begin their stewardship of the planet at the beginning of the novel. But careful, deliberate, and honest diplomacy by Duke Leto and his soldiers builds their trust and respect, and the Fremen gradually become something close to allies, though they maintain their fiercely independent ways and keep their secrets.

There is also another reason why the Fremen are much more interested in forming an alliance with the Atreides family: they have a legend, implanted by the Bene Gesserit

centuries before, that an off-world messianic figure known as the Mahdi (like the Islamic religious figure) or the Lisan al-Gaib, also known as “The Voice from the Outer World” and “The One Who Will Lead Us to Paradise,” will come to their planet and free them from the yoke of all colonial oppression. This messiah will be the son of a Bene Gesserit and possess deep wisdom and power; he will also be able to become a fully integrated member of Fremen society. Naturally, Paul and Jessica intrigue them; Jessica, using her Bene Gesserit training, passes an important test from Mapes, their Fremen housekeeper, and Paul saves Mapes's life when she becomes an innocent bystander during an assassination attempt on him. These incidents, along with various Atreides kindnesses like giving water, the most valuable commodity to the Fremen, freely to the city-dwellers and attempting to work with them as autonomous allies, fuel rumors that Paul is their long-awaited messiah.

After House Atreides is betrayed by House Harkonnen and Duke Leto killed, Jessica and Paul are able to escape into the desert, but are quickly discovered by a tribe of Fremen. The Fremen normally kill off-worlders on sight because they jeopardize safety and security, but both Jessica and Paul prove themselves by using Bene Gesserit fighting abilities (called “the weirding way” by the Fremen, because a user can move so quickly as to appear in two places almost simultaneously) to deflect attack. The Fremen are already some of the most fierce and skilled warriors in the universe, hardened by the difficulty of life on a desert planet, but Jessica, who appears to be a weak offworlder, has fighting skills more powerful than theirs. Jessica's defeat of Stilgar, the tribe's naib, is significant because the Fremen recognize leadership mainly through fighting ability. The naib of a tribe is regarded as its finest and most capable leader and fighter (as Stilgar states, the naib is “one who brings

water and security” [Herbert 290] and vows never to be captured alive so he cannot divulge Fremen secrets). But in just a few seconds, Jessica proves herself to be a better warrior than Stilgar. The naib proposes that, because she is a stranger, she use her skills in the guise of a religious leader as the Reverend Mother of the Fremen.

Paul, however, is confronted with a different choice than his mother. The Fremen who attacked Paul, Jamis, is stubborn, proud, and hotheaded, and his humiliation at the hands of Jessica and especially of Paul, who is only fifteen years old, angers him. Jamis invokes his right to the tahaddi challenge, where he will confront Paul in single combat to prove that his defeat at Paul's hands was a mere aberration. Both Jessica and Stilgar attempt to stop the fight, Stilgar by attempting to deflect Jamis's anger away from Paul and toward himself, and Jessica through her Bene Gesserit abilities, but Jamis refuses to back down, and Stilgar eventually acquiesces. Since Paul and Jessica have accepted the tribe's protection, they must also submit to its ways; Jamis has the right to call Paul out for combat, and so Paul must fight. The challenge cannot be refused if Paul and Jessica wish to remain members of the tribe.

Like many elements of society in *Dune* (such as the caste system and the hereditary nobility), trial by combat has a connection to medieval Europe as a means for people to quickly solve disputes without a localized court system; it makes sense that the Fremen, who have no centralized government, would use it. But unlike the medieval versions, which blamed or praised divine providence for the outcome of the fight, the Fremen view trial by combat mostly as an exercise of skill. The winner of the fight wins not just because it is God's will, but because he or she is a better fighter, and status within the tribe is earned

based on the outcome of these types of fights. There are also qualities that the fighters engaged in the tahaddi challenge are expected to show; as I recount the fight between Paul and Jamis, I will explain them.

In order to ensure fairness, each fighter fights nearly naked and armed only with a crysknife, the sacred weapon of the Fremen; no shield or armor is used. Like the nobility of old, Paul has been trained for combat since childhood both by his mother and his father's weapons masters; Jessica knows that her son is "a fighting machine born and trained to it from infancy" (304)--Jessica's use of "machine" here suggests that Paul's abilities are detached from his emotions and that he has the ability to view a battle based towards his likeliness to win or lose it. But Paul is trained to fight as the nobles do, with body shields. With the judgement of a "fighting machine," he is aware that this technique places him at a disadvantage to Jamis, who has been taught no such thing. Jamis is a skilled fighter, as all Fremen are, but anger causes him to be sloppy; Paul can easily deflect his attacks, but is too slow on the offensive to land a fatal blow. Stilgar, misreading this slowness as an insult to Jamis rather than as a result of Paul's training, begins to grow angry, asking Jessica, "Is your son playing with that poor fool?" (303) Stilgar can see that Paul has the skill to win the battle handily, but is confused at what appears to be hesitancy on Paul's part. Stilgar cannot understand why Paul would "play" with his opponent, as it is not a practice amongst the Fremen to humiliate their opponents in the tahaddi challenge. This confusion highlights the differences in value between Paul's home culture, the Faufreluches, and the Fremen; both Paul and Jamis are skilled fighters in each of their cultures, but trained in entirely different ways. The way the amtal rule can be applied here is that Paul is struggling to redefine the

“test”—since the Fremmen play by different rules, Paul must adjust to them, or die.

Another way in which this difference is highlighted is when Paul finally inflicts a minor injury to Jamis's hand, and asks him if he yields—another thing he has been trained to do since the nobility usually end a fight after first blood. Stilgar then tells Paul, “There can be no yielding in the tahaddi-challenge. Death is the test of it” (303). Paul realizes, then, that he is up against a different set of rules than those he has ever encountered: the only way to end this dispute is by killing his opponent. As he hears Stilgar's words, he realizes, then, that the real test of the tahaddi challenge is not just to prove fighting prowess, but to show that one is able and willing to kill another—even a friend—if the circumstances call for it. The “test to destruction” of the amtal rule here is the literal destruction of another human being. This murder, Paul's first, will not be done through a battle order or by the cloak-and-dagger means of the Faufréluches; it must be performed by Paul himself. Stilgar urges him on: “Have an end to it, lad. [...] Don't play with him” (304). Again, Stilgar accuses Paul of playing with his opponent. Paul learns an important lesson about Fremmen honor: that they kill swiftly and equate that swiftness with mercy. Though they are tough and fearsome, they are not cruel; in fact, they find cruelty offensive. They believe that killing someone quickly in the tahaddi challenge shows respect for them, and they are not fond of torturing their enemies. The longer the fight lasts, the more incensed the tribe becomes: they can see, too, that Paul will be the clear winner, and cannot understand why he is hesitant to kill. Here, Paul is still struggling between what is familiar to him about fighting and what is new: he must learn that, for the Fremmen, a swift death is a merciful one. The definition of the amtal rule is that it defines limits; the limit here is the difference between mercy and cruelty.

Jamis attempts one final trick: as he leaps at Paul, he shifts his knife to his opposite hand, a skill he has previously concealed. But Paul can also fight equally well with both hands, and he also shifts his knife to the other hand and lands a fatal blow directly to Jamis's chest. Within moments, the body is removed; the Fremen will take it to a deathstill, a machine that will compress it until only the water is left. Both Jessica and Stilgar reprimand Paul after the fight ends: Jessica, because she does not want her son to revel in his ability to murder, and Stilgar because he still believes Paul dragged out the fight. Both of them, either consciously or unconsciously, perceive that Paul's victory is not just indicative of his fighting prowess, but that it is a step towards a pivotal leadership role. Stilgar makes his suspicion of Paul's future prominent when he tells Paul, "When the time comes for you to call me out and try for my burda, do not think you will play with me the way you played with Jamis" (306). Stilgar is still misinterpreting Paul's actions as cruelty, which is offensive to him; Jessica then informs him that Paul has never killed a man, and this surprises Stilgar. Again, this is an example of a cultural misunderstanding: Fremen learn how to fight as children and become warriors in the tribe as young teens. Stilgar has assumed that Paul has become so skilled a fighter not through training, but use and application of his skills through many acts of murder (as the cruel Harkonnens do). He states, "That's why y' asked him to yield. [...] I see. Our ways are different, but you'll see the sense in them. I thought we'd admitted a scorpion into our midst. [...] And I'll not call you lad the more" (306). Now, Stilgar no longer sees Paul as a fifteen-year-old boy in need of protection, but as a skilled warrior that will have the ability to defeat him soon, if he cannot already.

