# The Agency of Women in Frank Herbert's *Dune* Series

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## Contents

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## Abstract

This thesis examines the extent to which Frank Herbert's best-selling science fiction series, the six-book *Dune* saga, can be considered feminist by studying the representation of women across the series. It analyzes the characters of the Bene Gesserit Sisterhood by engaging with contemporaneous second-wave feminist theories and cultural context. Focusing especially on feminists' demands for women to have control over their bodies, it looks at the high degree of female embodied agency in five different avenues—mind-body synergy, reproduction and motherhood, voices, education and memory, and sexuality—in order to conclude that women are depicted as agential and influential as well as constrained at times by their body and their membership in a larger organization. The thesis explores how the series anticipates and addresses some of the second-wave feminist movement's concerns and how it handles the contentious issue of sexual difference. It also discusses the *Dune* series within the context of twentieth-century American science fiction and argues that the critical neglect of feminist elements has resulted in its exclusion from proper consideration as a text of the New Wave period and of feminist science fiction. The thesis therefore challenges the existing critical discourse of mid-twentieth century science fiction and seeks to establish Herbert's *Dune* series as making a significant contribution to the genre's representation of women.

## Citation Abbreviations

| | |
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| *DM* | *Dune Messiah* |
| *CHI* | *Children of Dune* |
| *GE* | *God Emperor of Dune* |
| *HD* | *Heretics of Dune* |
| *CHA* | *Chapterhouse: Dune* |

# Chapter One: Introduction—The Sidelining of the Women of *Dune*

> [W]hether or not the Dune series is ultimately feminist in the images and voices of women it projects is an open question.
> William F. Touponce, *Frank Herbert* (109)

The question of whether the *Dune* series can be considered feminist has remained unanswered since William F. Touponce posed it in 1988 in his book-length study of American author Frank Herbert, creator of the popular science fiction saga. First serialized as "Dune World" and "The Prophet of Dune" in the science fiction magazine *Analog* in 1963-1965, *Dune* was published as a novel in 1965 and was followed by five sequels: *Dune Messiah* (1969), *Children of Dune* (1976), *God Emperor of Dune* (1981), *Heretics of Dune* (1984), and *Chapterhouse: Dune* (1985), with events spanning around 5,000 years within the Dune universe.[1] The first novel holds the status of being the best-selling science fiction book and one frequently taught in science fiction courses.[2] The fact that the series materialized during a period of transformative social and cultural movements in the U.S. makes it a unique case study in American science fiction in which to examine the representation of women. The sexual revolution and second-wave feminism in particular contributed to changes in the perception of gender roles and women's place in society in the U.S. and other areas of the world. As a relatively new genre emerging from the pulp magazines of the 1920s, American science fiction was gaining in popularity and more of its authors were engaging explicitly with issues of gender, leading to a profusion of feminist science fiction in the 1970s and 1980s. Yet in spite of *Dune*'s status and the series' publication during the height of second-wave feminism, critical attention to female characters in the series has severely lagged behind that devoted to female characters in other science fiction, particularly in the category of feminist science fiction, in which Herbert's series has never been placed. Even Touponce's study largely avoids a consideration of female characters outside of their role in the plot, but it is nonetheless valuable for raising interesting avenues for further study through brief suggestions, as it does with the above quotation located in the final paragraph of the book's

[1] Some of the later novels also first appeared in magazine form. A shorter version of *Dune Messiah* appeared in *Galaxy* (July-September 1969). *Children of Dune* appeared in *Analog* (1976). A condensed version of *God Emperor of Dune* appeared in *Playboy* (1981).

[2] It maintains its best-selling status based on the millions of copies sold, although sources are inconsistent. The obituary of Herbert in *The New York Times* in 1986 stated that *Dune* had sold more than 12 million copies and been translated into 14 languages ("Frank Herbert"). Touponce wrote in 1988 that *Dune* had sold over ten million copies in various editions, also noting its popularity as a text in the academic sphere (119). The official *Dune Novels* website notes that *Dune* has sold almost 20 million copies and been translated into dozens of languages (Herbert Properties).

section on the *Dune* series. Thus, this thesis seeks to take this question and his suggestion that female characters may in fact be "an innovative twist on the feminist ideal of Sisterhood" as a starting point for an in-depth study of female characters and linkages with feminist thought. In order to redress the oversight in the lack of feminist criticism, and in light of the rich historical context, I deemed it most suitable to undertake an approach that takes into consideration contemporaneous issues and the social climate in which Herbert was writing and publishing. Therefore, in this thesis I engage with second-wave feminist theories in the U.S. and look at trends in the American science fiction genre, namely the New Wave movement of the 1960s and 1970s, in order to analyze Herbert's representation of women by examining female characters in the *Dune* series. In so doing, I can not only answer Touponce's question about whether it is feminist, but challenge the existing critical discourse of mid-twentieth century science fiction that has relegated one of its most successful authors to the sidelines.

In this thesis I seek to draw together some of the threads that previous critics have uncovered in Herbert's series and relate them specifically to the female characters, namely the women of one of the major factions in the novels: the Bene Gesserit Sisterhood. I focus on these women because they are the most prominent female characters throughout the series, making them ideal objects of analysis whose characterization can also be compared across the six novels. As will be discussed in more detail below, critics have commented on the degree to which characters have choices regarding their destinies and humanity's improvement of their physical and mental capabilities in the absence of computers, but the majority have neglected a consideration of female characters in their analyses. Yet the characterization of individual women of the Sisterhood and the larger organization creates some of the rich complexities and key tensions in the narrative, including the tension between individual and collective agency and the tension between human agency and biological determinism, which also offers a perspective on the role of sexual differences between female and male bodies. Thus, I find it appropriate to use the concept of agency as a means of providing a comprehensive yet nuanced feminist analysis in this thesis. In light of the series' focus on the capabilities of humans rather than computer technologies and second-wave feminist demands for women to have control over their own bodies, I use the overarching framework of embodied agency in particular to explore these tensions and analyze Herbert's representation of the Bene Gesserit, as well as map the intersections between the series, second-wave feminism, and feminist science fiction texts.

In the thesis I am primarily concerned with the six novels and contextual and critical material published in the U.S. in the same time period that assists in a reading of embodied agency for women. I focus on the American science fiction tradition in which the series sits in order to show that the series makes a contribution to the maturation of the genre and is not merely recycling stereotypical views of women, instead offering more complex characterizations. I use influential second-wave feminist texts that deal with control of the body in avenues similar to those which the Bene Gesserit use, and use these texts as both cultural context and theoretical lenses for my analysis. Among these I count French author Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (trans. 1953) because of the large influence that the translation of her text into English had on many second-wave feminists and their understanding of gender and the body. Many other contexts are thus beyond the scope of this thesis, but I anticipate that this study lays the foundation and reveals pathways for future analyses, such as those concerned with theories of posthumanism and masculinity studies.

My main contention is that the *Dune* series is feminist but not wholly liberatory in its representation of the women of the Bene Gesserit due to the development of a high degree of female embodied agency but also complexities regarding this agency. Such complexities include its treatment of notions of determinism and sexual difference with which many second-wave feminists struggled. I argue that the series offers a representation of women that is nuanced and much more complex than the stereotypical females in other science fiction. I show how women appear as three-dimensional characters with a high degree of agency even in traditionally feminine roles, and that the series at times even goes so far as to position women's embodied agency as superior to masculine-associated technology. But I also show how this agency is complicated by women's membership in an organization that wants to control aspects of their lives for its own purposes that may not align with women's individual interests. I argue that the series anticipates one of the main aspects of second-wave feminism—women's right to have control over their bodies as well as agency in their lives—but also the notion of sisterhood and the tensions between individual and collective agency that would arise among feminist groups. The series problematizes radical feminist theories by on the one hand confirming that women should control their bodies, but on the other hand showing women who are content to participate in traditional institutions such as marriage and motherhood within a heteronormative framework. The series problematizes the offshoot of radical feminist theories, cultural feminist theories, by seeming to confirm that women are inherently better at certain tasks and different from men due to their capacity for

childbearing, but then in later novels showing an all-female group that is destructive and decidedly non-nurturing. I argue that the series also offers complex views of sexual difference and biological determinism—that sometimes these aspects do not affect human behavior or are controllable, and other times they drive men and women to act in certain ways outside of their control. Thus, the texts underscore the complexity of notions of essentialism (the idea that women and men are naturally a certain way) as well as demonstrating how women can strategically leverage essentialist notions at times to accomplish larger political goals. In order to examine agency within this framework, I have chosen to rely on essentialist assumptions in order to analyze the female characters in the texts within their historical context as well as the context of second-wave feminism, which was itself grappling with how to theorize women in terms of women's liberation. Ultimately, my analysis shows that although the series' depiction of an all-female order may not be as overtly liberatory in terms of women's roles or sexual equality as the depictions of women in other feminist science fiction, the series nonetheless presents a rich and complex speculation on the ways in which women may exert agency that anticipates and parallels similar issues in second-wave feminism.

Although a biographical approach is outside of the scope of this study, it is worth noting that Herbert's relationships with the women in his life were likely a large factor in his decision to create and characterize the Bene Gesserit as he did. As briefly mentioned by authors Timothy O'Reilly and Herbert's son Brian in their books on Herbert, which are discussed later in this chapter, his mother and her ten sisters shared in his upbringing, and his aunts' insistence that he be taught by Jesuits points to them being the model for the Sisterhood (O'Reilly 89; B. Herbert 21). Another influential woman in Herbert's life was his second spouse, Beverly. She helped support his writing in a financial sense and, according to B. Herbert, by assisting with plot and characterization, "particularly the motivational aspects of female characters" (O'Reilly 17, B. Herbert 170). O'Reilly notes that Herbert said of her, "She's the best thing that ever happened to me," and B. Herbert writes that his father "depended upon the abilities of a 'white witch,' my mother" (O'Reilly 17, B. Herbert 523). After their marriage of almost four decades ended when she passed away from cancer in 1984, Herbert published a long dedication to her in *Chapterhouse: Dune* that begins: "Here is another book dedicated to Bev, friend, wife, dependable helper and the person who gave this one its title" (*CHA* 434). B. Herbert argues that the presence of "many strong independent women's voices" that Touponce mentions as being in this final novel was due to Herbert's

grief at Beverly's death and his recognition of her contributions to his writing (B. Herbert 434). B. Herbert also specifically links his father's intentions with the historical context: "Aware of a simmering women's liberation movement in the early 1960s and the desires of women in religious service for more recognition, Dad decided to postulate a 'sisterhood' in control of an entire religious system. He thought readers would accept the premise of women with occult powers of memory, since females have traditionally been said to have 'women's intuition'" (B. Herbert 187). Although critics have preferred to explore Herbert's intentions with regard to other aspects of the novels, such as psychological concerns, the above insights indicate that the connections between the women in his life and the characterization of the Bene Gesserit are also worth further exploration.

## Overview of the *Dune* Series

Before discussing the structure of the thesis, it will be useful to provide a brief summary of each of the six novels with the caveat that they are rich, complex, and lengthy books despite the sometimes seemingly simple narrative arcs. The *Dune* series is set in a universe with a medieval-like feudal structure that has developed in response to the Butlerian Jihad, a human revolt in the distant past against thinking machines that saw them banned, thereby forcing humans to develop their own capabilities. *Dune* features the story of the family of House Atreides—Duke Leto, Lady Jessica (a member of the Bene Gesserit Sisterhood), and their son, Paul—as they move to the planet Dune, the only location of sandworms and the prized spice known as melange, where their enemies, House Harkonnen, have laid a trap for them. The sandworm life cycle is integral to the creation of the spice, which is an addictive substance highly valued for its geriatric properties and ability to expand the psyche. Leto is killed and Jessica and Paul escape to the desert, where she uses her Bene Gesserit skills to find safe passage among the locals known as the Fremen, whose tribal culture has been prepared by previous Bene Gesserit women of the Missionaria Protectiva to accept a Bene Gesserit woman and her child as fulfilments of a prophecy. Because he is part of the Bene Gesserit's breeding program and his mother trained him in the Bene Gesserit Way, Paul gains access to prescient visions and discovers that his mother is actually Baron Harkonnen's daughter. He eventually overthrows the Baron and the highest authority in the Imperium, the Emperor, agreeing to an unconsummated marriage with the royal daughter Princess Irulan to solidify his ascension to the imperial throne.

*Dune Messiah* details the downfall of Paul after the wars in his name resulted in the deaths of millions across the universe and his enemies plot to deny him an heir and end his reign. One of the enemies is a new group, the Bene Tleilaxu, who create gholas, which are resurrections of deceased individuals developed from skin scrapings that the Tleilaxu can train to behave in certain ways at a subconscious level. Paul accepts a gift of a ghola of his former swordsmaster, Duncan Idaho, who comes to love Paul's sister, Alia, who also has a type of prescient awareness. Paul's concubine, Chani, is being fed a contraceptive by Irulan and only becomes pregnant with twins once she retires to the desert. She dies in childbirth while Paul becomes blinded in an attack. He is tempted by the Tleilaxu to resurrect Chani, which will give them influence over him, but he resists with the help of Duncan, who overcomes the Tleilaxu compunction to kill Paul and in the stress restores the memories of the original Duncan Idaho person. Paul accepts the Fremen tradition that blind people must walk into the desert to be devoured by the sandworms, Alia becomes regent for the children, and Irulan gives up her plotting to help raise the children.

