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Unraveling the Prescient Rulership of Paul and Leto Atreides in Dune

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(Ryan "Leto II, transformation")

Unraveling the Prescient Rulership of Paul and Leto Atrides in Dune

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Introduction

Dune, the science fiction novel written by Frank Herbert in 1965, has recently been experiencing a renewed level of interest among both fans and scholars. Herbert's works have gained a reputation for intricate world-building in the portrayal of the desert world Arrakis, the complexity of the characters, and how themes of ecology and politics intersect. *Dune* tells the story of Paul Atreides, who becomes embroiled in a power struggle for control over Arrakis. This desert planet is the only source of spice, a mind-altering and life-extending substance found only on this planet. Subsequent novels extend the narrative to encompass Paul's accession to Emperor and his rule over the Imperium, before moving on to Leto II Atreides and his transformation in *God Emperor*.

This new surge of interest in *Dune* is seen in the release of a new two-part cinematic adaption of the novel by Denis Villeneuve, of which the second part is set to be released soon. Like the novel, the film foregrounds the themes of ecology and politics as well. Alongside this popular interest, there is also an increase in scholarly interest. *Discovering Dune: Essays on Frank Herbert's Epic Saga* (2022), edited by Dominic J. Nardi and N. Trevor Brierly, provides critical insights on various themes explored in *Dune*, such as politics, ethics, ecology, history, and religion, among many others. While some SF scholars have argued that there is a deficiency of scholarship on *Dune*, this is incorrect. Nardi & Brierly discovered that there has been interest in *Dune* academically for decades; preparation for their publication revealed over twenty books and dozens of articles about the *Dune* saga. The problem they ascertained is that "the study of *Dune* ... never coalesced into an academic subfield" (Nardi & Brierly 6). Part of the issue which obscured the breadth of earlier research, is the fact that these works often did not cite other publications because these discussions were "segregated into disciplinary silos" (6).

It is useful here to provide an overview of two of those scholarly disciplines here, before moving on to this thesis's analytical focus on how the themes of autocracy, ecology and hero-worship intersect. One branch of previous scholarship focuses on Herbert's depiction of the monomyth, a hero's journey. For instance, Donald Palumbo uses this motif of a monomythic hero by analyzing various characters on this journey throughout the *Dune* saga in his article "The Monomyth as a Fractal Pattern in Frank Herbert's *Dune* Novels". He argues that these monomythic heroes present a fractal pattern within the narrative, where the various characters that match this character display a "fractal quality of self-similarity as duplication" (434) and experience a repetition of "plot structures, themes and motifs" (434). The focus within these publications is on Paul, Leto and others within the *Dune* saga as epic heroes, and the conventions that come with them.

Another branch of scholarship focuses on Herbert's relevance as the text's author. These lines of analysis explore Herbert's authorial intent in detail, as evidenced in interviews and his writings about the *Dune* saga and the historical setting of *Dune*. For instance, in "The Quileute *Dune*: Frank Herbert, Indigeneity, and Empire," Daniel Immerwahr focuses on Herbert's connection to ecological renewal projects, his interest in Indigenous tribes and the impact their views had on Herbert's own turn to environmentalism (191). These studies on authorial intent are relevant to this thesis and the wider field of *Dune*, as Herbert's *Dune* sage is "inextricably intertwined with Herbert's philosophical interests" (Nardi & Brierly 9). His authorial intent in writing this novel is central to this thesis, as Herbert states that "my superhero ¹concept filled me with a concern that ecology might be the next

¹ The term superhero, which will recur in this thesis in the same meaning throughout, is meant to be interpreted as the ultimate hero, not a hero with superpowers. "they will give over their ability to think for themselves to the first [hero] who comes along and promises a solution". (O'Reilly) A further analysis of the implications of hero/superhero in *Dune* can be found in chapter 4.

banner for demagogues and would-be-heroes” (Genesis 1). It is precisely this concern which this thesis will argue shapes the narrative of the three novels after *Dune*, as the ecological transformation of the planet becomes entwined with the grab for power by the Atreides.

This thesis explores how Frank Herbert’s *Dune* shows how humanity loses agency, individually and as a whole, as the Atreides’ prescient powers allow them to curate the future and become the ultimate autocrats. The link to authoritarianism will be established through a framework of authoritarian features provided by Erica Frantz in her book *Authoritarianism: What Everyone Needs to Know* (2018). The Atreides use of their prescient powers are an Orwellian power grab for ultimate autocratic authority, designed to teach humanity the folly of following autocratic leaders, disguised as heroes.

The first chapter analyzes the motif of prescience² in the novel and argues that it is analogous to autocratic power or vision. It will start with a description of how prescience functions in the novel and what its limitations are. Then it provides detail on how Herbert circumvents the paradox of foresight. Afterwards, the link between prescience and autocracy is made explicit. Finally, the Golden Path ³will be reinterpreted as a lesson to humanity to reject authoritarianism in all its forms.

The second chapter provides a framework of autocracy⁴ to explain and analyze the different governments in the novel. Then an analysis follows of Paul’s and Leto’s governments on the elements from this framework, and how that becomes evident throughout the narrative in their speech-acts and actions. Finally, this chapter

² The term prescience will be used interchangeably in this thesis with foresight, foreknowledge and prophecy with no meaningful difference.

³ The Golden Path in *Dune* refers to Leto’s vision where he guides and shapes humanity as such that they can no longer be seen by those with prescient powers. Chapter one will provide a reinterpretation of this term.

⁴ As with prescience, the terms autocracy and authoritarianism will be used interchangeably with no meaningful difference in this thesis.

combines these elements to show that adherence to this framework is crucial to Leto's success as the Tyrant, in his pursuit to be the ultimate predator of humanity.

The third chapter will investigate the exploitation of Arrakis's resources by the Atreides, and the implications that has for the novel's theme of ecological interdependence and the Atreides' role in co-opting that ecosystem and the *spice* drug in their grab for power. Furthermore, it will investigate the expropriation of Fremen labor by the Atreides. It concludes with an exposition of these elements' implications for the saga's theme of ecological interdependence and the Atreides role in co-opting that ecosystem to further their authoritarian goals.

The fourth chapter will explore Paul and Leto as the anti-hero character type. This chapter will explore why they should not be classed as either villains or (super)heroes, as they are flawed and questionable in their morality. This chapter will connect this thesis to earlier scholarship on the monomythic hero, offering an alternate interpretation of the protagonists as antiheroes instead. It then investigates why the antihero character type is necessary for Herbert to explore his characters motivation in pursuing authoritarianism and exploiting Arrakis's ecology.

Chapter 1: Prescience as an Oppressive Force

The *Dune* saga starts with Paul being tested by Reverend Mother Gaius Helen Mohiam to not only see whether he is human, but also measures the result of his upbringing and genetic diversity. *Dune*'s opening chapters detail Paul's multi-disciplinary upbringing, revealing that he contains all the genetic elements to be the Kwisatz Haderach, a superhuman with prescient powers never before seen. Moreover, he has been trained to be a Mentat, a human computer with superhuman abilities to recognize patterns and autonomously deal with enormous amounts of data to come to informed decisions. His mother Jessica trained him in special techniques to control his physique beyond the ability of regular humans, and control his own metabolism. All of these adaptations and interventions that are a part of Paul set him up to be a ruler with unimaginable control, heir to the Atreides duchy. The prescient powers that Paul has, are a recurring motif in the *Dune* saga. The most important actors with such foreknowledge are Paul Atreides, Alia Atreides, and Leto Atreides; they are the ones who wield ultimate political power in the empire.

This chapter will explore how the prescient Atreides employ their foreknowledge to cement their power and the effect it has on the world around them. It will provide an explanation of how Herbert deals with the paradox inherent with foreknowledge. Finally, it will reinterpret the Atreides' Golden Path and prescience as an analogy of a controlling autocratic vision for an ideal society or future for humanity. This analogy will be used in the following chapters to detail how Paul and Leto's autocratic governments function, how they expropriate their subjects' property and individual agency, Arrakis's natural resources, and co-opt the planet's ecosystem to maximize their control.

Paul and his sister Alia Atreides, in *Dune* and *Dune Messiah*, and Leto Atreides, in *Children of Dune* and *God Emperor of Dune*, are the protagonists

through which Herbert explores prescience as oppression. Their prescience emerges because of their sensitivity to the drug *spice*. This sensitivity has been purposefully bred into them by a generations-long breeding program of the Bene Gesserit. The novels reveal that “spice addiction always conveyed some sensitivity to prediction” (*Messiah* 459) and the Bene Gesserit amplified this sensitivity in the Atreides line. What that means for Paul and Leto, is that they are unable to escape from this prescience. When they encounter spice, the visions will come upon them unbidden and are inescapable. As Paul is brought to the planet by his father in *Dune*, he is thrust into a world where spice addiction is inescapable, as Arrakis is suffused with spice. Leto is born on said planet, and because of his genetic inheritance, he is revealed as aware of the future before his birth.

According to Nardi, in his article “Game Theory and the Paradox of Foreknowledge” (2022), the concept of prescience in a novel can be paradoxical. He explores numerous dilemmas associated with portraying prophecy in novels. The first one is the issue of free will. If prophecy is possible and real, it precludes the ability of the prophet themselves to take any meaningful action to change said future. The prophet’s own agency is lost, as his future is set in stone. The second dilemma he explores is the extreme opposite of the first, where free will would impact the prophecy from happening by the relevant actors being aware of the prophecy and actively pursuing a different strategy, thus negating the prophecy itself and thus invalidating it. The third dilemma relates to the accuracy of prophecies. If a prophecy is made, but the vision does not come true, the prophecy and prophet themselves are considered false.

