

UNIVERSIDAD DE ALMERÍA



GRADO EN ESTUDIOS INGLESES

**RESIZING ANCIENT AND CONTEMPORARY
HEROISM IN HERBERT'S *DUNE*:
PAUL ATREIDES AS A HEROIC FIGURE**

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Curso Académico: 2020/2021

Convocatoria: julio

Resumen: el Heroísmo es un elemento fundamental para la creación de todo tipo de narrativas, como novelas, obras de teatro, cómics o novelas gráficas. Además, el Heroísmo ha ido evolucionando con el paso del tiempo, preservando ciertos rasgos clásicos pero también incluyendo algunas innovaciones. En este Trabajo Fin de Grado analizaré cómo el héroe Paul Atreides, protagonista de la novela de Ciencia Ficción *Dune* (1965) de Frank Herbert, parece perpetuar el canon clásico y contemporáneo del Heroísmo. Para este propósito indagaré en los orígenes de la Ciencia Ficción y su relación con los Estudios de Recepción Clásica. Asimismo, desarrollaré dos análisis en los que Paul Atreides será comparado, por un lado, con el héroe clásico Aquiles y, por otro lado, con el monomito del superhéroe. Finalmente, concluiré examinando si Herbert se decanta por el Heroísmo Antiguo o el Contemporáneo para crear la historia del joven Paul Atreides.

Abstract: Heroism is a fundamental element for the creation of all sorts of narratives, as such novels, plays, comics or graphic novels. Besides, Heroism has evolved over time, preserving certain classic features but also including some innovations. In this Final Degree Project I will analyze how the hero Paul Atreides, protagonist of Frank Herbert's Science Fiction novel *Dune* (1965), might be able to perpetuate both the classical and contemporary canon of Heroism. For such purpose I will research the origins of Science Fiction and its connection with Classical Reception Studies. Likewise, I will develop two analyses in which Paul Atreides will be compared, on the one hand, with the classic hero Achilles and, on the other hand, with the monomyth of the superhero. Finally, I will conclude by examining if Herbert opts for Ancient or Contemporary Heroism to create the history of the young Paul Atreides.

Key Concepts: Science Fiction, novuum, estrangement cognition, Herbert, *Dune*, Classical Reception Studies, Ancient Heroism, Achilles, Contemporary Heroism, superhero.

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1. Introduction: Justification, Objectives & Methodologies

Heroism is a key concept within Science Fiction, as the hero often becomes the pillar on which the plot is sustained, structuring the work around his figure. Currently, the most widespread Heroism is that represented by superheroes, extraordinary individuals championing justice and goodness. Indeed, it is almost impossible to ignore the relevance of the hero in the contemporary world, as it is a genre in constant expansion through comics, graphic novels, films, series and even video games.

However, Heroism is not a recent product of our society, since myth making within Classical literature also held the most privileged stages for heroes. Specifically, the ancient authors of these stories included many different characters, thus giving birth to selfish Gods, incomprehensible creatures, ordinary humans and, of course, admirable heroes. The resulting stories could describe all kinds of scenarios, from depicting the forgotten birth of life to prophesying the inevitable demise by the fangs of darkness, but it was always possible to find a heroic figure in the spotlight.

Thus, Heroism extends its influence from Classical Literature to Science Fiction, becoming a key piece for the cultural and literary development of humanity. In addition, the relevance of this concept is even more evident thanks to its ability to captivate audiences both by the epic deeds the hero accomplishes and by his enigmatic existence. As a result, admiration for Heroism fueled the inspiration to develop this Final Degree Project, which was boosted thanks to the subject Classical Tradition in English Literature: The Reception of the Theater. Precisely, this course was taken during the third year of the Degree in English Studies, providing the necessary impulse to investigate the classical origins of Heroism through the discipline of Classical Reception Studies.

Therefore, the objective of this Final Degree Project will be to study how the Heroism described in Science Fiction combines traits of both Classic and Contemporary Heroism, the latter being based mainly on the so-called monomyth of the superhero. For this, the figure of Paul Atreides, the hero of the Science Fiction novel *Dune* (1965), will be studied in order to check if he meets the standards of both the classic hero and the contemporary superhero. Specifically, a comparison will be made between Paul Atreides and Achilles, since the latter can be considered the epitome of the Classic Hero.

In order to develop this research, it will first be necessary to study the historical origins of Science Fiction, as well as the concepts on which it is based. In addition, the relevance of Frank Herbert in this genre will also be highlighted, as well as his contributions and how his novel *Dune* (1965) reflects them. Subsequently, a Classical Reception Studies approach will be essential to understanding the connection between the Science Fiction genre and classical literature, since this area of study focuses on the analysis of how classical concepts are adapted and reproduced again in modern works. Once the theoretical foundations are established, Ancient and Contemporary Heroism will be thoroughly analyzed taking Paul Atreides as a good case in point. Finally, I will draw some relevant conclusions.

2. Science Fiction: State of the Art

Science Fiction is a genre that has always fed the imagination and aesthetic sense of the human being, although the truth is that the term “Science Fiction” was coined for the first time a century ago, approximately. As a result, it was possible to establish a consensus among different authors to define this genre, in very broad terms, as

a form of cultural discourse (primarily literary, but latterly increasingly cinematic, televisual, comic-book and gaming) that involves a world view differentiated in one way or another from the actual world in which its readers live (Roberts 2).

Thus, through Science Fiction the authors can mold a new reality, which can be dominated by its own natural laws. Its origins are really uncertain, which creates a discussion among experts to identify the progenitors of Science Fiction. There are countless authors who dispute this title, being good candidates for it Jules Verne, Edgar Allan Poe or Jonathan Swift, thanks to their works in which fantastic journeys are described. More specifically, the influential writer Brian Aldiss (1925-2017) explains that the starting point for Science Fiction is found in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818) “because it is only in the 19th century that science, [...], obtained widespread cultural

currency” (Roberts 5).¹ Moving on, the author Darko Suvin (1930-) suggests “More’s *Utopia* as the starting point for science fiction and utopian writing both” (Canavan *et al.* 2). Furthermore, Science Fiction “has roots in the philosophical and fantastic narratives of the ancient past” (Canavan *et al.* 2), so there is certain evidence that the first traces of this genre are actually found in the Ancient Greek novel, which will be studied in greater depth later on in this Final Degree Essay.

Regardless of when Science Fiction was born, its true flourishing is found in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, reflecting “the great cultural, scientific and technological upheavals [...] of those eras” (Roberts 1). Besides, during the 1920s-30s the writer Hugo Gernsback (1884-1967) played an important role in the consolidation of Science Fiction “as a recognizable and distinct literary genre” (Canavan *et al.* 2). Indeed, his labor in the American Pulp magazines made it possible to build the necessary basis for the Science Fiction to capture the interest of the audience.

Even so, this only represents the tip of the iceberg that the SF genre supposes,² since there are different definitions that interpret its features in very varied and personal ways. The first definition that can be addressed is that of Damien Broderick, who argued that “SF is that species of storytelling native to a culture undergoing the epistemic changes implicated in the rise and supercession of technical-industrial modes of production, distribution, consumption and disposal” (Broderick 155 *apud* Roberts 1). Therefore, Broderick directly connects the composition of SF works with the scientific and technological development of a society. Although this definition actually only refers to the fact that scientific progress provides the necessary fuel to inspire authors, nevertheless “SF has little to do with real scientific investigation, and many texts routinely considered among the greatest instances of the category are scientifically quite silly” (Canavan *et al.* 5). This is due to the fact that the science and technology that are represented in these

¹ Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus* “recalls the ancient Greek myth of Prometheus, the Titan who stole fire from the gods and gave it to humankind. [...] Since the myth of Prometheus may be read as an explanatory account and as a symbol for the ongoing human relationship to technology, Shelley’s subtitle further implies that Frankenstein will share with Greco-Roman literature and with mythology more generally an interest in the question of how “technology” of different types helps define human culture and [...] our relationships to the natural world” (Roberts *et al.* 1-2).

² SF is the abbreviation for Science Fiction.

works “operate according to aesthetic rather than logical-deductive processes” (Roberts 7).

However, it is undeniable that the presence of technology in SF is fundamental for the development of the plot, which leads us to the concept created by Darko Suvin (1930-) known as ‘**the novuum**’. Specifically, the author defines this concept as “the fictional device, artefact or premise that focuses the difference between the world the reader inhabits and the fictional world of the SF text” (Roberts 1). Therefore, any material or conceptual element that is necessary to describe the paradigm of a SF novel, be it a spaceship, a time machine, androids or aliens, will be included in the definition of ‘the novuum’.

Besides, Darko Suvin also developed his own definition about SF, considering it a literary genre or verbal construct whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author’s empirical environment (Suvin 37 *apud* Roberts 1).

Hence, Suvin considers that the fundamental principle for composing SF works is to create strange worlds with their own peculiarities but that bear a certain resemblance to the world of the reader, which can be conceptualized with the term ‘**estrangement cognition**’. Consequently, “we come to see our own conditions of life in a new and potentially revolutionary perspective” (Parrinder 4 *apud* Roberts 1), creating a balance between strangeness and familiarity that is enticing for the audience.

As I will prove in the remaining parts of this Final Degree Essay, Frank Herbert’s *Dune* (1965) encapsulates the above mentioned definitions of the SF literary genre masterfully.

3. The Presence of *Dune* (1965) within Science Fiction

3.1. The author: Frank Herbert

Frank Patrick Herbert (1920-1986) was an American Science Fiction writer who was born on 8 October 1920. His childhood was characterized by the religious education he received, since he was born into an Irish Catholic family, the McCarthy's. It was during this early age that his passion for Fantasy and Science Fiction awakened, enjoying the novels of prominent authors such as Jules Verne, H. G. Wells or Edgar Rice Burroughs.

Such enthusiasm for literature would lead him to sell a Western story when he was seventeen years old, although he used a pseudonym that up to now remains unknown. Eventually, he would start studying journalism, but always dedicating part of his time to his hobby as a writer. Subsequently, Frank Herbert spent many years working as a copy editor, a journalist in different newspapers and even as a photographer in the navy. His career as a writer began to flourish after his second marriage to Beverly Ann Forbes in 1946, whom he had met during a writing course. Furthermore, he also started interacting with great artists and intellectuals of the moment, such as the SF writer Jack Vance, Ralph or the Jungian psychologist Irene Slattery.

Thanks to the incredible support Herbert received, his first SF story, *Looking for Something*, was finally published in 1952. Afterwards, the novel that really demonstrated his ability in SF composition was *The Dragon in the Sea* (1956), a psychological thriller also known as *Under Pressure*. However, the most relevant work in Herbert's career is *Dune* (1965), since this novel allowed him to win the Nebula Award for best SF novel in 1965 and the Hugo Award in 1966. Thereafter, the Herbert's moved to the Olympic Peninsula of Washington in 1972 in order to run a humble farm. Besides, he would also start lecturing at the University of Washington about politics and ecology. Unfortunately, Herbert was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer in 1985, which led to his demise on 11 February 1986.