This ritual has also cemented Paul's place as a member of Stilgar's tribe; he will take

the place of Jamis, who he has defeated. The next part of the ritual takes place: Paul earns his name, as a Fremen must earn everything to which he or she is entitled. Stilgar gives it to him: “I see strength in you...like the strength beneath a pillar. [...] You shall be known among us as Usul, the base of the pillar. This is your secret name, your troop name. We of Sietch Tabr may use it, but no other may so presume” (306). The other members of the tribe praise Stilgar's wise choice—a pillar supports a building or community. It is essential to its function, and cannot be moved without risking a collapse. Unlike the Bene Gesserit, who demand simple obedience in all things, the Fremen earn obedience and loyalty through collectivism: when someone feels they are an integral member of that community, they are likely to consider the needs of the community first and unlikely to betray that community. But “Usul” is also suggestive of Paul's future leadership abilities: this name suggests that, someday, he will be the main support mechanism of the community.

This theme of “earning” that runs throughout Fremen epistemology is essential to their definition of humanity. While there is no separation between who can be considered human and who is not—all Fremen are born human—there is a sense that a member of the community must earn his or her status and be able to pull his or her own weight. A common practice amongst the Fremen is to abandon those who are blind (or, likely, otherwise severely disabled) in the desert to die. On the one hand, this practice does make some practical sense—the Fremen are an extremely disciplined people, and those who must be physically cared for are likely to be a liability if the tribe should have to move quickly or be attacked—but on the other, it is a disturbing practice that demonstrates judgment within the community on who is worthy and able to be a part of it. This definition excludes the

disabled, the elderly, and the sick, though their sacrifice is seen as a spiritual practice—a gift to Shai-Hulud, the sandworm god who the Fremen view as a steward and protector of their way of life. They do not lose their humanity even though they are dismissed from the community.

After Paul is awarded his secret sietch name, he then chooses his Fremen name, which he will be called openly by members of other tribes. He remembers a small mouse he saw in the deep desert before he and his mother were discovered by the Fremen. Stilgar informs him the mouse is called muad'dib: “Muad'Dib is wise in the ways of the desert. Muad'Dib creates his own water. Muad'Dib hides from the sun and travels in the cool night. Muad'Dib is fruitful and multiplies over the land. Muad'Dib we call 'instructor-of-boys'. That is a powerful name on which to build your life, Paul Muad'Dib” (307). It is indicative of Paul's modesty that he identifies with a mouse rather than a more fearsome creature (the sigil of House Atreides is a hawk, which devours mice). The Fremen see the value in muad'dib's life: the mouse is not viewed as an annoying vermin, as humans often view mice, but as a creature with wisdom and lessons to teach for those who are willing to learn them. (The name is also similar to Mahdi, the Fremen name for their expected messiah.) Paul also knows from his lessons that Muad'Dib is a constellation in the sky of Arrakis: a sparkling mouse whose tail points north, a guide-point for those lost in the desert. This symbolic mouse transfers the lessons of muad'dib to the spiritual realm, reminding lost Fremen that even the lowliest of creatures has value. Like the name “Usul,” “Muad'Dib” is indicative of leadership, but a different sort of model of leadership than the Bene Gesserit propose: for the Fremen, a leader is more than just a skilled fighter (although skill in fighting is usually what



earns one the rank of naib). A leader protects and provides for his tribe, as a father would, ensuring their survival. He is generous in time of need, but also understands the necessity of discipline and law. He also leads by example, teaching those after him how to survive as well as thrive. Paul, sensing the significance of his Fremen name but not willing to entirely rescind his old one, elects to keep his given name and be known to the Fremen as Paul Muad'Dib, thereby cementing his Atreides and Fremen identities.

Paul's three names are representative of the three points of the human-machine-animal triangle I discussed in my first chapter: Paul is a human name rich in historical and religious significance: St. Paul the apostle carried the Christian religion to pagan Europe and Asia, Usul represents the functional and mechanical as well as the figurative, and Muad'Dib the animal and symbolic, the teacher and guide. But unlike the elements of the triangle, which according to the Bene Gesserit exist in a kind of hierarchy in which human reigns supreme, all three exist within Paul no matter how much he may try to suppress them, and his attempts to keep them balanced is a consistent theme throughout the novel.

The final part of the ritual emphasizes more important Fremen values. Water is scarce in the deep desert and is the Fremen's most valuable commodity. Nearly every ritual they hold involves water in some way: "water rings," or metallic rings corresponding to amounts of water in the sietch aquifer, is the main form of currency (the more rings one holds, the wealthier one is), debt is paid by water, and water is extracted from the bodies of the dead. Paul is shocked to discover, first, that the water from Jamis's body belongs to him; the cannibalistic overtones of the ritual repulse him, just as he was repulsed by Mohiam's lessening of the human race to breeding stock. Jessica insists he take the water to respect

Fremen ways—both of them are being integrated into the tribe, and both must observe their rituals. Then, Paul is uncomfortable when Jamis's belongings are either distributed to members of the tribe in need or taken by his friends. Paul wonders if he, as Jamis's killer, is expected to take any of his belongings as well. Paul struggles over his conflict to do what he feels is looting the dead: born to privilege, he has never known material need, and has never had any reason to covet or steal anything. He is still struggling with his impulse to maintain his individual identity and his belief that property belongs to the owner, not the tribe. But the Fremen take a different view—either property is earned, or it is given away, even after the owner has died, because all things, fundamentally, belong to the tribe. Jessica leads him in the ritual, calling on her deep knowledge of culture, and takes a kerchief belonging to Jamis. Following his mother's lead, Paul feels freer to engage in the ritual:

Paul felt the diminishment of his *self* as he advanced into the center of the circle. It was as though he lost a fragment of himself and sought it here. He bent over the mound of belongings, lifted out the baliset. A string twanged softly as it struck against something in the pile.

“I was a friend of Jamis,” Paul whispered.

He felt tears burning his eyes, forced more volume into his voice. “Jamis taught me...that...when you kill...you pay for it. I wish I'd known Jamis better.”

[...] A voice hissed: “He sheds tears!”

He felt fingers touch his damp cheek, heard the awed whispers.

Jessica, hearing the voices, felt the depth of the experience, realized what

terrible inhibitions there must be against shedding tears. She focused on the words: “*He gives moisture to the dead!*” It was a gift to the shadow world—tears. They would be sacred beyond a doubt.

[...] “I touched his cheek,” someone whispered. “I felt the gift.” (314-5)

It is not Paul's *taking* but his *giving* that truly awes the Fremen: they have been taught their entire lives to value moisture so much that they cannot even shed tears for the dead, but Paul shed tears for Jamis, the first man he has killed. Jessica's cruel chiding of Paul after the fight was likely unnecessary; it is clear here that Paul feels remorse for the murder, though he knew he had no choice. Paul's tears not only serve the function of honoring Jamis's memory and expressing his remorse, but as an expression of loss for something in himself. Paul cries now because he perceives that his *self* is diminished in some way: his childhood did not end through pride in accomplishment or the reaching of milestones, as most childhoods do, but through the profound loss of a parent, his friends, and much of his identity. Paul is no longer Paul; he is both something more, as he is now Fremen, and something less, as he is now part of a tribe, and part of his autonomy is gone. As Paul takes Jamis's water, Chani, the Fremen girl Paul has dreamed of before he arrived on Arrakis, tells him in the words of the ritual: “May he pass [the water, his water] on in his time for the good of the tribe” (315). The double meaning here is important; not only does the water Paul earns, either through combat, debt, or trade, ultimately belong to the tribe, his *own* water now belongs to the tribe. Even his body is no longer his own.