Csilla Csori underlines another factor in *Dune*’s model of prescience: “[Paul’s] prescient awareness had its roots in probability mathematics” (114). In order to determine which of the many prophecies is most likely to come true, extensive

probability calculations have to be performed. The amount of data, the quality of said data and how it is interpreted all impact the prophecy itself. It is the aspect of data in prophecy that Herbert utilizes in constructing a plausible explanation within the realm of science-fiction of how prescience works, and to delineate clear boundaries to its scope of influence. As discussed earlier, Paul had been raised as a Mentat, capable of interpreting and extrapolating on extreme amounts of data. Herbert combines Paul's computational abilities and logic with the genetic predisposition to prescience, in order to convey to the reader a sense of a believable concept of prescience:

Paul ' s mind had gone on in its chilling precision. He saw the avenues ahead of them on this hostile plane. . . . he focused his prescient awareness, seeing it as a computation of most probable futures, but with something more, an edge of mystery — as though his mind dipped into some timeless stratum and sampled the winds of the future . Abruptly, as though he had found a necessary key, Paul ' s mind climbed another notch in awareness It was as though he existed within a globe with avenues radiating away in all directions... yet this only approximated the sensation . (*Dune* 402)

This particular quotation reveals Herbert's approach to prescience. The use of the word "computation" here allows for the prescient power to be seen as an extension of logic. Nardi compares Paul's powers to that of a Delphic Oracle, and highlights the important difference between the two. A Delphic Oracle's prophecy is cryptic in nature, often containing vague descriptors and unclear outcomes, where the prophecy itself is open to interpretation to the one who requested their oracular insight. (Nardi 31) Paul's prophecy, and the others in the novels with oracular powers, are different in the sense that their prophecy is more direct. Their predictions are relatively accurate, but not set in stone. Within the *Dune* universe,

Nardi argues, the future is framed as inherently paradoxical in nature. It is “both limited and comprehensive, both accurate and inaccurate” (32) . As seen in the quotation above, Herbert describes the oracular vision as sampling the winds of the future, winds that can change based on any small word or action. It is Paul’s Mentat potential that empowers him to interpret all that data that the many avenues those winds of the future provide. The results of this computation are then presented as the vision.

So far the scope of prescience has been explored, with Mentat logic as its mediating factor in analyzing the data those with prescience have access to. Now it is relevant to explore how this power can be analyzed as a political concept, a metaphor for autocratic power. As discussed earlier, the Atreides’ predisposition to prescience was bred into them by the Bene Gesserit. An interaction between Paul and a Reverend Mother of the Bene Gesserit explicates the purpose of that breeding:

“‘The Great Revolt took away a crutch,’ she said. ‘It forced human minds to develop. Schools were started to train human talents.’

‘Bene Gesserit schools?’

She nodded. ‘We have two chief survivors of those ancient schools: the Bene Gesserit and the Spacing Guild. The Guild, so we think, emphasizes almost pure mathematics. Bene Gesserit performs another function.’

‘Politics,’ he said.” (*Dune* 19)

Paul here has correctly deduced the purpose of the Bene Gesserit, and in turn strengthens the argument that their breeding scheme is a clear metaphor for the creation of a being with total political control. However, this prescient potential is limited , which prevents the Atreides from being truly omniscient. It is necessary to explore these limits in order to establish that the symbol of prescience is in fact analogous to autocratic oppression. If the prescient Atreides are able to employ full

omniscience, individual agency would not exist. It is again through Paul that Herbert expresses the limits of prescience:

“This sense of the future—I seem to have no control over it. The thing just happens. The immediate future—say, a year—I can see some of that... a road as broad as our Central Avenue on Caladan. Some places I don’t see... shadowed places... as though it went behind a hill ... and there are branchings.” (*Dune* 403)

The Atrides can essentially see the future, but the further away it is, the novel reveals, only general patterns can be discerned; parts of the future remain hidden to them. This also reveals that Herbert’s concept of prescience does not mean omnipotence. There is no direct control over the concept of future, the control the prescient wield is mediated through their own actions in the present or commands they give to their lackeys, thus choosing one of the avenues to go through.

In his article “Prisoners of Prophecy: Freedom and Foreknowledge in the *Dune* Series”, William Peden argues that this model of prescience as the ability to anticipate outcomes through the powers of a human computer is essentially “an amplification of what we can already do – for instance, we can model the global climate and estimate outcomes of various environmental policy choices, but after that, we must choose how to act given this information” (2). This concept of prescience as anticipation and control reinforces the notion that prescience is analogous to an autocrat’s vision of an ideal future, along with the level of control an autocrat has over their population. Peden further asserts that the Atrides’ prescience is also subject to a Prisoner’s Dilemma, as Paul and Leto describe blind spots in their prescience, areas where others with prescient abilities shape their futures. Peden explains that in such a dilemma, both players in the prescient game try to pursue what is rationally the best outcome from their point of view. However,

this can lead to a suboptimal outcome the moment these rational pursuits interfere with each other (Peden 4). This notion highlights the inherent dampener that other prescient powers can impact the control the Atreides have, and in turn are a threat to their political powerbase.

In *Dune Messiah*, Herbert exposes the other problems inherent in prescience besides its limits. Paul and his sister Alia realize that they are trapped in a Catch-22 situation. Their status as omniscient aristocrats at the top of the political pyramid seems inevitable; at numerous points in the novel, Paul reveals a distaste for his inability to escape his power, and the excesses that his followers commit in their belief of his messianic visions. Specifically, the Fremen, whose power Paul used to establish his control of the Empire, are convinced they need to spread their belief in their omniscient Messiah, by embarking on a Jihad. Paul foresees this holy war, and yet is determined throughout *Dune* to prevent it: “[he] still [sees] the jihad’s bloody swords and fanatic legions. ‘It will not be,’ he told himself. ‘I cannot let it be’” (334). And yet, the second novel opens with the Jihad having visited numerous worlds in the known universe. In an interaction between Korba, the head of the Qizarate holy order devoted to their messiah Muad’Dib, and Paul, Muad’Dib himself, this inability to escape the Jihad is made explicit by the juxtaposition of Korba’s framing of the Jihad versus Paul’s:

‘My Liege makes a joke,’ Korba said, voice trembling. ‘The Jihad has brought ten thousand worlds into the shining light of—’

‘Into the darkness,’ Paul said. ‘We’ll be a hundred generations recovering from Muad’dib’s Jihad. I find it hard to imagine that anyone will ever surpass this.’ *Messiah* 97)

Despite Paul having extraordinary powers to know the avenues of the future, his followers still pursue their own goals and motives. Paul laments the results of his Jihad, which came to be regardless of his wishes to the contrary.

Consequently, his inability to escape the clutches of his own prescience does not come solely from the powers intruding unbidden. Another aspect is that his own followers and retinue expect and demand such guidance of their prophet, and in fact still make their own individual choices based on their interpretation of the prophets' oracular powers. The novel reveals the sycophants' need for a strong leader, with a vision, to lead them. In fact, there is also a subconscious need for the sycophants to be absolved of responsibility, as is the case in *Dune Messiah* as well: "It was a curiosity, m'Lord," Korba pleaded. 'We knew the Old Law said that only Families could possess atomics, but the Qizarate obeyed . . . obeyed . . . ' 'Obeyed you,' Paul said. 'A curiosity, indeed'" (175). After Korba is caught being a part of a plot to assassinate Paul, he tries to shift blame away from himself to bureaucracy, or even Paul. After all, Korba simply obeyed the system in place.

The Atreides' claim to power is compelling to the common man. If you believe the autocrat has all the answers, that he can will the future into being and to conform to his vision, there is nothing to be done but submit to that vision. It is through this motif of prescience as autocratic vision that Herbert explores the more perverse impetus of autocracy to maintain itself. A trap for the autocrat and their subjects alike, where greed begets greed, powerful authoritarian leaders beget others who desire power.

Yet, Paul and Leto are not motivated by greed necessarily. Their motivation for taking on the mantle of the one at the top of the hierarchy is one of necessity. As discussed earlier, Paul is essentially thrust onto the throne. His visions of Jihad in his name seem inescapable, as the mentioning of Jihad by Korba reveals above. He is

aware of the trap of prescience, and as such autocracy, as evidenced by the fact he calls it his terrible purpose, and the fact these visions come upon him unbidden. Somewhere in these visions, Paul comes to see his role as the ultimate ruler and government as necessary.

He knew which path his feet must follow, He'd seen it enough times ... Once, long ago, he'd thought of himself as an inventor of government. But the invention had fallen into old patterns. Shape it any way you wanted, but relax for a moment, and it snapped into the ancient forms. Forces at work beyond his reach in human breasts eluded and defied him (*Messiah* 112).

The autocrat's vision, Paul's, is made explicit here, which is to provide the ultimate government. Paul entertains the idea here that his vision and his ideal are perfect, an inventor of noble and perfect government. Yet his control over government and his subjects is more elusive than he realized. Other sources of autocratic vision, prescience, muddy his own, and prevent him from attaining that goal. Eventually, he recoils from the worst excesses of his own government, choosing instead a life of exile, leaving the government in charge of his sister Alia, drunk on power.