Grosso modo Herbert's works are characterized for taking "the reader's hand and with painstaking patience leads him into the strange, yet somehow familiar environs of a futuristic world" (Feder 7). Hence, the author is able to seduce the reader with the charms of the strange new world he creates, but also inviting him to reflect. Indeed, the four pillars on which Herbert's works rest are:

(1) Psychology: the vast majority of Herbert's works show a great interest in the human psyche, since "they all explore the potentialities and limitations of what it is to be human" (Evershed 3). In order to adequately represent this complex field of study, Herbert initiated a research about "extra sensory perception and Jung's notion of collective shared memory" (Evershed 1), as such information would provide him with the necessary knowledge to understand how the human being behaves as an individual and as part of society. Therefore, Herbert's main characters explore their own psyche, amplifying their state of consciousness by consuming drugs or using artificial intelligence. However, Herbert also creates charming heroes with excellent mental abilities, capable of manipulating through demagogy, as we will see when dealing with Paul Atreides in this Final Degree Essay.

(2) Politics: due to his extensive knowledge about psychology, Herbert was able to understand how social consciousness worked, which led him to the study of politics. Eventually, he became a political lecturer specialized in power discourses, warning to "be very careful of surrendering your decision-making power to a charismatic leader" (Feder 7). Therefore, Herbert's works not only present extraordinary stories about captivating heroes who seek to fulfil their objectives, but also indicate "the dangers of mass submission to [these] superman myths" (Evershed 2). Through the creation of this kind of SF works, Herbert appeals to social responsibility, thus it is evident that "political power and its abuses have received careful and detailed treatment in many of his books" (Feder 7), *Dune* being an excellent case in point.

(3) Religion: this concept is inherent in Frank Herbert's style due to the aforementioned Catholic education he received. However, the religious orders represented in Herbert's works are not limited to mimic Catholicism exclusively, as he also explores Zen Buddhism, "Judaism, Navajo and Islam [...] to create new religions that play a significant role" (Flint).³ Indeed, Herbert characterizes religion with the ability to mold the minds of its acolytes, thus becoming another method of social control. A good example of this is the Bene Gesserit order described in *Dune*, which was inspired by his Catholic education. As a result, this religious sect "has engineered various religions to

³ All references to Flint have been retrieved from her personal blog as quoted in the final References to this Final Degree Essay.

include myths and prophecies of their own design in order to utilize them later for their own gain” (Flint), such as controlling different cultures.⁴

(4) Ecology: the last defining trait of Herbert’s style is ecology and his curious interest “in the challenges imposed on human life by extreme environments and biological necessity” (Evershed 3). Therefore, Herbert not only explores the limits of mind, but also focuses on studying the limits of the human body regarding different environmental adaptations. However, in the same way that the rest of his themes are used as a warning to humankind, Herbert also “explores the problems inherent in Man’s manipulation of his environment” (Feder 7). As a result, it is visible that the author is well aware of the horrible environmental impact that an irresponsible use of technology can cause, this being one of the main causes of concern in *Dune*.

All these traits demonstrate that Herbert’s works not only provide entertainment, but also convey valuable lessons that humans should learn, as “the function of science-fiction is not always to predict the future but sometimes to prevent it” (Feder 7). Indeed, *Dune* could be considered one of the most complete novels in Herbert’s career, as it combines all the elements mentioned above, creating a masterpiece that will be further analyzed in the remaining parts of this Final Degree Project.

3.2. *Dune*’s World: the Cycle and the Novel

Dune (1965) is one of the most important Science Fiction novels that were created during the 20th century. As mentioned above, it was written by Frank Herbert and published in 1965, quickly becoming a referent in the SF genre. The great reception of *Dune* by the SF community prompted Frank Herbert to create a whole trilogy, thus adding the titles of *Dune Messiah* (1969) and *Children of Dune* (1976). In fact, the passion for *Dune* did not disappear easily, as the public wanted to know more about this universe. Consequently, Herbert continued extending the *Dune* cycle, adding *God Emperor of Dune* (1981), *Heretics of Dune* (1984) and *Chapterhouse: Dune* (1985). With these last three novels, Frank Herbert concluded the plot of *Dune*, despite the fact that years later

⁴ For the record, the Spanish edition in Nova (2019), which belongs to Penguin Random House contains three appendixes dealing with religion and ecology.

he published several prequels explaining the origin of the main Houses in *Dune*, such as: *House Atreides* (1999), *House Harkonnen* (2000), or *House Corrino* (2001), among others.

Despite the extensive literary content that Frank Herbert offers, this Final Degree Essay will analyze solely his first novel: *Dune* (1965), whose plot focuses on Paul Atreides, the successor to the noble Atreides family. Hence, the young Atreides was taught to become the ideal leader from a very early age, cultivating his intelligence and physical skills up to superhuman limits. It all began when the Padishah Emperor, the ruler of countless planets throughout the Known Universe, ordered House Atreides to leave their home planet Caladan and settle on the desert planet Arrakis. Apparently, this decision was made to improve the economy of House Atreides, but actually it was all a conspiracy by the vile House Harkonnen to end Duke Leto Atreides and his dynasty. Eventually, the fortress of the Atreides in Arrakis was assaulted, causing the death of Duke Leto by the hands of the Harkonnens. Fortunately, his successor Paul managed to escape with his mother Jessica through the Arrakeen desert, facing monsters and dangerous situations. Subsequently, Paul is welcomed by the Fremen community, proclaiming him their political and religious leader after demonstrating his prodigious abilities. Therefore, this allows Paul to start plotting his revenge against the Harkonnens, unleashing a revolution throughout the entire Known Universe. As a result, he will become the new Emperor, thus extending the power of House Atreides.

At first glance, *Dune* can be considered another story within the extensive Science Fiction genre, since it reproduces many of the previously defined features. Hence, *Dune's* universe uses Suvin's concept of '**estrangement cognition**' so that the audience is able to empathize with the narrative. Specifically, Herbert creates a modern space empire founded by human beings, who have progressed so much technologically that they have been able to master space travel. Therefore, the reader is able to visualize humanity in the future under these conditions, which is more attractive due to the mystery that involves exploring other planets.

Evidently, '**the novuum**' is also necessary in order to create this enticing but verisimilar atmosphere. Indeed, technology is the key to build 'the novuum' of this story, as explained by Damian Broderick. Precisely, the use of the **Ornithopter** must be highlighted, which "is any flying machine that propels itself with bird-like, beating

wings” (Palumbo 144), or the valuable **stillsuits**, high-tech garments that avoids dehydration in the Arrakeen desert. However, ‘the novuum’ of *Dune* also includes the dangerous **sandworms** that inhabit the deserts or even the **mélange**, a spice produced by the life cycle of these dreadful monsters, and its “prodigious consumption [...] can extend an individual's life to as many as 400 years” (Palumbo 131), among other unbelievable effects on a human body.

That being said, *Dune* is a much more complex novel than it appears to be, since it also explores such striking concepts as **political conspiracies**, **psychological manipulations** and **the limits of the human being**. Therefore, *Dune* strengthens the four pillars that define Frank Herbert's career, which will be explored in further detail below.

3.3. Themes: Psychology, Politics, Religion & Ecology

As it has been stated, *Dune* meets the requirements of any Science Fiction novel, but its relevance within the genre lies in this statement found in *Dune* (1965): “No more terrible disaster could befall your people than for them to fall into the hands of a Hero” (Herbert 351). Therefore, Herbert warns his readers of the psychological manipulation that charismatic leaders can exert. In fact, this is the case of Paul Atreides, who throughout the novel uses politics and religion to psychologically manipulate his people and achieve his goals.

As such, **psychology** is the central theme of this novel. Paul’s mental and emotional hyper awareness is highlighted in the novel, the hero being even able to discern between truth and deceit (Palumbo 66). As a consequence of his superhuman mental abilities, Paul easily gained control over politics and religion, becoming a **religious figure** for the Fremen, who ended up being commanded by him. As a matter of fact, he was renamed as ‘Lisan Al-Gaib,’ a deity prophesied for centuries that would become “the one who will lead them [the Fremen] to paradise” (Palumbo 129), bringing life once more to the arid lands of Arrakis. Therefore, Paul Atreides could be said to have taken advantage of this prophecy to manipulate the Fremen, achieving his revenge against the Padishah Emperor and the Harkonnen House.

This prophecy was spread by the **religious order** of the Bene Gesserit, who were able to control the entire Universe through their religious practices. Specifically, the plan of this frivolous cult sought “to lift Homo sapiens from animal awareness to people, to humans, and then to trained humans and perhaps beyond” (DiTommaso 317). Hence, they conspired to promote eugenics and create a god, so “the goal of the Bene Gesserit breeding program was the Kwisatz Haderach, a male Bene Gesserit whose organic mental powers would transcend space and time” (Palumbo 120). Unfortunately for the Bene Gesserit, it was Paul Atreides who achieved such enlightenment, overthrowing them from their power positions in the Empire.

Notwithstanding, religion is just another tool for psychological manipulation, since “Herbert [also] harbors a fear of the misuse of leadership positions” (Feder 7) through the instrumentalization of **politics**. Paul Atreides is the perfect reflection of Herbert’s fear, since he is able to seduce people with words: ““Will I subtract from our strength when we need it most?” Paul asked. ‘I am your ruler, and I say to you that it is time we stopped killing off our best men and started killing our real enemies - the Harkonnens!’” (Herbert 541). Consequently, Paul aroused fervor in the Fremen community, promising them glory and well-being if they go to battle against the Padishah Emperor and House Harkonnen, as it can be seen in the following passage: “a deafening roar filled the cavern, echoed and re-echoed. They were cheering and chanting: ‘Ya hya chouhada! Muad’Dib! Muad’Dib! Muad’Dib! Ya hya chouhada!’” (Herbert 541). Therefore, the exalted Fremen were under Paul's control, being able to sacrifice themselves for his sake if necessary.

Another good example of manipulation and political conspiracies is visible in Baron Vladimir Harkonnen, who spun “a conspiracy with Emperor Shadam IV to destroy House Atreides by luring the Atreides from their secure base on Caladan to Arrakis, the former Harkonnen fief, where the Atreides would be more vulnerable” (Palumbo 101). However, Paul Atreides’ mental ability far surpasses any strategy devised by the Baron, so in the end the latter perishes along with all his ambitions.

Finally, **ecology** is also a relevant issue in *Dune*, as another goal of Paul Atreides’ revolution is “to save his desert planet, Arrakis, from ecological disaster” (Feder 7). In fact, the unfortunate state of Arrakis is due to the overexploitation of its natural resources with the aim of producing *mélange*, as it had a great value as a spice in the market due to

its prodigious attributes. Indeed, to accelerate the production of *mélange*, hundreds of sandworms were introduced into Arrakis, as the spice was the result of their life cycle. The introduction of this species into the ecosystem led to the desertification of Arrakis, since “most of the sand was created by sandworm activity” (Palumbo 154). Therefore, Herbert also intends to warn his audience of the dangers of industrialization and overexploitation of natural resources, as they can cause a great cataclysm that makes life difficult on the planet.

However, these are not the only notable features of *Dune*, as Science Fiction may well be traced back to the so-called Classical Tradition, since there are clues that point in that direction and they will be studied in the following paragraphs of this Final Degree Essay.