*Children of Dune* follows the maturation of Paul and Chani's twins, Leto II and Ghanima, who also have prescient awareness, and how they plan to carry out the vision that their father had but was too afraid to follow: that of setting humanity down the Golden Path that will ensure that humans are no longer trapped by prescience. They avoid plots against them by outsiders as well as their Aunt Alia, who has become possessed by the memory of her grandfather, the Baron Harkonnen, and Jessica returns to Dune to ensure that the twins are not similarly possessed. Leto II accepts that he must enter into a symbiosis with the sandworms in order to enable him to live for thousands of years and follow the Golden Path. Ghanima agrees to a relationship with another royal heir in order to continue the Atreides line into the future.

*God Emperor of Dune* takes place around 3,500 years after the birth of Leto II and is largely concentrated on his philosophical musings, after he has become the God Emperor whose body has become almost entirely that of a sandworm. He converses with his household entourage, including Duncan Idaho gholas that he has had continually produced for him by the Tleilaxu, as well as members of the Bene Gesserit, whose breeding program he has taken over in order to develop humans who will be free from the trappings of prescience. He creates an all-female army called the Fish Speakers in order to enforce peace across the universe, which has the effect of cultivating a longing for more freedom among his subjects. Eventually he allows a young woman of the Atreides line named Siona along with one of the

Idaho gholas to rebel against him and cause his death because it is necessary for the fulfilment of his plans.

*Heretics of Dune* takes place around 1,500 years after Leto II's death, when people who had gone out into what is known as the Scattering begin fleeing back to the known universe without explanation, causing trouble for groups like the Bene Gesserit and Tleilaxu. Many of those who return call themselves Honored Matres, who are women using advanced sexual techniques to enslave men and gain control over whole planets. They see the Bene Gesserit as rivals to be eliminated, as do the Tleilaxu, though the latter still produce gholas for the Bene Gesserit and eventually reveal how they are produced: using axlotl tanks which are actually female Tleilaxu turned into wombs. The Bene Gesserit have gained more abilities: they can share memories with other members on demand and can sexually imprint men in order to gain their loyalty, in a way similar to that of the Honored Matres. In a battle between the two female groups, led by the Bene Gesserit's military commander Miles Teg, the planet Dune is destroyed but the Bene Gesserit manage to transport a sandworm to their secret home base on Chapterhouse. They hope that the orphan girl Sheeana, who can communicate with sandworms and is being trained as a Bene Gesserit, will be able to help restart the worm lifecycle and create a desert planet of spice once again.

*Chapterhouse: Dune* details the final confrontation between the Bene Gesserit and Honored Matres after many Bene Gesserit and all Tleilaxu save one have been destroyed. The Bene Gesserit have a number of strategies to survive, including resurrecting a ghola of Teg, but ultimately their leader, Reverend Mother Odrade, realizes that the two groups must merge in order to curb the wildness of the Honored Matres. When Odrade dies, the former Honored Matre Murbella becomes the new leader, having undergone Bene Gesserit training. Finally, Sheeana, the latest Duncan Idaho ghola, and the last Tleilaxu escape from Chapterhouse in a ship with a sandworm aboard in the hope of avoiding the duties the Sisterhood had planned for them and embarking on a new journey.

## Five Avenues of Agency

The thesis is structured to trace the avenues in which the Bene Gesserit secure agency through the Bene Gesserit Way, reproduction, the techniques of the Voice and Other Memory, and sexuality. Because the Bene Gesserit's agency stems from their prana-bindu training, the mind-body synergy that they cultivate through this training is the subject of the first main body chapter. Subsequent chapters mirror the development of the Bene Gesserit's

skills and their presence in the novels, with the model being Jessica, who is the most prominent Bene Gesserit woman in the first novel and showcases her abilities in the greatest detail. Although she is not wholly representative of the Bene Gesserit, her characterization plays a significant role in establishing the capabilities of the Sisterhood for the reader, making her a valuable example in many cases. Jessica first appears as a mother, demonstrating her control over reproduction by choosing to bear a son rather than a daughter as the order had expected. She later uses the Voice to physically control one of her household's military leaders. Finally, she undergoes a religious ceremony to become a Reverend Mother and gains access to the memories of her female ancestors, known as Other Memory. Although there are subtle hints at her skills in the area of sexuality, there is much more material in the last two novels on this topic in relation to the Bene Gesserit, so sexuality is the subject of the final body chapter, which focuses on examples from other Bene Gesserit characters. These five aspects thus form the avenues in which I analyze the representation of women in the series by examining their characterization and contrasts between the Bene Gesserit and other major groups, all within the historical and theoretical context of second-wave feminism. I contend that the Bene Gesserit present a valuable case study by which to examine female agency, but it is important to note that the concept of agency is fraught and complex in the *Dune* universe. The first novel sets up a strongly feudal society in which aspects such as authority, hierarchy, and prophecy determine much of an individual's behaviors, as do education and socialization. This results in significant restrictions on characters' agency at times, whether they are male or female. Yet as the structures within the universe change over the course of the series, and as the focus moves away from the main characters of the Atreides family, agency too changes so that its depiction cannot be viewed as stable. Overall, agency is always determined in relation to the environment in which characters operate, but I argue that it is still possible to recognize female agency within the series and that the Bene Gesserit present the clearest example through which to do so.

In my examination of mind-body synergy in Chapter 2, I draw on Beauvoir's understanding of women as beings situated in bodies to show how the Bene Gesserit's abilities refute the Cartesian dualism that consigns women to an inferior side of a binary of male/female, mind/body, and rational/irrational. I look at the similarities between the Bene Gesserit's training and elements from Eastern religions like Taoism and Hinduism, and Eastern-influenced Jungian psychology, as well as the implications of a more holistic understanding of the human on representations of women and sexual difference. I also

analyze several of the key skills of the Bene Gesserit, such as their abilities in hand-to-hand combat and their survival of the spice agony, and how they contribute to a strong sense of embodied agency for women. Then I examine the prescient abilities of male characters and compare the Bene Gesserit and the male Mentats, who are characterized as much more limited in their logic-driven nature. I note similarities between Bene Gesserit abilities and those in feminist science fiction novels of the 1970s to show how the Sisterhood may have anticipated some of these later communities of women.

In Chapter 3, I move into full engagement with second-wave feminist contexts and theories, using Shulamith Firestone's and Adrienne Rich's theories about reproduction and motherhood to analyze the agency of Bene Gesserit mothers like Jessica and Janet Roxbrough-Teg. Although Firestone and Rich have quite different views on the relationship of reproduction to women's liberation from oppression, I find it valuable to read these two theorists in dialogue with each other since they both want women to have choices, and I see aspects of each of their arguments reflected in the series' treatment of reproduction. Rather than limiting a discussion of agency to the maternal body alone, I also look at how the Bene Gesserit breeding program and individual women's mothering serve to make reproduction a considerable political tool. I define natural and unnatural reproductive methods and contrast those of the Bene Gesserit with those of the Tleilaxu. Sexual difference is a key component of this chapter, and I suggest that the depiction of female embodied agency is possible because the series gives women the tools to actively control their bodies although it presents a vision of reproduction that is less speculative than some of the alternatives in feminist science fiction.

I take a broader view of embodied agency in Chapter 4 by looking at women's voices, drawing on many feminists' calls for the female voice to be reclaimed as authoritative, influential, and truthful rather than dismissed or ignored. I examine the Bene Gesserit's mastery of the abilities of the Voice and Truthsaying, both of which show women in possession of a high degree of embodied agency to be able to speak their mind and influence others. I also briefly explore their basis in the pseudo-scientific field of general semantics in order to demonstrate that the techniques are extrapolations of existing communication methods. This aspect is important in showing that it is neither sexual difference nor magic that enables women to become masters in these areas. I examine women's voices more broadly by analyzing women's advisory roles and the narrative structure itself, which features frequent epigraphs authored by Bene Gesserit women such as Irulan. These epigraphs in

particular reinforce the presence and influence of the Bene Gesserit throughout the series. As in the chapter on reproduction, I show how the series problematizes feminist theories by showing women in control of their bodies without necessarily changing the avenues in which they wield influence, such as through their roles as partners and advisors to male leaders. Drawing comparisons between the vocal and agential female characters of the Bene Gesserit and those in feminist science fiction, I explore how the series anticipates and parallels the trend of having a multitude of female speakers in the genre.

In Chapter 5, I continue to examine women's voices and influence but more specifically in their role in the early education of Bene Gesserit women and in the historical memories that comprise Other Memory. I argue that the Bene Gesserit's system of education for girls cultivates their agential potential by socializing them to become highly skilled women, yet also represents an acquiescence to the desire for women to be prepared for traditional roles as concubines and wives. I compare the Sisterhood to the Jesuits and see the degree to which the female body is prepared to become a political instrument, and I examine how this leads to tensions between individual and collective agency. I analyze Other Memory and how this woman-controlled historical memory is also politically-oriented since it enables women to embody history and forge stronger bonds of solidarity with their female ancestors, yet is still problematic in its basis in Jungian theories that tend toward dualistic distinctions. I discuss similarities with second-wave conceptions of sisterhood and the recovery of women's 'herstory,' and argue that the series showcases their potential in a similar way to feminist science fiction narratives.

The final chapter before the conclusion, Chapter 6, addresses sexuality, which becomes an increasingly important avenue for the representation of embodied female agency. The last two novels contain explicit sexual scenes and introduce the Honored Matres. I argue that on the one hand, the Bene Gesserit are represented as sexually active, self-determining, and free from male oppression, which are characteristics discussed by many second-wave feminists as a pathway to greater female agency in the realm of sexual expression. However, the Honored Matres possess similar characteristics and yet are demonized as characters, and thus I believe that their presence serves to problematize both radical and cultural feminist theories about sexual agency for women. They have bodily control such as radical feminists called for, but they use it to enslave men rather than cultivate the loving, nurturing relationships that cultural feminists thought women would naturally establish. In my comparison of these two groups, I also discuss the language used to describe them—'witch'

and ‘whore,’ the significance of the connotations of these terms on the representation of women, and the effect these terms have on the existence of stereotypes. I examine the treatment of biological determinism in relation to female sexuality as well as homosexuality and how this limits the revolutionary potential of the series. I close this chapter by drawing comparisons between the portrayal of female sexual agency in the series and that in feminist science fiction, and positioning the series as an example of changes in the depiction of sexuality in the genre over time. Overall, this thesis seeks to analyze the above five avenues of embodied agency in order to show the extent to which the series can be considered feminist in its representation of women.

## Conceptions of Agency and Embodiment

In order to explain in more detail the concept of embodied agency and the tensions noted above, I need to define agency as it will be used in this thesis. I utilize a definition of embodied agency as the capacity for self-determination and control over one’s body and the ability to actively influence the outcomes of events, both of which are mediated by their existence within a particular context, in this case by women’s membership in the Bene Gesserit Sisterhood. This definition is humanistic in nature, in line with other feminist critiques of science fiction such as that of Jeanne Cortiel, discussed below. This means that it rests on the theory of humanism, which is the idea that what makes human beings human is that they have the capacity for self-determination—“the active capacity to change [their] environment and [them]selves according to [their] own projects and ideas” (Noonan 135). In other words, humans can be agents of change in a way that other species cannot. This theory sits in opposition to postmodern theories such as poststructuralism, which minimizes the impact of human agency in its insistence that socialization and conditioning are in fact responsible for much of what appears to be human choice. Although feminist theory has had a conflicted relationship with humanism and its legacy of defining humanity according to male standards, Pauline Johnson in *Feminism as Radical Humanism* (1994) puts forward a strong case for the claim that feminism is always necessarily a type of humanism due to its commitment to values of freedom and civil rights and the belief that activism can improve women’s lives. Feminism is also very concerned with the issue of agency, as articulated by Judith Kegan Gardiner in the introduction to her edited collection, *Provoking Agents: Gender and Agency in Theory and Practice* (1995), although she acknowledges that there are vigorous debates between postmodernists and humanists over the degree to which humans are constrained by factors other than their own ‘choices.’ Similarly, Peta Bowden and Jane

Mummery in their chapter on agency in *Understanding Feminism* (2014) argue that a desire for effective agency underpins all forms of feminism, even though feminists may understand it in different terms depending on whether they tend toward more humanistic or postmodern thinking. Attempting a broad definition that crosses theoretical divides, the authors define agency as "a capacity for self-determination and autonomy according to which women are able to be effective against their own oppression," in effect meaning "control over their own bodies and lives" (Bowden and Mummery 123). However, this conception of agency does not necessarily take into account the tension between individual and collective agency that is present both in feminism and the *Dune* series. Thus, I believe that Gardiner's recognition of the complexity of agency must be acknowledged, and I agree with her assertion that agency should be considered to be "action that cannot arise from a single, individual source but is always mediated and preceded by other actions and must always take place within a field of power relations, including those among women" (Gardiner "Introduction" 10). In this conception, agency is self-determination within a particular context, which may involve conflicting demands by others for one to take a particular action. This understanding allows for an exploration of how women may be agents of change as individuals but also as part of a collective, as well as how they may acquiesce to or resist pressure from other women to act in ways that do not align with their perceived interests.