It is Leto who realizes Paul is flawed in his vision of ultimate government, ruled by the superhero of Herbert's concept for the novel: "And we're locked into my father's vision. A way out of that insanity lay along the Golden Path ... His father had seen it" (*Children* 212). Leto's interpretation of that vision explicates the link to autocracy through the motif of prediction. "Seeking the absolute of orderly prediction, [Paul] amplified disorder, distorted prediction" (*Children* 343). Leto accuses Paul here of pursuing a path of becoming an enlightened ruler, whose singular vision will set humanity straight from its authoritarian proclivities. Leto also reveals the flaws in that plan, as an enlightened despot is still an authoritarian ruler, where people's agency is suppressed, creating dangerous patterns of disorder.

“‘You didn’t take your vision far enough, father. Your hands did good things and evil.’ [Paul] ‘But the evil was known after the event!’ [Leto] ‘Which is the way of many great evils’” (*Children* 347) This interaction reveals that Paul was afraid of the extent of the vision, and could not bring himself to fully implement it, out of fear of doing evil. Leto explicates the folly of that route and how Paul’s approach instead amplified its evil.

Leto’s goal becomes clear here. He is prepared to martyr himself, unlike his father, and commit the necessary evils in order to teach humanity the ultimate lesson. The template for Leto’s Golden Path is explained by Ghanima, his sister: “[Humanity longs] for the Pharaonic Empire which Leto will give them. They long for a rich peace with abundant harvests, plentiful trade, a leveling of all except the Golden Ruler.” (*Children* 396). Leto’s aim then is to level humanity, take all agency and power from them, concentrating it within himself. “The aristocrat’s unspoken duty—to teach, and sometimes by horrible example” (*Emperor* 251). By becoming the ultimate autocrat, the sole being in power, and leveling all others, he seeks to instill in humanity a lesson of anti-authoritarianism they will never forget.

This chapter made the link between prescience and autocratic vision explicit. Herbert explores the theme of prescience as autocracy vision by revealing the downsides and limits of that vision through Paul’s rise to power and government. The authoritarian governmental hierarchy is exposed as a threat not just to its subjects, but to the ruler and elites themselves. Through Leto the role of the enlightened despot is questioned, and Paul’s pure intentions are revealed to be flawed in nature and effect.

Chapter 2: The Atreides Autocrats

Dune's setting invites the reader to consider the distribution of power throughout the saga. Paul Atreides is the son of a Duke, who himself is part of the feudalistic Imperium, ruled by Emperor Shaddam. His training involved techniques of the Bene Gesserit, centered around control of one's own body and a perceptiveness of others, both in physical behavior and language. At the start of the novel, Paul correctly ascertains the Bene Gesserit's true purpose.

'Schools were started to train human talents.' 'Bene Gesserit schools?' She nodded. 'We have two chief survivors of those ancient schools: the Bene Gesserit and the Spacing Guild. The Guild, so we think, emphasizes almost pure mathematics. Bene Gesserit performs another function.'

'Politics,' [Paul] said. (*Dune* 18)

Paul's observation primes the reader to view the narrative through this lens of power management. It is the Bene Gesserit's breeding program that led up to this point, the creation of a male Bene Gesserit. Their political intent in that creation becomes explicit in *Dune Messiah*: "the kwisatz haderach, then, ... through whom the Bene Gesserit hoped to control human destiny" (*Messiah* 15). The Bene Gesserit's goal in creating the Kwisatz Haderach is to establish the ultimate autocrat, the one who can curate humanity's future ultimately, ideally in a manner that the Bene Gesserit have sketched out.

Where the previous chapter dealt with the link between prescience and autocratic vision, this chapter will establish how Paul and Leto serve as the Kwisatz Haderach, the ultimate autocrat. To achieve the aim of the Leto's Golden Path, showing humanity the folly of following an autocratic leader, their leadership has to exemplify autocracy. Therefore, their leadership features and the performance of their political power will be analyzed in this chapter by using a framework of

authoritarian government styles and features. This analysis will be utilized in the subsequent chapter to emphasize how the authoritarian political power of the Atreides links the exploitation of Arrakis' ecology and the Fremen's labor potential.

In her book *Authoritarianism: What Everyone Needs to Know* (2018), Erica Frantz provides an overview of authoritarianism through comparing various authoritarian regimes past and present. She aims to dispel stereotypical views of authoritarianism and provide a sharper understanding of authoritarian politics by drawing on theoretical and empirical studies to provide a context in which to analyze authoritarian governments (2). This framework will be used to compare the shape of Paul and Leto's authoritarian style and why that is relevant for their authority as autocrats.

Frantz provides a minimalist definition of authoritarianism where any governing structure can be defined as such when "the executive achieved power through undemocratic means" (6). According to Frantz, scholars in the past made distinctions between dictatorship, autocracy and authoritarian regimes, but that contemporary scholarship tends to use the terms interchangeably (7). Frantz's definition creates a clear dichotomy of rule, where a government is either democratic and has free and fair electoral competition, or it is authoritarian, with varying degrees of opportunity for the people to participate and share in power.

In keeping with the minimalist definition provided by Frantz, *Dune* does not actually contain any type of democratic rule. The known universe is ruled by the Imperium, governed by the concept of faufreluches, defined in the appendix of the novel as: "the rigid rule of class distinction enforced by the Imperium. 'A place for every man and every man in his place'" (*Dune* 558). The Emperor rules over the Great Houses, ducal fiefdoms, which themselves rely on hereditary systems of succession.

We've a three-point civilization: the Imperial Household balanced against the Federated Great Houses of the Landsraad, and between them, the Guild with its damnable monopoly on interstellar transport. In politics, the tripod is the most unstable of all structures. It'd be bad enough without the complication of a feudal trade culture which turns its back on most science. (*Dune* 32)

The mention of the instability of the tripod structure here foreshadows the vulnerability of the imperial system of governance which allows for the Atreides to take over the Imperium. The feudal trade culture referenced here is CHOAM, the trade organization that the three pillars all participate in, which governs the economic aspects of the Imperium, of which spice is the most vital resource that it governs. Behind the tripod structure of the Imperium are the Bene Gesserit, arguably the least authoritarian, as they rule by consensus. Their political power is exerted in the shadows, choosing to influence and charm those in power to further their own goals, as Paul ascertained correctly. But even they would not be considered democratic by Frantz's definition, as their leader, the Mother Superior, gains that title through seniority.

The minimalist definition alone, therefore, is unsuitable in analyzing the various governments and factions present at the start of *Dune* or the Atreides' governments that succeed them. To differentiate these governments, there are two methods of analysis. The first method relies on continuous typologies of authoritarian regimes with which a regime can be analyzed as being part of a spectrum of authoritarian rule, depending on various features of democratic versus autocratic rule (Frantz 68). The Bene Gesserit, for instance, would be classified as a hybrid regime under such typology, incorporating both democratic and autocratic traits. The Imperium's concept of faufreluches would result in it being placed on the

autocratic side of the spectrum. The division of power among the tripod is one step removed from power concentrated with the Emperor only.

The second method is a system of categorical typologies of authoritarianism. Within this approach, there is no spectrum of authoritarianism as it relies on the minimal definition provided above. Instead, it differentiates between modes of governments and leaders by interrogating how power is divided among different factions within the hierarchical structure and the strategies they use to maintain that power (Frantz 69-71). This method does not work with fixed features, as different scholars use different criteria. The features used below to analyze the factions in *Dune* are based on the features selected by Frantz, as they provide enough distinction and clarity on power distribution and performance of political power by these regimes. First, Paul's and Leto's governments will be analyzed on their categorical typologies giving a general overview of their differences and how they relate to the Golden Path. Second, their regimes will be analyzed according to continuous typologies which will detail the breadth and application of their political power in relation to their government's hierarchy, the Fremen, and utilization of the planets resources and ecology.

In continuation of the Imperium tripod structure referenced above, Paul's government falls under the monarchic dictatorship type of categorical typology, or family rule. Both he and his sister Alia stand at the apex of the Imperium, Alia serving as a stand-in for Paul whenever he is absent, eventually becoming Regent over the twin heirs, Ghanima and Leto. Paul's manner of seizing power is typical of monarchic dictatorships, as Frantz asserts that such types of autocracy "typically stem from a dynastic family takeover" (89). This detail of government intrigue that Herbert provides here shows his level of knowledge of authoritarian power structures. It highlights his authorial intent revealed by his son in the introduction of

Dune Messiah of “warning that entire societies could be led to ruination by heroes,” writing about “the megalomania of leadership and the pitfalls of following magnetic, charming politicians” (*Messiah* 9). These pitfalls become apparent in Paul’s type of government, as a monarchic dictatorship typically relies on shared power with different elite factions, who all serve their own motives. Paul is shown to be ineffective and often leaves the daily governing to his council.

Leto’s government is that of a personalist dictatorship type, or classic authoritarian rule. A key feature of such rule is that there is no institution that wields any kind of power independently of the leader. In these types of dictatorship, leaders disproportionately wield political influence (Frantz 77). Leto takes this aspect to the extreme, as he embarks on his journey to become the God Emperor who rules the Imperium in his worm body for 4000 years.

Frantz distinguishes between an authoritarian leader and an authoritarian regime, and this distinction is helpful to highlight the differences between the two modes of government under analysis here. An authoritarian regime is the collection of basic rules, both formal and informal, that specify how leadership, decision-making and policies are enforced throughout the state. By considering the relationship and division of power between leader and elite, that you can see how the authoritarian regime enforces its rule (Frantz 25-26).