4. Classical Reception Studies: Models of Reception in SF

The Science Fiction genre and Greco-Roman literature are widely valued today, be it for their charismatic characters, their fascinating storylines, or their ability to transmit emotions. Without a doubt, they have caused a great impact over different generations, but this is not the only trait they share, since they actually have more similarities than one would expect. In fact, the most obvious characteristic is that “all surviving ancient novels involve fantastic elements” (Roberts 26), which were not used exclusively to satisfy the imagination of the audience. On many occasions they tried to explain natural and astronomical phenomena, such as wind, rain, lightning or the fall of comets. Many authors tried to compose these works “because such phenomena could not be reduced to the purity or simplicity required by the theological model of the cosmos” (Roberts 27). A good example of this is the Ptolemaic model that Plato and Aristotle developed in the 4th century BCE,⁵ by which they tried to explain the composition and functioning of the universe, combining their knowledge of the empirical and celestial

⁵ A theory suggested by Plato and Aristotle during the 4th century BCE in order to explain that “the universe was composed of 59 concentric spheres with the Earth in the middle. The four inner terrestrial spheres constituted the four elements (fire, air, Earth, water) that [...] were the fundamental ingredients of all earthly matter. The remaining 55 spheres, composed of a mysterious fifth element, not found on Earth, carried the celestial bodies in a series of circular revolutions around the stationary Earth” (Roberts 27).

world. Therefore, both Science Fiction and Classical literature try to explain certain phenomena using the logic and knowledge that characterize their times.

One of the most illuminating examples of this reality is personified by **Lucian of Samosata**, “the classical author most consistently cited as a father of science fiction [...] (c. AD 120–190)” (Roberts 29). This recognition was achieved due to his successful novels *Ikaromenippos* (Ἰκαρομένιππος) and *Verae Historiae* (Ἀληθῆ διηγήματα), since nowadays they are considered the basis on which the Science Fiction was built. Certainly, the plot of these two works leads their characters to the Moon, something that was unthinkable for Lucian of Samosata’s society. Obviously, this is because “even if the Moon could theoretically be reached from Earth, actual travel would require extraordinary means” (Canavan *et al.* 16). Consequently, this impossible challenge awakened the imagination of many authors, who would try to devise a plan in order to reach the Moon in their narratives.

It is true that “Lucian’s sympathy is with the mythic, not the scientific, mode” (Roberts 33), as throughout both novels he tries to satirize and ridicule the scientific discourse of his time. However, it is also undeniable that these fantastic voyages “connect with material, practical discourses, such as the science of navigation, rather than strictly theological idioms” (Roberts 28). Unexpectedly, Lucian composed two works with the traits of current Science Fiction, even though these were not his true intentions.

Another feature that connects Science Fiction and the Classical Tradition is the fact that both genres “similarly conceptualize and instrumentalize the future and the past” (Christensen 162) with the aim of creating fantastic plots that seduce audiences. Subsequently, while the classic novels place their plots in a remote past that humanity has forgotten, Science Fiction develops its works in a future far from current civilizations. Therefore, when building these storylines, “the strangeness of images of the ancient past is matched by the ‘cognitive estrangement’ of futures imagined in modern SF” (Roberts *et al.* 18), just like Darko Suvin hypothesized. As a result, a strange world is created, differing with that of the public, but also sharing certain similarities. In addition, these images are not simply created in an irrational and supernatural way, but are given a logical explanation to be plausible, as is the case with the Ptolemaic model or the novels by Lucian of Samosata.

Much in a similar vein, it is appreciated that Greco-Roman literature was able to influence Science Fiction directly when creating storylines. Indeed, Tony Keen, a member of the Science Fiction Foundation, explains that not all works adapt the classics in the same way. More specifically, he distinguishes up to six different procedures for this:

- **Allusion:** this simple adaptation technique consists of making “brief references to ancient history or literature that are not particularly central to the story being presented.”⁶ For example, *A Martian Odyssey* (1934) only includes a reference to Homer's epic poem in the title, since their plots are not alike.
- **Appropriation:** this second category seeks to carry out “the depiction of a society or individual which has in some method consciously modeled itself upon Greco-Roman (or other historical) precedents.” For example, the culture described in *Star Trek* (1966) in the episode *Plato's Stepchildren* (1968) builds its society based on Plato's ideal model.
- **Interaction:** this third technique is characterized by “featuring the cultures or individuals (real or imagined) of the Classical past, or some continuation of the same,” being able to create alternative stories. A good example of this is found in *Doctor Who* (2005), as through space-time travel its protagonists can interact with the mythological past, even visiting the Trojan War or meeting Nero.
- **Borrowing:** this fourth category shares certain similarities with **appropriation**, since also “elements of Classical antiquity are used to build an imagined society.” However, in this case both the audience and the authors are aware of this process. In this way, names of Greco-Roman origin can be incorporated, making reference to classical elements.
- **Stealing:** through the fifth category “not just elements of the background or foreground have been taken from an ancient culture, but the story itself derives from a Classical original.” In my view, this technique might denote laziness when creating SF works, since the plot has already been composed previously.
- **Ghosting:** the sixth and last technique is the most difficult to detect since in some works “no direct influence of classical originals can be established, but where nevertheless there are strong hints of themes derived from antiquity.” An example

⁶ All quotations from Keen belong to the online reference as cited in the bibliographical references section of this Final Degree Essay

could be *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), a work that describes a journey to the ends of the universe, which can be related to the myth of Jason.

As per the case of *Dune*, I believe that Frank Herbert made use of several of the above-mentioned procedures in his **appropriation** of ancient heroic mythology, literature and culture. Some of these procedures could be recognized in terms of **allusion**, as in the family name of the hero, Paul Atreides; **borrowing**, as in the gladiator scenes played by the Harkonnen Feyd-Rautha, and, in my humble opinion, **ghosting**, as in the epic quest for heroic identity envisaged by the protagonist, Paul Atreides / Muad'Dib. Therefore, it is visible that “modern SF has [...] looked forward to the future and around at the present in part by looking farther back: to Greco-Roman mythology, to the literature of classical antiquity, to images of ancient history” (Roberts *et al.* 5). It is for this reason that Science Fiction has grown exponentially, since it has been able to adapt innumerable cultural references to the needs of the new generations, providing entertainment and knowledge in equal measure.

5. Heroism in Herbert's *Dune* (1965)

5.1. Ancient Heroism and Epic Stereotypes: Achilles VS Paul Atreides

Ancient Heroism is at the source of the contemporary hero, whose eventual appreciation obviously differs within every generation in society. As such, in order to understand the origin of Ancient Heroism, it is necessary to turn to Classical Greco-Roman Literature. Actually there are numerous Greek heroes, each of them with their own singularities and convictions. Many of such heroic figures have been the object of research of the Classical Tradition and Reception studies. As such, these study areas have performed commendable cultural labor by compiling the first heroic narratives that, “while providing entertainment, facilitate the exploration of individual identity and psychology, the examination of social structures, and the search for humankind's place in the universe” (Christensen 162).⁷ Unfortunately, many of these stories fell into oblivion

⁷The first record of a hero can be found in the Mesopotamian *Epic of Gilgamesh*, a heroic myth that portrays the deeds of Gilgamesh, a demi-god that slays monsters in his adventures alongside his companion Enkidu.

because they were transmitted orally, thus preventing us from knowing the stories of other heroes.

Focusing on written tradition, it is important to mention that these heroic myths were created in the form of **episodic narration**, combining features of both serials and series. Therefore, they were delivered “in discrete doses [...] which were able to stand on their own” (Johnston 247), just like **series** present their short stories. Despite presenting this episodic nature, each story was interconnected seemingly like **serials**, since the authors made references about previous events in the hero’s life, developing a “longer narrative arc that necessarily stretches over every human life” (Johnston 248). Therefore, Greek mythology created an extensive network of highly complex characters who were able to faithfully represent human lives.

These heroic myths that were “narrated serially [...] please their audiences by repetitively engaging in the same sorts of adventures and displaying in the same behavioral (and sartorial) tics over and over again” (Johnston 252). According to Umberto Eco, this narrative mechanism is the **iteration** that, through the repetition of certain types of tasks or virtues, the author is able to convey a simple message for the audience (Umberto Eco *apud* Johnston 252-260). Concretely, myths always seek to reinforce the humanness of heroes in order to celebrate the human effort, representing the pinnacle of evolution within humankind. Indeed, these heroes can be defined as “humans who either are born with or acquire status and abilities beyond that of other humans, which they retain after death and can use to benefit the living humans who worship them” (Johnston 220). As a result, every reader does not just profess admiration towards heroes, but they can also empathize with them, suffering when heroes struggle to overcome their weaknesses and praising their victories after fulfilling their missions. Evidently, the fact that they are mortals facilitates the reader to identify with them to some extent.

The problem arises when delimiting the heroic spectrum, since in Classical literature there is a wide range of heroes, each of them with different nuances. Hence, “the definitional boundaries were allowed to remain fluid” (Johnston 224) in order to classify all of them. Therefore, Greek heroes can manifest any of the following characteristics:

(1) The hero is closely related to holy deities: this connection is normally established through blood ties, since any Greek God can be the progenitor of a hero together with a mortal human being, which “clearly marks a hero as someone who is situated between humans and Gods” (Johnston 240). A good example of this category is the demigod Perseus, the son of Zeus who beheaded the Gorgon Medusa wielding holy weapons. However, there are also heroes whose relationship with Gods is based on admiration and respect, since the hero’s exceptional talents can be recognized by the Gods themselves, which brings the hero closer to “being one of them as any human ever can be” (Johnston 240). As a result, there are many Greek myths in which Gods offer their help to heroes in order to complete their deeds. One of the loveliest relationships between heroes and Gods is represented by Odysseus and Pallas Athena, as the Goddess of wisdom not only advised him countless times, but also recognized this witty hero as her equal after returning to Ithaca.

(2) The hero completes deeds thanks to his marvelous physical and intellectual abilities: Greek heroes are characterized for being able to exploit their skills to the fullest, thus excelling among mortals. Indeed, “hero myths [...] suggested that there had once been exceptional human individuals who came close to the status of Gods in their deeds” (Johnston 238), but this greatness would not be achieved without the teachings of a resourceful master. Hence, the inexperienced hero must be instructed into the arts of war in order to achieve victory, that is the reason why they were trained to wield powerful weapons and devise witty strategies. The honorable centaur Cheiron is the best representative of this role, since he trained many disciples on Mount Pelion, standing out *swift-footed Achilles*, Peleus, Ajax The Great, Jason, Nestor, Castor, Pollux... After finishing their respective training, heroes demonstrated their worth in the eyes of the world by completing risky missions. Indeed, Achilles became the mightiest warrior during the Trojan War, being feared by entire armies due to his monstrous strength and unbeatable spear.

As a result, heroes were able to become admirable symbols among humans and Gods. Nevertheless, “heroes not only had to undertake remarkable tasks that other humans would not even attempt [...] but also had to know how to do humbler, more ordinary tasks” (Johnston 255). Therefore, heroes do not stand out purposelessly, as with their actions they try to show the rest of humans that greatness can be achieved despite

earthly limitations. Consequently, their strength tries to encourage other mortals to fight and progress, since they could also rise to the pinnacle alongside heroes.