My use of a humanistic conception of agency that acknowledges potential tensions between individual and collective agency builds on the excellent model that Cortiel provides in *Demand My Writing: Joanna Russ, Feminism, Science Fiction* (1999) for the analysis of female agency in science fiction texts within the context of second-wave feminism. She defines agency in a humanistic way as "the power and ability to effect changes in the process of human history, combined with the recognition by others that the agent is indeed the origin of that change" (Cortiel *Demand* 15). She explains her use of this understanding of agency as a way of maintaining fidelity to the historical moment in the U.S. in which feminist science fiction author Joanna Russ was writing:

> I rely on the humanist, stable concept of agency outlined above in order to position Russ's texts within the context of early second-wave materialist feminism. This approach is based on the belief that to identify and explore the intersections among different feminist texts, one needs to keep these texts' own logic intact for the moment of analysis. Therefore, the readings in these chapters partially suspend the fundamental indeterminacy that governs more recent feminist thinking. (Cortiel *Demand* 16)

Cortiel thus justifies her decision to focus on agency as change-making by arguing that it is necessary for her as the critic to make this humanistic assumption about women as agents in order to properly analyze Russ's texts within their historical context. She finds that the "main site of intersection between Russ's fiction and radical materialist feminism lies in both discourses' desire for women's agency and knowledge of self" (Cortiel *Demand* 15). Like Cortiel, I engage with texts that carry humanistic assumptions and are positioned within the same historical context of second-wave feminism, and I find a humanistic concept of agency the most conducive to an analysis of the representation of women in the *Dune* series. I acknowledge that humanistic assumptions have been rooted in problematic notions of who constitutes an agent, such as the learned Western European man of the Enlightenment period; however, I agree with Gardiner's contention that "within feminist theory making, the idea of agency has become a prerequisite around which other concepts are defined," whether or not the term agency is specifically used (Gardiner "Introduction" 9). I argue that feminist thought has been able to mold an idea of agency that is valuable for theorizing women's liberation, and that it is productive to use agency as a way of examining the representation of women in fiction as Cortiel has demonstrated. For the most part, I rely on the notion of individual agency as it pertains to characters such as Jessica, but I also address the collective agency of the Sisterhood when relevant to the characterization of women as members of a larger organization.

Although use of a humanistic concept of agency does not necessitate a focus on the human body, I examine embodied agency in particular due to the importance of the female body both within the texts and within feminism. In her review of the literature theorizing the body inside and outside of feminist contexts, Kathy Davis in *Embodied Practices: Feminist Perspectives on the Body* (1997) demonstrates that for feminist scholars, "the body has always been—and continues to be—of central importance for understanding women's embodied experiences and practices" (Davis 7). Whether feminists approach the body as having different characteristics based on nature or socialization, as being oppressed due to objectification, or as being capable of agential and subversive acts within the confines of society, she finds that the body is usually present to some extent in feminist thought. Like the authors above with their skepticism about postmodernism's treatment of agency, she critiques postmodern theorizing for its problematic treatment of the body, which she argues "has all too often been a cerebral, esoteric and, ultimately, disembodied activity" (Davis 14). Feminist theory holds the potential to avoid this problem, she writes, but only if it can attend to the

material bodies of individuals and their everyday interactions with their bodies, which many feminists have been reluctant to do. Davis's discussion is valuable for calling for more exploration of the "tensions which the body evokes," which I believe a focus on embodied agency in the novels is able to accomplish (Davis 15). According to Letitia Meynell in her introduction to the edited collection *Embodiment and Agency* (2009), embodiment is very important to an understanding of agency within feminist theory. She recognizes that the body can afford women agency rather than be merely a means by which they are oppressed, arguing that feminist theory needs to move away from "an overwhelming focus on how oppressive practices constrain and damage agentic possibilities" and toward an examination of "how the body is the ground for agency more positively conceived" (Meynell 9). In this vein, by focusing on embodied agency, I am able to attend to the ways in which the body affords women agential potential and analyze how this impacts the representation of women in the *Dune* series.

Indeed, showcasing the potential for embodied agency to form the basis for a productive and precise reading of science fiction, Florian Bast uses it as his central analytical tool in "'No.': The Narrative Theorizing of Embodied Agency in Octavia Butler's *Kindred*" (2012). He defines agency as "an individual's capability to reach a decision about him- or herself and implement it" and examines it in relation to embodiment by looking at how *Kindred* narrates agency through an intense focus on the body, specifically the female body of the protagonist (Bast 152). Bast finds that "an agency reading is capable of encompassing issues at the heart of science fiction […] and feminist literature," such as determinism and gender constructions (Bast 153). He also believes such a reading offers a different interpretation from a reading more focused on issues of power struggles, one able to analyze conflicts between characters much more precisely (Bast 153). As stated in his article, Bast sees the use of embodied agency as a way of avoiding both the opposition to the body as conceptualized in the definition of agency in the Western philosophical tradition—stemming from the Cartesian mind-body split to be discussed in Chapter 2—and the frequent ignoring of issues of the body in postmodernist theory (Bast 166). Although the *Dune* series' focus on the body is arguably more subtle than that in *Kindred*, there is still considerable value in using embodied agency as a tool with which to examine female characters.

Therefore, this thesis draws on aspects of both Bast's and Cortiel's critical approaches to be able to use the framework of embodied agency as a critical tool alongside second-wave feminist theory in order to analyze female characters in science fiction whose avenues of

agency have been consistently overlooked. The thesis uses a definition of embodied agency as the capacity for self-determination and autonomy—within a particular context—with which women can exercise control over the material realities of their existence, such as in reproduction, and take an active part in shaping history. In this view, the female body becomes not an obstacle to women's ability to be agents but a means for them to be active rather than passive. For example, rather than being socialized to accept restrictions on her movement due to a fear of bodily harm, a woman may move about freely and accomplish tasks knowing that she can actively protect herself at any time. Or rather than regarding her pregnancy as a burden she must passively endure, she may take charge of her bodily experience and actively shape her responses. The female body in this view is not an inert vessel that needs to be transcended since the concept of embodied agency rejects the Cartesian dualism that splits mind and body and relegates women to an inferior status. But neither is it a body that is the same as a male body, allowing for sexual difference to play a role in women's expression of agency.

A focus on embodiment in relation to agency allows for exploration of the persistent problem of sexual difference within feminism and the related issue of biological determinism, issues which appear in the series. For the purpose of this thesis, I define sexual difference as biological differences between women—those with a female body—and men—those with a male body. The primary difference is women's capacity to become pregnant and give birth. Disagreements over how to understand and theorize sexual difference as it relates to women's lives and experiences—including whether or not there is an essential 'womanness' that women share or just a socially constructed identity of woman that is linked with the female body—abound in feminist theory (Kemp and Squires 216). For example, second-wave feminists Firestone and Rich approach the issue of reproduction, the subject of Chapter 3, from almost opposite angles, with Firestone viewing childbirth as a painful, barbaric experience that should be eliminated as soon as possible via technology, and Rich viewing childbirth as a uniquely female experience that should be cherished as a defining feature of womanhood. The issue of sexual difference is important to consider because it is entangled with notions of female embodied agency and at times can limit what women are able to do, either due to physical limitations or perceptions of limitations. Thus, even though an event like childbirth is not a daily occurrence, it is situated in the female body and can cause women to be viewed as constrained or inferior in comparison to men, whose agency is not affected in the same way. Furthermore, the issue of difference and its impact on

understandings of agency raises the notion of biological determinism, "the view that certain biological features determine either the totality of one's being (personality, appearance, likes and dislikes) or certain significant features of a person" (McHugh 12). A biological determinist view is inclined to see differences between women and men as being caused by uncontrollable factors such as genetics rather than societal norms. If women appear to be more nurturing than men, for example, a deterministic view would see this difference as caused by women's capacity to become mothers. Despite feminist resistance to the idea that biology is destiny—which has been used to restrict women's full participation in society—the notion that gender roles and behaviors are in some sense fixed by nature persists. Indeed, this phenomenon is one that Anne Fausto-Sterling explores in her research on the construction of sexual identity from a biological perspective. In *Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality* (2000), she complicates the narrative surrounding sexual difference and determinism by arguing that human bodies are "too complex to provide clear-cut answers about sexual difference" (Fausto-Sterling 4). Using the examples of intersex individuals (around 1.7% of all births), she shows how it is often society that molds human anatomy and behaviors into its (two-sex) structure rather than anatomy solely determining human behaviors (Fausto-Sterling 51). The persistence of the belief that women are a certain way and men are another shows that it is important to look not only at embodied agency in the *Dune* series, but also the tensions between such agency and sexual difference and determinism that are likely to impact it and the representation of women.

## Contemporaneous Concepts of Second-Wave Feminism

The following section provides an overview of second-wave feminist thought and works that will be used as both contemporaneous cultural texts and theoretical lenses with which to situate the *Dune* series in its historical context and analyze the representation of the women of the Bene Gesserit. This method is similar to that of Cortiel in her study of Russ, discussed above, who examines ideas from second-wave feminists like Firestone and Rich that were formulated and expressed around the same time as Russ's writing and thus are historically relevant. Cortiel makes clear that she "explores intersections between specific representative texts in feminist theory and Russ's fiction" and "formulate[s] connections, without, however, establishing exclusive causal links between texts or events" (Cortiel *Demand* 11). Similarly, this analysis of the *Dune* series focuses on key feminist theorists and ideas of that era—especially the radical feminists' belief that women should control their body—in order to perform a feminist analysis of the texts and to see how they may address

feminist concerns and bring them to life through a group of fictional women in science fiction, without necessarily proving that there was a direct relationship.

Second-wave feminism in the U.S. was a heterogeneous movement with various branches and ideologies, but there are several key ideas popularized by radical feminism that are pertinent to this thesis in its exploration of women's agency. Building on a long tradition of women who advocated for women's rights, including early feminist and British author Mary Wollstonecraft in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) and American suffragists like Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, second-wave feminists offered their own interpretations and reformulations regarding how to address women's oppression. According to Rosemary Tong's overview of feminism in *Feminist Thought: A Comprehensive Introduction* (1989), feminist theoretical approaches can be classified into the broad categories of liberal, Marxist, radical, psychoanalytic, socialist, existentialist, or postmodern (Tong 1). To illustrate: whereas liberal feminists generally advocated for equality of the sexes and believed that new laws would help eliminate inequality, and Marxist feminists believed that a socialist revolution would benefit both workers and women, radical feminists theorized that women's oppression was based on their sex—that their bodies were sexually different and considered inferior to men—and that they needed to fundamentally change society in order to achieve liberation. They were more concerned with women's rights over their bodies than equal pay in a capitalist system that they saw to be based around men's needs and desires. Although a range of feminist ideas had an impact on the shaping of feminism in the second wave, it was radical feminism that was arguably responsible for the popularity of the women's liberation movement. This was largely due to media coverage of radical feminist demonstrations, as detailed by Alice Echols in her comprehensive study of radical feminism, *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-1975* (1989). Indeed, it was the New York Radical Women's 1968 protest of the Miss America pageant that "put the women's liberation movement on the map" due to "extensive press coverage" (Echols 96, 93). Echols notes, "By mid-1969, one of the most pressing problems facing the women's liberation movement was, paradoxically, its success. In New York City alone, there were thousands of women clamouring to become involved in the movement" (Echols 186). In radical feminist Ellen Willis' reflections on the era, she argues, "It was radical feminism that put women's liberation on the map, that got sexual politics recognized as a public issue, that created the vocabulary ('consciousness-raising,' 'the personal is political,' 'sisterhood is powerful,' etc.) with which the second wave of feminism entered popular culture," and

confirmation of her statements can be found threaded throughout Echols' study (Willis 92). Through their rhetoric, radical feminists introduced concepts regarding women's agency and bodies that would become standard feminist fare. According to Echols, radical feminism was central to the transformation of women's situation in the world in terms of improving women's self-determination (Echols 285-286). In light of the significance of radical feminism and the parallels between its theories and the characterization of the Bene Gesserit as possessing myriad bodily abilities, this thesis is concerned primarily with radical feminist theories. As Tong observes, "more than liberal and Marxist feminists, radical feminists have directed attention to the ways in which men attempt to control women's bodies" and "have explicitly articulated the ways in which men have constructed female sexuality to serve not women's but men's needs, wants, and interests" (Tong 72). The fact that radical feminist theories were circulating during the time of Herbert's writing offers a unique and fruitful opportunity for the *Dune* series to be read alongside contemporaneous feminist debates and have connections traced between them.