Paul’s and Leto’s governments are different in nature, even though both assume the position as emperor. Paul is an authoritarian leader who shares his power with others in his autocratic government and the rest of the elite hierarchy in his empire. Paul expresses in *Dune Messiah* that he “[had] thought of himself as an inventor of government. But the invention had fallen into old patterns ... forces at work beyond his reach ... eluded and defied him” (*Messiah* 112). Paul’s imperium, though ostensibly led by him, is in fact one of a labyrinthine bureaucracy.

Leto's government, by contrast, is one where the leader and the regime are one and the same. Leto has no need for a hierarchy of elites with varying levels of control over sections of his society. This becomes evident in a scene where there is an attack in his empire: "[Leto] had not the strength to make a prescient sweep which would send his messengers to the proper meeting points" (*God Emperor* 227). This particular quote directly links Leto's prescience to his authoritarian devices. It is the strength of one's prescience that indicates their authoritarian power. Knowledge is power, so unlimited knowledge, foreknowledge, is unlimited power. While the extent of his power is revealed here, it shows that his rule is mainly predicated on his subjects following his direct commands, based upon his authoritarian vision.

Frantz argues that authoritarian leaders tend to follow specific patterns in retaining their power, especially in "constraint-free political atmospheres" (45), just like the one that effectively exists for Leto. She notes that it is typical for leaders in those environments to purge challengers, picking loyal advisors over competent ones, and pursue erratic policy choices that cement their powerbase (45). The goal of all autocrats is the maximization of their political power to direct policy. In the case of Paul and Leto, that concerns the power to direct the entirety of humanity.

This maximization of political power is achieved through what Frantz terms personalization, whereby an autocrat move their regime towards a state where they "[amass] greater political power into their own hands" (49). There are a number of indicators of personalization, such as the narrowing of the inner circle, installation of loyalists in key positions of power, the promotion of family members to powerful posts, and the creation of new security services (50). Two other indicators, the creation of a party and the use of referendums, will not be discussed in this chapter, as Paul and Leto's government types established before do not involve the population in their political power management.

According to Frantz, one of the concerns in that maximization of political power is the need to mitigate “the threat elites pose to their rule over that of the masses” (46). Paul fulfills this need after taking over the Imperium by the narrowing the inner circle, the Imperial council. He also installs his sister on this council, and provides for her to be a stand-in if Paul is ever incapable of ruling. There are two indicators of personalization that Paul pursues in order to maximize his power. He also installs loyalists in key positions of power, as in *Dune Messiah*; there are multiple instances of Fremen seeking power, and Paul and his council reward various elites within the Fremen by giving them political posts or securing perks and privileges of being Fremen in the Imperium. “[The Fremen] were sensitive to the uses of power and they were greedy to maintain their ascendancy” (*Emperor* 206). The Fremen are enamored and seduced by the trappings of power, and their constant quest is to maintain the new status quo, one in which they have been emancipated from their former elite oppressors, and are now elevated to the political elites themselves.

Leto, by contrast, foregoes these first three indicators of personalization. In *Children of Dune*, he actively destroys much of the spice storage present on Arrakis, enraging the elite and Paul’s imperial council. Instead of co-opting the elite the way Paul has done, Leto engages in the ultimate powerplay, by fusing himself with the worm precursors, becoming the great Worm himself. At the start of *God Emperor*, Leto explains how he attained ultimate power, by being the sole proprietor of the spice, as he eliminated all traces of *mélange* throughout the universe, making himself the one who doles out the resource, and thus himself as the one who controls all power.

Leto’s behavior here exemplifies Herbert’s authorial intent, as revealed in his “Science Fiction and a World in Crisis” (1974). Herein he argues that *Dune* contains a

critique of the Western obsession with political, social and economic control. It is Leto here who represents the extreme variety of such hegemony. His power is near absolute, in both the political sense, as well as in the physical sense. His government controls the known universe, and since Leto is both the regime and leader in one, indistinguishable, he controls the known universe. He maximized physical power as well, becoming one with the Worm, acquiring physical properties no human before has ever attained. And he has maximized power over the environment as well, controlling what Arrakis should look like, who gets to live in what environment, the locations of forests, rivers, deserts and all else.

The remaining indicator of personalization is the creation of new security services, which provides protection to the regime through “coup-proofing” (Frantz 52), by creating a military elite whose sole purpose is to protect the leader. Paul’s security service is the Fedaykin, his personal bodyguards. As they are answerable only to him, they are an effective safeguard against any surreptitious threat to his rule. This threat to outsiders is made apparent as they are also called ‘the Emperor’s Death Commandos’ (*Messiah* 137). Leto similarly engages in such coup-proofing, by establishing an all-female pacification force, the Fish Speakers, who he binds to himself through veneration: “The ritual is called Siaynoq—the Feast of Leto. It is the adoration of my person in my presence” (*Emperor* 137).

Their security forces answer only to the autocrat, making it an effective tool for maximalization of political power. The purpose of the security force, coup-proofing, does not serve to maximize power, but instead is one of the methods autocrats have in retaining that power. The security force can be utilized in case a coup occurs, as they are loyal to a fault. According to Frantz, there are two more methods which are proactive in retaining power, rather than the reactive nature of

coup-proofing. The first of these methods have already been examined above, namely the installation of loyalist figures in government, incentivizing them to stay loyal.

The second one is factionalization, where the elite is kept in separate groups. (Frantz 47). Leto, unlike Paul, actively applies this method of factionalization. His control over the spice allows him control over entire communities and their opportunities to connect. Because spice is a necessity for space travel, the means through which the Guild traverses space, by limiting its supply and enforcing rules on when people can travel, he effectively keeps the entirety of humanity planet-bound as needed to keep them from becoming too strong. It is through divide and conquer that Leto cements his authoritarian rule.

Frantz's framework of authoritarianism served to highlight the key differences and similarities between Paul and Leto's government. Paul is arguably not the ultimate autocrat, as he seems more entrapped by the elites as a restraint on his power. This pattern has already been established at the end of the previous chapter, where Paul seemed afraid of taking the necessary steps in becoming the ultimate autocrat in order to teach humanity. Leto in fact does fulfil this requirement, and applies the features of autocracy to the fullest extent in order to teach humanity about the horrors of authoritarianism.

The difference in their government is one of control. The Golden Path, as analyzed in the previous chapter, serves as an inoculation of humanity against such authoritarian control. Leto rebuked Paul for not following through the vision of the Golden Path to its fullest. By comparing their governments, it becomes evident that a crucial element of the Golden Path for Leto is the level of control that is exerted on humanity. Paul was afraid of the decisions he would have to make he considered evil. This fear is reflected in his government, where many of the decisions are made, in his name, by loyalist elites in crucial positions throughout his government. These elites

taste part of the power of authoritarianism and become enamored by it, attempting to acquire more power within Paul's government for themselves. Leto sidesteps the threat of elite factions to autocratic rule, and thus the risk of keeping autocracy alive. His government is of his making alone, the rest of humanity in thrall to his whims and commands. This contrast to Paul's government reveals Leto's idea of teaching humanity to forget the appeal of authoritarianism and control over others, by becoming the sole nexus of power on all levels of government, becoming the ultimate predator Tyrant.

Herbert then, through his autocrats Paul and Leto, offers a clear rebuke of autocratic tendencies. In particular, he explores how authoritarian rule can be destructive and unfair, as in the bureaucratic imbroglio of Paul's Imperium, or dehumanizing, as can be seen in the total suppression of human agency in Leto's so-called enlightened dictatorship.

Chapter 3: The Interconnectedness of Ecology and Autocracy in *Dune*

The previous chapters focused on the nature of the Atreides' autocracy and how the motif of prescience is analogous to their autocratic vision of the ideal trajectory for the future of humanity, and in turn, Arrakis. This chapter dissects how the Atreides' autocratic powerbase depends on the ecosystem of Arrakis, how they utilize the Fremen, and their control and exploitation of the two dominant resources water and spice. The first part will explain how the ecology of Arrakis changes in nature from *Dune* up to *God Emperor* and how those changes impact how the ecology theme is developed in the different novels. The second part will expose how the various hegemonies that rule Arrakis over the course of the novels co-opt the planet's human and natural resources and how that reinforces the Atreides' autocratic tendencies. The third part then explores how the Atreides co-opt the ecosystem and ecological balance as a weapon and why that threat is vital to their power base as autocrats.

Much of the dialogue and narration in *Dune* provides an exposition of the planet's ecological balance. Herbert develops the ecology theme in *Dune* in a way that emphasizes the complex interdependence of all the aspects of Arrakis's ecosystem. Reef links this interdependent ecosystem in *Dune* to the emergence of a new ecological notion of the environment after 1945, when a paradigm shift occurred away from separate “aspects of environmental issues” to the notion that these aspects are interdependent and that this holistic view of the environment provides an opportunity to review humanity's problematic relationship with nature (Reef 157). Herbert's treatment of the ecology in *Dune* exemplifies that paradigm shift.