This sequence, Paul and Jessica's initiation into the community of Sietch Tabr, is essential in understanding what the Fremen value as well as how they differ from the Bene

Gesserit. I have already stated that the Fremen value strength and skill in combat, self-discipline, generosity and giving, hard work, the value of community and the self-reliance of the individual, and both the preservation and taking of life when necessary. When a Fremen dies, his water becomes part of the tribe's aquifer, symbolizing his permanent connection to the community even after his death. All things are “for the good of the tribe.” The Bene Gesserit do have elements of collectivism within their culture, but their culture is based, fundamentally, in their voluntary and elitist separation from nearly everything and everyone else. The Bene Gesserit believe in the humanity of only a very limited population of people; however, the Fremen have no such perception of difference. They view every Fremen with the same perception of human dignity. For the Fremen, one is *born* human, while the Bene Gesserit *become* human. There is still an exclusivity present in the Fremen's view of humanity, but it is an exclusivity born out of long secrecy and both the cultural and literal memory of past oppression. It is also a view that is not entirely opposed to outsiders—once Jessica and Paul prove they value the same things as the Fremen do, they are invited into the tribe as permanent members and even endowed with leadership roles—but one that also privileges Fremen ways above others.

That being said, I return to exclusivity. When Jessica survives the ritualized poisoning through the Water of Life (the last exhalation of a drowned sandworm of Arrakis) and becomes the Reverend Mother of the Fremen, she gains access and insight into their past through Other Memory. This allows her to understand why the Fremen are the way they are: they are an ancient people who sought out the difficulty and hostility of Arrakis purposefully after centuries of colonial oppression and enslavement at the hands of the Faufreluches. Both

she and Paul had originally judged them to be a simple and somewhat primitive people, though a noble one, but with this knowledge they discover that this is not the case. The Fremen live surrounded by spice, which is the fundamental substance used in narcotics which enable the user to attain a higher state of consciousness. This gives them some prescient abilities, which they suppress out of fear, but it also enables them to live simultaneously in the past, present, and future. Paul later observes that “the Fremen were a people whose living consisted of killing, an entire people who had lived with rage and grief all their days, never once considering what might take the place of either” (389). The rage and grief which empower the Fremen to free and separate themselves from other people also make them dangerous, because Paul knows that, someday, that rage and grief must be directed outward, and the consequences of it will be devastating. (This is a point I will discuss further in the next chapter.)

Paul's next test, the one that marks his complete integration into the Fremen community, occurs when he is eighteen. Paul has advanced quickly into a leadership position not only within Sietch Tabr, but within the Fremen as a whole. But in order to become a true Fremen, Paul must learn how to master their means of transportation: the giant sandworms of Arrakis, called singly a Maker and collectively Shai-Hulud. But Shai-Hulud is more than just the worms; Shai-Hulud is a godlike spirit, embodied in the worms, which governs fate and is a permanent guardian of the planet and a protector of the Fremen way of life. To ride a Maker is not just to transport oneself from one place to another; it is to confer with the spirit of Shai-Hulud, which imparts this human/animal interface with religious and spiritual significance. Learning and practicing the process of sandriding is a rite of passage among

young Fremen which enables them to travel long distances through the harsh conditions of the desert without being detected. The worm is also a mode of transportation that cannot be confiscated by any oppressive outsider; a Fremen's ability to ride a worm has nothing to do with wealth and everything to do with skill. As I said earlier, the sandride is also a kind of spiritual practice designed to help a Fremen commune with his or her environment and with God.

On the occasion of his test, Paul, pondering the purpose of the test as he did with the Bene Gesserit box, understands it as a boundary that must be crossed in order to become a true Fremen, another *amtal*:

Yet the meanest and smallest of the Fremen warriors could do a thing that he had never done. And Paul knew his leadership suffered from the omnipresent knowledge of this difference between them.

He had not ridden the maker.

Oh, he'd gone up with the others for training trips and raids, but he had not made his own voyage. Until he did, his world was bounded by the abilities of others. No true Fremen could permit this. (385)

Just as Paul cannot become *naib* of *Sietch Tabr* without challenging *Stilgar*, he cannot become a Fremen warrior without riding the worm. Both are barriers to his advancement. The Fremen value self-reliance, and any Fremen who is unable to maintain the standard of life and discipline required of life in the deep desert is unworthy of the name. In order to become a true Fremen, then, one must master all aspects of Fremen life.

The question of taming versus channeling the sandworm in the sandride is an

important distinction. Shai-Hulud cannot be *tamed*, he can only be *channelled*. The sandride diverts the worm's energy to the Fremen's will in a temporary partnership that ends when the worm is tired. And a Fremen who rides the Maker employs not just skill and daring, but several essential pieces of technology. The first is the stillsuit, which is worn by Fremen in the deep desert and mechanically reclaims nearly all the water lost from the body through natural processes. This enables the Fremen to travel without having to carry much extra water as well as protecting the body from harsh desert conditions. The next is the thumper, a small machine that drums a consistent rhythm into the sand, which attracts the worm. The last is a set of maker hooks, which are used to grapple onto the thick rings of the worm's body to climb and steer it.

Cyborg theorists generally agree that the definition of a cyborg is an organism with mechanical parts or tools which enhance inherent abilities; according to this definition, any Fremen who wears a stillsuit to travel in the deep desert could be considered a cyborg, since the stillsuit is a piece of technology which reclaims water that would ordinarily be lost and enables survival. In her theory of the “amborg,” or her term for the human/animal interface (first introduced in “Gazing Across the Abyss: The Amborg Gaze in Sheri S. Tepper's 'Six Moon Dance'”), Joan Gordon posits her amborg model as both a relation and an alternative to the cyborg model proposed by Donna Haraway in “A Cyborg Manifesto” and other works of cyborg theory. Gordon theorizes that the concept of the amborg allows us to understand the human/animal interface as “hybridizing creatures in the state of always becoming, rather than ever being: [humans in the human/animal interface] must necessarily employ the amborg gaze, and each gaze changes them further” (195). A Fremen who rides the Maker

employs the amborg gaze: the relationship between them is not a relationship of taming, as one would a horse or other domesticated animal. As stated earlier, it is one of *channeling*—diverting the worm temporarily from its life to serve the needs of the Fremen who rides it. The worm is wild, and only under temporary control. When it is tired, it is let go to bury itself in the sand and rest, and another is called to take its place. It is also ritualistically thanked for its participation in the ride, falling into the boundaries of Wolfe's *humanized animal* in the species grid. In this sense, the animal's habits are interfered with by the most minimal of means—the Fremen riders are more like an inconvenience to the worm than a duty or devotion.