However, radical feminism had a relatively short period of popularity before being superseded by cultural feminism in the 1970s, and it is important to note that this splintering was due in part to internal struggles within the feminist movement that illustrate the potential consequences when there are significant tensions between individuals and groups. Some critics do not use a separate label for cultural feminists and instead label both radical feminists and cultural feminists as radical, which is understandable since many radical feminists changed their viewpoints over the years and became cultural feminists even while still identifying as radical feminists. Tong, for example, makes no distinction, writing that most radical feminists were "[i]nitially preoccupied with the enslaving aspects of women's biology and psychology […] [but] came to view women's biology (especially their reproductive capacities) and the nurturant psychology that flows from it as potential sources of liberating power for women" (Tong 3). However, as Echols argues, radical feminism should not be conflated with cultural feminism—although the latter is a branch of radical feminism—because the two movements differed in key respects: whereas radical feminists sought to change society to make gender irrelevant, cultural feminists sought to celebrate femaleness in order to reverse the devaluation of stereotypically feminine characteristics in society. Rather than rejecting as sexist the idea of different male and female natures, cultural feminists embraced the belief that women were "more nurturant, less belligerent, and less sexually driven than men" (Echols 9). By organizing women on the basis of this revaluation

of "dominant cultural assumptions about women" and retreating from radical political activity, cultural feminists thus offered a more attractive vision of "a global sisterhood" that offered a ready "escape from the debilitating discourse of difference" that had undermined radical feminists' appeal to the power of sisterhood (Echols 9, 11). In radical feminists' efforts to eliminate inequality within the movement—by holdings meetings with no chairperson to lead them, by refusing to allow individual women to speak to the press, and by voting out other women seen as disobeying the rules—and their reluctance to explore women's differences—such as those related to class and sexuality—they created tensions between individual women and the larger collective of women that ultimately splintered radical feminism. Cultural feminists' notion of sisterhood based around women's female nature may have represented a way to unite women despite their differences. Yet, in Echols' analysis, ultimately the "struggle for liberation became a question of individual will and determination, rather than collective struggle" and thus lost the notion of women's agency as a group effecting change in society (Echols 279). What the ascendancy of cultural feminism illustrates is not only the difficulty in theorizing sexual difference to the satisfaction of all women, but that there must be a balance between the consideration given to individual members of a group and the consideration given to the larger group and the goals it is trying to achieve that require members' commitment.

For information about the concerns and theories of the second wave, this thesis relies on several key texts that were precursors to the movement, primary sources that were published during the heart of the movement, and secondary sources that analyze feminist ideas and trends with some distance from the events themselves. The precursor texts are Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (trans. 1953) and Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963). Primary sources include essays in editor Robin Morgan's anthology of radical feminist texts, *Sisterhood is Powerful* (1970), and editors Anne Koedt, Ellen Levine, and Anita Rapone's collection, *Radical Feminism* (1973), and stand-alone texts like Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (1970) and Rich's *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (1976). Secondary sources include Sara Evans' books on the women's liberation movement—*Personal Politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movements and the New Left* (1979) and *Born for Liberty: A History of Women in America* (1989); the aforementioned book by Echols; and Jane Gerhard's book on feminism and sexuality, *Desiring Revolution: Second-Wave Feminism and the Rewriting of American Sexual Thought, 1920 to 1982* (2001). Together these texts present a multi-faceted

picture of the currents of second-wave feminism that nonetheless shows that women were united about one thing: they wanted change.

Arguably the most crucial overarching idea of second-wave feminism—and one that is key to an analysis of the *Dune* series—is that women should have the right to control their own bodies. Beauvoir's theory that "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" challenged the idea that women came to be the way they were, namely normatively feminine, because of biology, which enabled her to argue that the weakness and inferiority associated with the female body were actually a result of socialization that needed to be changed to liberate women (Beauvoir 281). Once translated into English, her book *The Second Sex* quickly became a pivotal text within American feminist thought, with most feminist writers acknowledging a debt to her (Spender *Women* 512).[4] Beauvoir's main argument is that women have been categorized as Other by men, limited to the physicality of the body while men are free to transcend the body and be considered autonomous individuals capable of higher orders of thinking. She blames women's socialization and conditioning for restricting them to roles as wives and mothers. In childhood, she writes, boys are allowed free movement and actively interact with their environment via activities like climbing and fighting, whereas girls are treated like live dolls and encouraged in pursuits like cooking and housekeeping—such socialization prepares girls to follow in their mothers' footsteps and accept an inferior status based on their sex (Beauvoir 294-295). However, she insists that things can change, for "Woman is the victim of no mysterious fatality; the peculiarities that identify her as specifically a woman get their importance from the significance placed upon them. They can be surmounted, in the future, when they are regarded in new perspectives" (Beauvoir 763). It is societal pressures, then, that are responsible for giving weight to sexual differences in her view, and these are malleable. Although Beauvoir has been criticized for seeming to treat the body with abhorrence, notably by feminist scholar Toril Moi in *Simone de Beauvoir: The Making of an Intellectual Woman* (1994), her recognition that it is socialization not biology that causes it to be a hindrance for women offers an important feminist perspective on the female body, as well as pointing to a possible way out of women's dilemma. Indeed, her theory about women's socialization "came to be absolutely crucial to feminist thinking" (Hughes and Witz 48) and "launched a whole generation of feminist scholars, intent on dispelling the doctrine of 'natural' difference and showing that differences between the sexes were socially rather than biologically constructed" (Davis 8).

[4] Tong calls *The Second Sex* "probably the key theoretical text of twentieth-century feminism" (Tong 6).

Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, credited with helping initiate the second wave of feminism, has a narrower focus: the "problem that has no name—which is simply the fact that American women are kept from growing to their full human capabilities" (Friedan 364, Bowden and Mummery 13). Although Friedan is referring mainly to middle-class American housewives, her underlying message that women should be free to make their own decisions about their futures is more broadly feminist and concerned with female agency.

Later feminists were more focused on the issue of the reproductive body and women's right to choose whether to become mothers. Firestone, who co-founded several radical feminist groups in the 1960s, rejected reproduction as an activity that any woman should partake in and was heavily criticized for her belief that artificial reproduction offered a viable solution to liberate women from the limitations of the female body. In *The Dialectic of Sex*, she detailed the subjection of women to the pain and trauma of childbirth and the unequal allocation of childcare responsibilities, then posited that an equal society was possible if women no longer had to bear the brunt of pregnancy and men shared responsibility for raising children. In contrast to Firestone, Rich—herself a mother of three who came to identify more with cultural feminism than radical feminism—embraced the sexual difference that allows women to become pregnant and give birth and argued that this was something for feminists to celebrate, not give away. She theorized that motherhood provides a valuable perspective on the debate about whether the differences between female and male bodies should be erased or acknowledged as positive, and she suggested that motherhood should be reclaimed by women.

A related issue in second-wave feminism was sexuality and women's right to define it on their own terms outside of a male-dominated or procreative framework. Radical feminists confronted Freudian theories on female sexuality and began to consider what sexual pleasure for the female body might entail. Some believed that women must create an "exclusively female sexuality through celibacy, autoeroticism, or lesbianism" while others thought that women should be able to experiment sexually however they chose (Tong 5). Cultural feminists, meanwhile, defined male and female sexuality as opposed. Former radical feminist Robin Morgan maintained that men were interested in sex but women were interested in relationships, writing that men promoted "genital sexuality, objectification, promiscuity, emotional noninvolvement, and coarse invulnerability" but women pursued "love, sensuality, humor, tenderness, commitment" (Morgan qtd. in Echols 256). This theory gave women less room to maneuver in terms of sexuality since it appeared to be preprogrammed for them, but

it nonetheless allowed women a reason to refrain from participating in relationships with men if they chose. Although all feminists did not agree on what they believed the female body should do once freed of its conditioning, if this were possible, they knew they wanted women to have the choice to decide.

The concept of women in control over their bodies is important to an analysis of the *Dune* series because it forms the backbone of the philosophy of the Bene Gesserit, whose members train their bodies extensively in order to establish precise control over nearly all of their functions. The basis for their skills in prana-bindu, or muscle and nerve control, will be analyzed in Chapter 2, which looks at the mind-body synergy they cultivate and the mental and physical feats they can perform because they are not bound by the dualistic thinking that Beauvoir critiques. The representation of reproduction and motherhood is examined in Chapter 3 using Firestone's and Rich's theories, as is the way that the series showcases the potential consequences of technological interference in reproduction. The complexities of sexuality are taken up in Chapter 6, in which the focus is on the later novels where there is a marked shift toward more open discussion of female sexuality and a clear refutation of the idea that women are naturally more nurturing and loving in their sexual relationships through the characterization of the Honored Matres.

Two other issues in second-wave feminism that are relevant to this thesis are women's right to speak and their right to recover the history of their foremothers. For women, the right to speak meant having the right to not only express themselves without being silenced, but also be listened to and trusted rather than dismissed. The technique known as consciousness-raising that became popular in the second wave was one method of gaining this platform. Consciousness-raising involved groups of women across the U.S. meeting in their own communities to share the details of their lives where, by breaking the silence around notions of womanhood and taboo topics such as sex, they realized that they were not alone in suffering from sexism and being dissatisfied with the current state of affairs for women. Consciousness-raising was important to radical feminists in particular because, as the group New York Radical Women believed, "part of women claiming their authority lay in the larger process of, first, overturning male experts and oppressive socialization and, second, speaking their own truth about their experience" (Gerhard *Desiring* 101). Before women could claim an authoritative position, then, they had to set aside men's perspectives and trust in the value of their own. Although feminist texts may not explicitly state their authors' desire for an end to the silencing which women had been subjected to, it runs as a current

throughout the second wave. For example, Morgan in her introduction to *Sisterhood is Powerful* clearly thinks of the publication as a statement in itself: "This book is an action. It was conceived, written, edited, copy-edited, proofread, designed, and illustrated by women" (Morgan "Introduction" xiii). It is not just women's voices being expressed through the texts that matters to Morgan but the fact that it was women who were instrumental in having those voices published. The recovery of the voices and ideas of feminists from the past was also an important concern. Both the collections *Radical Women* and *Sisterhood is Powerful* open with articles about American women's history in an effort to contextualize the emergence of the contemporaneous feminist movement, and these articles serve to both frame the collections of radical feminist texts and underscore the need for women's history. In fact, higher education did respond to a growing demand for courses about women spurred on by the feminist movement, and women's topics were increasingly taken up by researchers (Evans *Born* 300).

Women's demand that the voices of themselves and their foremothers be heard is particularly significant to an analysis of the *Dune* series because of the Bene Gesserit's abilities in the Voice and Other Memory, which play a key role in their characterization. Chapter 4 examines the extent to which the female voice is authoritative, influential, and truthful as seen in the Bene Gesserit's skills with the Voice and in their roles as advisors and Truthsayers. Chapter 5 looks at the Bene Gesserit's system of education for girls and how it prepares them to use their bodies for political goals and to undergo an initiation wherein they gain access to the lives and memories of their female ancestors through Other Memory.

Two second-wave slogans that are pertinent as background information are 'the personal is political' and 'sisterhood is powerful.'[5] The idea that 'the personal is political' for second-wave feminists meant that what may seem like a personal issue, such as workplace discrimination or a lack of affordable childcare, is in fact political because it reflects women's disempowerment in patriarchal society and requires some kind of intervention to address it.[6] Consciousness-raising was a clear example of this personalized approach to politics (Evans *Personal* 214). It saw personal issues as all potentially open to collective action and solutions (Evans *Born* 290). The idea was not without its flaws, however, because for some it encouraged self-transformation in one's lifestyle that did not translate into

[5] The first appeared as the title of a paper by Carol Hanisch in the women's liberation publication *Notes from the Second Year* (1970), and the second appeared as the title of editor Robin Morgan's anthology that same year.
[6] It should be noted that "[w]hile the women's liberation movement popularized the slogan 'the personal is political,' the idea that there is a political dimension to personal life originated with the new left" that branched off from old left political groups in the 1960s (Echols 16).

collective political action (Echols 17-18). Nevertheless, for others it prompted them to "embrace an asceticism that sacrificed personal needs and desires to political imperatives" (Echols 17). Having a broad definition of what is political allows for a wide range of people and activities to be deemed politically relevant and important for feminist analysis—including female bodies, concepts of femininity, education, and language—of which this thesis takes advantage. Acknowledging that the personal can be political is well-suited to an analysis of the Bene Gesserit, since it is revealed to be a political organization in the opening of the first book that clearly sees a link between the capabilities of the individual bodies of its members and the accomplishment of its political goals. In addition, the idea that a woman can put the needs of a movement ahead of her own—and that some may even consider this action to be essential to being a feminist—recognizes a more complex version of motivation and understanding of agency than many of the critics of the Bene Gesserit do when they evaluate members' loyalty.

