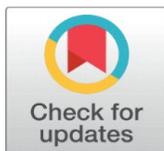
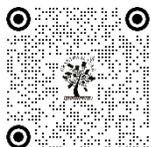


WOMEN OF FATE: POWER AND POLITICS OF WOMEN IN DUNE, DUNE MESSIAH, AND CHILDREN OF DUNE

Gargi Verma ¹, Dr. Parvanshi Sharma ²

¹ Department of English, University Institute of Liberal Arts and Humanities, Chandigarh University, Mohali-140413, India

² Department of English, University Institute of Liberal Arts and Humanities, Chandigarh University, Mohali-140413, India



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Corresponding Author

Gargi Verma, gargiverma993@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

The Dune saga by Frank Herbert is a science fiction genre that puts feminine power as the core of the myth-making epic. Throughout *Dune* (1965), *Dune Messiah* (1969), and *Children of Dune* (1976), women are a lot more than just empowering their male characters. They build dynasties, direct human evolution, and the religious and ideological frameworks that keep the Imperium united. The paper observes the overlapping roles of the most powerful female characters in both political and psychological terms. This narrative counters the masculinity of imperial power. By applying feminist theory, psychoanalysis, and posthumanist feminism, this paper shows how Herbert has portrayed the gender relations in a nuanced way. It reveals the varied spectrum of power in terms of memory, motherhood, and embodied power. The Bene Gesserit comes out as a posthuman survivalist tool that constructs possible futures by embedding historical narratives into the female body. The paper concludes that the female characters of the DUNE saga are critical instruments of continuity, resistance, and change.

Keywords: Frank Herbert, Dune, Feminine Power, Psychoanalysis, Posthuman, Matriarchal Counter-Narrative

1. INTRODUCTION

There are a few science fiction literary canons that depict feminine agency and matriarchal power as extensively as the Dune saga by Frank Herbert. Whereas male adventurism stories have tended to dominate science fiction, be it the robotic technocracy of Isaac Asimov or the cosmic paternalism of Arthur C. Clarke. However, Herbert goes against the tide. He constructs a world where women not just build the empire but also become creators, historians, breeders, and mystics of the same. They play with the genetic fate, shape the religious faith, and possess ancestral memory stretching thousands of years. Feminine power is not passive in the Dune universe. It is systemic, embodied, and often more persistent than the military or messianic power of males. The core of Herbert's world-building is the Bene Gesserit Sisterhood. A mysterious and secretive matriarchal order that is a powerful religious and social manipulator. Its

influence extends over several planets. They fundamentally engage and manipulate history via religious engineering (such as Missionaria Protectiva), genetic control (the gene breeding program), mental and physical discipline (training in the Voice, nerve control as in Gom Jabbar, and truth-sensing). They aim to create the Kwisatz Haderach, the male Bene Gesserit who could bridge the male and female memory. Ironically, in their attempt to make the ideal man, they discover the extent of their own influence. They discover how to manipulate and steer the evolution process using the womb and stabilize the empire using myth. Nevertheless, the female power is not homogeneous, according to Herbert. Rather, he turns to its various sides using characters such as Lady Jessica, a Bene Gesserit who disobeys her commandment to love and conceives the prophesied messiah, Paul. The Fremen warrior Chani, the true companion of Paul, through her character, displays the strong bond between femininity and ecology, intimacy, and resistance. In Irulan, Herbert creates a woman whose power is not her passion or fertility but her skills of writing and controlling history. And in Alia, the sister of Paul, who was a preborn, endures a terrible descent into madness, obsession, and tyrannical female nature. This serves as a warning against the dangers of uncurbed memory and psychic inheritance. This paper will discuss the complex gender, political, memory, and prophetic representations of women in the first three novels of the saga. By mentioning the distinction of woman as the Other and the self-determining subject by Simone de Beauvoir, the gender performativity theory of Judith Butler, and the theory of abjection and maternal developed by Julia Kristeva, the paper critically explores how Herbert constructs a narrative in which women are worshiped and at the same time, feared, empowered, and at the same time, constrained. It can also be argued as posthumanist features, especially on how memory and identity are enacted and reproduced through the female line through the cyborg feminism of Donna Haraway and the posthuman subjectivity of Rosi Braidotti. It can be seen through these prisms that the women in *Dune* are not the companions of greatness. They are biological manipulators, religious judges, political manipulators, and myth creators. Their influence trickles down through the generations and determines the course of not just House Atreides, but the entire known universe of *Dune*. The current work aims at putting Herbert in the periphery of the science fiction analysis on its frontline.