(3) The hero's humanity is always emphasized: Greek myths do not focus exclusively on glorifying heroes' divine abilities, but usually describe the traits that make them human. Heroes' humanity is usually forged through their emotional ties and mortality. Therefore, "many heroes [...] had lived lives that differed little from [...] some men of the historical period" (Johnston 225), which is the reason why they were mostly represented enjoying daily life with their relatives, friends and lovers. Besides, they could also set journeys with companions to distant lands, living risky and exciting adventures. Hence, all these experiences helped them to strengthen their emotional bonds and construct their personality. Evidently, this dynamic made it possible for the reader to empathize even more with heroes, since they were not only symbols to admire, but they were also human beings to know.

Subsequently, these heroes could also suffer any physical and emotional trauma due to unfortunate situations. On the one hand, their bodies could be seriously ill-treated by their enemies, as the corpse of *Man-slaying Hector*, who was punished by Achilles even after death. On the other hand, heroes could also experience the deepest of the pains by losing their beloved ones or knowing a terrible truth. For instance, Oedipus lacerated his eyes and went into exile after realizing that his wife Jocasta was also his mother. Furthermore, heroes could even fall prey to death, since even if "heroes are more resourceful and daring than other humans, in the final result death wins out" (Johnston 243). However, their death is not a symbol of weakness as one might think, but a way to elevate them as an object of adoration.

(4) The hero usually faces monsters and fantastic animals: the confrontations between heroes and monsters are commonly represented in Greek myths, emphasizing creatures such as Cerberus, the Lernaean Hydra or the Nemean Lion. According to Ancient Greek mythology, "the heroes were destined to clear up the bits of monster killing that Zeus had left unfinished after his victory over [the progenitor of monsters] Typhon" (Johnston 271). Indeed, this is a message of encouragement for all humankind, since heroes represent humanity in these stories, transmitting the bravery that humans need to overcome their fears. Therefore, "monsters are representatives [...] of the chaos that Gods might always inflict upon mortals and against which mortals had to be continuously on guard" (Johnston 275), thus holiness is not necessary to purge evil. Eventually, these

monsters were all slaughtered by heroes such as Heracles, so “by the time of the [Trojan] war, those who would be called heroes had nothing left to kill except one another” (Johnston 277). Furthermore, not all fantastic creatures that heroes face are unholy monsters that they must slay. Indeed, there are also mythological animals that accompany and help the hero during these adventures, becoming a fundamental key to achieve victory, such as Pegasus, Xanthus or Balius.

(5) The hero sometimes founded fruitful civilizations and dynasties: the importance of heroes does not lie solely in the victories they achieved on the battlefield, since many of them were called *oikistai*, that is to say, “founding heroes”. Therefore, this class of heroes were characterized by their great wisdom as governors, making a city-state prosper. Besides, many *oikistai* initiated dynasties of heroes that also helped humankind to progress. For instance, Ion was a hero fathered by God Apollo whose “claims to fame ended up being those of a wise ruler [...] and a productive father” (Johnston 223). Unfortunately, many of these heroes “lacked stories that were deemed worthy of passing down by the poets and historians” (Johnston 223).

(6) The hero could become an object of worship after death: as mentioned above, heroes were mortal beings, but their demise was a necessary element to become eternal and powerful deities. In the same way that heroic myths transmitted great deeds, “hero cults [of the ninth century] [...] suggested that [...] [heroes], after death, could come close to the Gods in their power to affect mortal lives” (Johnston 238-239). As a result, once the heroes rose as immortal legends, the cults magnified their figure, stating that their spirits were able “to wield significant power: they could protect cities at times of war, fend off plagues and perform various other sorts of feats” (Johnston 244). However, not all heroes were worshipped by multiple city-states, since there were others that simply fell into oblivion. As such, Iops was “a Spartan hero who received worship at a shrine outside the local marketplace” (Johnston 223), but Greek myths do not mention anything special from his life as a warrior or as a monarch.

In keeping with the informal canon of heroic traits devised by Johnston, I will now focus on a comparison between Achilles, as the epitome of the epic Greek hero, and Paul Atreides, the protagonist of *Dune* as well as the veritable hero of the novel. As a result, I will demonstrate that the Heroism portrayed in this SF novel is clearly connected to the Ancient Heroism represented in Classic Epic literature, as Paul Atreides perpetuates the canon of Classical Heroism on many occasions, denoting similarities with Achilles.

On the one hand, *Swift-footed Achilles* is a demigod “of the highest distinction, whom the Gods themselves respected” (*Il.* 9. 110). His bravery and prowess in hand-to-hand combat was “worth a whole army” (*Il.* 9. 118), turning him into one of the most praised heroes in Greek mythology. Indeed, he became a legend thanks to his determining role in the Trojan War, dramatically described in Homer’s *Iliad*.

That being said, this epic narrative is not actually characterized by glorious victories that celebrate the strength of heroes, but is a story full of pain and blood because of capricious human passions. Indeed, the etymology of the Greek name “Achilles” is directly connected to this sad story, as Ἀχιλλεύς comes from the Greek terms ἄχος, which means “distress, grief”, and λαός, which means “people”.⁸ Therefore, Achilles’ name can be associated with the idea of spreading grief among humans, since all soldiers in Greece and Troy were tremendously afraid of his wrath in the battlefield. Furthermore, Ἀχιλλεύς can be associated with another meaning, concretely with ἀ-χειλός, which means “without lips”. Thus, this etymology of Achilles’ name describes how thin his lips were or, as Apollodorus asserts in his mythological *Library*, how he never put his lips to his mother’s breast (3.13.6).

On the other hand, Paul Atreides is the young hero that plays the role of the main character in Frank Herbert’s *Dune*. Despite being only fifteen years old, he is a fearless and intelligent warrior that inspires a revolution across the universe, defying the strict laws established by the Padishah Emperor and the Bene Gesserit order. Indeed, his royal surname “Atreides” is directly related to Homer’s *Iliad*, since it derives from the Greek term Ἀτρεΐδης, which means “descendant of Atreus”, the father of Menelaus and Agamemnon. Furthermore, the Greek term Ἀτρέυς refers to a “fearless person”, establishing a profound connection with Paul, as he keeps fighting and moving forward inspired by a Bene Gesserit rite:

I must not fear. Fear is the mind-killer. Fear is the little-death that brings total obliteration. I will face my fear. I will permit it to pass over me and through

⁸ This etymological interpretation has been famously sustained by Nagy 69-83.

me. And when it has gone past I will turn the inner eye to see its path. Where the fear has gone there will be nothing. Only I will remain (Herbert 10).

Therefore, his surname perfectly describes his ideals and convictions, being a hero who focuses on avenging Duke Leto's death, his dear father. Eventually, Paul is baptized by the Fremen tribe with the new name "Muad'Dib", which refers to "the adapted kangaroo mouse of Arrakis admired by the Fremen for its ability to survive in the open desert" (Palumbo 135). The young Atrides decided to adopt this new name in order to reflect his strength, as he was able to escape from the Harkonnen assassins and avoid death in the desert, leading his mother to safety.

Following the above-mentioned characteristics, it can be appreciated that these two heroes fit in most of them. Firstly, Achilles is directly related to deities, since he is a demigod born from the union between the King of Myrmidons Peleus and *silver-footed Thetis*, a sea Goddess whose beauty was admired by all Olympian Gods. Thetis is mostly remembered for her caring attitude towards her son, particularly in the *Iliad*, where she "rushes to her son's side when he weeps" (González 5), trying to comfort him at all costs.⁹ Indeed, Thetis professed such a great love for Achilles that she "attempts to render her son immortal, either by dipping him in the river Styx or by thrusting him into a fire" (González 17). Unfortunately, her wish could not be fulfilled as her husband Peleus stopped her, but her desperate efforts to save Achilles' life continued. As a case in point, "Thetis, knowing that her son is destined to fight and die in Troy, attempts to elude his fate by taking him to Skyros" (González 59). Once there, she entrusts the protection of her son to King Lycomedes, who accepts to hide the young hero disguised as a maiden of his court. Eventually, her plan fails and Achilles is recruited by Odysseus and Diomedes in order to join Menelaus' army. Therefore, Thetis realizes that she cannot take her son away from the heat of battle and decides that she will support him unconditionally so that he would win renown.

After being dishonored by Agamemnon, Achilles tearfully asks his mother to ease his pain, thus Thetis promises that she would speak to Zeus to find a solution. As it is well known, Thetis ascended to Mount Olympus and "kissed [...] [Zeus'] knees, took his chin in her hand and begged him to bring honor to Achilles sacker of towns" (*Il.* 8. 371-72).

⁹ Thetis plays the role of the archetypal mother figure in the *Iliad*, as insightfully viewed by Laura Slatkin.

The Father of all Gods, who deeply appreciated Thetis, agreed to satisfy Achilles' wish by supporting the Trojan army in the war, so that Agamemnon would understand the enormous mistake he had made after offending the mightiest of his warriors. However, Zeus was not the only God who supported the proud Achilles, since Hephaestus helped him by creating a new armor after Thetis requested it. Indeed, Hephaestus shared the pain of the Sea Nymph by pronouncing the following words: "I only wish it were as easy for me to save him from the pains of death when dread destiny confronts him, as to provide him with a magnificent set of armor, which will be the wonder of everyone who sees it" (*Il.* 18. 464-467).

As such, Achilles was not just another demigod, he was one of the most beloved warriors among Gods. For instance, Athena and Hera tried to appease his anger, as the gray-eyed Goddess said: "I came from the skies to cool your fury, if you will listen to me. The goddess white-armed Hera sent me because she feels equally close to both of you and is concerned for you. Come now, give up this quarrel and take your hand from your sword" (*Il.* 1.207-210). The two Goddesses tried to convince him not to leave the battlefield, promising him glory if he remained fighting alongside Menelaus and Agamemnon.

As per Paul Atreides, it is also possible to connect him with the divine entities of his universe. His mother, Jessica Atreides, is a priestess of the Bene Gesserit order, which can be characterized as

an ancient school of mental and physical training [...] [that] was established primarily for female students after the Butlerian Jihad. Bene Gesserit adepts have been keen [*sic*] powers of observation and memory, can control any muscle in their bodies, are skilled in hand-to-hand combat, are students of Galactic politics and can control others through voice manipulation (Palumbo 71).

To my mind, in the same way that Thetis is a Sea Nymph, Jessica Atreides is part of the religious cult that pulls the strings in the universe of *Dune*. Indeed, Jessica is quite similar to Thetis, as she is also a caring and loving mother that struggles to protect her son, as when Paul seemed to be suffering "she wanted to reach out to him, hold him,

comfort him, help him— but she sensed there was nothing she could do” (Herbert 244). That is the reason why Jessica Atreides trained his son in the Bene Gesserit arts, as she wanted him to be the mightiest Duke in the universe, able to rule wisely by seeing through deceits and avoiding human weaknesses. This is another feature in which Jessica is similar to Thetis, as the Goddess also wanted her son to be an immortal deity, as explained above.

In spite of all their similarities, there is a crucial difference between Paul and Achilles, as they behave differently when they are near their mothers. In the case of latter, he behaves as a sulking young man that enjoys being spoiled by his mother, whereas the former just seeks independence, behaving as a mature adult, something which is observed by Jessica herself: “*There’s no more childhood in his voice, she thought*” (Herbert 248). Furthermore, the relationship between Paul and Jessica is quite asymmetrical, since as the story progresses Paul evolves into a somewhat hypocritical leader who inspires fear in his mother, who utters the following words: “*I’m afraid of my son; I fear his strangeness; I fear what he may see ahead of us, what he may tell me*” (Herbert 313). In sum, we may appreciate that Jessica not only cares about her son, but ends up becoming a submissive servant to him. Evidently, the relationship between Thetis and Achilles does not evolve in this way, maintaining the roles of mother and son throughout the *Iliad*.