The idea that 'sisterhood is powerful' arose from the new bonds formed among women during consciousness-raising (Evans *Born* 289). The intensity and power of these bonds between women "prompted them to name themselves a sisterhood, a familial metaphor for an emerging social and political identity" (Evans *Born* 289). Women saw themselves as fighting for common goals and needing to show solidarity toward one another (Bowden and Mummery 144). However, as described earlier, fractures formed over disagreements and differences between women, and for many their loyalty to radical feminism was replaced by a belief that women should bond on the basis of a supposed essential femaleness that they could cultivate individually. Yet the belief that women's experiences, at least, were in some way universal and that there was strength in bonding together as women helped underpin the movement as a whole (Bowden and Mummery 144). In the *Dune* series, the concept of sisterhood is immediately set up in the second sentence—"This every sister of the Bene Gesserit knows"—though the Bene Gesserit are only referred to as the Sisterhood once in the appendix (*Dune* 3, 506). The term becomes used more frequently in the remainder of the novels as a synonym for the Bene Gesserit, which emphasizes their connections with one another. With *Dune* being published in the magazines in 1963-1965, before the second-wave movement, it is likely that Herbert was drawing upon older forms of sisterhood to characterize the Bene Gesserit such as Catholic nuns, both of whom wear black robes and use the terminology of sisters. Nonetheless, there exists a noteworthy parallel, discussed further in Chapter 5, between the Bene Gesserit and real-life women during the second wave who

used the concept of solidarity to achieve their political goals yet also faced tensions between the interests of individuals and the collective.

A complicated issue in second-wave feminism that is also complicated in its manifestation in the *Dune* series is that of how to treat sexual difference. Broadly speaking, feminist approaches to biological differences between females and males can be categorized as either equality or difference approaches, which "assume either that women, having the same basic needs and interests as men, should be recognized as equal to men, or, being essentially different from men, should be recognized as having different needs and interests" (Bowden and Mummery 14). Although feminists rejected the idea that anatomy was destiny, most radical feminists saw women's difference as something to be eliminated while cultural feminists saw difference as something to celebrate, as illustrated by Firestone's and Rich's theories about childbirth discussed earlier. By no means does the *Dune* series offer a uniform view of the meaning of sexual difference, but its focus on reproduction has caused critics to write the series off as valorizing women's subjugation by linking female characters too much to their childbearing capacity. This thesis will critique this tendency as an overgeneralization and examine the nuances of sexual difference in relation to the Bene Gesserit.

## The Incomplete Narrative of New Wave and Feminist Science Fiction

In addition to examining the *Dune* series in relation to the context and theories of second-wave feminism, this thesis situates it in the genre of science fiction literature where so far Herbert is not considered to have made a contribution to the development of feminist themes. Although Herbert is included in histories of science fiction and sometimes in criticism of the New Wave period specifically, it is never because of his treatment of female characters. With thousands of stories published in magazines, novellas, and novels across a period of rapid technological and cultural change, twentieth-century science fiction is difficult to classify in precise categories; nonetheless, as the genre gained more critical attention in the 1970s and 1980s, critics made attempts to frame its history through their classifications of stories and themes and began using the term 'New Wave' to identify the period of change in genre texts that began in the 1960s. According to Peter Nicholls in *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, the term New Wave was borrowed from film criticism where it was used to refer to experimental French cinema (Nicholls "New Wave"). In science fiction it refers to a "kind of imagistic, highly metaphoric story, inclined more towards psychology and the soft sciences than to hard sf;" hard sf generally referring to fiction reliant

on sciences like physics, mathematics, and space flight, and soft sf to fiction reliant on the so-called soft sciences or social sciences including anthropology, ecology, and psychology (Nicholls "New Wave", "Hard SF", "Soft Sciences"). In other words, 'hard' science fiction is considered "distinct from 'soft' SF, which deals with social issues," because it is based on real-world scientific principles and more concerned with the incorporation of technology (Seed *Science* 50). Nicholls notes that New Wave science fiction often shares qualities of the 1960s counterculture such as an interest in drugs, Eastern religions, and sex, and "a pessimism about the future that ran strongly counter to genre sf's traditional optimism" (Nicholls "New Wave"). Adam Roberts describes it as "a loose affiliation of writers from the 1960s and 1970s who, one way or another, reacted against the conventions of traditional SF to produce avant-garde, radical or fractured science fictions" (A. Roberts *History* 230-231). The New Wave is closely associated with the British science fiction magazine *New Worlds*, which in 1964 gained a young editor named Michael Moorcock who sought to transform what was considered to be science fiction (Merrick "Fiction" 103; Aldiss and Wingrove 298). Indeed, "the fundamental element was the belief that sf could and should be taken seriously as literature," which involved writers making "a deliberate attempt to elevate the literary and stylistic quality of SF" (Nicholls "New Wave"; A. Roberts *History* 231). There is some critical debate as to the suitability of the label New Wave, as Helen Merrick acknowledges in her chapter "Fiction, 1964-1979" in *The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction*. However, she argues that regardless of how much of a break with previous science fiction one believes there was, this period did see a broadening of themes, with stories more "radical in style and content, often explicit in terms of language and sexual references, and more concerned with 'inner' than outer space" (Merrick "Fiction" 103).

Although these definitions, especially those of Nicholls, would appear to place *Dune* squarely within the New Wave, in critical histories and overviews of the science fiction genre, the *Dune* series is accorded a mention for its popularity, its world-building, or its messianic theme rather than its many other themes or the complexities of its characterization, including that related to women. Brian W. Aldiss in *Billion Year Spree: The History of Science Fiction* (1973) presents Herbert as significant primarily for his world-building skills, devoting over a page to a block quote from *Dune* to this effect (Aldiss 275-276). Even in the updated version of the text, *Trillion Year Spree: The History of Science Fiction* (1986), co-authored with David Wingrove, the authors keep the quote and add more about world-building (Aldiss and Wingrove 315-316). In their discussion of the later novels, they do

recognize that there is a focus on the women of the Bene Gesserit and Honored Matres but make no comment on the gendered nature of these groups nor hint at a connection to New Wave concerns, even while acknowledging that Herbert's work shows "growth, change, a continued interest in new things" (Aldiss and Wingrove 396). Merrick in her chapter noted above only states that *Dune* won both prized science fiction awards—the Hugo and Nebula—and does not discuss Herbert in sections about the impact of the women's movement on science fiction. A. Roberts in his chapter "The Impact of New Wave Science Fiction 1960s-1970s" in *The History of Science Fiction* (2006) focuses on *Dune*'s messianic theme, as does Damien Broderick in his chapter "New Wave and Backwash: 1960-1980" in *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction* (2003). Broderick is one of the few critics to more explicitly recognize Herbert's writing as potentially part of the New Wave, seen in his observation that Herbert set up his hero to fail and thus demonstrated that "his secret instinct resonated with the writers of the emerging New Wave if not with older sf fans" (Broderick 52). Even so, the question of Herbert's position as a writer who engages with the concerns of the New Wave—particularly higher literary quality and inclusion of the social sciences, both directly related to his representation of women—has not been sufficiently addressed by existing criticism.

By examining the complexities of the representation of women in the *Dune* series, this thesis seeks to show that the series makes a significant step toward the maturation of the genre at which New Wave writers aimed. It examines how the attention to characterization results in three-dimensional female characters who have a high degree of agency that affords them the ability to play a large role in the narrative, thus illustrating a clear move away from the use of sexist stereotypes for which the genre was heavily criticized by feminists, detailed below, and toward a higher quality of character development. Female characters also are an important means through which the series showcases a concern with the social science of psychology, and aspects such as Other Memory focus attention on the 'inner' space that Merrick discusses rather than outer space and the technology needed to navigate it. Although the series may not seem to be very radical in content, the depiction of women possessed with self-determination and precise control of their bodies in fact gives women some of the very rights for which radical feminists were struggling. This thesis seeks to show that what the series contributes to the genre as part of the New Wave is further movement toward the goal of higher literary quality through rich character development, especially as seen through female characters.

Not only has the series been neglected in criticism of the New Wave, it has also been overlooked in criticism of feminist science fiction, which is partially explained by a critical narrative that focuses on female-authored texts of the 1970s that infuse New Wave concerns with those of the feminist movement. Merrick devotes a chapter in *The Secret Feminist Cabal: A Cultural History of Science Fiction Feminisms* (2009) to her analysis of the development of feminist criticism of science fiction, criticism that is especially important because, as she argues, it plays a large role in constructing what counts as feminist science fiction (Merrick *Secret* 103). Merrick opens the chapter with a quote from science fiction writer Connie Willis that was published in 1992, wherein Willis discusses how she keeps hearing that there were no women in science fiction before the 1960s and 1970s or that the few who were there had to either use pseudonyms or had to write domestic stories about babies, but that she knows that "[t]here's only one problem with this version of women in SF—it's not true" (Willis qtd. in Merrick *Secret* 103). Merrick agrees that this narrative is too neat and obscures older female authors and older stories, and one of her goals is to problematize it by examining material outside of feminist criticism found in academic publications. This narrative is also problematic in that it obscures male authors and stories, resulting in the stories of an author like Herbert never being considered as a potential source of representations of women that might be considered feminist. A survey of existing criticism with Merrick's argument in mind does indeed show how a limited focus on female authors post-1960s has restricted the definition of feminist science fiction to make it very unlikely that male-authored texts would be considered in this category.

The reason for the focus on female-authored texts is straightforward: female science fiction authors and critics like Joanna Russ did not believe that the genre and its mostly male authors were living up to the potential to challenge traditional gender norms and speculate on new gender roles. Russ is a central figure in any discussion of feminist science fiction, herself a science fiction author and critic clearly influenced by feminism. She was one of the first to draw attention to the failures of science fiction to genuinely engage in speculation about women's and men's roles in its many imagined worlds or in the future, even as she praised the genre for its ability to show characters escaping from culture-bound gender roles. In her essay "What Can a Heroine Do? Or Why Women Can't Write" appearing in the edited collection *Images of Women In Fiction: Feminist Perspectives* (1972), which contained some of the earliest literary critiques to come out of the Women's Liberation Movement, Russ criticizes the lack of realistic female characters in literature, finding that women are often

shown to exist only in relation to men and cannot hope to be protagonists themselves unless in a love story. She states that depictions of women are still often limited to mythic images such as modest maidens, wicked temptresses, or faithful wives, that they do not appear to be real people with ordinary motives that the reader can relate to or aspire to be (Russ "What" 5). Russ concludes by postulating that science fiction is one genre that looks to be more promising—for female writers in particular interested in developing female protagonists—since its authors are able to use plots and myths that are free from accepted gender roles by virtue of the genre's focus on exploring new worlds, creating new technology, and doing other tasks that have not yet been done in the real world. Yet in Russ's second essay in the same collection, "The Image of Women in Science Fiction," she castigates science fiction writers for not in fact trying to imagine new types of gender roles. She argues that writers often envision "the relations between the sexes as those of present-day, white, middle-class suburbia" or rely on the cultural stereotype that "masculinity equals power and femininity equals powerlessness" when their fiction shows that active or ambitious women are evil, women are weak, and women's powers are passive and involuntary (Russ "Image" 81, 83). In a headnote to a republication of her first essay in 1995, she uses the benefit of hindsight to conclude that "I do not think that now I would conclude a manifesto like this one with praise of science fiction (it can be just as good or bad as anything and just as timid, clichéd, and dull)" (Russ *Write* 79).

Russ's thoughts on science fiction as a liberatory genre appear thus both hopeful and skeptical, and she would go on to publish *The Female Man* (1975) as a non-traditional science fiction narrative that includes the points of view of multiple female characters across time, a book now considered the "central text of feminist sf" (Merrick "Fiction" 108). It has achieved this status due to the fact that critics identify it "as a response to the burgeoning American feminism of the late 1960s and early 1970s […] since the problem of women's oppression fairly saturates its every passage" (Hicks para. 7). The text engages with radical feminist thought by examining the social construction of gender through four female characters whose "differences are the product of the different histories of their respective universes" (Hicks para. 6). It also speculates on a society without men, where women can realize their full humanity and explore female sexuality (Gardiner "Empathetic" 89). Despite Russ's engagement with feminist concerns in an overt way, though, her experimental style—a challenge to novelistic convention—means that the text can be difficult to read (Boulter 155). This aspect aside, *The Female Man* along with Russ's other texts is important for

demonstrating the potential of science fiction to explore complex feminist theoretical concepts and portray "a ruthless commitment to agency" (Cortiel "Joanna" 510).