2. THE BENE GESSERIT: THE MATRIARCHAL ORDER BEHIND THE THRONE

Within the *Dune* universe, the most ubiquitous and long-lasting socio-political institution in Frank Herbert is the Bene Gesserit, the impact of which permeates all the principal events of the Imperium. This social order of women is not merely a religious or political society, but a living catalogue of human evolution and domination. Working behind the scenes, the Bene Gesserit use power, though not in force or direct conquest, but through the control of memory, genetics, culture, and belief. Herbert stresses that many times, the Bene Gesserit do not use explicit force but instead apply manipulation to survive. Being a matriarchal network, the Bene Gesserit is an institutionalization of feminine knowledge and power. They are celibate fighters of the womb, who know perfectly well that the ultimate power is not in weapons, but in the ability to control who is born and how. They share an approach bordering on a posthuman conception of identity: women whose physical forms are turned into precision and memory instruments. The main element of the Bene Gesserit thousand-year plan is the eugenics program, a selective breeding program (long-term), which is aimed at creating the Kwisatz Haderach, the shortening of the way, a superbeing able to reach both male and female ancestral memories. Their desire is ironic: the society of women, who intend to give birth to a man who will rise above them. We get to know in the book *Dune* that Jessica had been given specific instructions to birth only daughters to Duke Leto in order to propagate this project. Her choice to mother a son, Paul, changes the path of history and gives rise to the messiah, Paul, as well as the disastrous imperial jihad that ensues.

“You were told to bear only daughters to the Atreides.”

“It meant so much to him,” Jessica pleaded (Herbert, *Dune* 28).

This apparently touching choice is actually a political one to the core. The rebellion of Jessica destroys centuries of planning, but a genetic singularity is created as well. This decision acts as a turning point, where love, politics, biology, and fate all meet, and she posits that the maternal body can also be a place of revolutionary change. Here, the claim of Simone de Beauvoir in the *Second Sex* that woman is commonly perceived as “Other” and is denounced to the role of reproduction is flipped. In the Bene Gesserit, reproducing is replicated as a political power. They do not passively weaponize the womb, but do so intentionally, bringing ideology, biology, and power to the new generation through the womb itself. This multidimensionality between agency and determinism is also emphasized further when Paul starts developing his prescient powers. The Kwisatz Haderach was intended to be of service to the sisterhood, but Paul, who was born out of love and not obligation, eludes its grasp.

I conceived out of instinct and not out of obedience (Herbert, Dune 241).

Herbert, therefore, presents the paradox of matriarchal power; its immense potential is weakened when applied to the uncontrollable factor of the individual will. The other important instrument of the Bene Gesserit control system is the Missionaria Protectiva, a program whereby the sisterhood implants the religious myths in the primitive or distant worlds. Messianic anticipations and symbolic patterns are imprinted into these belief systems, where a trained Bene Gesserit agent can fit in when necessary. Memetic warfare through time, in short. On Arrakis, Jessica understands that the Fremmen myths of the impending Mahdi are not just coincidental; this was planted by her sisterhood since earlier generations. She is terrified and astonished by the preciousness of such manipulation:

They've prepared a way for us in the desert, Jessica told herself. (Herbert, Dune 250)

The fact that she acknowledged herself as a produced divine archetype is an example of the strength of narrative engineering. By this, Herbert criticizes the religious orthodoxy, but also the tactical use of faith as a means of imperialism, a maternal kind of colonization. As a postcolonial issue, the Missionaria Protectiva reflects European empires and their missionary techniques. It imposes cultural hegemony by spiritual conquest, imposing foreign ideology on local mythologies, reinventing them as vessels. However, as opposed to the paternalism of the real-world missionaries, the Bene Gesserit religious intervention is maternal, even womb-centered, with its references to the symbol of fertility and the admiration of female power. Here, we can see resonating the theory of Julia Kristeva of the chora, the maternal space of meaning before language. The myths of the Bene Gesserit, which exist in the subconscious cultural chora, have to do so such that even before speech, individuals are aware of the form of prophecy. When Jessica takes the Water of Life and turns into the Fremmen Reverend Mother, she performs the prophecy, not because it is true, but because it is believed.