The Bene Gesserit order is not the only religious cult that is represented in *Dune*. Indeed, the desert planet of Arrakis hides the Fremen tribe, a community of fervent warriors who “are addicted to traditions, such as their rule that leadership is determined by a fight to the death, and are reluctant to abandon them even when they are counterproductive” (Palumbo 24). Moreover, the Fremen are governed by brute force, being able to wield weapons such as the sacred crysknife, “a twenty-centimeter-long, double-edged, milk-white blade ground from the tooth of a dead sandworm” (Palumbo 81). This weapon is not only a valuable piece within their culture, since it also proves their strength to defeat sandworms, the huge beasts that lurk inside the earth on Arrakis. Indeed, the Fremen were able to control these monsters in order to move through the deadly desert, adapting to the adverse situation of their home world.

In addition, Arrakeans created the stillsuits, “a body-enclosing micro-sandwich [garment] that reclaimed the body’s moisture and dissipated heat” (Palumbo 167), since water was the most valuable element in Arrakis after it became a desert planet. On top of that, the Fremen “are also addicted to their religious beliefs and legends, including their

faith in a ‘Madhi’ or savior, [...], which is so powerful” (Palumbo 24). This superstitious attitude was the key for Paul Atreides to embody the role of Madhi, since his superhuman physical and mental abilities, as well as his mastery of the use of the word, allowed him to become a powerful political and religious leader. Such was the control that Paul exercised over the Fremen that he considered that “an act of disobedience must be a sin and require religious penalties. [...] [They] must depend not so much on the bravery of individuals, [...], as upon the bravery of a whole population” (Herbert 350). Hence, Paul Atreides sought a united community easy to manipulate, as they will support him to achieve his purposes. If we look back to Achilles, it is appreciated that he was also supported by Gods in order to complete his revenge towards *man-slaying Hector*. However, Achilles was not a demagogue who coldly constructed a speech to convince his audience. On the contrary, he just fervently expressed his emotions, which were reciprocated by Gods.

Finally, one particularity that both religions share in Herbert’s novel is that they await the arrival of a Messiah. As it has been already mentioned, the Fremen culture awaited the arrival of the Madhi, better known as “Lisan Al-Gaib”, who was “a messianic prophet from another planet, the ‘Voice from the Outer World’” (Palumbo 126). In the case of the Bene Gesserit cult, they were eager to receive the Kwisatz Haderach, “a male Bene Gesserit whose organic mental powers would transcend space and time” (Palumbo 120). Evidently, the one who arises with this title is Paul Atreides, becoming the deity that unifies both religious cults and is worshipped, as it will be later studied in this Final Degree Essay. Therefore, he is another hero that has divine and mortal traits, but he eventually embraces his godly powers, surpassing even the head of the Bene Gesserit cult, the Reverend Mother Gaius Helen Mohiam. Conversely, Achilles suffers the opposite process, becoming a hero which is more proximate to humans than deities, since he is consumed by his own emotions and weaknesses.

Returning to Achilles, the demigod also fulfils the second essential characteristic of heroes, demonstrating that he excels among mortals thanks to his physical and intellectual abilities. From an early age his godlike strength was rigorously enhanced “by Cheiron, most honest of Centaurs” (*Il.* 11. 832), who taught him the arts of war and the secrets of medicine. As a result, he was awarded his father’s spear, “who [Achilles] alone knew to handle it. It was made from an ash-tree on the top of Mount Pelion and had been a gift from Cheiron to Achilles’ father, Peleus, to bring death to warriors” (*Il.* 16. 141-

44). Besides, Achilles was also instructed in politics and rhetoric by Phoenix, a wise mentor sent by Peleus in order to “make a speaker of words [...] [Achilles] and a man of action” (*Il.* 9. 438-43). Therefore, godlike Achilles received the perfect education to be feared in the battlefield and also to be respected as the Prince of Myrmidons. Furthermore, Achilles was not only an excellent soldier and healer, he was also a talented musician who loved “entertaining himself on a tuneful lyre, [...] singing of the famous deeds of heroes” (*Il.* 9. 189). Thus, Achilles was able to calm his fierce fighting spirit in the company of his beloved ones, such as Patroclus, son of Menoetius.

Similarly, Paul Atreides was trained in order to enhance his physical and intellectual skills, but it is remarkable to state that Paul Atreides “learned rapidly because his first training was in how to learn [...] [and he] knew that every experience carries its lesson” (Herbert 84). Accordingly, he received superhuman training by his Bene Gesserit mother, dominating his enemies with physical strength and his witty and convincing speeches. However, he was also taught by other powerful men at the service of his father, the Duke Leto. In total, there were four important masters that played a role in Paul’s education:

There was Gurney Halleck, the troubadour-warrior. You will sing some of Gurney’s songs as you read along in this book. There was Thufir Hawat, the old Mentat Master of Assassins, who struck fear even into the heart of the Padishah Emperor. There were Duncan Idaho, the Swordmaster of the Ginaz; Dr. Wellington Yueh, a name black in treachery but bright in knowledge (Herbert 35).

The strict training that Paul received made him an expert in shield fighting, mastering weapons such as “the rapiers, the bodkins, the kindjals, the slow-pellet stunners, the shield belts” (Herbert 41). Nevertheless, Paul did not stand out especially for his brute strength, but his speed and analysis of the battlefield were his main skills, since according to the teachings of his masters “attack has the sole purpose of tricking the opponent into a misstep, setting him up for the attack sinister” (Herbert 43). Eventually, this severe training was the key to overcoming a great number of feats, such as the Gom Jabbar test. According to the Reverend Mother Gaius Helen Mohiam, “the Gom Jabbar is a poisoned needle tipped with metal-cyanide that is used by the Bene Gesserit to test

for human awareness” (Palumbo 97). Hence, the contestant must insert his hand into a box that stimulates nerve pain to extreme levels, thus to survive the test it is necessary to remain calm and not remove the hand from the box, otherwise the poisoned needle would end the life of the contender. Paul was able to withstand the most intense pain possible for longer than anyone, since the Reverend Mother declared that “no woman-child ever withstood that much. I must’ve wanted you to fail” (Herbert 11). In order to achieve this feat worthy of the House Atreides, he used the already mentioned Bene Gesserit teachings that dispel the fear of the mind, such was his degree of mastery.

After Paul arrived to Arrakis, he had to face another life-threatening situation, as someone tried to assassinate him using a Hunter-seeker, “a common assassination device, [...] [that] is a suspensor-buoyed metal sliver controlled by a near-by operator” (Palumbo 107). The person who was trying to end his life wanted to take him by surprise, but his precise and constant awareness of the environment helped him to detect it. Initially, he just observed the killing device, calming his anxiety and thinking of possible solutions. After the necessary conditions for his victory were arranged, “with a violent turn and thrust, he slammed the thing’s nose against the metal door plate. He felt the crunch of it as the nose eye smashed and the seeker went dead in his hand” (Herbert 86). Therefore, it was the perfect opportunity to display his muscle control and speediness, becoming aware of the danger that his House was about to face.

Subsequently, the betrayal of Dr. Yueh towards House Atreides caused a succession of unfortunate events for Paul, as his abilities became the only resource for him and his mother to escape alive from the Harkonnen threat and the arid desert. Unfortunately, that was not their biggest problem, as when they were firstly found by the Fremen tribe, he had to participate in a deathmatch against one of their most powerful members: Jamis. At the beginning of the duel, many Fremen of the audience thought that Paul would not win, he was just a teenager that was behaving as an adult. Eventually, the tables turned after Paul displayed his fighting abilities, and the Fremen thought “*Paul’s toying with Jamis, [...] being needlessly cruel*” (Herbert 386). As a result, Paul won the match after taking Jamis’ life, spreading admiration and fear all over the Fremens, the fitting characteristics for the perfect leader. Therefore, he not only achieved victory, but also gave the first step to become their ruler, surpassing them through their fighting culture and adopting the Fremen name “Muad’Dib”. It cannot be denied that Paul ticks the second box of the ancient Greek mythological hero as mentioned above.

All these feats were accomplished by displaying the Bene Gesserit training and the teachings of his four great masters. However, Paul had one last trainer while he was living with the Fremen tribe: Stilgar, the leader of the Fremen at the moment in which the young hero and Jessica were wandering in the desert. Few things Stilgar had the opportunity to teach to Paul Atreides, since he was already the best fighter in the Fremen community. Indeed, Stilgar only transmitted him the traditions and customs of their tribe and the necessary knowledge to easily survive in the desert with the stillsuits. Moreover, he was also the man who taught him how to control sandworms, advising him with a few words: “Judge the line of approach carefully. Remember, a worm seldom makes an unseen approach to a thumper. Listen all the same. You may often hear it before you see it” (Herbert 493). Hence, he explained to Paul how to detect the presence of sandworms, thus the young hero just had to apply his previous training with House Atreides. Consequently, this led to Paul’s following deed on Sandworm riding, the last test to demonstrate the worthiness within the Fremen community. Indeed, this particular feat reflects another of the classic qualities of the hero, since the young Atreides would face the terrible monsters of the *Dune* universe: the sandworms, also referred to as “Shai-Hulud”,

the sandworm was the dominant lifeform on Arrakis. Sandworms were introduced to Arrakis, then a water planet, as sand trout and eventually changed the ecology of Arrakis until it was arid enough to support the mature sandworm. [...] Sandworms can be over 400 meters long, [...] [and] were attracted by rhythmic vibrations and by an activated shield but avoid water, which is poisonous to them. Luring them with thumpers and mounting and controlling them with maker hooks, the Fremen used sandworms for transportation and, [...] as assault vehicles (Palumbo 154).

It should be noted that these beasts were not just the key to be totally respected by the Fremen, but also the most powerful weapon to take over the government on Arrakis, thus completing his revenge towards the Harkonnens and the Padishah Emperor. That is the reason why Paul “felt exultant, like an emperor surveying his world

[on top of the worm]. He suppressed a sudden urge to cavort there, to turn the worm, to show off his mastery of this creature” (Herbert 508).

The last deed Paul faced was the purification of the Water of Life, a Bene Gesserit ritual in which the contestants must transmute the poisonous substance produced by dying sandworms “into a non-lethal awareness spectrum narcotic within their bodies. [...] A Bene Gesserit who successfully transmutes the Water of Life for the first time becomes a Reverend Mother in the process” (Palumbo 183). Since Paul was able to accomplish this deed as well, he became a male Reverend Mother, also known as the Kwisatz Hadreach prophesied by the Bene Gesserit cult. As a result, Paul transcended “life and myth to enter an inexpressible realm beyond forms [...] [experiencing] ‘the vision of pure time’” (Palumbo 35).¹⁰ In other words, Paul Atreides came into contact with the flow of time itself, ceasing to be human by extending his consciousness beyond the limits of understanding. Hence, he was able to see the past, the present and the future, there was no truth hidden for him. Paul Atreides reached the pinnacle of human evolution, which was the initial goal of the Bene Gesserit cult. However, that super consciousness led him to a devastating conclusion for the universe, as he understood that the only way to reach freedom and peace was through the holy war of Jihad, unleashing a genocide.