Liet-Kynes, the planetologist, features as the voice of the ecosystem both in-character and through epigraphs, providing a voice to the planet as an active participant. The title planetologist is an example of that paradigm shift from a

separate local view of ecological factors to an integrated global one. Herbert's ecology is necessarily compressed, as it is impossible to approximate with Arrakis the complexity of Earth's actual ecosystem. Through Liet-Kynes exposition, Herbert showcases his "micro-ecology revolving around the sandworm" (Reef 166). A vital part is played by this worm-cycle, where the sandtrout, larval forms of the sandworms, process any water present on a planet, keeping it away from the sandworms as water is lethal to them. During this process, they create spice, and some sandtrout transform into small sandworms. In turn, these sandworms provide a vital function to Arrakis's ecology, as through their metabolism they provide atmospheric oxygen. Arrakis contains no forests, and extremely little plantlife, so it would be an uninhabitable planet without this vital step. Herbert's creation of a micro-ecology radically different from the one on Earth allows for water and spice to be both scarce and bountiful within *Dune's* universe. With this simplified ecology, Herbert is enabled to "create a parable of humanity's hubris in seeking to control and exploit nature" (Reef 157). Paul and Leto's exploitation of that ecology exemplify that hubris.

These planetologists Pardot Kynes and his son Liet-Kynes have a utopian vision of an Arrakis transformed into a verdant planet:

The planet was merely an expression of energy, a machine being driven by its sun. What it needed was reshaping to fit it to man's needs. His mind went directly to the free-moving human population, the Fremen. What a challenge! What a tool they could be! Fremen: an ecological and geological force of almost unlimited potential. (*Dune* 519)

Their view of the planet's ecology and the Fremen indicates the paradigm shift in viewing the environment more holistically during the 1960s. They are aware of the interdependence of the ecosystem, but view that interdependence as something that

can be reshaped to humanity's whims and needs. Reef argues this is a critique of the “folly of state-orchestrated planning of nature” (162). This theme of an anthropocentric view on ecology is apparent throughout the *Dune* saga and is essential in establishing the link between the Atreides' autocratic pursuits and the ecology of Arrakis.

To create Arrakis's simplified micro-ecology Herbert adds a mechanism for oxygen through the sandworm-cycle, but the other essential element for a functioning ecology is central to understanding Arrakis' ecosystem, water. The significance of water is apparent in the Fremen culture, where every mention of it elicits reverie from the Fremen: "A voice hissed : ‘He sheds tears!’ It was taken up around the ring: ‘Usul gives moisture to the dead!’” (*Dune* 500). Water is woven into Fremen society and shapes much of the interactions within that society. Water's scarcity is part of life on *Dune*, and affects all classes of people on Arrakis in some shape or way. However, the lower classes experience this scarcity as a threat to survival. Water equals life. The higher classes, the Atreides and the more affluent merchant classes, mitigate the impact of that scarcity through their wealth and connections, and even flaunt their ability to ignore that scarcity: “It was the custom ... for guests as they entered to dip their hands ceremoniously into a basin, slop several cups of water onto the floor, dry their hands on a towel and fling the towel into the growing puddle at the door” (*Dune* 145). Water scarcity symbolizes class imbalance.

The power that the scarcity of water holds for an autocrat like Paul to capitalize on is highlighted in the second novel. The changing balance between a society where water could only be used wastefully by the rich and water becoming a resource available to the masses is essential for Paul's autocratic government to cement its political power. His government successfully co-opts the ecological

transformation of Arrakis started by the a-political planetologists through which Paul cements his political power base: "[Paul] promised to transform your desert planet into a water-rich paradise. And while he dazzled you with such visions, he took your virginity!" (*Messiah* 14). This quote makes that link explicit. Paul capitalized on his promise of a planet where water is no longer scarce, with the only caveat that he and his government do not have to divest control over the planet and its resources to the people.

The motif of water changes as the *Dune* saga progresses up to *God Emperor*. Water is present throughout the narrative as a motif, ritual, religious symbol, and so much more. In *Dune Messiah* its symbolism diminishes from a scarce, critical resource and measure of wealth to a tool to be used in the ecological transformation of the planet. The cultural aspect of water transforms as well, where water discipline transforms from a necessity to a status symbol. As the ecological transformation of Arrakis progresses and more and more water becomes unlocked within the atmosphere of the ecosystem, the older Fremen still keep to the water discipline. In contrast, the younger Fremen take water for granted; the rituals and religious symbolism of water are no longer relevant to them. This loss of socio-cultural traits in the younger Fremen is a result of the changing environment because of the ongoing terraforming project fast-tracked by the Atreides. According to Chris Pak, extreme environments encourage and facilitate tightly knit communities, as the Fremen are, where co-operation and strict adherence to those communities is vital for their survival (Pak 116). As that environment changes, so do the communities that developed out of those environments change and in time fall apart. This allows for the Atreides to capitalize on that loss of community, offering an alternative in their new autocratic power fantasy.

In *Children of Dune*, the motif of water becomes a threat to the stability of the Imperium and in turn, humanity. The narrative focuses on the destructive effects of the accelerated terraforming of Arrakis, threatening to destroy the spice cycle, as water is poisonous to the sandworms. It is Leto that has a vision of this threat, "[filling] him with foreboding for the cataclysmic changes which human intervention was bringing" (*Children* 169). Paul's tool of control becomes a threat to his political power and the survival of the human race. Leto becomes an agent against Paul's government, destroying much of the terraforming installations to gain political power to execute his Golden Path.

As scarce as water is on Arrakis, spice is ubiquitous. It is inversely correlated with water in *Dune* when looking at the balance of power and wealth that both symbolize. Water's worth is almost immeasurable planet side, as it signifies survival and a building block of life. It is used as coin, as evidenced by the water rings that serve as currency. For Liet-Kynes, and thus the Fremen, it is also the essential resource for the realization of the planetologist's utopia. Spice, by contrast, can be found anywhere in the desert and is thus effectively worthless planet side. This dichotomy between water and spice is reversed when viewed on an Imperial scale. Water is not scarce within the Imperium as a whole. In contrast, spice is the most valuable substance throughout the Imperium. Because of huge demand, there is scarcity which in turn makes spice a prime focus for Paul and Leto to control and utilize in their autocratic pursuits.

The fact that spice is ubiquitous provides the Fremen and Liet-Kynes with opportunities to pursue their emancipation through the terraforming project. "They're paying the Guild for privacy, paying in a coin that's freely available to anyone with desert power-spice" (*Dune* 213). Spice, unlike water, is available everywhere for those on Arrakis, making it essentially worthless in the economic

sense. Although it is of vital importance to Fremen culture, it is available everywhere on the planet and is essentially renewable. Unlike the Atreides, their use of the spice is not focused on economic or political dominance.

In “Postcolonial Science Fiction: The Desert Planet” (2010), Gerard Gaylard states that many science fiction works between the 1960s and 1980s explore forms of imperial hegemony appropriating resources and the political struggle that ensues as a result of that appropriation. In *Dune*, this struggle is between Atreides, on the one hand, and Harkonnen and the Emperor, on the other. The way in which the subsequent hegemonies exploit the Fremen and the planet is indicative of primitive accumulation, which Johanna Oksala defines as “extracting resources and appropriating them for free or without adequate compensation” (221). These overlords of Arrakis, whether Harkonnen or Atreides, view the planet and the Fremen as sources of real estate, labor, and raw natural resources that can be seized and appropriated without any form of meaningful compensation. Whether it is Leto's unilateral edicts on the exact layout, shape, and organization of Arrakis, to the expropriation of the Fremen's labor and potential for war, up to how the allocation of water and spice on Arrakis is arranged, all of these are subject to primitive accumulation, and a form of maximizing political control or personalization as discussed in the previous chapter.

The Harkonnen are opaque in their approach to the appropriation of resources. The Fremen are recruited as forced labor in building up Harkonnen infrastructure on Arrakis and in the harvesting of the spice. Herbert highlights this Harkonnen approach through their speech acts when speaking of the Fremen: “Fremen scum” (*Dune* 29), “a few mongrel Fremen” (30), and their language regarding their ultimate aim: “Wealth was the thing. CHOAM is the key to wealth” (29). The Harkonnen's approach is framed as a classic example of the above-

discussed primitive accumulation. This existing hierarchical dynamic is part of the reason that Paul manages to assume his position of power among the Fremen, as they see in Paul a path to emancipation from the Harkonnen oppression.

When the Atrides come in as the new overlords of Arrakis, they are presented at first as a nobler alternative. The Duke and Paul speak of allying the Fremen, as if to enter into an equal partnership with them in establishing themselves on Arrakis. The reason for establishing on Arrakis, where the fief was granted to them by the emperor, is part of a powerplay designed by the Harkonnen and the Emperor. Paul's father, the Duke, explains the details of that trap and why he is taking over the fief despite that threat:

‘[The Harkonnen] mean spice production to fail and you to be blamed.’ ‘They wish the Atrides name to become unpopular,’ the Duke said. ‘Think of the Landsraad Houses that look to me for a certain amount of leadership – their unofficial spokesman. Think how they'd react if I were responsible for a serious reduction in their income. After all, one's own profits come first.’