In her book *Animal Alterity: Science Fiction and the Question of the Animal*, Sherryll Vint explores the role of animals in science fiction, using the term “alterity” to signify the relationship of otherness between animals and humans as well as how science fiction, in general, pushes against those boundaries. Since my thesis is primarily concerned with definitions of humanity, it also makes sense, I feel, to understand the relationship between the Fremen and the sandworm. In some cases, Vint sees animals as a form of technology humans use in order to accomplish their goals, such as gaining scientific knowledge in laboratory testing. I argue that the Fremen's view of Shai-Hulud falls somewhat into that model—the sandworms are not just humanized animals because Shai-Hulud remains sacred—but he is a tool utilized by the Fremen to accomplish goals, whether it be travel, spice production, or the making of the Water of Life. The communion with Shai-Hulud is part of a Fremen's spiritual life, symbolizing eternal freedom from oppression and high regard for the Fremen way of life. Vint, citing Haraway's *Where Species Meet*, states that



companion species are more than just humans and domesticated animals: the term companion species “implies instead of radical reshaping not only of the human-animal bond but also of our understanding of both the human and non-human partner in the relationship. [...] [B]oth partners in the exchange are companion species, each to the other, rather than the more typical understanding of domesticated animals as species who have become companions to humans. Haraway [...] insists that both humans and other animals are changed in this metaphysics of subjectivity” (44). Haraway's perspective here is useful in understanding the importance of Shai-Hulud and the sandride to the Fremen: not only do the Fremen change in the sandride by employing the amborg gaze, but the worm changes as well. It gains personality and significance within the spiritual and practical practice of the sandride.

The Maker that Paul summons during his sandride is extremely large, the largest he has ever seen. Called an “old man of the desert” (Herbert 402) perhaps as an allusion to Moses, it “appeared to be more than half a league long, and the rise of the sandwave at its cresting head was like the approach of a mountain” (391). Like a true son of a Bene Gesserit, Paul climbs the maker carefully but easily; he is careful to utilize all his training and not show off and risk an accident. Though Stilgar criticizes Paul's technique, he acknowledges that he passes the test:

“Then I am a sandrider, Stil?”

“Hal yaum! You are a sandrider this day.” [...]

“And I am a Fremen born this day in the Habbanya erg. I have had no life before this day. I was as a child until this day.”

“Not quite a child,” Stilgar said. (404)

As it did when Paul Atreides was renamed Usul and Paul Muad'Dib after the tahaddi challenge, the completed rite of passage is a rebirth of sorts—Paul suggests that, now, he is a man in the sense where his way of looking at the world has changed entirely. His remarks about being like a child before the sandride is indicative of this shift in his perspective. He is now, truly, a “free man,” able to go where he pleases when he wishes to go, a freedom that he could not enjoy even when he was the son of a Duke. Now, he can travel without a spacecraft or a road, in a way that is untraceable. He can also now channel the most dangerous animal on Arrakis and subvert it to his will.

The Fremen's relationship with the animal, especially the worm, is one that I wish to add to their definition of humanity. As a whole, *Dune* features few pets or “companion animals,” which is why I believe the Fremen's relationship with Shai-Hulud to be significant. They do not normally domesticate animals (the only other animal they tame are the bats used to send messages like carrier pigeons); firstly, it is because they would require water that the Fremen cannot spare, and secondly, the notion of domesticated animals goes against the Fremen's current relationship with their environment. They respect it as dangerous, and learn what they can from it, but their attempts to tame it are limited and careful—they intend to terraform their planet, but understand that the process must be done gradually or risk disaster to the ecosystem which creates the spice (their and the universe's source of wealth) and the desert that they treasure. The Fremen associate life in the deep desert with both freedom and trial; the skills they employ in order to survive in the desert are echoed in their culture.

Returning to the Fremen's relationship with animals, in the introduction to her book,

Vint mentions that relationships with animals are less common in science fiction than in other genres (the fantasy hero or heroine's relationship with dogs or horses comes to mind), and in this sense, Herbert's exclusion of humanized animals is not unusual. He is more concerned with how *humans* animalize each other and the reasons why they do so. The Fremen are not unusual in this; though their model of humanity is much broader than that of the Bene Gesserit, it is still limited, and still exclusionary. In my final chapter, I will examine the broader social system to which all the characters in the novel belong, whether they acknowledge it or not—the Faufreluches—and how the status of humanity in that social and epistemological system is also problematized in the denouement of *Dune*.

#### IV. CHAPTER THREE: THE RULES OF KANLY: THE TEST OF THE FAUFRELUCHES

The previous chapters of this project have presented two different ways of being human in *Dune*, with some aspects, such as allegiance to community, in common, while others, such as self-determination, radically different. In spite of their ideological differences, all characters in *Dune* are part of a larger system: the Faufreluches caste system, which determines the social order of all human beings.

The three main noble houses of the Faufreluches seen in *Dune*—House Atreides, House Harkonnen, and House Corrino—all have some association with animals. The symbol of House Atreides is the hawk. Duke Leto Atreides is described as hawk-like, and his father, the Old Duke, was infamously killed in a bullfight. House Corrino, the Imperial House, takes the lion as their mascot—symbolic of kings, nobility, and the ultimate predator. House Harkonnen's symbol is a fictional animal—the griffin, a mixture of the bird of prey associated with House Atreides and the Corrino lion—but they are often portrayed as an entirely different animal.

The Harkonnens are often referred to as “beasts,” with the most hated member of their family given the title of “Beast” himself—Glossu Rabban, who is ostensibly in charge of mining operations on Arrakis. His uncle, the Baron, has deliberately set him up for failure; he favors Rabban's younger brother, Feyd-Rautha, for inheritance of his title,

and the Baron purposefully keeps Feyd-Rautha away from Arrakis so that he can later emerge as the savior of the oppressed Fremen who dwell in the cities of Arakeen and Carthag (a tactic straight out of Machavelli's *Prince*, according to Kevin Mulcahy in his article "The Prince on Arrakis: Frank Herbert's Dialogue With Machiavelli"). "Beast" Rabban is permitted to brutalize the Fremen to suit the Baron's own ends, but this is not unusual for House Harkonnen, as I will explain. I begin this chapter with these facts to emphasize that, in spite of the Bene Gesserit's insistence on separating animal from human, the animal always remains part of culture in some form, even symbolically.

Sherryl Vint states in *Animal Alterity* that

the motif of animality works to show that humans are more beastly even than the beasts, not redeeming the denigration of the animal that occurs via the human-animal boundary but instead using this imagery to conduct an even harsher critique of humanity's failure to achieve humane status. [...] This symbolic use of animal imagery [...], within [science fiction], is frequently linked to fears about degeneration as a consequence of humanity's self-destructive tendencies. (171-2)

The use of animal imagery in the Faufreluches is both symbolic, in the sense where the sigil of each House is meant to convey its philosophy and personality, and this symbolism, especially in the cases of House Harkonnen and House Corrino, sometimes gives the House more nobility than it deserves. But, as Vint discusses, the use of animal imagery, particularly in the case of the Harkonnens, is designed to illustrate that House's degradation and depravity. Its sigil is laughable; they are more often called beasts, and are

doomed to destroy themselves.

As stated in the introduction, human society in *Dune* is locked into a caste-based system, with few opportunities for upward mobility. Without sophisticated computer systems, humans still perform many of the tasks that would have died out as a result of automation, such as manufacturing, piloting, and service, military, and agricultural work. There is also a system of slavery, with House Harkonnen as the worst culprits; unlike Paul, who learns how to fight via non-lethal means, Feyd-Rautha hones his fighting abilities by killing slaves in gladiatorial games. The slave is a major source of labor for the Harkonnens and for other Houses in the Imperium; many are born into the trade, and those few characters who manage to rise above their birth caste, such as Gurney Halleck, the Atreides swordmaster who was once a Harkonnen slave, do so mostly through luck.

These facts are important because they relate to a theme in my project: that the lines between “animal,” “machine,” and “human” are not so easily discernible in spite of certain characters' efforts to maintain their separation. In *Dune*, the characters we encounter are not only *humanized humans*, to use Wolfe's term, but *animalized humans* as well. In Wolfe's original definition, the *animalized human* is defined as animalized as a means to lessen their humanity and enable oppression. However, the Harkonnens prove that this animalization can be *reversed* as well—when a human acts like our idea of how an animal (namely, a predator) should act, he is in turn animalized by those whom he oppresses. He becomes a “beast” with a “stench” instead of a human being. In many ways, this process separates Rabban and the Harkonnens—it makes it more acceptable to slaughter them, because they are not really human—but it also denies them their

humanity.