Other female authors and critics echoed Russ's belief that the genre, mainly male-authored, was not embracing its potential for more speculation on gender roles, leaving the way open for female authors to position themselves as the ones making advances in this area. According to Merrick, the 'images of women' type of critique that Russ used only lasted a short while before critiques became more explicitly feminist analyses of female-authored science fiction. Beverly Friend's "Virgin Territory: Women and Sex in Science Fiction" (1972) was the first critique of the image of women in science fiction to appear in science fiction criticism specifically, her article appearing in the only science fiction journal that existed at the time, *Extrapolation* (Merrick *Secret* 109). Similarly to Russ, Friend critiques negative portrayals of women, such as "woman as mere appendage to man," and praises authors who "truly extrapolate rather than recreate such pitiful creatures as the standard walking womb" (Friend 49, 57). The first collection of science fiction short stories solely authored by women, *Women of Wonder* (1974), contains a long introduction by editor Pamela Sargent, a science fiction writer herself, lamenting the state of women in science fiction, both as writers and characters. In one passage she observes that female characters have been present in the genre for some time "but usually in unimportant roles. One can wonder why a literature that prides itself on exploring alternatives or assumptions counter to what we normally believe has not been more concerned with the roles of women in the future" (Sargent 13). She specifies traditional roles as being that of housewife, childraiser, damsel in distress, and scientist's daughter, with sex object added after the depiction of sex became more acceptable in the genre (Sargent 35). Blaming old cultural assumptions, she critiques the idea that men are seen as aggressive but women are seen as followers, rarely the initiators. From her perspective in the early 1970s, Sargent saw signs of change and innovation regarding female characters stemming from "the growing numbers of women entering the field as writers, and to the changing views of some of the male writers," partially explaining her decision to construct a collection of science fiction authored by women in which female characters have important roles in the narratives (Sargent 50-51). Another science fiction writer, Ursula K. Le Guin, published an essay entitled "American SF and the Other" (1975) in the new journal *Science Fiction Studies*, in which she criticizes the portrayal of women as "squeaking dolls subject to instant rape by monsters—or old-maid scientists desexed by hypertrophy of the intellectual organs—or, at best, loyal little wives or mistresses of

accomplished heroes" (Le Guin "American" 83). Mary Kenny Badami in "A Feminist Critique of Science Fiction" (1976) and Carolyn Wendell in "The Alien Species: A Study of Women Characters in the Nebula Award Winners, 1965-1973" (1979) also presented 'images of women' critiques: Badami writes that "[i]t is difficult to discover a competent and admirable woman character" and Wendell finds that in the thirty-seven texts she examines "only six portray [women] to some degree as people rather than as stereotypes" (Badami 7; Wendell 344). Both authors indicate that positive change in the representation of women is possible, and Badami implies that the increase of women in the science fiction genre is helping to move toward that end. It is noteworthy that of the above critics, only Wendell mentions *Dune*, it being one of the Nebula Award winners; her critique of Jessica as "a stereotyped woman subservient to the organization she belongs to and to the men she loves" is very brief and shallow, however (Wendell 348).[7] It was the publication of Pamela J. Annas' "New Worlds, New Words, Androgyny in Feminist Science Fiction" (1978), Catherine Podojil's "Sisters, Daughters, and Aliens" (1978), and new anthologies of female science fiction writers the same year that, as Merrick argues, began to move feminist criticism away from the 'images of women' critique and toward the discussion of female authors and the construction of a feminist science fiction canon composed primarily of such authors, including Russ and Le Guin.

Indeed, when female authors including Russ began publishing stories that were more experimental with regards to gender, they captured the attention of feminist critics who positioned those works as constituting feminist science fiction, which entailed a turning away from the analysis of male-authored texts. As is evident in Jane Donawerth's overview of "Feminisms" and Gwyneth Jones' overview of "Feminist SF" in *The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction*, texts considered by current feminist science fiction critics to be part of the "feminist years (roughly, the 1970s)" are almost all authored by women (Jones 485). These include: Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969), Suzy McKee Charnas's *Walk to the End of the World* (1974), Russ's *The Female Man* (1975), Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976), Sally Miller Gearhart's *The Wanderground* (1979), and James Tiptree Jr.'s (later revealed to be Alice Sheldon) short stories such as "Houston, Houston, Do You Read?" (1976). Accordingly, the application of feminist theory and criticism to science fiction has been most closely associated with female writers of that time period. As Merrick

[7] Russ does not critique *Dune*. But it is possible that Herbert is giving a narrative nod to one of Russ's female characters, Janet, by naming one of the Bene Gesserit characters after her in *Heretics of Dune* (1984).

notes, as feminist science fiction criticism moved out of magazines, fanzines, and feminist journals in the early 1970s and into science fiction journals, edited collections, and monographs in the 1980s, the trend was a "turn away from negative critiques of masculine sf (and indeed from male writers altogether) and the constitution of feminist writings within sf in terms of utopia" (Merrick *Secret* 104, 122-123).

There is not necessarily an identifiable feature of female characters that makes these texts worthy of inclusion in the category of feminist science fiction. Rather, it appears that critics consider them to be feminist due to their attention to the problematic nature of male-dominated societies and women's place in those societies and, in most cases, their depiction of capable, agential women who are far from the cardboard stereotypes that critics had found in other science fiction. *The Left Hand of Darkness* is a story about a male envoy from Earth, Genly Ai, who visits a planet of biologically androgynous beings (who develop a male or female sexual identity during a short period each month) and struggles to understand their cultures, and the narrative thus offers a speculation on how gender roles might change if people had no fixed sex. It has been criticized—including by Le Guin herself—for certain aspects related to gender, such as concerning itself with the masculine side of behavior, using the male pronoun throughout so that the characters all seem to be male, and having only one woman in the entire novel (see Le Guin "Gender," Lothian, Rhodes, and Russ "Image"). It differs from the following feminist texts in its lack of a strong female character, but Genly's inability to move past a reliance on gender categories and stereotypes is itself a feminist critique. *Walk to the End of the World* depicts a society where women are enslaved in a situation "analogous to an exaggerated version of contemporary sexism" (Barr "Utopia" 49). The main female character, Alldera, is victimized but able to escape at the end of the novel due to her "mental acumen and physical endurance" (Barr "Utopia" 52). This gives her a release from the daily oppression she endures as a woman, but she is pregnant and will eventually struggle with motherhood in the novel's sequel, *Motherlines*. Charnas's text is a clear critique of what she herself calls "the powerless class of women" wherein "mothers and daughters figure only as labor, brood mares and objects of aggression" (Charnas "Woman" 104). The text also recognizes that not all women are sisters who will support one another, and Alldera's individuality rather than her commonality with other women is emphasized (Barr "Utopia" 50). *Woman on the Edge of Time* features a Chicana protagonist without the support of a job or a spouse who is committed to a mental institution where she has visions of a genderless society where children are born in pods and people have the freedom to choose

their life path. Russ calls its speculation on reproduction "inventive […], with bisexuality (they don't perceive it as a category and so don't name it) as the norm, exogenetic birth, triads of parents of both sexes caring for children, and all three parents nursing infants" (Russ "Recent" 76). This use of alternative forms of childbirth and parenting, as well as the use of gender-neutral pronouns, makes it a novel that speculates on how society might deal with gender issues in a way that is less restrictive for women. Frances Bartowski in *Feminist Utopias* specifies that it is the "reconception of housing, work, family, pleasure, and ritual" in both Piercy's and Russ's works that makes them "contemporaneous feminist texts" (Bartowski 50). *The Wanderground* shows the interactions between hill women who live in all-women communities and can reproduce without men, and men who live in cities with their technology and weapons. The novel is "built around the concept of sisterhood," and this bonding gives women the freedom to develop powers that stem from their subconscious, including mental telepathy, levitation, and flying (Freibert 79-80). The text aligns with cultural feminist ideals in that it not only depicts women who "have escaped the patriarchal oppression of the Cities" but emphasizes an essential womanness that enables them to connect with and draw strength from nature in a way the men cannot (DelRosso 214). In "Houston, Houston, Do You Read?" three male astronauts come aboard a spaceship with an all-female crew and discover that they have travelled to the future where all males have been wiped out by a plague and women live contentedly without them, reproducing via cloning. The women decide that these men with their aggressive, violent nature are dangerous, and the "conclusion is uncompromising: in a world of women there is no place for men with their innately aggressive sexual drive" (Lefanu *Chinks* 108). The story thus deals with the alienation between the sexes, although it is unclear whether the men are naturally this way or socialized this way.

What these stories share is a critique of aspects of male-dominated societies such as restrictive gender roles and, with the exception of *The Left Hand of Darkness*, a portrayal of female characters who are agents in their own right that resist oppression and exercise their abilities in a variety of ways. I argue that the obviousness of the stories' critiques regarding gender roles is one of the primary reasons they are considered feminist science fiction, for there are other stories—by older female authors and by male authors—that also include agential female characters but have seemingly never been considered for inclusion in this

category.[8] Although a comprehensive comparison between these texts and the *Dune* series is beyond the scope of this thesis, there are several similarities in the concerns that they address that have yet to be noted by existing criticism but are important to highlight, including concerns related to mental and physical prowess, reproductive choice, memory, and sisterhood. Therefore, each chapter includes a section discussing these similarities in order to position the series and its depiction of female agency alongside some of the most critically significant feminist science fiction narratives.

In science fiction criticism, the turning away from the analysis of male-authored texts was confirmed in the 1980s, and thus there was less of the kind of feminist criticism that Badami had offered—where she pointed out women's lack of importance as characters of science fiction and critiqued male authors for their poorly-developed characterizations of women—and more of feminist literary criticism directed at science fiction texts by women (Merrick *Secret* 104). It was feminist writers, assumed to be women, who were expected to "write women into sf futures; to create active female characters rather than the unbelievable or unimportant caricatures too often standing in for womanhood in past sf" (Merrick and Tuttle). In *Future Females* (1981), edited by Marleen S. Barr, there is an emphasis on the idea of the feminist utopia and the need for science fiction to envision a future informed by feminist concerns, such as the separation of sexuality from reproduction (Merrick *Secret* 126). The overwhelming majority of science fiction texts analyzed are by female authors. Natalie M. Rosinsky's *Feminist Futures: Contemporary Women's Speculative Fiction* (1984) examines how feminist ideologies affect the themes that writers like Russ and Piercy make use of, as well as how the estrangement a reader feels when reading such texts can help them question dominant biases, including those related to gender. Barr's *Alien to Femininity: Speculative Fiction and Feminist Theory* (1987) explicitly links feminist theorists such as Nina Auerbach and Nancy Chodorow with feminist science fiction by writers including Charnas, Tiptree/Sheldon, Russ, and myriad other women. She applies feminist theory to contemporary speculative fiction by "structuring each chapter as a thematic study read in terms of an appropriate example of contemporary feminist thought," the themes being community, heroism, and sexuality and reproduction (Barr *Alien* xiv). Sarah Lefanu's *In the Chinks of the World Machine: Feminism & Science Fiction* (1988) sees to what extent

[8] Helen Merrick notes that many of the over sixty female writers mentioned in the entry on women in Peter Nicholls' *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* (1979) have still received little if any criticism (Merrick *Secret* 53). This then precludes their works from being considered to be feminist if they include agential female characters.

authors make use of the subversive potential of science fiction to examine gender roles and explore the construction of the notion of woman. Her book marks a shift in the criticism toward the use of postmodern theories but continues the focus on female authors, seen through her case studies of Tiptree/Sheldon, Le Guin, Charnas, and Russ. Subsequent feminist science fiction criticism has continued to focus on female authors, often looking further back in history to recover female writers of earlier centuries and demonstrate how themes reoccur whenever women speculate on new worlds. For example, the volume of essays edited by Jane Donawerth and Carole A. Kolmerten, *Utopia and Science Fiction by Women* (1994), seeks to recover the tradition of utopias and science fiction by women, where writers have envisioned "a place where gender will not be so limiting" (Donawerth and Kolmerten 4). Essays include analysis of concepts like sisterhoods, collectivism, and motherhood in women's writing beginning with Margaret Cavendish's *The Description of a New World, Called the Blazing-World* (1666). A significant effect of the clear focus of the above studies on female authors is that critics established both the definition of feminist science fiction—as being written by women—and the approach that subsequent feminist science fiction criticism would take—the study of female-authored texts rather than male-authored ones.

However, although the focus on female science fiction writers as detailed above has been necessary in order to recognize women's valuable contributions to the genre and to discover feminist aspects of their writing, this has left a gap regarding criticism of male-authored texts that indicates a neglect of important analyses relevant to the history of the representation of women in science fiction. Despite the fact that feminist critics have become more likely to see the flourishing of feminist science fiction in the latter half of the twentieth century as part of a longer tradition, they have typically chosen not to return to male-authored texts to see if they merit inclusion in the definition of feminist science fiction. Even when there is an attempt to broaden the definition—Merrick notes that *Daughters of Earth: Feminist Science Fiction in the Twentieth Century* (2006) edited by Justine Larbalestier "both implicitly and explicitly challenges the notion of a fixed feminist sf canon"—the focus remains on female authors (Merrick *Secret* 141). Even when a male author is acknowledged—as when Samuel Delany becomes the only male author that Russ includes as a feminist writer of a utopia with his novel *Triton* (1976)[9]—other feminist critics may not agree that his work fits the criteria, as Lefanu discusses (Lefanu *Chinks* 55). The *Dune* series

[9] *Triton* was published as *Trouble on Triton: An Ambiguous Heterotopia* in 1996.

in particular continues to be ignored by feminist critics or, on the rare occasions it is discussed, negatively characterized such that it is easily dismissed. Robin Roberts' *A New Species: Gender and Science in Science Fiction* (1993) offers a prime example of the latter. She believes that science fiction criticism has not engaged enough with postmodern theories and presents her study as one that connects postmodernism and feminism, proving that feminist science fiction is valuable for its deconstruction of both science and traditional science fiction. Clearly excluding male writers, she states, "Science fiction enables women writers to criticize the past as well as provide for the future. Weaving together the strands of woman as scientist/witch/mother, these writers threaten and transform conventional notions of science" (R. Roberts 13). In fact, R. Roberts' argument here relies on her earlier dismissals of texts including *Dune*, setting up the reader to believe that male authors are simply not up to the task of writing feminist science fiction. In her critique of *Dune*, she takes all of four sentences to discuss the depiction of the Bene Gesserit in very negative terms:

> In science fiction by male writers, magical powers are usually depicted as evil and corrupt and the female scientist is often taunted with the cry of 'witch,' as are the Bene Gesserit in Frank Herbert's *Dune*. In his Hugo and Nebula award-winning novel, Herbert resuscitates the medieval condemnation of witches as satanic. At the end of *Dune*, the hero, Paul, becomes the Emperor and rejects the Reverend Mother of the Bene Gesserit, even though she gave him the first indication of his powers and in fact was, through her breeding program, indirectly responsible for his birth. Despite his debt to this sisterhood of witches, Paul dismisses feminine power and excludes women from his government. (R. Roberts 7-8)

Here, R. Roberts presents a grossly distorted and inaccurate summary of the characterization of the Bene Gesserit: there is no textual evidence to support the idea that the Bene Gesserit appear satanic (see analysis of the term 'witch' in Chapter 6), no discussion of plot points that explain how the Reverend Mother came to be Paul's enemy (see discussion of her role as the Emperor's Truthsayer in Chapter 4), and no mention of Jessica nor her essential role as Paul's advisor at the close of the novel (see analysis of the Bene Gesserit's advisory capacity in Chapter 4). This description cannot be considered to be a careful analysis of the characterization of the Bene Gesserit. Compared to the detailed and nuanced treatment that female characters developed by female writers receive from R. Roberts and other feminist science fiction critics, the way in which the female characters of the Bene Gesserit are ignored or dismissed is noticeably out of step in science fiction criticism. I contend that criticism has largely relied on incorrect assumptions or a narrow reading of *Dune*, and I seek to show that male-authored texts can contain feminist representations of women, which

suggests that there may be other writers who have been missed and whose works require reappraisal.