(Dune 54)

This quote makes the Atrides' plan for Arrakis and their underlying motives explicit, in that their decisions taken for this planet serve to cement and maintain their positions of power and to do so the profits have to be protected. In order to protect those profits, the Fremen are an essential tool:

‘We have [on Arrakis] the potential of a corps as strong and deadly as the Sardaukar. It'll require patience to exploit [the Fremen] secretly and wealth to equip them properly ... You see now why we walk into Arrakis, knowing the trap is there.’ *(Dune 56)*

The Duke expounds the argument that the expropriation of the Fremen is necessary to maintain their powerbase and defeat their main political rivals. This plan fails, as

the Duke is assassinated and Paul goes into exile. Eventually, however, Paul regains that powerbase at the end of *Dune*, and again makes the role of the Fremen to the Atreides more explicit: "The Fremen are mine" (*Dune* 517). It is their labor and potential for war that the autocrat Paul needs, without providing any adequate compensation besides being a more gentle and compassionate overlord than what came before. In the end, Paul duped the Fremen, and they "remain without notable agency as a new imperial and ecological structure erasing their freedom is imposed" (Reef 170). No longer viewed as allies, instead they are co-opted as a resource in maintaining and expanding political power.

The culmination of Paul's power grab in *Dune* brings all these aspects of control over the planet's resources together. As shown above, in the Duke's expounding of the Atreides political dilemmas in maintaining power, Paul is already made aware of the necessity of control over the planet's natural resources. For Paul to assume the mantle of autocratic leadership of not just the Atreides duchy, but the Imperium, his control over the spice and the desert has to be solidified. His appropriated Fremen warriors are essential in this pursuit, because through their prowess the "capture of Arrakis ... gave him a monopoly over the ultimate coin of the realm—the geriatric spice, melange, the poison that gave life" (*Messiah* 16). This monopoly allows the Atreides to completely subvert the power structure of CHOAM, as much of the economical balance is predicated on how much of the scarce spice is extracted and traded in the imperial trade network.

The manner in which Paul asserts his control over the Fremen, and thus Arrakis, is by capitalizing on their desire to be emancipated from the burden of their current masters, the Harkonnen. Instead, they are “subordinated to the agenda of an individual aristocrat. The terraforming project ... commandeered for the purposes of an individual’s drive for ... power” (Pak 119). This method of control is what Joshua

Pearson, in “Frank Herbert’s *Dune* and the Financialization of Heroic Masculinity,” attributes to Paul’s “weaponized ecological literacy” (165). He uses his ecological knowledge gleaned through prescience and his experiences on Arrakis to present the Fremen with an ecological shortening of the way. Whereas the Fremen’s initial project could take upwards of a hundred to a thousand years, Paul induces the Fremen to abandon their slow approach, and instead allow him to fulfill their deepest desires.

At the conclusion to *Dune*, Paul has arrived at a foreseen nexus of his prescient visions. He presents the Emperor with an ultimatum to transfer Imperial power to himself. He orders the Spacing Guild to remove their ships from Arrakis space, at which the Guildsmen argue that they do not take orders from anyone. Paul then threatens the assembled parties: "'If I hear any more nonsense from either of you,' Paul said, 'I'll give the order that'll destroy all spice production on Arrakis ... forever'" (*Dune* 504). Paul refers to a method where a metabolite of the spice can be used in conjunction with a large deposit of spice in the desert which would kill off all the sandtrout, destroying the spice cycle upon which the Imperium relies. Here Paul utilizes his control over the Fremen and the spice production to issue an ultimatum. The spice itself would be removed forever from existence, blinding the Space Guild who rely on the spice to jump between the different planets in the Imperium. It would also blind Paul. "The eye that looks ahead to the safe course is closed forever, [the] Guild is crippled. Humans become little isolated clusters on their isolated planets. You know, I might do this thing out of pure spite ... or out of ennui" (*Dune* 505). As chapter one discusses, the eye that looks ahead is Paul’s prescience, or autocratic vision. In effect, it would remove Paul’s powerbase.

This power play by Paul represents an aspect of authoritarianism, as discussed in chapter two. In this scene, Paul assumes the mantle of the autocrat quite willingly,

relying on his control over a vital natural resource: “The power to destroy a thing is the absolute control over it. You've agreed I have that power. We are not here to discuss or to negotiate or to compromise. You will obey my orders or suffer the immediate consequences!” (505). Paul here displays two of the authoritarian features from chapter one: personalization and the maximalization of political power. He co-opts the ecology of Arrakis as a weapon. As destruction of the spice would inevitably mean a collapse of his own source of power, Paul has created a weapon with which the threat of mutually assured destruction forces compliance on any factions that would oppose his political power.

Unlike Paul, Leto's control over the spice is no longer predicated on the mechanism of primitive accumulation. Instead, it highlights another mechanism of expropriation, namely the subsumption of nature, which is defined as “the strategies to intentionally alter biophysical processes in order to overcome obstacles in production, gain competitive advantage, and increase profitability” (Oksala 227). In *Children of Dune*, Leto expounds his strategy in becoming the Worm by allowing a symbiotic relationship with the sandtrout to transform his body. At first, he seeks to stockpile the spice. Then, when his stockpile is great enough, he intends to destroy the entire spice cycle, making his hoard the only source of the vital spice. In *God Emperor*, this strategy comes full circle, as he finally lays out the plan for control over the spice and in turn the Imperium. His eventual death, orchestrated and foreseen by him, will create a new spice cycle as he sheds the sandtrout which were a part of him before. In the meantime, Leto is the only source of spice, and gains the ability through his control over the biophysical processes of the sandtrout attached to him to provide him with his own personal source of spice, in effecting subsuming nature to gain control over spice and its generation processes. Leto imitates Paul's approach here, as his own survival and power base is secured through control over

the spice cycle. This pattern is similar to Paul and provides Leto with a very similar deterrent, where any outside threat to Leto's life or political power is suppressed lest his opponents risk mutually assured destruction. He knows eventually he will be overthrown, the ultimate rejection of autocracy by humanity, and will die: "I am pregnant with my Empire. I'll die giving birth to it" (*God Emperor* 91). According to Michael Phillips, this symbolism of giving birth to his empire, and thus humanity, is part of the motif of Leto as humanity's predator (47). Leto strengthens humanity and teaches it not to follow heroes, by showing them the end-result. Leto's use of the word predator in relation to his lesson of anti-authoritarianism explicates the link between ecology and authoritarianism as well, where "ecology is the management of such conflicts" (47), the conflict between predator, autocrat, and prey, humanity.

In conclusion, this chapter detailed how the themes of ecology and autocracy are intertwined within the novel, and how Paul and Leto's political power is dependent upon the ecosystem. The natural resources of Arrakis provide the Atrides with the wealth to support their governments, the Fremen supply them with the labor force and army to attain their autocratic objectives and their co-opting of the spice cycle provides them with the insurance that their powerbase is unassailable. Paul and Leto's pursuit of reshaping Arrakis represents "a grand social and bio-engineering project conducted in a strictly top-down manner" (Reef 161). This directly links the destabilizing of Arrakis's ecology and subversion of the Fremen's emancipation to the Atrides' autocratic aim of maximizing their political power.

Chapter 4: From Monomyth to Antihero

The previous three chapters establish Paul and Leto as autocratic rulers, who present their prescient visions as the only path forward for humanity. To do so, they command the planet's natural resources, the Fremen's labor and war potential and threaten the very stability of the empire in order to remain in power and even extend that power. In this manner, they are established as Herbert's authoritarian superheroes whose vision for humanity is imposed upon the Imperium. Herbert is explicit in his essay "Genesis" (1980) that *Dune* is meant to explore what happens when "people tend to give over every decision-making capacity to any leader" (1). This warning invites Paul and Leto to be analyzed as anti-heroes and the novel's relation to broader political warnings of mistaking such anti-heroic autocrats as heroes.

In *Crime Uncovered: Antihero* (2018), Fiona Peters and Rebecca Stewart provide an analysis of what the anti-hero character type entails by comparing various characters in modern literature that show elements of anti-heroism. They make a compelling case by comparing these characters and through relevant literature that each antihero has shared characterizations and elements that are more typical of a particular sub-type of an antihero. These more unique elements are part of their specific narrative's focus on critiquing or questioning heroism in diverse themes. The focus is on protagonists in the crime genre, either the criminal or a vigilante operating outside of established authority. Stewart details in the introduction how the idea of an antihero in modern literature is used to "critique notions of heroism by disturbing and disrupting our expectations, and furthermore by enticing us to be complicit in this" (7). Victor Brombert also observes this usage of the antihero, who "more keenly perhaps than the traditional hero, challenges our assumptions, raising anew the questions of how we see, or wish to see ourselves" (qtd. in Grantham 7).

This definition ties in with Herbert's intent of the superhero warning, raising questions for his readers on falling for such a hero's charms and insular vision. The previous chapters highlighted Paul and Leto's prodigious use of authoritarian powers. Both Paul and Leto provide their own judgment when killing or are complicit in morally dubious acts which subvert their heroism. They slowly regress further from the hero they are showcased initially to be. This chapter starts with a more detailed analysis of why Paul and Leto are antiheroes in type. Then it compares them to features from Peters and Stewart's antihero analysis to investigate how that character type is revealed in Paul and Leto both. It ends with an investigation into how using the anti-hero type emphasizes Herbert's exploration of heroism and how that intersects with authoritarianism.

Following Peters and Stewart's reasoning, to establish whether a character is an antihero, they have to be analyzed in opposition to the classic hero personality features, which are "honest, idealistic, courageous, honourable, [and] noble" (7). In *Dune*, Herbert presents Paul as a superhero with those qualities (Immerwahr 212) to his readers. He is honest, idealistic in his pursuits, and is continuously heralded by other characters as honorable and noble. But his flaws start showing when considering his role in *Dune Messiah*. By this time, he is complicit in the Jihad his mere presence started. Eventually, he seeks redemption by renouncing his government and his role in it, advocating against authoritarianism from the sidelines instead of becoming humanity's gruesome anti-hero teacher, precipitating that choice for Leto.