I have spent much of my project both exploring and problematizing the question of “human.” In my final chapter, I intend to explore the human as defined by the Faufreluches. In my first chapter, I discussed the problematic definition of “human” held by the Bene Gesserit; now, I return to the same theme, but with a different set of standards for determining who or what is “human” in mind. Without the Bene Gesserit to “free” them, the people of the Faufreluches believe they are human and operate under assumptions based on that belief, just as the Fremen do. As many critics have previously discussed, the caste-based system in *Dune* is troublesome, but I think my theme can provide some insight into its inner workings.

One of the ways I wish to explore this further is through the concept of kanly. I see the Fremen's revenge as yet another form of kanly—one which, since it operates outside of the system of the Faufreluches, is not always governed by its rules. My argument is that, in the denouement of *Dune*, there are two forms of kanly. The first is the Fremen's battle for control and recognition of their own planet, resulting in them coming out of the shadows and into both light and fear as a formidable military and cultural force. The second is Paul's hand-to-hand battle with Feyd-Rautha, which is, in many ways, similar to his fight with Jamis, and the last example seen in the novel of the amtal rule. One of these forms of kanly is governed by the rules of the Faufreluches, while the other is not.

After Paul, Gurney, and the Fremen utterly decimate the struggling Harkonnen army and the Emperor's Sardaukar, Paul takes back his family's former palace in

Arakeen. The Emperor, his household, the Reverend Mother Mohiam, and representatives of some of the leading Fauflreluches families are brought into the palace to discuss their terms of surrender, as the Bene Gesserit and the Spacing Guild have withdrawn their support for the Emperor in light of his embarrassing defeat. Gurney Halleck points out the last living Harkonnen is in the Emperor's entourage—Feyd-Rautha. Gurney also has a reason for kanly against the Harkonnens; they murdered his sister as well as his Duke, and he desires his own revenge:

Paul raised his voice, called out to the Emperor: “Majesty, is there a Harkonnen among you?”

Royal disdain revealed itself in the way the Emperor turned to look at Paul. “I believe my entourage has been placed under the protection of your ducal word.” [...]

“You have the word of a Duke,” Paul said, “but Muad'Dib is another matter. *He* may not recognize your definition of what constitutes an entourage. My friend Gurney Halleck wishes to kill a Harkonnen. If he--”

“Kanly!” Feyd-Rautha shouted. [...] “Your father named this vendetta, Atreides. You call me coward when you hide among your women and offer to send a lackey against me!”

[The Emperor stated,] “Kanly, is it? There are strict rules for kanly.” [...]

“M'Lord,” Gurney said, “You promised me my day against the Harkonnens.”

“You've had your day against them,” Paul said [...].



“There's no need for this,” Jessica said. “There are easier ways, Paul.”

Paul stepped out of his stillsuit, slipped the crysknife from its sheaf in his mother's hand. “Poison, an assassin, all the old familiar ways.”

“You promised me a Harkonnen!” Gurney hissed, and Paul marked the rage in the old man's face [...]. “You owe it to me, m'Lord.”

“Have you suffered from them more than I?” Paul asked.

“My sister,” Gurney rasped. “My years in the slave pits--”

“My father,” Paul said. “My good friends and companions, Thufir Hawat and Duncan Idaho, my years as a fugitive without rank or succor...and one more thing, it is now kanly and you know as well as I that rules must prevail.”

Halleck's shoulders sagged. “M'Lord, if that swine...he's no more than a beast you'd spurn with your foot and then discard the shoe because it's been contaminated. Call in an executioner, if you must, or let me do it, but don't offer yourself to--”

“Muad'Dib need not do this thing,” Chani said.

[...] “But the Duke Paul must,” he said. (Herbert 479-81)

This passage is important for several reasons: firstly, the separations between Paul's identities as Muad'Dib and as Duke Paul Atreides. There are things that Duke Paul must do, such as answer Feyd-Rautha's call for kanly according to the rules and traditions of the Faufreluches, that are not necessary for Muad'Dib, the Mahdi of the Fremen. As I have stated, kanly is usually conducted using secretive means such as poison or

professional assassins, tactics designed to avoid harm to innocent bystanders. As Gurney points out, Paul Muad'Dib could merely order a Fedaykin, a member of his personal guard, to collect Feyd-Rautha's head and one would gladly obey him (and would even, likely, consider it an honor). However, Duke Paul, conscious of his role as a member of the Faufreluches and not wishing there to be any question of the outcome, concedes to obey the ancient rules. In this way, he acknowledges Feyd-Rautha as part of the Faufreluches and not merely as an animal to be slaughtered, as Gurney wishes to portray him.

This is the first time that Paul acknowledges the humanity of his enemy. It is a minimal acknowledgement; Paul states, "This being has human shape, Gurney, and deserves human doubt" (481). Though Paul hesitates to call him entirely human, as Feyd-Rautha is the most horrible kind of human, a vicious murderer and slave-driver, he acknowledges that Feyd-Rautha is human nonetheless, and agrees to fight him hand-to-hand as the Fremmen do, in a challenge for power. This revisit of the tahaddi challenge seen earlier in the novel presents a revised version of the amtal rule: if the tahaddi challenge served the purpose of presenting and defining what it meant to be a Fremmen, the kanly ritual provides the definition of what it means to be a noble of the Faufreluches. In the Faufreluches, kanly is invoked as a means of settling personal vendetta and, like in the tahaddi challenge, certain rules must be obeyed. Outsiders and innocents must not be hurt, and the participants are meant to fight honorably, as equals and acknowledged human beings.

But Feyd-Rautha does not give Paul the same honor of acknowledging his

humanity. In yet another example of animalization, Feyd-Rautha refers to Chani as Paul's "pet," therefore demeaning both her status as Paul's chosen mate and her status as a human being at all. As they fight, Feyd-Rautha taunts Paul, calling him a pagan, insulting his cautious fighting style, and threatening to steal and enslave Chani after he kills Paul. Feyd-Rautha manages to wound Paul slightly, and his Bene Gesserit training senses that the Emperor's blade has been poisoned, not to kill, but to slow down any opponent it cuts. With this realization, Paul understands that, although the rules of the fight are similar to those of the Fremen tahaddi challenge, the Emperor and Feyd-Rautha do not fight honorably and honestly, as the Fremen do. The Faufreluches' reliance on secretive and subtle means of assassination, like poison, has filtered into this fight as well. Paul has attempted to make this fight as honorable and equal as possible, out of respect for his opponent as well as necessity, but he knows that any fight in the Faufreluches is inevitably and inescapably unfair. Their respect for the "rules" goes only as far as the rules' ability to ensnare an opponent who is too willing to honor them. Feyd-Rautha and the Emperor's attempt to sabotage the fight and willfully disobey the rules of kany shows their fundamental disregard for anyone who does not fit their definition of human: Paul is no longer a human being to them, an equal worthy of respect within their own social system, but an animalized human that must be "put down" by any means necessary.

This same issue arises again when Paul wins the fight. He kills Feyd-Rautha in spite of the Emperor's poisoned blade and the poisoned needle hidden in Feyd-Rautha's clothing. The Emperor, knowing he has lost but desperate to hold onto his throne (which Paul now, rightfully, owns), orders his best friend and closest advisor, Count Fenring, to

kill Paul. Paul is astonished to see Fenring, whom he had never seen with his prescient abilities: “Fenring was one of the might-have-beens, an almost-Kwisatz Haderach, crippled by a flaw in the genetic pattern—a eunuch, his talent concentrated into furtiveness and inner seclusion. A deep compassion for the Count flowed through Paul, the first sense of brotherhood he'd ever experienced” (487). It is ironic that Paul finds this sense of brotherhood with Fenring, of all people, but Paul has never met anyone like himself. Fenring feels it, too, and flatly refuses to follow the Emperor's order.