Then she knew what she had to do.

Jessica opened her eyes, gestured to the watersack now being held above her by Chani.

"It has been blessed," Jessica said (Herbert, Dune 452).

Let the catalyst do its work, she thought. Let the Gesserit, therefore, works on the crossroads of psychoanalysis, religion, and politics. They are myth-makers knowing the symbolic structure of the human psyche, which they use with the surgical precision. In addition to their outward breeding and religion strategies, the Bene Gesserit train to their power using intensive training. They don't possess super-natural powers, but hyper-natural: control of muscle, nerve, perception, and psychology. They are taught to change their physiology, to make biochemistry change to their wishes, and to command obedience using tone of voice, which is called "the Voice."

She held her face high in the instrument glow to be sure Kinet would read her lips, said: "You mustn't disagree." (Herbert, Dune 215)

The field is reminiscent of the idea of docile body proposed by Michel Foucault, the useful body with its regulation. However, when the outside (prisons, schools, militaries) is used to discipline patriarchal institutions, the Bene Gesserit model is an internalized system of feminine rule. Their bodies are not passive receivers of ideology but active tools of ideology. This is especially applicable to the theory of gender performativity by Judith Butler. Bene Gesserit "enacted" womanhood in both conventional and subversive ways. They play roles, like concubine, noblewoman, truth-sayer, not in the form of identities, but as tactics. Their womanhood is a disguise that is intentional. Irulan, as an example, fulfills the role of a responsible imperial wife when she works as a political commentator and a historiographer. Even their military styles are gender ambiguous. They conduct psychological and political warfare in a subtle manner, yet equally harbor lethal techniques in the weirding way, a martial art of focusing on speed, economy, and rhythm. Even the word weirding is derived out of Anglo-Saxon *wyrd*, which means fate or destiny, and this further entangles feminine power with mythic time. The Bene Gesserit are not necessarily good, even though they are skilled. Herbert opposes them as savers and manipulators, protectors as well as exploiters. Their argument of being in the service of the survival of humanity is actually a cold utilitarianism that, in many cases, does not care about the suffering of an individual. This disrupts the sympathy of the reader. Are the Bene Gesserit a feminist response to the decadence of male empires, or just another form of elitist domination? Their rationalizing the manipulation in pursuit of the greater good is a reflection of the most sinister logic of technocratic governance.

3. JESSICA'S ROLE: MATRIARCH, REBEL, AND ETHICIST

Lady Jessica, concubine to Duke Leto Atreides and the mother of Paul and Alia, is the most crucial female character of the first trilogy of Dune. The clash between political duty, motherly instinct, spiritual change, and defiance is the pitchforks of her personality. As a fully trained Bene Gesserit who goes defiant and breaks her order in love, Jessica symbolizes the conflict between the institutional and the individual, the programmed femininity and the moral motherhood. Since its very inception, the plot of Jessica is characterized by rebellion. She personally and politically chooses to give Leto the son that he wants when she is told to only bear daughters and advance the breeding program of the Bene Gesserit. This love leads to the unexpected birth of the Kwisatz Haderach years early and causes an upheaval that will be felt throughout the Imperium.

Jessica is reminded by Reverend Mother that she was ordered to give birth to only daughters in the bloodline of Atreides, an order she defies based on her personal affection for Duke Leto (Herbert, Dune 28)

This scene depicts something bigger than romantic gestures. It brings out a profound sense of morality in Jessica: her unwillingness to put the human connection of love over the cold genetic manipulation. Jessica claims to be subjective in Beauvoirian terms. She refuses to play the instrumental part that the Sisterhood imposes on her, not in a rebellious manner, but in a moral agency statement. Simone de Beauvoir writes in *The Second Sex*, "the woman who asserts herself as a subject, an active being, is repudiated." Jessica fits this mold. The Bene Gesserit turn on her; she is scorned at because she has given birth to a male messiah too soon, but she still exercises immense power out of the periphery. Her disobedience is not dominant and forceful, but subversive, maternal, and existential. When she sets her foot on Arrakis, Jessica realizes that she has entered into a mythical web created by her own rank. The Missionaria Protectiva already has made her out the prophesied "Outworlder Bene Gesserit" who will bring the Fremen to greatness. Jessica interprets this manipulation, but she decides to play this role, not because of her personal ambitions, but to guarantee her and Paul's survival.