Unlike Paul Atreides, Achilles was unable to complete many feats during his short life nor face any mythical creature, as they were all previously slaughtered by other heroes, such as Heracles. Indeed, the feast that immortalized his name was the raid to the impenetrable Trojan fortress alongside the Greek army. However, Paul and Achilles shared the fact that they took the lives of many people while fighting for their goals. It is important to remember that while Paul Atreides did so with full awareness of his actions, Achilles was simply fighting to achieve glory. Nevertheless, he would later slaughter many Trojans after experiencing the greatest of the sufferings when he saw Patroclus, the person the godlike hero loved most, dead. Ironically, Achilles had “no personal interest in this war, [...] [since] the Trojans have done him no wrong and the only reason he is in Troy is to defend the honour of Agamemnon [...] by avenging the abduction of Helen” (González 34), thus obtaining eternal glory in the process. Therefore, his ambitious desire

¹⁰ It is worth noting that Paul’s mother, Jessica Atreides, was also able to become a Reverend Mother by drinking the poisonous Water of Life while pregnant with Paul’s sister Alia, both becoming endowed with a sort of overhuman knowledge and power.

came true, but he first fell into the deepest despair, showing the humanity that also characterized heroes.

On the one hand, *swift-footed Achilles'* humanness is easily recognizable, since "Achilles' emotions drive the structure of the *Iliad*" (González 44), which demonstrates the importance of his emotional ties. Indeed, Homer describes Achilles as a hero that expresses all his feelings without restrictions, as "on Homer's Trojan stage, tears are common to men and women, to heroes and slaves" (González 70). This moving closeness to his loved ones allows the reader to empathize with the hero because, despite his divine origins and unbeatable abilities, he continues to be a mortal capable of suffering and love.

One of the first bonds that Achilles creates is with his father Peleus, the King of the Myrmidons, who governed wisely in Phthia, becoming the most honest of men in Greek mythology. Indeed, Peleus' honorable demeanor would lead him to rise as a deeply respected mortal among the Olympian gods. That is the reason why Peleus "exhorted his son Achilles always to be the best and excel all others" (*Il.* 11. 783-84), so that he would become a worthy man as well. Therefore, Achilles was characterized by his honorable and lawful nature out of battle, thus showing his hospitality to anyone in need. A good case in point is when he ordered Patroclus to serve their visitors and "mix less water with the wine and give every man a cup" (*Il.* 9. 202-04). Furthermore, he was able to sympathize with Priam, King of Troy, by releasing the corpse of his son Hector as we can see from the following words: "Venerable Priam, everything shall be as you require. I will hold up the fighting for the time you have demanded" (*Il.* 24. 669-70). As such, he allowed Priam to organize a suitable funeral for his son, showing his kindness and respect towards his opponents.

Besides, this greatness led him to become an extremely proud man, feeling deeply dishonored when one of his rightful privileges is forfeited. Thus, Achilles quarrels with Agamemnon son of Atreus after the latter claims for himself Achilles' beautiful slave Briseis: "The heat and burden of the fighting fall on me, but when it comes to dealing out the spoils, it is you that takes the lion's share, leaving me to return to my ships, exhausted from battle, with some pathetic portion to call my own" (*Il.* 1. 166-68). As a result of this situation, Achilles releases the wrath within his heart, reacting as a young man injured in his pride. Indeed, his sorrow leads him to burst into tears of helplessness and anger, drawing the attention of his beloved mother Thetis, who requests the help of Zeus and Hephaestus to calm her son's grief, as mentioned above. Evidently, these actions

reinforced Achilles' sulking, since he "hardened his once noble heart and [...] [became] quite unreasonable – no thought for the affection of [...] his comrades, who held him in the highest regard in the whole camp" (*Il.* 8. 629-31). As it is well known, he abandoned his comrades in the battlefield and preferred to stay "nursing his heart-tearing anger by the ships" (*Il.* 4. 513), such was his stubbornness. However, Achilles awarded a little help to the army of Agamemnon thanks to the humble request of his beloved Patroclus, who begged him to use his armor in combat in order to intimidate the Trojans. Achilles agreed, but with one condition: "I want you to win me great honour and glory in the eyes of all the Greeks, so that they give my lovely woman back to me and provide splendid gifts as well" (*Il.* 16. 80-83). As we can see, Achilles' pride had not diminished at all, since he still desired to be acclaimed by the Greeks.

Eventually, all the pride and selfishness that characterizes Achilles disappear when he learns of the death of Patroclus, since "a black cloud of grief engulfed Achilles" (*Il.* 18. 22). Consequently, Achilles is swallowed up by grief, anger and guilt: "my dearest companion is dead, Patroclus, who was more to me than any other of my men, whom I loved as much as my own life. I have destroyed Patroclus" (*Il.* 18. 80-82). Achilles understands that his selfish attitude had been the cause of such misfortune, even feeling that he does not deserve to live. Indeed, the exaggerated response of the hero to the death of his companion is due to the fact that "for Achilles, Patroclus represents everything that is dear, everything that is worthy of being loved" (González 38). Having no other way to deal with his sorrowful anger, Achilles decides to resume the fight to take revenge and achieve glory once more, but this time the honor would be in memory of Patroclus. Eventually, when he manages to complete his revenge, "Achilles began to weep for his dear companion whom he could not banish from his mind, and all-conquering sleep refused to visit him" (*Il.* 24. 3-5). Hence, he still had to assimilate all the sour feelings that his soul was experiencing, helping him to grow emotionally.

Achilles' deep love towards Patroclus is also the key element to understanding his sexuality, a matter that is often invisible among modern heroes. Indeed, Achilles is usually depicted as a passionate lover towards women, seducing Princess Deidamia while he was hiding at Skyros and also in love with his slave war Briseis. Therefore, this portrayal of godlike Achilles may perpetuate the stereotypical gender roles in literature, but the whole picture of Achilles' sexuality completely changes the paradigm. To cut a long story short, the relationship between Achilles and Patroclus in the *Iliad* is not based

on subjectivity and possession, since their union “is a legitimate, honest and loving relationship that Homer does not name because it is obvious to any educated man” (González 69). In sum, Achilles’ sexuality remains fluid in all different heroic myths that recall his life, showing that he was free to love whoever he desired without restrictions.

On the other hand, Paul Atreides’ humanity fades as the plot in *Dune* progresses. Initially, he is depicted as a skilled teenager who is being trained to play his role as Duke of House Atreides in the future. Therefore, he takes each of his responsibilities seriously, although he sometimes doubted himself, as “he could not escape the fear that he had somehow overrun himself” (Herbert 480). At this point, Paul shows the audience that he values his relationship with his masters and, above all, with his father, Duke Leto Atreides.

Whereas it is true that Paul is characterized for being extremely serious with his coaches, the young Atreides is even more respectful in the presence of his father. As Palumbo aptly put it, Duke Leto, though portrayed as “often charming, witty, compassionate, and tender, he could at times be cold, demanding, selfish, harsh, and cruel” (63). However, it is undeniable that Paul loves his father deeply, as when he learns of the plot to end his dukedom, he despairs after not being able to find a solution: “you haven’t said one thing about what we can do to help my father. I’ve heard you talking to my mother. You talk as though my father were dead. Well, he isn’t!” (Herbert 33). Unfortunately, all his efforts are in vain and his father dies without having the opportunity to say goodbye properly to him or his mother Jessica. In this situation it is easy to think that Paul would explode in irrepressible anger, just as Achilles did when he knew that Patroclus had fallen in battle. However, his body is unable to react as a normal human being: “*I loved my father*, Paul thought, and knew this for truth. *I should mourn him. I should feel something*” (Herbert 240). This is actually because his emotions were condensing in his mind, unleashing his true potential as Bene Gesserit and saving his mother from the desert, which was the most important issue in that moment. In fact, once he manages to understand his thoughts and his purpose as the future Duke of House Atreides, he expresses the following emotions: “*Now, my father, I can mourn you*. And he felt the tears coursing down his cheeks” (Herbert 253). It is evident that at this point it is also possible to empathize with the young Atreides, but as he grows and amasses more power among the Fremen, he might be seen as becoming a ruthless demagogue who defends that the end justifies the means, a dehumanization process that is crowned with

the ascension of Paul as the omniscient Kwisatz Haderach. From my personal point of view, this not only causes Paul to withdraw from his loved ones, but also to distance himself from the connection he had initially established with the reader, inevitably losing the humanity that characterizes Achilles and many other heroes.

Another of the most important relationships for Paul Atreides is the one he establishes with Chani, the young Fremen lady he meets during his escape from the Harkonnens. Although Paul first meets her in the Arrakis desert, the young hero had already dreamed of her while living on his home world Caladan:

The familiarity of that face, the features out of numberless visions in his earliest prescience, shocked Paul to stillness. He remembered the angry bravado with which he had once described this face-from-a-dream, telling the Reverend Mother Gaius Helen Mohiam: 'I will meet her' (Herbert 362).

As a result, the meeting between these two teenagers is predestined, which is more touching after seeing how they form a family together. Indeed, Paul is aware of the love they profess for each other, reflecting the following: "*So many times you've given me comfort and forgetfulness*" (Herbert 458). Notwithstanding, Paul's progression as a political and religious leader causes the reader not to feel this connection, as his actions do not match his words. In fact, towards the end of the novel Paul loses his son because of the war that he had unleashed in Arrakis, pronouncing the following words: "'My son is dead.' [...] he felt emptied, a shell without emotions. Everything he touched brought death and grief. And it was like a disease that could spread across the universe" (Herbert 575). Despite the enormous emotional load that these words convey, it is very complicated to empathize with Paul, since his desire for revenge had devoured his humanity. This is the reason why during his stay with the Fremen, Paul solely focuses on gaining more power to overthrow the Padishah Emperor, leaving no clue about his sexuality or feelings. This hypocritical attitude reaches its maximum development when Paul confesses to Chani his intentions:

'I swear to you now,' he whispered, 'that you'll need no title. That woman over there will be my wife and you but a concubine because this is a political thing and we must weld peace out of this moment, enlist the Great Houses of

the Landsraad. We must obey the forms. Yet that princess shall have no more of me than my name. No child of mine nor touch nor softness of glance, nor instant of desire (Herbert 616).

In my view, Paul is not only prioritizing his convictions over his emotions, but he is relegating the woman who has unconditionally loved him to being a simple concubine whose only function is to perpetuate his bloodline. Consequently, it is appreciated that “Paul, like all the nobility, is addicted to power and position; even though he sees it will bring the Jihad, he cannot abandon his compulsion to reclaim his father’s Dukedom” (Palumbo 24) and extend their dynasty. Evidently, Paul fulfils the characteristic of heroes that focuses on founding new dynasties, but he ends up forgetting his emotional ties repeating the same mistakes as his father, as he also hid his true feelings for Jessica until the very end. This is noticeable in the last message that Duke Leto left Jessica: “He wanted you to know he always trusted you completely, always loved you and cherished you. He said he would sooner have mistrusted himself and he had but one regret– that he never made you his Duchess” (Herbert 245). As a result, Duke Leto died without professing all the love that he felt towards Jessica, which led him to die in the most absolute regret. Once again, these very dehumanized actions of the Atreides family, focusing only on their political duties, alienate them from the reader, being unable to empathize.