The Emperor, now, is truly defeated—no one else will be a match for Paul, and the Imperial Sardaukar have been decimated. Paul and the Fedaykin now control the spice (and, through that, the interplanetary economy, because it cannot function without spice production). Paul again makes a separation between his role as Duke and his role as Muad'Dib: “Your person is safe in my presence, [Emperor]” Paul said. “An Atrides promised it. Muad'Dib, however, sentences you to your prison planet” (487). Again, Muad'Dib can do what Duke Paul Atrides cannot. A Duke cannot depose his Emperor, but Muad'Dib, the religious leader of a dangerous and angry army thirsty for lasting revenge, does not hesitate to do this. The Paul who feared the Fremen jihad and would have done anything to stop it is gone; he does not thirst for the power of an Emperor, exactly, but he understands that the jihad is no better or worse than the many atrocities the Imperium has committed over its centuries of rule, and that the consequences of not letting events take their course could be worse. Paul knows, now, that the jihad is unstoppable—the Fremen will wage war with or without Paul, as they now fight for Muad'Dib, the symbolic self to whom no rules apply.

I stated in my introduction that, at the end of *Dune*, Paul is a synthesis of three different identities. The first is his Atreides self, a Duke of the Faufreluches, bound by their rules. This identity is nearly obliterated in the wake of the two others: Usul, a member of Sietch Tabr and the lover of Chani, reborn in the ways of the Fremen and forever a member of their society. The last and most unpredictable is Muad'Dib, most beloved of the Fremen and also the source of danger, because he is *more* than human. He is the Mahdi, having immense power but with little ability to control that power because it extends beyond himself. The Fremen make the Mahdi real; it is their belief, devotion, and love which powers the legend, just as it powers the jihad they wage in his name, a jihad that the human Paul Atreides loathes.

I also stated in my introduction that a fundamental question I intended to answer is whether or not, in the universe of *Dune*, one is *born* human or *becomes* human. The answer, of course, depends on the lens which one uses to examine the question. The Bene Gesserit would argue that one *becomes* human; that training awakens those *human* talents which they regard so highly. This question for the Fremen and the Faufreluches would be much more complex: the argument would likely be that some people are more human than others, either by birth or belief. Like most of the concepts in *Dune*, the definition of human remains ambiguous and relative. Paul's final view is that *all* people are human, and his vision of the jihad haunts him because he regards all human life as valuable. After the Fedaykin are victorious and the palace at Arakeen is reclaimed, Paul callously states in an oft-quoted line, "There are no innocent any more" (471), a statement which he later regrets when Jessica points out Chani mourning their son, murdered by the Sardaukar.

The infant Leto's murder will be only one amongst many billions, destroyed through kanly or Muad'Dib's jihad. But Paul's doom is his role as a fulcrum: out of many terrible possible futures, he must decide which of these futures he must live with. With her own prescient abilities, Mohiam can see the terror of the Fremen jihad, fueled by centuries of righteous anger, as well; she states, "You cannot loose these people on the universe!" Paul responds sarcastically, "You will think back to the gentle ways of the Sardaukar!" (488)

With this statement, Paul acknowledges that oppression and murder are ever-present in human life. It is ironic that the Fremen label Paul as the Lisan al-Gaib, "The One Who Will Lead Us to Paradise," when, in reality, paradise does not exist. The universe of *Dune* is by no means a utopia, and Paul knows, in his deep awareness, that utopia will never exist because all humans are fundamentally flawed. Paul's perspective is valuable, not only as the book's protagonist and our main lens into the events of the novel, but by what he represents: as Lorenzo DiTommaso states in "History and Historical Effect in Dune," "Paul represents the zenith of [...] training. He has been taught by a Bene Gesserit [...], a Mentat [...], [Atrides] warmasters [...], and a Duke [...]. He is at the apex of the pyramidal Faufreluches, even down to his superior genetic history" (314-15). Paul's character encompasses all possible versions and values of humanity within the universe. His prescience, the long-planned tool by which the Bene Gesserit thought they would rule the universe, is instead turned into a curse: like the oracles of Greek literature, Paul is doomed to know the future (actually, all possible futures), yet trapped within his own prophecies, both the ones he creates and the ones

placed upon him by others. Muad'Dib is both him and not him; he is the catalyst for the jihad, but powerless to control it. Before Paul battles Feyd-Rautha for the throne of the Emperor, he

sampled the time-winds, sensing the turmoil, the storm nexus that now focused on this moment place. [...] Here was the unborn jihad, he knew. Here was the race consciousness that he had known once as his own terrible purpose. Here was reason enough for a Kwisatz Haderach or a Lisan al-Gaib or even the halting schemes of the Bene Gesserit. The race of humans had felt its own dormancy, sensed itself grow stale and knew now only the need to experience turmoil in which the genes would mingle and the strong new mixtures survive. [...] And Paul saw how futile were any efforts of his to change any bit of this. He had thought to oppose the jihad within himself, but the jihad would be. His legions would rage out from Arrakis even without him. (Herbert 482)

Throughout the novel, Paul attempts to prevent the Fremen jihad, only to realize, with sorrow and horror, that it both ultimately unpreventable and entirely necessary. In spite of its promise, humans grow bored with utopia and suffer in Paradise. Fundamentally, in spite of humankind's perception of themselves as above animals, their instincts are animal instincts—to procreate with others so that they can survive. If any one person or group attempts to control this instinct, as the Bene Gesserit attempt to, they will ultimately fail. Humankind will always find a way out of this trap, and also destroy the one who entrapped them, removing the threat to their kind.

One of the first pieces of advice given in *Dune* by Duke Leto, whose wisdom is undervalued and cut short by his murder, is about entrapment—a concept that a powerful Duke of the Faufreluches is familiar with. He tells his son, “Knowing where the trap is—that's the first step in evading it. This is like single combat, Son, only on a larger scale—a feint within a feint within a feint...seemingly without end. The task is to unravel it” (43-4). The story that *Dune* tells is this unravelling of the trap of definition, and through that, control and subjugation, and the solution to this trap is rebellion and submission to our own instinct for rightness.



## V. CONCLUDING REMARKS: THE FULCRUM AND THE PROPHET

Much of the Fremen's religion is based in two things: their past as Zensunni Wanderers (in *Dune*, a religion that contains many Islamic elements but is not recognizably Islam), and their belief in the Lisan al-Gaib. The truth behind this latter belief is based in Bene Gesserit missionary work. Centuries earlier, Bene Gesserit missionaries visited many worlds they deemed “primitive” and implanted various messianic legends known as the Missionaria Protectiva so that these societies would be open to Bene Gesserit influence and also accept the key to their eventual assumption of political control of the universe, the product of their breeding program. This product is the Kwisatz Haderach—essentially, a male Bene Gesserit Reverend Mother, able to survive the ritualized poisoning necessary to open the mind to powerful prescience. Unlike the female Bene Gesserit Reverend Mother, the Kwisatz Haderach can access Other Memory through both matrilineal and patrilineal lines, and so have the most complete and accurate past knowledge and prescient abilities of anyone in the universe.

In Appendix III of *Dune*, titled “Report on Bene Gesserit Motives and Purposes” and supposedly written at the behest of Lady Jessica, the motives behind the breeding of the Kwisatz Haderach were made clear: “[The Bene Gesserit] sought a human with mental powers permitting him to understand and use higher order dimensions. They were breeding for a super-Mentat, a human computer with some of the prescient abilities found

in Guild navigators” (508-9). In essence, the Kwisatz Haderach is a conglomeration of “human” qualities as the Bene Gesserit define them: not only would he have all the abilities of a Bene Gesserit, he would have all the abilities of a Mentat and advanced prescience as well. He would be the most powerful person in the universe: not politically, but qualitatively. The Kwisatz Haderach would be yet another form of power in the Imperium, which always favors secrecy and stealth above open aggression.