In *Children of Dune* and *God Emperor*, Leto Atreides is presented as a hero with prescience from birth, and in *God Emperor* is transformed into the Tyrant, the predator, the sole ruler of the known universe for millennia from the very start of the novel. Donald Palumbo analyzes both Paul as well as Leto as "heroic protagonists"

(436). He goes on to explore their role in the novels as mere reiterations of the monomyth, a hero's journey. This seems to forego the fact that in *Dune Messiah*, Paul's heroic image presented in *Dune* is subverted, and he becomes the same type of autocratic leader and government that already existed before in a similar shape in Emperor Shaddam. Palumbo's analysis also foregoes Leto's admission of being a predator and villainous in nature. These incongruencies in Palumbo's research problematize his argument of a monomyth narrative, creating space for an alternate interpretation of their character arc as having antiheroic features.

This raises the question of why Paul and Leto would willingly go down such a path, considering they have prescient powers. They must be aware beforehand of the implications of their actions, especially considering their multi-disciplinary upbringing and access to ancestral memories, which contain a plenitude of people they can embody. The crucial connection between the two is the Golden Path, the one avenue that both Leto and Paul saw in their visions: "And what is the Golden Path? You ask. It is the survival of humankind" (*Emperor* 16). As analyzed in chapter one, the Golden Path is the metaphor through which Herbert communicates his warning of relying on the autocratic hero and such a hero's implicit threat for humankind. As prescience can be read as a metaphor for authoritarian control, the Golden Path can be interpreted as the antidote to such power. "'The Golden Path,' [Ghanima] said. 'It is not a good vision.' [Leto as Paul:] 'It's the only possible vision.'" (*Children* 72). Leto embodies Paul here through his ancestral memory and, as Paul, acknowledges the Golden Path as the only vision. The earlier discussion of Paul and Leto's confrontation revealed that Paul did not follow through on this vision out of fear of committing evil. Leto chided him that by relegating that authority to his sycophants, he committed the greater evil. The greater evil here would be that Paul's choice of not following the path to fruition forces Leto to do so: "[Paul] Muad'Dib, the hero, must

be destroyed utterly ... Otherwise this child cannot bring us back from chaos” (*Children* 72). Paul realizes that his own choices led to humanity seeing him as a hero, while he knows that instead, he and his regime serve as an authoritarian monster.

Paul’s choice precipitates Leto’s dilemma, where Leto’s Golden Path requires that to teach humanity the lesson of anti-authoritarianism, he needs to become a negative exemplar of how humankind should live their lives. The manner that he employs to deliver society from their feudalistic or authoritarian tendencies is to engulf them with a tyrannical government, where they lose all control and agency over their lives. “[Leto’s] eyes were fixed upon the Golden Path and in his left hand he carried the scepter of absolute mastery” (*Children* 103). The scepter of absolute mastery needs to be wielded as horribly as possible in order for humanity to reject the autocratic rule that the scepter symbolizes.

Framing Paul and Leto as emblematic of the monomyth hero is problematic when considering these circumstances. However, they do not fit the mold of the traditional antihero either, as Michael Grantham states that the traditional antihero interpretation is one where the antihero has “limited capacity to effect change ... [and is] a hero of inaction, already defeated by the social reality in which they exist and their own incapacity to effect change” (8). He further challenges the validity of applying such a definition of the classic antihero onto antiheroic protagonists from speculative fiction. Instead, he contends that those antiheroes he terms “paradoxical protagonists” (9) of speculative fiction are depicted as superhuman, having gained powers that supersede those of everyday individuals (9). Both Leto and Paul gain access to memories and lived experiences of all of their ancestors past, and are gifted with prescience. This concept connects Herbert’s superhero concept to the paradoxical protagonist. Grantham continues his argument by contending that these

paradoxical protagonists are susceptible to violence. Unlike a traditional antihero, who employs violence for selfish reasons: “his lack of a developed conscience enables him to transgress moral and social laws regarding killing” (Peters 26), the paradoxical protagonist is often seen as “employing violence as a means to an end, and while the violent acts may be considered immoral in the social reality inhabited by both reader and protagonist, such actions can ... be justified in relation to the situation ... the protagonist [confronts]” (Grantham 9). This justification can be found in the Atreides’ Golden Path. This situation requires violence, typically immoral, but is justified because the outcome would mean the survival of humankind and its release from authoritarian proclivities. The dichotomy of Leto as the hero, and him as the Worm, the antihero, is necessary for the Golden Path. If he does not wear the guise of an enlightened despot, a hero to the masses, he would not reveal to masses what it means to live under absolute authoritarian rule. And similarly, if he is not the Worm, the predator, actively committing horrible crimes against humanity, he would not be teaching them the lesson of the tyranny of authoritarianism. He needs to be the anti-hero for him to expose humanity’s proclivities for autocratic rule.

There are numerous moments in the novel where Leto reveals strategic long-term thinking, informed and sometimes steered by his inner world, as the bedrock of assuming the role of antihero. The protagonists analyzed by Peters and Stewart do not self-ascribe to this characterization, while Leto purposefully revels in it. This aspect of Leto problematizes ascribing the classic antiheroic character type to him. In the end, for Leto, being the antihero is simply a means to an end, an instruction method. He is not a hero, and yet he is also not a villain. Herbert invites his readers to think of Leto as a martyr, with only the best interests of humankind at heart. The more compelling argument is that he is emblematic of Grantham’s paradoxical

protagonist. Hence, for the remainder of this thesis, the definition of the antiheroic paradoxical protagonist will be implied when the term antihero is used. This allows for Leto to be compared to the antiheroes analyzed by Stewarts and Peter, with the caveat that Leto employs his violence as a means to an end, unlike a classical antihero where violence is a result of lack of guilt entirely.

Peters and Stewart state that the antihero character type contains an element of attraction to readers, allowing the reader to feel complicit in the antiheroes' actions (8). Kent Worcester provides an example of such complicity in his chapter on the Punisher, a vigilante from the Marvel universe, who acts as the judge, jury and executioner in taking out lawbreakers, resulting in many deaths in his pursuit to punish crime. The Punishers "operates on the assumption that the system has definitely broken down and that he has no choice but to take matters into his own hands" (Worcester 35). Worcester argues that this transgressive morality of the goal justifying the means makes this Punisher attractive to audiences. The reader is encouraged to overlook such crimes against humanity, as it is the greater good being served. Moreover, the Punisher is quoted by Worcester as having the ultimate motivation for his death to have meaning, to die while fighting those he deems unworthy of living because of their crimes (37). Herbert invites the reader, through Leto, to do something similar. Leto is the ultimate hunter of his prey, humanity, with the goal to teach them to forego authoritarianism in all its forms, even that of a supposed enlightened despot, even if it means that his death is a necessary element of that goal.

Every antiheroic protagonist analyzed by Peters and Stewart possesses a quality of being "recognizably human, needy for love and validation" (10), one of the antihero's shared characteristics. A hero, a superhuman, would not have such needs. A villain would pursue evil for evil's sake. Humans are inherently flawed and

vulnerable, and it is on those aspects of humanity that people connect with. Peters and Stewart point out those flaws and insecurities in the literary anti-heroes they analyze as a humanizing factor, which the authors use to make their antiheroes more compelling. Leto reveals those same insecurities and flaws through Hwi Noree, an ambassador of Ix to Leto, a clone created by his enemies to weaken him by appealing to his still human side. Upon meeting her, Leto immediately recognizes this ploy: “to charm the God Emperor, to find a chink in his armour” (*Emperor* 140). “She appeared the epitome of goodness, obviously bred and conditioned for this quality by her Ixian masters with their careful calculation of the effect this would have on the God Emperor” (144). Hwi’s inclusion in the narrative serves as a foil to Leto. She is described as calm and quiet, and Leto describes her as seeming “outside of time in a deeply peaceful way” (145). Hwi’s peaceful nature directly opposes Leto’s predation on humanity and highlights him as the anti-hero. “By just standing there in front of him, Hwi cried out to his lost humanity. It was too much for him and he moaned in despair: ‘Why do your masters torture me?’” (*Emperor* 147). He mourns the irreversible loss of humanity in this moment in choosing to become the Worm. This complicates the humanizing factor for Leto, as the Worm is shown here to be inseparable from Leto the human. The Worm acts on pure instinct, is deathly afraid of water, and always on the lookout for threats, and is a being without any human concerns.

And yet, that particular dichotomy between Worm and human which Hwi’s creation and insertion into Leto’s sphere by his enemies shines reveals Leto’s humanity not just as a foil, but as a trigger for Leto’s discovery that his body is still primed with the capacity for lust and love: “My most secret secret is exposed. They had discovered his secret. Hwi was the evidence of it. ... Could this terrible metamorphosis be reversed? Could he return to a human state? Not possible”

(*Emperor* 168). His enemies have discovered that Leto's choice required him to deny his humanity and be the predator. Hwi's appearance conflicted Leto, as his desires prevent him from sending her away. He even considers abandoning the Golden Path, but is quickly rebuked by his ancestral memories, referred to as the mob by Leto:

'To hell with the Golden Path! Have these folly-bound idiots ever thought once of me? Not once'

How the mob within laughed at that question! Did he not have a task to complete? Was that not the very essence of the agreement which kept the mob in check?