## Critical Landscape of the *Dune* Series

The female characters in the *Dune* series suffer from a lack of detailed examination even in criticism focused more specifically on the series. The following section provides an overview of such criticism in order to demonstrate a clear need for more attention to this successful science fiction saga. The critical landscape for the series remains surprisingly narrow and limited in not only volume, but timeframe and scope. Science fiction journals have published the majority of criticism, with around thirty articles in *Science Fiction Studies*, *Extrapolation*, and *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, though not all of them are solely concerned with Herbert's series. The bulk of criticism dates from the 1980s, around the time of the film adaptation of the first novel in 1984 and Herbert's passing in 1986. Book-length studies about the author and his works as a whole remain David Miller's *Frank Herbert* (1980), Timothy O'Reilly's *Frank Herbert* (1981), and Touponce's *Frank Herbert* (1988). The former were published before the last two novels in the *Dune* series and are overviews of Herbert's life and collected works, not specifically focused on the series; the latter includes an introductory biography, a chapter of critical summary dedicated to each book in the series except for the last two books, which are combined into one chapter, and then a brief examination of Herbert's other works and reputation. Touponce himself considers it surprising that, despite the best-selling status of the novels, Herbert "has received very little critical attention" (Touponce 119). There is a more recent biography written by Herbert's son, Brian Herbert, entitled *Dreamer of Dune* (2003), which weaves together stories of their family's life with insights about various aspects of Herbert's work, including *Dune*. As for more recent critical work, aside from a handful of journal articles, most has been written by students, with the novel continuing to be a popular topic for master's and doctoral papers, as evidenced by a recent spate of theses and dissertations. Yet it is extremely rare for any of these to see publication: it appears that only David M. Higgins' 2010 dissertation on imperialism ("The Inward Urge: 1960s Science Fiction and Imperialism")—which includes *Dune* as one of the texts under analysis—has been successfully turned into an article for a science fiction journal ("Psychic Decolonization in 1960s Science Fiction" in *Science Fiction Studies* in 2013). Thus, most of the published criticism is now well over twenty years old. Another issue is that the scope of the criticism has hardly scratched the surface of an analysis of the *Dune* series with all of its richness and openness to multiple

interpretations. Critics have largely focused on aspects of the obvious themes—the messiah figure, religion, ecology and the environment, politics, and psychology—to the neglect of issues of gender, postcolonialism and the Other, and posthumanism. Furthermore, critics often focus solely on the first novel as the most popular and self-contained one. However, its sequels take place in the same universe and continue Herbert's exploration of significant themes. They also provide the opportunity to see how changing social mores and political concerns may have influenced Herbert as a writer, since he wrote the novels over a span of several decades. The narrow and limited body of criticism has meant that there is much material left unexamined, and the later novels especially have very little criticism on them at all.

The three book-length studies of Herbert and his works vary significantly in their coverage and focus, with none of them containing a sustained analysis of female characters or gender issues in the *Dune* series despite the presence of the Bene Gesserit Sisterhood in each novel. D. Miller's short book contains fewer than twenty pages on the first three books of the series, in which he focuses on dualities present in the characters and plots, often within a psychoanalytical framework of Freudian and Jungian theories. He notes that the novels contain conflicts between "reason and intuition, between masculine and feminine, between good and evil, between earth-rapers and ecologists, between individual desires and social imperatives, between morality and politics," although he does not consider these at great length (D. Miller 16). He finds that the complexity and depth in the novels stem from an "elaborate system of power structures," with two significant "'service' organizations" within those structures being the all-male Mentats and the all-female Bene Gesserit (D. Miller 18). D. Miller provides a brief overview of their skills as well as the Bene Gesserit's breeding program, but in looking at issues of gender he is more concerned with exploring the male-female polarities of Paul, the hermaphroditic Tleilaxu, and Leto II and Ghanima, and the meaning of symbols with sexual undertones. Because he does so within a psychoanalytical framework, he finds numerous symbols related to plot points like the death of Paul's father and Paul's actions toward his mother, but this Oedipal reading seems dated and dismissive of the complexities of characterization present in the novels. D. Miller also presents a Jungian reading of *Children of Dune* wherein the female is passive and yielding and the male is active and seizing, concluding, "At any particular level the female may be more powerful than the male, but taken as a system, the active is more powerful than the passive. Ultimately, Herbert's universe is a male chauvinist" (D. Miller 30). Such a reading is made possible by

the text, but it does not leave much room for analysis of female characters as agents within this novel or other ones. Even he seems to realize that Herbert should not be pegged to such an overarching statement, as he then writes, "But, one hastens to add, sexuality is not identical to male-female polarity. A woman and a man are *instances* of the macro-forces, rather than *constituting* those forces" (D. Miller 30). This leaves room for the argument that biology is not destiny and that women are not necessarily always the passive force. Despite its limitations, D. Miller's analysis does provide a thorough overview of the structure of the Imperium and addresses the roles of major factions like the Bene Gesserit and the Tleilaxu, unlike other critics who ignore them or discount their importance. But the brevity of the book and the fact that it was published before the later novels mean that it is more useful as an example of how a psychoanalytical approach may obscure important aspects of characterization and prevent a recognition of avenues of female agency.

O'Reilly's study is much more comprehensive and contains valuable analyses of the Bene Gesserit as a group, though it largely avoids discussing the implications of its members being female. O'Reilly provides an analysis of Herbert's works that had been published before 1981 alongside historical context and biographical information. His work benefits from background information he gained from interviews with Herbert, his spouse Beverly, and others in his circle of acquaintances, as well as access to manuscripts, letters of correspondence, and other unpublished material. O'Reilly is thus able to provide valuable insights into Herbert's motivations and his sources of knowledge about religions, psychology, and communication, all of which are relevant to an understanding of the Bene Gesserit. It is worthwhile to note, though, that the integration of biographical information results in his analysis having a strong sense of Herbert's authorship and intent woven throughout, which may have foreclosed other avenues of interpretation. In his analysis of the first three novels of the series, O'Reilly has a particular focus on the main character of Paul Atreides, but he does provide insightful analysis of the Bene Gesserit as an organization seeking its own measure of indirect control in a feudal universe via the cultivation of its members' talents. O'Reilly links the Bene Gesserit's techniques with general semantics, mastery of consciousness, and Eastern disciplines in a way that flatters Herbert as being a writer of "predictive science fiction of the best kind," since many of these areas of study had not yet become popular in the West (O'Reilly 61). He also positions Paul as reliant on his Bene Gesserit upbringing for his emerging powers, rather than ignoring the role and agency of his mother as other critics tend to do. However, at one point he appears to downplay the Bene Gesserit's significance as the

originators of Paul's training: in discussing Paul's hyperconsciousness, O'Reilly writes that "it is important to remember that Paul is not the only character who possesses it. His mother Jessica shares his Bene Gesserit sensitivity to mood, events, and nuances of meaning, as does the Reverend Mother in her brief appearance" (O'Reilly 63). It is rather Paul who shares the women's Bene Gesserit skills, but this passage may mislead the reader into giving Paul undue credit for his skills. In a brief passage elsewhere, like D. Miller, O'Reilly draws on Jungian thought—though he does not explicitly make this link—to discuss the psychology of power through either taking or giving. He argues that the Bene Gesserit are "a more positive extreme of the giving tendency" because they choose to lead by submission (O'Reilly 75). Yet O'Reilly refrains from commenting on the gendered nature of these Jungian principles and how successful the Bene Gesserit ultimately are in choosing this more indirect path. O'Reilly also sees a parallel between the Bene Gesserit and the psychohistorians in science fiction author Isaac Asimov's *Foundation* trilogy, but again does not comment on the potential significance of the former being an all-female organization. His only acknowledgement that the Bene Gesserit are female is when he notes that they may have been based on Herbert's ten maternal aunts who insisted that he be raised Catholic. In an otherwise detailed study, it is surprising that he does not draw out this connection and take the opportunity to analyze the implications of Herbert's decisions regarding the Bene Gesserit in relation to the representation of women in the series. Overall, O'Reilly's book offers important contextual and biographical information toward a deeper analysis of Herbert as a writer and the Bene Gesserit organization, but his substantive discussion is very limited in its attention to issues of gender.

With the benefit of having been published after the publication of all six *Dune* novels, Touponce's study offers one of the few examinations of both the later books and the female characters within them, yet is valuable more for raising interesting avenues for further exploration than discussing them in detail. His main argument is that Herbert is concerned with dialogue and that his series thus contains a polyphonic nature with competing voices. Throughout his discussion of various characters, Touponce gives due credit to Bene Gesserit women like Jessica, who shapes the reader's understanding of the speech of other characters, and Irulan, who in her epigraphs "projects her idealized image of Paul onto a distanced horizon and in effect creates a counternarrative of events" (Touponce 30). Indeed, he is one of the few critics to provide a detailed analysis of Irulan's role in *Dune*, though he does not comment on her gender. Like D. Miller and O'Reilly, Touponce at times relies on the ideas

of Jung to explain Herbert's characterization—"It turns out that the female psyche has more weakness in that inner assault"—and avoids a deeper analysis of this psychological theory or how female characters might be operating in terms of their agential potential (Touponce 50). However, he does recognize the use of some of the Bene Gesserit's abilities—namely the Voice and Other Memory—as constituting an important part of women's dialogue. Touponce's book in general suffers from an overreliance on plot summary as well as descriptions straight from the novels that are neither indicated as such nor scrutinized. For example, part of a sentence in the opening of his discussion of *Heretics of Dune*—"the Bene Gesserit remains the most powerful and enduring missionary force known" (Touponce 91)—comes straight from the thoughts of one of the Tleilaxu characters—"He had gained the services of the most powerful and enduring missionary force known" (*HD* 320). Yet in Touponce's book it appears to be his own commentary or analysis of the novel, potentially misleading the reader and offering no hint that it stems from a group actually antagonistic to the Bene Gesserit. Where Touponce is most valuable is in his discussions elsewhere of rival groups to the Bene Gesserit—the Tleilaxu and Honored Matres—both being very underrepresented in *Dune* criticism since they only come to prominence in the last two novels published in the mid-1980s. He is also the one who raises the possibility that the series is feminist due to its preoccupation with women's voices. At the close of his final chapter on the series, he briefly analyzes the showdown between the Bene Gesserit and the Honored Matres. Despite their differences, the groups contain several similarities, Touponce notes, including addiction, sexual bonding techniques, and production of rage within their members (Touponce 107-108). Again drawing on Jungian theories, he sees the groups as Herbert's deployment of "two male archetypes of the feminine—the witch and the whore" and argues that it was inevitable that Herbert would broach the subject of women in his series, since "any novel based on dialogical principles of relationship to an Other would sooner or later have to confront the nature and social position of women, whose voices have long been excluded from male-dominated discourses" (Touponce 108). Although this statement acknowledges that the later novels include women's voices, it is problematic for suggesting that the earlier novels do not. It also leaves these two labels—witch and whore—and their connotations unexamined, and thus this thesis will undertake an analysis of their usage and significance in Chapter 6. Even though Touponce does not do justice to the complexity of the characterization of either group with his cursory mention of them, he does open the door to further investigation of female characters from a feminist perspective as evidenced by the quote at the beginning of this chapter.