One of the reasons why Reverend Mother Mohiam tested Paul at the beginning of the novel was because of the possibility that he could be the Kwisatz Haderach. He passes the test due to his Bene Gesserit training, but it is not definitive proof that he is the Kwisatz Haderach, and the Reverend Mother is cautious not to assume. But as Paul is exposed to the spice melange on Arrakis for longer periods, his prescient visions, which were confined to his dreams at the beginning of the novel, become more uncontrollable and frightening. He has increasing difficulty separating the past, present, and future, and possible events from things which have actually occurred. He becomes increasingly aware of the “terrible purpose” he believes he carries, and perceives it as the jihad against the Imperium led by the Fremen that will result in the deaths of countless people, people which Paul regards as human and whose lives he values. Paul seeks to prevent the jihad, but he also cannot risk breaking the Fremen's belief that he is their Lisan al-Gaib, because they are his only chance of regaining Arrakis and his rightful place as its Duke. (It also does not help the situation that nearly everything Paul does manages to fit into the vague prophecies of the Missionaria Protectiva.) The power and accuracy of Paul's prescient visions deepen as he grows more addicted to spice, but he is frustrated at the things he

still cannot see. After he fails to predict Gurney Halleck's attempted assassination of Jessica (Gurney believed, wrongfully, that she betrayed Duke Leto and House Atreides), Paul decides to discover, once and for all, if he is indeed the Kwisatz Haderach, with all the knowledge and prescient power that position entails.

In order to become a Reverend Mother, a Bene Gesserit acolyte must survive a ritualized poisoning known as the spice agony. She ingests a lethal amount of spice, and must use her ability to metabolize poisons to save herself. The large amount of spice she ingests in the test gives her the ability to obtain Other Memory. The Kwisatz Haderach will be the only man to survive the test, the only man with the ability to metabolize the poison and gain Other Memory without going insane. All of the tests I have previously discussed are forced on Paul by other people. Paul's "changing of the water," to satisfy his desire to determine if he is the Kwisatz Haderach, is his *choice*.

The spice agony very nearly kills him, but does not: he is indeed the Kwisatz Haderach. Upon waking from a coma, he fully understands the extent of his abilities as well as the responsibility those abilities give him, and describes them to Jessica and Chani:

"There is in each of us in ancient force that takes and an ancient force that gives. A man finds little difficulty facing the place within himself where the taking force dwells, but it's almost impossible for him to see into the giving force without changing into something other than man. For woman, the situation is reversed. [...] These things are so ancient within us [...] that they are ground into each separate cell of our bodies. We're

shaped by such forces. [...] When you look inward and confront the raw force of your own life unshielded, you see your peril. You see that this could overwhelm you. The greatest peril to the Giver is the force that takes. The greatest peril to the Taker is the force that gives. It's as easy to be overwhelmed by giving as by taking.”

“And you, my son,” Jessica asked, “are you the one who gives or one who takes?”

“I'm at the fulcrum,” he said. “I cannot give without taking and I cannot take without...” (445)

Here, Paul characterizes his position in the universe as a “fulcrum,” which grounds and balances a lever; during his first overwhelmingly strong vision under the spice drug during the orgy at Sietch Tabr, he saw himself as a “pivot” or point of rotation. Both times, he makes a connection between his human self and a mechanic function, seeing himself as a machine and characterizing the difficult spaces he finds himself in with the mechanics of simple machines. In his first vision at Sietch Tabr, the rotational points on one side are the people responsible for the death of his father and the fall of House Atreides—the Emperor and his Sardaukar and House Harkonnen. On the other are the Fremen, who have welcomed him as their messiah, but whom he must organize and utilize if he is to retake the planet. Paul is caught between them, with any attempt to rotate away from one side leading him into the other. In his second vision, Paul characterizes himself as both Giver and Taker, both masculine and feminine (though, of course, these characterizations are stereotypical in their view of gender roles), and this is

the reality of the Kwisatz Haderach, the male Bene Gesserit. Paul's power lies in his ability to navigate borders, to negotiate balances, to literally be “in many places at once.”

The Kwisatz Haderach test determines the function and value of someone who possesses so many so-called “human” qualities that he is, at times, barely recognizable as human. But this is not to say that, in becoming the Kwisatz Haderach, that Paul loses his humanity: his motives and desires remain the same as they always were. He wants to avenge his father's murder. He wants to be free to love Chani and to protect his mother, sister, and son. The means by which those motives are executed, however, are permanently changed: like the Fremen, he lives simultaneously in the past, present, and future, and has trouble balancing what has already occurred with what might occur. He explains to Chani and Jessica how his perception of his place in the universe has changed—that he is not just a person (or a human), but something more profound on whose decisions the fate of the human race balances. He now understands that his vendetta against House Harkonnen and House Corrino is not just about himself. Paul realizes that to continue organizing the Fremen, to be their Lisan al-Gaib and train them as Fedaykin, the fighting force more feared than the Sardaukar not only due to their ability but their fanaticism, will unleash them upon the universe. The terrible jihad he feels he cannot prevent is not just their devotion to Muad'Dib, it is the vendetta of the Fremen against the entire universe, their long-awaited *kanly* which does not have to follow the “rules” of formal vendetta because the Fremen choose to operate outside of the *Faufreluches* system.

Carol McGuirk also addresses this issue in her article “NoWhere Man: Towards a

Poetics of Post-Utopian Characterization.” She states,

For while the desert-dwelling Fremen culture clearly symbolizes human toughness and capacity for survival [...], Paul Atreides, the novel's hero and the Fremen's messiah, just as clearly stands for something different: our lack of self-sufficiency, or human thirst in the desert of evolutionary struggle for a savior from offworld. The symbolism inherent in the Fremen's name is not static: it seems straight-forward only until the developing plot leads us to question how “free” a man can be whose great need is to be enslaved by a Redeemer. The messiah, too, is ironically rendered, for the more heroically Paul triumphs as liberator, the more completely he becomes enslaved by his destiny. (144)

I wish to problematize McGurk's statement here, particularly her assertion that the Fremen *desire* a Messiah. Their desire for the Lisan al-Gaib is the result of the Missionaria Protectiva, so in that sense it is born out of an act of manipulation and dominance, but I do not view the Fremen as merely slaves to a “Redeemer.” Paul notes that the Fremen do have limited prescient ability, so it is likely that they have foreseen his coming, but I wish to emphasize that they are *active* participants in the war against the Emperor and House Harkonnen. Paul, the fulcrum upon which opposing forces balance, is the catalyst for aggressive change. Before he came, the Fremen were willing to take patient centuries to quietly and stealthily terraform their planet, resorting to spice bribes to keep their skies clear of satellites that would have tracked their movements and hiding places. The bribes worked—the Fremen were ignored, even regarded as primitive and

subhuman while they held deep power of their own. To make the assumption, as many critics do and as Paul himself does, that he is solely responsible for the jihad underestimates the complexity of the situation.

I set the Fremen as permanently oppositional to the Faufreluches: their abuse and enslavement by the nobility remains fresh in their memory through ritual and the role of the Reverend Mother, their religious leader. When Lady Jessica becomes Reverend Mother of the Fremen, both she and her unborn daughter Alia gain access through Other Memory to the Fremen's cultural history: their lives wandering from planet to planet, often suffering enslavement and tragedy at the hands of the Faufreluches nobility before settling on Arrakis, a planet so inhospitable that in spite of the spice, no one else is willing to live there. Arrakis is the Fremen's paradise, both currently and for the future; they feel it is the only place where they can control their destiny as much as any culture can in an Imperium. Upon his arrival on Arrakis, Duke Leto realizes that the key to holding the planet lies in making friends of the Fremen. The Harkonnens make a mistake in attempting to subjugate them, a mistake which they pay for when Paul organizes them against the Imperium. This interpretation sees Paul's role differently; Paul is the *catalyst* for the jihad, but not entirely responsible for it, as the Fremen have their own reasons for desiring it.