'You have a task to complete,' they said. 'You have but one purpose.'

Single purpose is the mark of the fanatic and I am not a fanatic!

'You must be cynical and cruel. You cannot break the trust.'

Why not?

'Who took that oath? You did. You chose this course.' (*Emperor* 145)

This scene reinforces the theme of martyrdom, of being bound to a horrible choice for the sake of all mankind. He has to remain cruel and cynical. Through Hwi, the reader is called to empathize with Leto's predicament in pursuit of the Golden Path. Moreover, this passage invites the reader to consider the Golden Path noble and the overlook the insidious means he employs to get there.

Peters suggests that novels that foreground antiheroes contain characters who identify and empathize with the anti-heroes transgressive morality. Patricia Highsmith's Tom Ripley is a suave psychopathic murderer who features in the novel *The Talented Mr Ripley*. Peters uses an interaction between the couple Jonathan and wife Simone in the novel to demonstrate how Tom's transgressive morality can attract people into identifying and empathizing with him: "her antihero challenges the status of conventional morality, and ... demonstrates how his transgressive

persona can attract other people into identifying with him: ‘I cannot understand. I cannot!’ Her husband Jon, surrogate to Highsmith’s bemused reader, reflects, ‘Tom was not really such a monster. But how to explain?’” (21). This concept is reflected in *God Emperor*, where Hwi empathizes with Leto’s plight: “‘I propose that he made this desperate choice because he saw in our future something that only such a sacrifice would prevent ... ‘You make the tyrant appear a selfless servant of the people!’ ... ‘The Lord Leto delights in the surprising genius and diversity of humankind. He is my favourite companion’” (*Emperor* 60). Hwi here indicates she understands his choices in becoming the Tyrant, and empathizes with him.

Another antiheroic feature is a freedom of the restraints of guilt. Ripley lacks the inhibitions of guilt for the murder he commits, a point which Peters argues by calling on Freud and the idea that a lack of parental agency, a “structural model of authority that channels external prohibition into the sense of morality that the super-ego represents” (22). Once more, this is mirrored in Leto. In *Children of Dune*, he is presented by Herbert as an adult at birth. Through the *spice*, his ego had been opened up to the lives of all his past ancestors while still within his mother’s womb, without any model of authority or even childhood to mediate all those experiences. For Ripley, Peters states that the death of his parents “[instigated] a schism in the formation of his super-ego that both prevents him from identification towards mature object-choice and will leave him endlessly reproducing the real lived experience of that event” (23). Herbert portrays Leto as submersing himself in his past lives, sometimes almost to the point of threatening to lose his sense of self. The problematized ego is a hallmark of the antihero, which is readily applied to Leto’s lived experiences in both *Children of Dune* and *God Emperor*.

The next feature of the classic antihero, the ability to “shift one’s identity” (Peters 24) is underlined Ripley’s ability to mirror others. While not entirely the

similar, Herbert often portrays Leto as embodying his ancestors, sometimes as inspiration, at times even speaking with their voice. Peters argues it is this particular quality, the flexibility of character, that allows the reader to “identify with <the antihero> despite his transgressive actions, thus making him an exemplary antihero” (24). Part of this flexibility, she argues, hides much of the underlying drive towards “control and cold, undemanding and clean rationalism” (24). It is that control and cold rationalism that Leto equally employs as the Tyrant.

The focus of the analysis of the Atreides as antiheroes so far has been on Leto. Various features of the antihero, the paradoxical protagonist, are readily applicable to Leto. Paul, in contrast, fits the mold less easily for the features described so far. Unlike Leto, he does not shift his identity, in fear of the mob of inner lives overtaking him. He free of the restraints of guilt, evident in the fact that he eventually is overcome by the guilt of subjecting humanity to his authoritarian government. He, unlike Leto, is worshipped as a hero by his sycophants and does not attract people to him because of his transgressive morality. However, he does display the antiheroic feature of completing a regressive arc. In her chapter “Walter White and Dexter Morgan: Regression vs stagnation”, Katherine Robbins provides an example of an early regressive antihero, Shakespeare’s Macbeth. Like Paul, Macbeth follows prophecy into actions that he struggles to reconcile after the fact. He “regresses from a hero to a child-murdering antagonist. ... the cognitive dissonance slowly changes [him]” (Robbins 101). According to Robbins, this is a model of creating “satisfying antiheroes that enthrall us with a fully developed regressive arc” (101). This model applies to Paul, where the start of this arc is signaled in *Dune* when he laments his foreknowledge of the Jihad to come: “I am a theater of processes ... I am a prey to the imperfect vision ... and its terrible purpose” (*Dune* 406). Robbins argues that a successful regressive arc requires the antihero to continuously wrestle with his

descent, instead of stagnating and accepting the change fully. Paul exemplifies this struggle, especially when Leto and Paul meet in *Children of Dune*. While Paul has seen the same vision of the Golden Path as his son, he still wrestles with the overwhelming depravity that choice implies.

Whether or not Leto or Paul are effective antiheroes is a matter of whether Herbert successfully persuades the reader of that idea. Peters argues that “an antiheroic status depends fundamentally on the author’s success in implicitly persuading [their] readers to identify with characters when they perform transgressive, morally wrong actions” (30). Many of the elements are inherently applicable to him, and serve the purpose of exposing the overarching anti-authoritarian theme of the novel. This enticing of the reader to be complicit is strengthened by including Leto’s memoirs as the epigraph to the chapters in *God Emperor*. Leto is aware that he is this antihero during his lifetime, explicitly mentioning this to Hwi and Paul, and through the epigraphs. The epigraphs especially link his transgressive actions to his eventual savior moment of releasing humanity from its authoritarian tendencies. In the end, Leto quite literally dies for humanity’s sins. From hated despot back to unrecognized martyr.

To conclude, the Atreides are evidentially antiheroes. Herbert’s *Dune* saga explores the theme of anti-authoritarianism more effectively because of the antiheroic qualities of his protagonists. The dichotomy of hero/antihero in Leto and Paul allows Herbert to highlight the problems with replacing one political system with another. Paul’s government and leadership reveals the inability to replace a system of governance with a new one, without becoming entrapped by the elite and completing a regressive arc from hero to antihero. Leto effectively demolished all previous forms of stratification, all previous models of governance, and became the only model of governance. As the God Emperor he is the government in and of

himself. As discussed earlier, the Golden Path's purpose is to teach humanity, eradicating humanity's proclivity for authoritarian rule. Their character arcs exemplify the fact that antiheroes "challenge the ways in which we see, or wish to see, ourselves, and whereas heroes are celebrated and revered due to their commitment to their honour and pride, the antihero, whilst possibly having their own code of conduct, requires no veneration" (7). The Atreides' Golden Path is a commitment to anti-authoritarianism that requires no veneration.

Conclusion

In the *Dune* saga, Herbert explores the dangers of the superhero, of hero worship and deification, and serves as a warning against autocratic rule. Through Leto, he effectively details the road to an inoculation of humanity against its authoritarian proclivities. His championing of being a predator for 4000 years allows for a lesson humanity will not forget for any foreseeable future. And yet, whether that lesson remains is an unanswered question, as such teachings are easily forgotten through generational forgetfulness if not kept alive. It is a theme that Herbert uses in Leto, where the sheer length of his rule is designed to make humanity forget the appeal of autocracy entirely. Leto's curation of the future is designed to get humanity to forget the allure of authoritarianism through generations of suppressing dissent, removing agency, eliminating the past, and creating a new story.

By reinterpreting prescience and the Golden Path as an analogy for anti-authoritarianism, this thesis provides depth and nuance to the discussion around the notion that Herbert's *Dune* has elements of the "white savior" trope (Asher-Perrin) and the interpretation by some that the saga endorses authoritarianism (Caroll). Instead, the *Dune* saga explores the appeal of the white savior, ultimately showing that that appeal is corrupt and flawed. By analyzing Paul and Leto as antiheroes, this thesis refutes the idea that the saga endorses authoritarianism, and instead is wholeheartedly anti-authoritarian.

The interpretation of prescience as an autocratic vision allows an analysis of how Herbert explores the appeal of authoritarian leaders. As discussed in chapter two, the novel solely explores authoritarian governments, allowing Herbert to focus the narrative on authoritarianism in isolation, a microcosm of government. As with Herbert's micro-ecology enabling him to focus on the hubris of humanity trying to control the environment and its resource, his microcosm of government focuses the

narrative on the leaders themselves. Consequently, the novel explores Paul and Leto's autocratic governments through the prescience motif as a stand-in for authoritarian vision. Their mode of autocracy is one of curation, where government becomes the vehicle to bend society, the universe, to the autocrat's will.

The investigation of the link between the Atreides' autocracy and the ecology of Arrakis and the Fremen provided nuance on the morals of ecological transformation to a world better suited for human occupation. Herbert does not provide an answer on how such an ecological transformation should occur, but he does investigate why pursuing it through authoritarianism is flawed. The utopian society seemingly wished for by numerous factions and characters in the novel can't be attained through deification, systemic oppression, cannot be attained when one faction is favored over another. The Atreides' use of their prescient powers are an Orwellian power grab for ultimate autocratic authority. They co-opt the ecology of Arrakis and the agency of the Fremen and all of humanity to teach the folly of following autocratic leaders who are disguised as heroes.

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