Jessica comes to appreciate that the Fremen prophecy about her arrival is not a coincidence but the product of several centuries of religious engineering of the Bene Gesserit. (Herbert, Dune 250)

Her choice to drink the Water of Life and be subjected to the Fremen spice agony is what makes her a Reverend Mother of the Sayyadina. However, Jessica, unlike other Bene Gesserits, does not simply take up the shared remembrance of her maternal ancestors. She is a fusion of cultures, a little Atreides noble, a little Bene Gesserit, a little Fremen priestess. Her body, which has become sensitive to Other Memory, has become a vessel of multi-generational survival. The abject, as described by Kristeva, is essential in this case. Similar to her daughter, Alia, Jessica gets physically entangled with the consciousness of the ancestors. It is no longer a pure self; her subjectivity is filled with the presence of other people. But Jessica has control over this maternal surplus, which Alia fails to do, being overcome by possession. Her posthuman feminist theory places her in the multiplicity and memory embodiment. The concept of the nomadic subject, fluid, embodied, and networked, proposed by Rosi Braidotti, is relevant to Jessica, who goes through the planetary migrations, as well as genetic and cultural flows. She is the living offshoot of rival matriarchs: Bene Gesserit and Fremen. The motherhood aspect of Jessica is both motherly and politicized. She explains to Paul the Bene Gesserit systems, including the Voice, body mastery, and awareness techniques, and makes him ready to come out as Muad'Dib. This is not a relationship of doting motherhood but of guiding a sovereign. Jessica plays the role of the womb and the tutor.

But Jessica is also suspicious of what Paul is turning out to be. She watches as the messianic face obscures the son as his prescient powers grow. Her personal heartbreak comes as an opposition to the blind fanaticism of the Fremen:

"But what of Paul then? Who could tell yet what rules of parenthood prevailed here?" (Herbert, Dune 370)

The suffering that Jessica goes through is similar to the archetypal mother dilemma: give birth to something so powerful that it grows bigger, even bigger to the point of killing its mother. Her narrative turns into a reflection on the loss of a mother, not her death but her deification. By making Paul a messiah, the Fremen takes away the motherhood and family closeness that Jessica has with her family and reduces it to political drama. In psychoanalytic terms, Jessica is a representation of the "phallic mother" - a maternal (symbolically) powerful figure. However, her power is not dominant after all; she is not trying to control Paul but to mentor him morally. This conflict is a larger and more general reflection on what Herbert makes about power: a real leader must be an amalgamation of the arts of intuition and intellect, of maternity and political vision. The fact that Jessica returns in *Children of Dune* further complicates her identity. She is brought back to politics and now, in her older and more isolated state, to assist with the crisis of succession of Paul that

resides between his two children, Leto II and Ghanima. This time her worldview is more institutional; less maternal, more Bene Gesserit. Nevertheless, her struggles are still acute. She has to decide between her allegiance to the Sisterhood and her love for her grandchildren. She ends up putting the line of Atreides first, and therefore states that her instincts of motherhood are not still clouded by politics. Jessica does not want to be a pawn even in her old age. There is a hint of greater wisdom in her scenes with both Ghanima and Leto II that Bene Gesserit logic cannot sufficiently stabilize the future on its own. It should be pervaded with mercy and imagination. Her legacy is not the jihad of Paul, but is the ethical preparation for the transformation of Leto II.

This awareness lifts Jessica beyond the rebel and caretaker to the ranks of a philosopher-matriarch. She is emanated into an intergenerational transfer, with the hyperhuman future based on a recalled humanity.