After the battle at Arakeen, Reverend Mother Mohiam, in her guise as the Emperor's Truthsayer, enters the palace. Her outrage is among the worst there, not because she cares about the fall of the Emperor, but because she is now aware that not only is Paul indeed the long-awaited Kwisatz Haderach, but he is out of Bene Gesserit

control. The work of centuries has come to naught:

“I welcomed you to the ranks of humans,” [Mohiam] muttered. “Don't besmirch that.”

Paul raised his voice: “Observe her, comrades! This is a Bene Gesserit Reverend Mother, patient in a patient cause. She could wait with her sisters—ninety generations for the proper combination of genes and environment to produce the one person their schemes required. Observe her! She knows now that the ninety generations have produced that person. Here I stand...but...I...will...never...do...her...bidding!” (Herbert 477)

Mohiam attempts to remind Paul of his training, but his hatred of the Bene Gesserit, begun at the end of his test on Caladan and increased by the Bene Gesserit's refusal to save his father even though they knew the family had been betrayed, has separated him from them forever. Paul openly expresses his disgust for the Bene Gesserit's breeding schemes:

“I'll give you only one thing,” Paul said. “You saw part of what the [human] race needs, but how poorly you saw it. You think to control human breeding and intermix a select few according to your master plan! How little you understand of what--”

“You mustn't speak of these things!” the old woman hissed. (478)

What Paul is going to say, before Mohiam cuts off his speech, is that humans will always love and breed at will, even when there are some who wish to control that breeding for the “greater good.” Paul is disgusted by the Bene Gesserit's presumption that only their



way of life is best for the human race, and that, since they regard themselves as superior beings, they have the right to “plan” the future course of the human race. Though Paul has powerful prescience, he cannot definitively predict the future; he can only see possibilities, and decide (or refuse to decide) amongst them. He abhors his gift, yet knows that in the hands of the Bene Gesserit it would be infinitely worse.

In his article “The Prince on Arrakis: Frank Herbert's Dialogue With Machiavelli,” Kevin Mulcahy references the specific changes in Paul's character from the beginning to the end of the novel:

Paul begins as an immensely sympathetic character, a boy of fifteen, caught up in treachery and brutal warfare that rob him of father, home, friends, and position; a boy, too, of extraordinary powers that invite the reader's identification. Even as he begins to realize his remarkable potential, he retains a compelling humanity and a strong claim on the reader's sympathy. His grief at having to kill the Fremen Jamis is heartfelt, and his love for Chani, his Fremen mate, is genuinely touching. Paul's desperate attempts to stave off the terrible war that his prescient visions have revealed to him establish him, in the reader's mind, as the most developed moral awareness in the novel, the character with the broadest and most humane consciousness. By the end of *Dune*, however, he is a changed man, hardened by both his real and prescient experiences.

Not only is Paul personally changed, but he is also politically changed: the young noble is now the Emperor of the Imperium and the Mahdi of the Fremen. Muad'Dib is a man, yet

not: the Fremen regard him as nearly a god. His word is law and his word is the only truth. As I explained in Chapter Three, Muad'Dib can violate rules that Paul Atreides cannot. But it is important to understand that this is all a game—one with very high stakes—but a game nonetheless: a game of the construction of an artificial god. Humans often embody their gods with human-like qualities, not only physically, but emotionally as well: gods feel anger and compassion, curiosity and weariness. How we understand our gods in every religion is through our human qualities and experiences. Paul Atreides is a man and Muad'Dib is nearly God, but part of Muad'Dib will always remain fundamentally human, not only because his model is a man, but his believers' understanding of him is also based in their humanity.

Even the deliberate construction of the “character” of Muad'Dib fits into the overall model of constructed humanity seen in the Bene Gesserit and the Fremen. In his article “The Ambivalent Hero of Contemporary Fantasy and Science Fiction,” Juan A. Prieto-Pablos states,

Herbert's characters [...] grow their superhuman ability out of a strict control of mind and body gained from the application of mystical philosophies and techniques. Philosophy, not science, is the basis of their power. In *Dune* practically all the characters—from the Fremen and the Sardaukar, with their inordinate fighting skills, to the Bene Gesserit and the Mentats with their respective specialized tasks—are far from ordinary, even if not as great as the main characters. [...] Yet all these skills are not qualitatively different from those of ordinary human beings; they are the

result of painful and slow personal progress, rather than something acquired suddenly and accidentally, or just given. This way the kind of Olympus that *Dune* portrays becomes an ideal inhabited by characters in whom a reader may feel himself projected, provided he accepts the possibility of evolving or changing through his own efforts.

It is necessary to reiterate Prieto-Pablos's important point about evolution and change. The human characters encountered in the *Dune* series are recognizably human, not only physically, but in their frailties and struggles. They hold bonds of loyalty, admiration, and love. Their abilities, both physical and mental, are most often the result of long training and even indoctrination, as in the case of the Bene Gesserit, but the elitism often displayed by characters like Jessica and Mohiam is a construct. Everyone in the universe is human, but, as I have shown, the judgment of what *constitutes* human, and who is allowed to *be* human, is constantly in flux. Just as humans evolve, gods also evolve: the pagan gods fought wars with other gods and mated with humans, and now our modern perception of God in monotheistic religions places Him above us, ever-present, but not walking amongst us in human (or even animal) form as Odin or Zeus did. That role of the man-animal-god has been replaced by the Prophet, of which Muad'Dib is only one fictional example: a man who hears the voice of God and is specially anointed by God (or, at least, his human followers believe so) to lead through political and religious change, through the evolutionary process.

For my final point, I use the ideas of Lorenzo DiTommaso, from “History and Historical Effect in Frank Herbert's *Dune*”:

The struggle [Herbert] depicts between vitality and stagnation involves only degrees of difference rather than any fixed scale of, say, success or failure. *Dune* is a book of a thousand subtle shifts of perspective, acting upon and reinforcing each other in a holistic whole. Thus, Muad'Dib operates on the edge of the historical deluge, changing certain things by degrees in order to channel the floods to his benefit. As he realizes when he rides out the coriolis storm [...], historical forces, like the storm, are not easily deflected by resistance. While Muad'Dib is, in some respects, beyond the Imperium, as in being the unique Kwisatz Haderach, he is essentially bound to the strictures of the Imperium in thought and deed by the effects of the Butlerian Jihad on history. (321)

This idea is important because it reinvokes my central idea of the human-animal-machine relationship at the center of *Dune*. The scars of the Butlerian Jihad are cut deep into nearly all the human characters in *Dune* because they have cut into the fabric of human epistemology as a whole: even the Fremen, who deliberately isolate themselves from other humans, use technology only to augment their survival. Though they are capable of developing significant pieces of technology, such as the stillsuit, they are careful not to go to extremes even when they seek to terraform their planet. This is probably because the repercussions of the Jihad are built into spiritual practice and cultural belief, but it is also true that the human race barely survived the Jihad. Humans believe that they must emphasize what is human and to permanently distrust advanced technology if they are meant to survive, but this proves not to be entirely true, either. Paul can foresee that the

Fremen jihad will result in billions of deaths, and it is the lessons from this second jihad, Muad'Dib's jihad, that prove that even emphasizing human qualities will not protect the human race from the whims of a single man with enough charisma and power and a devoted fanatical army to back him up.

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