Unlike Paul Atreides, Achilles could not survive the conclusion of the Trojan War, being unable to come back to his homeland Phthia and be crowned king, just like his father Peleus. However, his education in political matters allowed him to demonstrate his diligence and love towards his people. This can be appreciated since “for Achilles, the Myrmidons are a key element within a broader system of alliances. They are described as the hero’s companions (*hetairoi*) and followers or attendants (*therapontes*)” (González 41). Hence, Achilles does not consider the Myrmidons simple pawns, they are precious lives for him. Indeed, the hero retired his troops from the battlefield when Agamemnon offended him, since he did not want to sacrifice any of his men in such a dishonorable battle. Homer explains that the Myrmidons “had forgotten the sound and fury of war, since there was no one to marshal them in battle-order; for swift-footed godlike Achilles was lying by his ships” (*Il.* 2. 686-687). Therefore, it can be appreciated that Achilles would have been a proud but fair ruler, always trying to excel among men. However, even though Achilles was not able to govern Phthia, he actually had descendants, since “during

his stay on Skyros, Achilles seduces the king's daughter Deidamia, and their union gives birth to a son (Pyrrhus/Neoptolemus)" (González 59). According to some later myths, Achilles' son would become a bloody warrior who just wanted to avenge the memory of his godlike father, even assassinating King Priam.

Finally, Achilles' death at the hands of Paris could mean the end of the hero and his glory, but actually that only caused Achilles to become a worshipped hero, also fulfilling this characteristic feature of Classical heroes. According to the myths, right after the destruction of Troy, "the Greeks have decided to sacrifice Polyxena because the ghost of Achilles has appeared on his tomb and has exhorted them not to leave without honours (*ageraston*)" (González 55), thus demanding the recognition for all the battles he went through. This is not the only offering that Achilles received after his death, since his deeds were praised in different locations, "from Croton in southern Italy to Erythrai in Asia Minor, in Laconia and Elis on the Peloponnese peninsula, on the Cyclades, in Miletus and obviously, in two key places, his tomb on the Trojan coast and on the White Island" (González 99). As such, it is possible to find coins and inscriptions in all these locations in order to honor his memory. *Swift-footed hero Achilles* actually achieved immortality, since he will be remembered and admired by humanity until the end of times.

As per Paul Atreides, he is also conscious of the fact that if he dies, he will become a worshipped symbol in Arrakis, fulfilling the last characteristic of Classic heroes:

This is the climax, Paul thought. From here, the future will open, the clouds part onto a kind of glory. And if I die here, they'll say I sacrificed myself that my spirit might lead them. And if I live, they'll say nothing can oppose Muad'Dib" (Herbert 608).

Indeed, throughout the novel, Frank Herbert offers at the beginning of each chapter epigraphs taken from "the many volumes authored by Princess Irulan" (Palumbo 165), who would become the wife of Paul Atreides at the end of *Dune*. Firstly, Princess Irulan's objective with these compositions is to highlight Paul's virtues, indicating that he was an ambiguous hero, capable of bringing together opposite traits: "He was a warrior and mystic, ogre and saint, the fox and the innocent, chivalrous, ruthless, less than a god, more than a man. There is no measuring Muad'Dib's motives by ordinary standards" (Herbert 588). Hence, Princess Irulan wishes to extend his feats and create a cult around

his memory, just as it happened when Achilles perished in Troy. Secondly, in order to highlight Paul's divine nature and superiority over humans, Princess Irulan describes his all mighty powers as Kwisatz Haderach:

Muad'Dib could indeed see the Future, but you must understand the limits of this power. Think of sight. You have eyes, yet cannot see without light. If you are on the floor of a valley, you cannot see beyond your valley. Just so, Muad'Dib could not always choose to look across the mysterious terrain. He tells us that a single obscure decision of prophecy, perhaps the choice of one word over another, could change the entire aspect of the future (Herbert 277).

Princess Irulan not only extols the figure of Paul Atreides, but also desires to unify the Fremen and the Bene Gesserit cult, since the Kwisatz Haderach was a common prophecy for both religions. In any case, this only proves that Paul Atreides abandoned his humanity and fully embraced his divine traits, ascending as a quasi-omniscient God, remembered and feared throughout the universe.

All in all, Paul Atreides shares a lot of similarities with Achilles, being able to be considered a hero according to the canon of Ancient Heroism. Despite the fact that Achilles and Paul may be considered heroes of the same category, the traits that differentiate them cannot be forgotten. Thus, while Achilles is an honest hero with himself, Paul Atreides is, to my mind, a hypocritical hero that believes that the end justifies the means.

5.2. Contemporary Heroism: Paul Atreides as the Monomythic Superhero

The Ancient Heroism that has been studied in this Final Degree Essay has evolved over time, adapting to the needs of its audience and reflecting the changes that society has undergone. Science Fiction has played a very important role in the formation of Contemporary Heroism, which is conceived from the perspective of superheroes. In fact, it is easily recognizable that these superhero stories contain elements of Science Fiction, since many superheroes "are aliens (Superman, the Martian Manhunter), the products of

scientific accidents (Spiderman, the Fantastic Four, the Incredible Hulk), or genetic mutations (the X-Men)” (Creekmur 284). Therefore, it is evident that the construction of this genre is due to the aforementioned concepts of ‘estrangement cognition’ or ‘the novuum’ formulated by Darko Suvin. Hence, the attractive figure of the superhero can be defined as

a heroic character with a selfless, pro-social mission; with superpowers – extraordinary abilities, advanced technology, or highly developed physical, mental, or mystical skills; who has a superhero identity embodied in a codename and iconic costume, which typically express his biography, character, powers, or origin (transformation from ordinary person to superhero); and who is generically distinct, i.e. can be distinguished from characters of related genres [...] by a preponderance of generic conventions. Often superheroes have dual identities, the ordinary one of which is usually a closely guarded secret (Coogan *et al.* 30).

The consolidation of superheroes within Science Fiction did not take place until 1938, the year in which *Action Comics #1* introduced Superman for the first time. Many critics defend the idea that “Superman was the first character to fully embody the definition of the superhero and to prompt the imitation and repetition necessary for the emergence of a genre” (Coogan *et al.* 175). As a result, Superman was not only the first of the superheroes, but also had the necessary characteristics to establish a canon with which to create new characters. According to the writer Peter Coogan, director of the Institute for Comic Studies, these are the four main traits that made Superman the epitome of Contemporary Heroism:

1) Mission: the duty of superheroes is to ensure the safety and well-being of society in a selfless way, since their sense of justice compels them to defend the weak and fight the evildoer. Therefore, this “means that his fight against evil must fit in with the existing, professed mores of society and must not be intended to benefit or further his own agenda” (Coogan *et al.* 31). However, the superhero's humanity can sometimes be

troublesome, making it difficult for him to complete his mission. For example, he may be influenced by anger, revenge, glory, money, or even love.

2) Powers: one of the most attractive traits within the superhero universe is their extraordinary powers that allow them to perform any feat with relative ease. The origin of these superpowers can be very varied, since they can be obtained “through science, as with Spider-Man; mystic arts, as with Dr. Strange; technology, as with Iron Man; alien abilities, as with Superman; or a birthright [...] as with Wonder Woman or the X-Men” (Darowski 5). Thus, the hero's story will be the one that defines his abilities and skills.

3) Identity: the identity of superheroes is another fundamental feature, since it allows us to define their history and personality. Nevertheless, this concept creates a duality in superheroes that is exciting for the public, since the hero must live with two identities throughout his life. On the one hand, the secret identity as a civilian allows him to “act in a manner to dissuade suspicion that they are really a costumed adventurer” (Darowski 6). On the other hand, his identity as a superhero not only allows him to use his powers freely, but in a way this identity reflects his true purposes. For example, “Superman is a super man who represents the best humanity can hope to achieve; his codename of him expresses his inner character of him” (Coogan *et al.* 33).

4) Costume: the outfit as superheroes not only allows them to differentiate themselves from the rest of the citizens they defend, but it also helps them to hide their identity and even enhance their powers. One of the most notable examples prior to the appearance of Superman is that of “Don Diego Vega [...], [who] wears the costume of Zorro to protect the helpless citizens from corrupt government officials” (Darowski 6) while pretending to be another nobleman.

That said, just as the spectrum of Ancient Heroism is very wide, the superhero genre can also include multiple variations and exceptions. Hence, there are characters that do not meet the four distinctive characteristics of the superhero and are still considered as such (Coogan *et al.* 39-40). In keeping with this trend of thought, I will now focus on whether Paul Atreides fulfils the canon of Contemporary Heroism or not.

First of all, Paul Atreides' mission is quite ambiguous, as he aims to spread Jihad throughout the Known Universe with the goal of freeing Arrakis from the oppressive yoke of the Padishah Emperor. Consequently, the *mélange* industry would be closed, causing

the water to flow again in Arrakis and bringing with it the blossoming of new life. However, young Paul Atreides also knew that such an ideal and utopian goal would inevitably bring with it a “path held long patches of gray obscurity except for peaks of violence. He had seen a warrior religion there, a fire spreading across the universe with the Atreides green and black banner waving at the head of fanatic legions drunk on spice liquor” (Herbert 253). In fact, Paul prophesied a terrible massacre, causing “the subjugation of 10,000 worlds and the deaths of 61 billion people” (Palumbo 135).

Moreover, the salvation of Arrakis was only a pretext to unleash such a cataclysm. Actually, what Paul really wanted was to satisfy his revenge against the Harkonnens and the Padishah Emperor, increasing the power of the Atreides dynasty. Thus, Paul’s seemingly selfless motives for saving Arrakis were nothing more than an illusion concealing his dark and selfish motivations.

Second, it is clear that Paul Atreides has powers that set him apart from the other characters in *Dune*. Many of his abilities and skills have been acquired through the arduous training that he underwent during his childhood. Precisely, Gurney Halleck, Thufir Hawat, Duncan Idaho and Dr. Yueh were the four great mentors in charge of educating the young Atreides, teaching him all kinds of psychological persuasion techniques and lethal combat maneuvers. It is also true that his ability to prophesy the future is the result of hundreds of years of genetic engineering by the Bene Gesserits. Therefore, Paul Atreides’ powers are the product of a great collective experiment with the aim of creating the perfect being, so in a way his origins fit within the superhero canon.

Third, Paul Atreides also fulfils the superhero identity trait, as “in Cave of Ridges Paul assumed [...] his public Fremen name, Paul Muad’Dib” (Palumbo 66). Indeed, the name young Atreides chose not only wanted to prove his willingness to integrate into the Fremen community, but also wanted to demonstrate his value as a soldier for the tribe. This is mainly because ‘Muad’Dib’ describes “the adapted kangaroo mouse of Arrakis admired by the Fremen for its ability to survive in the open desert” (Palumbo 135). In sum, his new identity performs a double function with which the young Atreides seeks to be accepted and respected in equal parts.