4. CHANI, IRULAN, AND ALIA: CONTRASTING EMBODIMENTS OF FEMININE INFLUENCE

Frank Herbert in the Dune saga constructs a more advanced gradation of feminine power, the strongest reflection of which is the characters of Chani, Irulan, and Alia. Each woman is a different form of female impact: Chani, as the natural concubine and strategist of the desert; Irulan- as the politically placed noblewoman and historian; and Alia- as the unfortunate product of early enlightenment. Herbert asks rhetorical questions about the intersection of gender, power, and agency in political, cultural, and spiritual spheres through their arcs. The three characters are not just narrative foils to Paul Atreides; they are independent political actors who act within and sometimes work outside of bigger patriarchal and matriarchal systems. They are different due to antagonistic ideologies, nature vs. institution, love vs. ambition, and intuition vs. control. Being molded by the traditions of the Bene Gesserit, and yet breaking them in important aspects, the women assist in creating a more subtle image of feminine power in a world that is fixated on prophecies, blood, and power. Chani is a Fremen warrior and the daughter of Liet-Kynes. She is the real companion of Paul in love and war. Chani has power, unlike Irulan, who just holds formal titles. Chani is spiritually and culturally a part of the desert and its people. She is a representation of ecology, mysticism, and feminine intuition. Being the concubine of Paul and mother to his children, Chani has maximum emotional and strategic power over the man. Her appearance is a milestone to the life of Paul. She is haunting his dreams even before their meeting, which means that she belongs to both fate and desire.

"I knew you'd come... It was in the vision."(Herbert, Dune)

Chani serves as the linkage between the prescient self of Paul and the human self. She roots him in love and the current reality, in a world that is growing more twisted by prophecy and religious spectacle. She is neither a manipulator like the Bene Gesserit nor is she a receptacle of power. She is a relational rather than hierarchical one. Through the psychoanalytic perspective, Chani represents the mother of the feminine ideal to Paul, caring, courageous, and confident. She is also opposed to romanticization: she is realistic, politically savvy, and never lowered into ornamentation. Her protective side is shown when she challenges Irulan in Dune Messiah, along with her knowledge of the politics of the court.

Chani does not hesitate to criticize the political marriage of Irulan and her reproductive powerlessness (Herbert, Dune Messiah)

But the tragedy of Chani is that she cannot do anything about institutional manipulations. Conspiring against her fertility are the Bene Gesserit and Irulan, who deny her spice and subject her to years of infertility. It is, in fact, her death that gives birth to the twins when she finally conceives, and it is a stark contrast that the creation of a woman is commonly met with violence or sacrifice in the world of Dune.

The ecofeminist theory is also quite useful in this case: Chani is a desert-dweller, in touch with nature and spirituality, and is consequently pushed to the margins and finally ruined by imperial systems of control. She is a symbol of female strength based upon an organic relationship, which cannot exist in the more and more artificial world of the Empire. The daughter of Emperor Shaddam Corrino IV, who is a trained Bene Gesserit and who is known as Princess Irulan, holds a contradictory role in the trilogy. There is a lot of symbolic power to her on the surface, as she is an imperial princess who is married to a messianic emperor. But in reality, she is marginalized and being manipulated as she serves rather as a narrative tool than a participant in the action of Dune. In Dune Messiah, Herbert provides Irulan greater interiority. Her work as historian and chronicler comes into play: she tells much of the mythology that solidifies the image of Paul as divine.

In her historical works, Irulan portrays Paul as something of necessity and myth more than of choice (Herbert, Dune Messiah)

Irulan, therefore, turns out to be the manufacturer of the collective memory, which is easily disregarded but plays a vital role in creating imperial power. She is a creature of defining the myths justifying the reign of Paul, although she is not a part of his love. She is not trying to give birth to the heir to the throne, and this is not done as a political move but by the order of the Bene Gesserit, who themselves consider her womb as the last hope for controlling the bloodline of Paul. Paul, knowing all of these manipulations, is not willing to grant her access. Irulan is really hurting, but on the other hand, her ambition can also be felt.

I am denied his bed, his love, and now even his heirs. Am I only a vessel for history?" (Herbert, Dune Messiah)

The importance of the concept of performativity by feminist theorist Judith Butler lies here. Irulan plays the part of obedient wife, court historian, and court dame, and rebels quietly by narrative manipulation. She is an agent of limited agency; she does not have power as such, but instead in records, framing, and strategic silence. Her success in breaking the Bene Gesserit plan in Children of Dune, when she assists in raising the twins and chooses to guard the latter against assassination, brings her redemption. She becomes both a tool of empire and the custodian of heritage, which implies that even female entities within corrupt regimes can reconquer their agency by caring about and morally adhering to it. Among all other women in the Dune trilogy, Alia remains the most unfortunate and the most disturbing one. Being born with full awareness when Jessica consumes the Water of Life in the course of pregnancy, Alia is a pre-born; a person who knows about the ancestral memory before the creation of a personal identity. This situation causes her to be wise and unbalanced at the same time. In Dune, Alia is depicted as a troubled kid who talks to generations and can be on the battlefield fighting like an adult. At the beginning, she appears miraculous, a living icon of the spiritual richness of the Atreides.

My brother is coming with the storm... He's bringing the whirlwind." (Herbert, Dune)

However, in Children of Dune, Alia becomes doomed. She falls into an obsession with the memory of Baron Harkonnen, and this is a depiction of the worst that the Bene Gesserit fears, which is Abomination. The pre-born is not able to develop their own ego due to the overpowering of ancestral consciousness. Alia turns out to be a warning story-what knowledge at too young an age can bring. In a psychoanalytic perspective, Alia represents the uncanny of Freud: pleasant but strange, childish, yet old. Her downward spiral into tyranny and madness is not just her personal issues, but they represent a symbolic description of what occurs when institutional knowledge surpasses moral foundations. In contrast to Jessica, who is able to cope with Other Memory in a humble and balanced manner, Alia is a puppet of history. Alia identifies herself as being permeated with ancestral voices, which is an indication of the breakdown of autonomous identity. (Herbert, Children of Dune)

The fact that she committed suicide in a moment of temporary self-awareness is set in the context of liberation and lamentation. She would rather die than become the servant of her parasite ancestor, which is a tragic heroism. The myth about Bene Gesserit fallibility is shaken by Herbert through the character of Alia. It implies that the ideal training and lineage cannot replace the true identity and ethical decision. The fall of Alia is a vitalized feminist interference of the trope of the "chosen woman". She is no evil or powerless person; a victim of patriarchal and matriarchal ambitions. She reminds us that the price of power, especially in women, is madness, isolation, even martyrdom.

5. CONCLUSION: THE SACRED FEMININE AND THE MATRIARCHAL LEGACY IN THE DUNE TRILOGY

Frank Herbert creates in Dune, Dune Messiah, and Children of Dune a world in which women and feminine power are just as much driving forces as emperors and messianic sons. He puts forward a hidden matriarchal society through the prism of the Bene Gesserit, which manipulates history, religion, and genetics. He uses Jessica, Chani, Irulan, and Alia to produce different plays of feminine power, some heart-warming and tender, some heart-wrenching or machismo. In the end, Herbert does not provide the simplistic opposition between the dominance of the masculine side and feminine resistance. He instead gives us a flowing, moving landscape where gendered power is polyfaceted, contingent, and usually paradoxical. The Bene Gesserit are planners of a significant proportion of the destiny of the Imperium. A long game of cultural engineering through breeding programs, myth-making campaigns is played by them. But Herbert will not glorify their strength blindly. They are not salvationists; they are leaders of reproduction and belief, technocrats. Their biggest roll of the dice is that of the Kwisatz Haderach, and it leads to disastrous jihad and the emergence of a God-Emperor. They become ethically blind in their struggle to control. The fact that Jessica rebels against the Sisterhood, thus, makes it a moral act, rather than a romantic one. This divine womanhood challenged by the reproductive profane and