As Paul Atreides demonstrates his power against the Fremen, 'Muad'Dib' takes on a religious connotation described by Baron Vladimir Harkonnen: "'They've a new prophet or religious leader of some kind among the Fremen,' the Baron said. 'They call him Muad'Dib. Very funny, really. It means 'the Mouse'" (Herbert 465). Evidently, 'Muad'Dib' also has an effect on the enemies of the Fremen, as the Harkonnen began to understand that there is a growing threat in the desert. Hence, Paul Atreides' new identity not only serves to identify himself among the Fremen, but is also a way of announcing his goals among his allies and his fearsome power against his enemies.

Fourth, Paul Atreides has never intended to wear a costume that identifies him with his role as the savior of Arrakis. Even so, throughout the novel the use of the Fremen's stillsuits became essential for the young Atreides, as these outfits were necessary to survive the adverse conditions of the Arrakeen desert. However, it is true that when he took the Emperor's throne under the name Muad'Dib, "garments that appeared to be but were not stillsuits became the fashion in the Empire" (Palumbo 167). As a result, the stillsuits that were used by the revolutionary army of the Fremen to cross the desert and reduce the enemy troops, became one of Paul's symbols of power.

Even if it is true that Paul Atreides meets some of the requirements to enter the superhero canon, he cannot be considered as such. I believe that the main reason for this is that he does not pretend to be a hero to be admired, but a leader capable of commanding an entire empire. Consequently, his ambiguous intentions, his seemingly selfishness and his hypocrisy make him a superhero in the eyes of the Fremen, but in my view this could just be seen as mere despotism.

6. Conclusions

Once the analysis on Heroism as displayed in a Science Fiction work like *Dune* (1965) has been completed, I would like to draw the conclusion that Ancient Heroism has a greater presence in Frank Herbert's novel than normally credited. Although it is true that Paul Atreides fulfils certain traits of the superhero's monomyth, such as the presence of superhuman powers or the use of a new identity to fight his enemies, in my opinion he is mostly guided by his own convictions and even ignores common well-being. As such,

I do not consider that Paul Atreides could be taken as the superhero of the Science Fiction genres.

In contrast, Paul Atreides does reflect the canon of the classic hero, coinciding in many aspects with Achilles, as I have stressed throughout this Final Degree Essay. Indeed, it is unquestionable that Paul was able to accomplish a greater number of feats than Achilles and even founded an empire to strengthen the power of his family. Subsequently, Frank Herbert complies with the patterns pinpointed by Johnston and it seems to me that he recurrently depends on Ancient Heroism to define the personality and history of Paul Atreides. Although *Dune* has been written in a modern context and with greater proximity to a society that appreciates superheroes, the readaptation of classical concepts prevails in the novel.

In my humble opinion, Paul Atreides is more than enough proof to demonstrate the great influence of the Classical Tradition in our times. This will lead to the strengthening of Classical Reception Studies, since many other contemporary authors continue to display these classical features in their stories in all sorts of different ways. In conclusion, despite the fact that Ancient Heroism might seem simple and has been readapted countless times throughout history, the audience continues to enjoy heroic feats. The celebration of *Dune*'s anniversary in 2021, with the release of a new cinematic version of this epic novel, is the best evidence of it.

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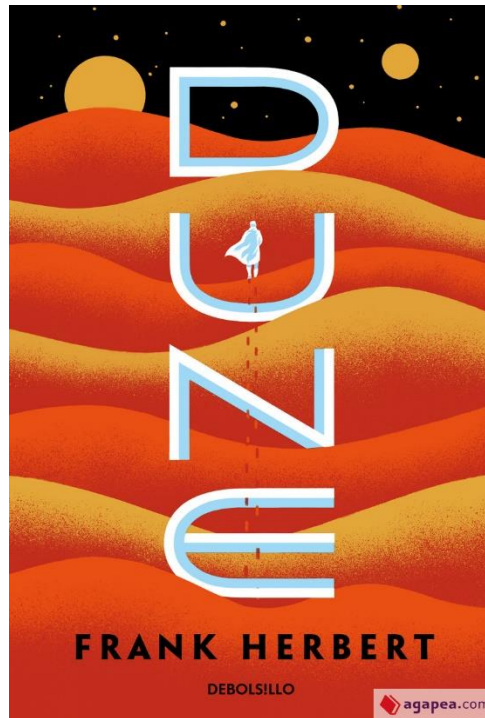
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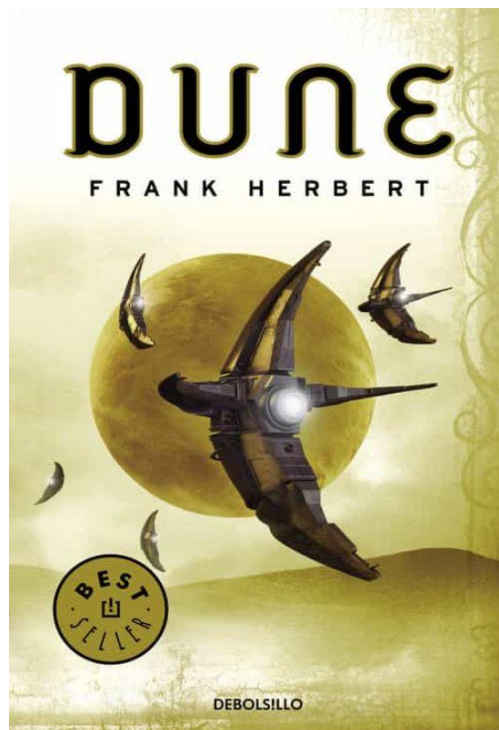
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8. Annexes



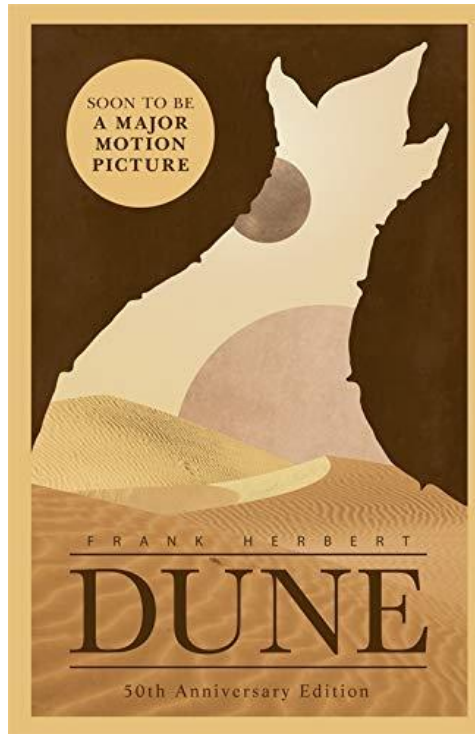
Picture I. *Dune*'s New Cover. 1st Edition (02/07/2020)

Editorial: DEBOLSILLO; Website: Agapea.com



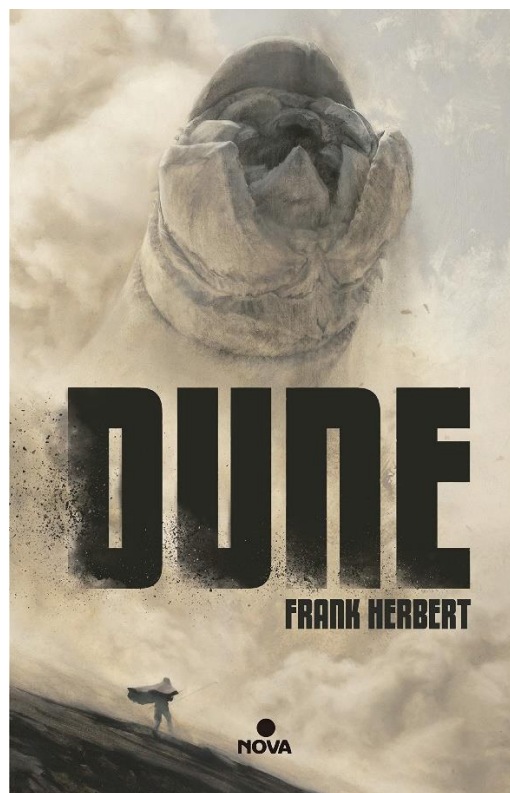
Picture II. *Dune*'s cover showing the Ornithopters

Editorial: DEBOLSILLO; Website: casadellibro.com



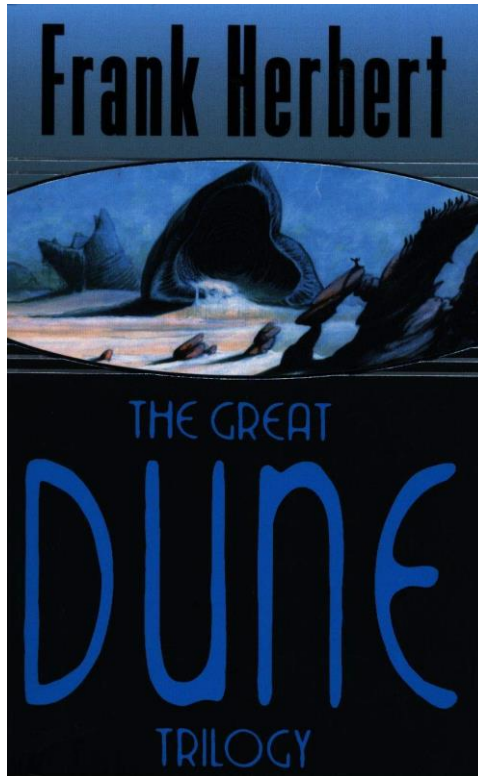
Picture III. *Dune*'s cover showing the dangerous Arrakeen desert (2015)

Editorial: Hodder and Stoughton; Website: Amazon.es



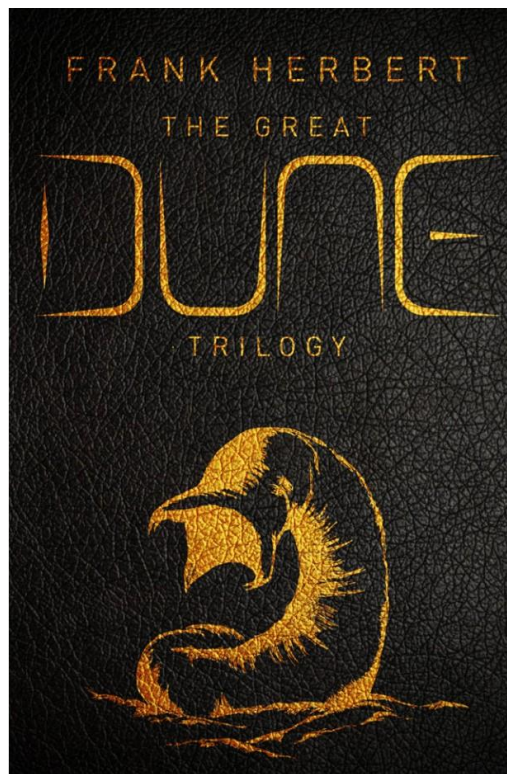
Picture IV. *Dune*'s cover showing a sandworm (2019)

Editorial: Nova; Website: Amazon.es



Picture V. The Great *Dune* Trilogy: *Dune*, *Dune Messiah*, *Children of Dune* (2005)

Editorial: Gollancz; Website: Amazon.es



Picture VI. The Great *Dune* Trilogy: *Dune*, *Dune Messiah*, *Children of Dune* (2018)

Editorial: Gateway; Website: Amazon.es