dominated by Reverend Mother represents the ethical conflict of the saga. She is a mother who validates and disaffirms Bene Gesserit dogma. She is the mother of Paul and the protector of Alia, so she does not act with violence or domination, but her actions are based on discipline, training, and moral counseling. Her denial of Bene Gesserit authority in favor of love- and subsequently wisdom- is another character who can be viewed as an exemplar of the way the future of matriarchal control can be. Chani's power is not founded on any training or political designations, but love, cultural embeddedness, and ecological wisdom. She is a personage of desert strength and Fremen independence. Although she does not have any formal authority, she is the heart of the Paul and the future of the Atreides family. The tragedy of Chani is that her inherent feminine strength, which is associated with fertility, intuition, and love, is eventually undermined and ruined by imperialist and Bene Gesserit forces. Her death during childbirth is not just a personal one, but rather the allegory of the price a woman has to pay when her body becomes the stage of the political game. Princess Irulan is presented as a cog in the great game of dynastic politics. She is not able to achieve this through the rebellion but through narrative. She, as a historian and scribe, ends up being the keeper of memory. She is doing a feminized version of historiography and making Paul be remembered even as she is pushed to the periphery in his life. Her eventual separation from the Bene Gesserit to look after the children of Paul is an unspoken revolution. It implies that the power of femininity can take the shape of revision, preservation, and care as opposed to coercion and seduction. The most haunting of these constellations is Alia, perhaps. Alia is not only a prophet and abomination, a genius and a vessel, but she was born with knowledge that she could not integrate. Her fall into possession is a melodramatization of the risks of excessive determination of femininity, when a woman is overwhelmed too soon with the voices of tradition, expectation, and ancestral memory. She is the psychic price of becoming a product and not an individual. Her demise is tragic yet inevitable. She is an agent again in the choice of death. The account of her life is a tale of warning against the repercussions of blocking the way of women to true subjectivity.

Through these character lines, Herbert reflects on the power, of which there are numerous forms: genetic, cultural, psychic, political, and maternal. There is no such thing as a monolithic feminine power in Dune. It may be either creative or violent, social or personal. The matriarchal politics that are created by the Bene Gesserit and their descendants are of a profound ambivalence that is concerned with control, specifically the control of life, of prophecy, and of history. Although Herbert does not indicate that matriarchy is necessarily superior to that of patriarchy, he does indicate that moral motherhood, spiritual integrity, and generational awareness are essential to the future worth of any endeavor. Theoretically, the Dune trilogy provides rich land for the feminist and posthumanist interpretation. Julia Kristeva is an author who can assist us in grasping how horrifying and awe-inspiring the pre-born state of Alia can be. The *Nomadic Subject* by Rosi Braidotti assists in the understanding of the fluid identity of Jessica in relation to cross-cultural and cross-consciousness. The *Cyborg Manifesto* by Donna Haraway presents an allegorical analogy of the Bene Gesserit, a technological sisterhood that has control and manipulation of reproduction systems. These theories, in conjunction with performativity by Judith Butler and ethics of ambiguity by Simone de Beauvoir, help us to understand that the women in Herbert are not just characters, but metaphors of the changing femininity in the hyper-technological world. Thematically, the trilogy is a warning that the feminine should not be instrumentalized, and not by myth, not by genetics, or even by religious dogma. The women of the novel all fill a purpose, each of them being a vessel to something bigger: a breeding program, a prophetic myth, a political alliance. Yet each also pushes back. Jessica declines her reproduction orders. Chani does not want to be marginalized by the court politics. Irulan reclaims authorship. Alia dies on her own terms. They help Herbert indicate that the real feminine power is not prophecy nor program, but self-understanding, moral decision, and affection. Ultimately, the Dune trilogy gives us an impression of a matriarchy, which is as turbulent and complicated as the universe in which it occupies itself. Power is never fixed, and the feminine can not be reduced to mother, maiden, and crone archetypes. It is an evolving power- it can be very helpful, very frightening, and very mysterious. In the future-crazed world, Herbert is reminding us that there are no stronger legacies than genetic empires or foresight visions, but instead, the decision of women not to be turned into an instrument.

“We are the secret force, the silent axis of power... but only when we remember that we are not gods.” (Herbert, *Children of Dune*)

These women of Herbert are not women of emperors--they are women of fate. In their decisions, in the myths they create, in the sacrifices they make, they demonstrate the outlines of an archaic and hyper-modern matriarchal politics.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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None.

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