A more comprehensive analysis of female characters is needed because the few critics who have explicitly addressed women and gender in *Dune* in journal articles have done so in a cursory way that forecloses a deeper, more nuanced analysis. Jack Hand's "The Traditionalism of Women's Roles in Frank Herbert's *Dune*" (1985) presents a scathing yet shallow critique of female characters in the first novel that has likely biased later critics against more critical analysis of women's role in *Dune* and the rest of the series. Hand's argument is that female characters suffer from Herbert's decision to derive his universe from past and present societies that are male-dominated. The medieval setting in particular, he believes, consigns women to traditional roles as "wives, mothers, sisters, and literary women" who are "always defin[ing] themselves by male standards" (Hand 28). He sees religion as the only avenue for women to exert official or unofficial power, but still condemns the women of the quasi-religious Bene Gesserit as "supporters of the male status quo" (Hand 26). Although Herbert's choice of a medieval, feudal setting may mean that female agency is expressed within traditional frameworks, Hand neglects to go beyond a surface analysis of several plot points in the text to prove that women are limited by their roles. He downplays Bene Gesserit women's positions as advisors and intelligence gatherers, although this has been and continues to be a method of gaining influence that oppressed or minority groups use. Regarding the Bene Gesserit's eugenics plan, he calls it traditional for using women as breeders—although it would be difficult to have such a plan without women bearing children—and for aiming "not at the development of a superior female as its end, but at the development of a superior male," a critique that is echoed by later critics as well but rarely analyzed more closely (Hand 26). He attributes Jessica's privileging of Paul's safety over her unborn daughter's to her "acting out the values of the male-dominated society" without considering alternate explanations, such as her own desire to survive or an understandable preference for a child in front of her needing protection over a fetus yet to be born (Hand 27). Furthermore, Hand makes some broad-reaching and incorrect statements about women that attempt to simplify the narrative to fit his argument. He writes that Jessica gives up her position as leader of her son, Paul, after one night in the desert, overlooking their later encounter with the Fremen where she subdues Stilgar, a Fremen leader, and negotiates their safe passage. He paints a picture of Paul's concubine, Chani, as "a woman of great gentleness and fierce passions when the well-being of her man is at stake" (Hand 28); in addition, he accuses Herbert of giving the reader "little enough to back up this characterization except Paul's attitudes, for she is bound by the Fremen codes to be in the shadow of her man" (Hand 28). In actuality, Chani is characterized as fierce and biting from the time Jessica and Paul

encounter her as a girl in a Fremen military company when she is assigned to watch over Paul; later, she handily disposes of men coming to challenge Paul's authority. While some of Hand's points about the traditional nature of women's roles are true, his simplistic assessment belies many other aspects of characterization that disprove his argument and that complicate the image of women that he offers. What is concerning is that he has likely prompted other critics to be more dismissive of the Bene Gesserit than they might otherwise be. Lorenzo DiTommaso, for one, in "History and Historical Effect in *Dune*" (1992) agrees with Hand's assessment that women in *Dune* are constrained by traditional roles. Although he does acknowledge that there is more work to be done to explore how that relates to the themes and plots of the novel, neither he nor any other critic has undertaken this work (DiTommaso 323). Thus, Hand's decades-old arguments are some of the few related to female characters in *Dune* and consequently will be engaged with and critiqued on a variety of fronts in this thesis.

Published the same year as Hand's piece, Miriam Youngerman Miller's "Women of *Dune*: Frank Herbert as Social Reactionary" is more willing to consider the positive aspects of Herbert's portrayal of female characters yet draws a similar conclusion about traditional female roles subordinating women in the series. M. Miller is one of the few critics to explicitly acknowledge the cultural context in which Herbert was writing, namely second-wave feminism, and consider how it might have impacted his characterization of women. She writes, "Another important trend that has surfaced during the more than twenty years from *Dune* to the publication in 1981 of *God Emperor of Dune* […] has been the re-examination and re-alignment of the traditional gender-assigned roles and sexual stereotypes in the wake of the women's movement" (M. Miller 182). But her apparent belief that equality between the sexes is required in order for the series to have redemptive feminist qualities results in her discounting the first four novels as having too traditional a view of women. She argues that despite Herbert's inclusion of "what is for science fiction (and indeed for so-called 'mainstream' literature) an unusually large number of well-developed, apparently strong, intelligent, aggressive, even violent female characters," women are still "subordinate, dependent, a creature of male fantasy, defined by male desire" (M. Miller 182). What she means is that female characters are too constrained by their relationships with men to be considered active or independent, though she admits that the Bene Gesserit are "extremely powerful women" and "frequently shown exerting physical and psychological control over others—in particular, men" (M. Miller 183, 185). For her support she relies on examples of

female characters—not just Bene Gesserit ones—appearing to be what she considers passive or traditional, such as when Jessica must "be championed by a male" and "stand by passively" while Paul fights one of the Fremen (M. Miller 187). Her analysis neglects to consider the multitude of times that Jessica is not standing by passively, though, or how female characters see themselves regardless of the attitudes of the men around them. The limitations of her analysis, as well as her inability to explore examples in more depth, likely stem from the fact that her chapter is part of a book of conference proceedings. Her analysis becomes valuable when she addresses the issue of sexual difference and biological determinism, for she exposes the tension that can exist whenever women are associated with their reproductive capacity. For her, the sexual difference that places maternal responsibility on women means that the first four novels "explicitly deny the equality of men and women" (M. Miller 191). She views the depictions of the Bene Gesserit breeding program and motherhood as examples of how the series "upholds traditional views of male and female sex roles and female subordination as a legacy of biological difference" (M. Miller 191). Reproduction is a large factor in the series, and her critique of biological determinism raises valid points that will be addressed throughout this thesis. However, she does not give sufficient attention to the complexity of sexual difference and its appearance in the texts, or to the significance of female agency that can operate even if the sexes are not shown to be equal in all aspects. A more detailed analysis of how reproduction and motherhood function in the series, and their relationship with female agency, will be undertaken in this thesis in an effort to challenge M. Miller's sweeping condemnation of the treatment of women's reproductive capacity.

Other critics reiterate in smaller degrees a negative view of female characters, and aspects of their critiques will also be contended with in this thesis to provide a more balanced analysis. Wendell argues that Jessica has stature but not autonomy. In her view, Jessica's loyalty to her organization means any display of skills still indicates subservience. In "A Psychological Approach to Fantasy in the *Dune* Series" (1982), Susan McLean uses a psychoanalytical critique to argue that the books appeal to adolescent male readers due to themes of "Oedipal conflict, fear of sex, and fear of women" (McLean 150). She also states that "Herbert associated directness, honesty, and integrity with masculinity and deceit and treachery with femininity" with little evidence (McLean 150, 156). Phyllis J. Day's brief discussion of the Bene Gesserit in "Earthmother/Witchmother: Feminism and Ecology Renewed" (1982) describes them as "feared and hated," heavily suggesting that the

characters are in constant danger of being killed (Day 17). There is no textual support provided for this statement, though, which gives an inaccurate picture of the narrative. In a more recent article on the Bene Gesserit's technique of the Voice, "Listening to Ourselves" (2001), Paul Q. Kucera relegates issues of gender to a footnote and proposes one of M. Miller's observations as a starting point for such an analysis (Kucera 244). However, although he concurs with her view regarding the limitations of female characters, he is not in complete agreement with her assertion that Paul as a male is necessarily able to wield more power than females. Despite minimizing the importance of gender to his argument, Kucera offers one of the few published caveats to M. Miller's critique and thus indicates that a deeper analysis is necessary to fully examine the roles of women in the series. It is worthwhile noting that it is in a book on adventure stories in children's literature where a female character in *Dune* receives more positive criticism than negative. In Margery Hourihan's chapter on women in *Deconstructing the Hero: Literary Theory and Children's Literature* (1997) she devotes two paragraphs to Jessica as an interesting exception to the stereotypically marginalized female character in science fiction. She notes that the Bene Gesserit "is a priestly caste which works within the male power structure to influence events" and that Jessica has "exceptional mental insight, skill in martial arts, and supreme self-control" (Hourihan 173). However, although Hourihan states that Jessica "emerges as by far the most interesting character in the novel" and "functions as a fully realized character," she criticizes her for having internalized her society's views of women's subordination and only using her talents toward furthering Paul's ambitions (Hourihan 173). Again, this analysis lacks depth and support but offers a better sense of female agency than other critiques of *Dune*.

In many cases, female characters are simply ignored by critics, which has resulted in a lack of critical attention to both prominent women like Jessica and aspects related to the series' representation of women such as sexuality. This is evident in the abundance of critical attention on Paul as a main character with scarcely a reference to his mother. In a recent example, in Higgins' article on three male superhero figures in science fiction, including Paul, he only mentions the Bene Gesserit twice, in effect casting Paul as a person who achieved self-mastery and control without assistance. There is no reference to Jessica, meaning that her role training and enabling Paul to become a strong leader is obscured and left unexamined. Furthermore, in their marginalization of female characters, critics have neglected to explore representations of female sexuality, leaving an important aspect of the

novels bereft of the attention that aspects of male sexuality have received. Sexuality is often a latent matter in the earlier novels, with Day noting that there are no strong themes dealing with sexuality in *Dune* (Day 16). But concepts like sexual bonding and enslavement in the last two novels undeniably bring concerns of sexuality to the forefront. Yet because there is very little criticism on these novels, these issues remain unexamined and what has received the most attention is either the theme of Oedipal conflicts—such as noted above in D. Miller's and McLean's psychoanalytical readings—or the negative characterization of homosexuality via the Baron Harkonnen—as discussed by John Ower and A. Roberts. Although these critics offer perspectives on some aspects of sexuality in the first four novels, there remains a lack of attention to female sexuality, especially in the later novels. Whether or not the absence of Jessica and other women is a deliberate component of critiques of the series, it is a reminder of how overdue a focus on her and other characters of the Bene Gesserit is. In contrast to much of the existing criticism, then, this thesis frequently focuses on Jessica because she is arguably the most well-developed female character and a member of the Bene Gesserit who introduces many of their skills and abilities that are further developed in later novels.

In an effort to understand why female characters in the *Dune* series have received relatively little criticism, C. N. Manlove's argument that the motif of concealment is central in Herbert's work offers one convincing explanation. Although Manlove's chapter on *Dune* in *Science Fiction: Ten Explorations* (1986) avoids detailed reflections on female characters, his analysis is valuable for providing a key insight into one of the potential reasons this has been the case. He argues that "the motif of concealment is central to *Dune* and its manner"—it "is of the essence, and is bound up with waiting over long periods of time" (Manlove 81). This motif can explain why female characters have been so underrated and underestimated by critics: because Herbert deliberately conceals their motives and political maneuverings just as he does with many other aspects of the story in order to construct multi-layered novels that offer the reader more than just an entertaining story. Indeed, Herbert spent six years of research on world religions, desert environments, and sciences like psychology and ecology before putting together the story in the first novel (*HD* v, B. Herbert 141, 164); yet much of this information is layered into the *Dune* universe such that the reader may not realize how much effort went into the world-building. As Manlove elaborates, "the readers have to work very hard as in all Herbert's fiction to make the links, which are often hidden in the narrative or understandable only with considerable effort" (Manlove 89). In this way, the series

requires an active reader to understand the depth of the complexities just as Russ's *The Female Man* requires an active reader to grasp such a "disjunctive" novel (Bartowski 50). In only looking at the surface level of the series—where women often operate in roles as concubines, wives, mothers, and advisors—critics miss expressions of agency that are more concealed. In fact, Herbert's use of a medieval/feudal setting and Taoist concepts such as *wu-wei*—action through inaction, discussed in Chapter 2—in his characterization of the Bene Gesserit's method of operations makes it more likely that instances of female characters' influence will appear in a variety of places, not necessarily easily detectable ones.

A possible reason why feminist critics in particular have ignored or dismissed the prospect of female agency in the series is that it contains no overt criticism of male-dominated societies, nor does it discount the role that sexual difference and tensions among women's groups can play in women's lives. However, this should not discount the possibility of female agency and a nuanced and non-stereotypical representation of women. Regardless of the reasons, no extended analysis of female characters in the *Dune* series has been attempted, leaving a woefully incomplete picture of aspects of female agency. Therefore, this thesis seeks to redress this lack and, in examining embodied agency through a variety of avenues, show how the series can be feminist in its representation of women, even if it is not wholly liberatory in terms of women's roles or sexual equality. In the following chapter, I begin by examining the mind-body synthesis that the Bene Gesserit cultivate and the many extraordinary skills that it affords them.

## Chapter Two: Mind-Body Synergy

Dualistic thinking that separates the mind and the body, privileging the former, has pervaded Western philosophy for centuries. It has also featured in science fiction narratives, some of which place faith in technological advancement as the way toward liberating the mind from the physical trapping of the body, which is viewed as a weakness or limitation. In the *Dune* series, however, the focus is on the human, not technology, and the series shows that when the mind and body work together and complement one another, the body becomes an essential part of humans and key to their ability to not only survive but thrive after the banning of computers in the Butlerian Jihad. It soon becomes apparent that the mind-body synergy that would be most useful in this type of environment has been achieved and perfected by the women of the Bene Gesserit, and that their skills, such as those in hand-to-hand combat, are more advanced than those of other characters, such as the Emperor's famously skilled soldiers. Their skill set even appears to increase across the series, such as when a Bene Gesserit woman discusses adjusting her blood flow and circadian rhythm to adapt to changing planetary conditions, which serves as a reminder that the body can be a help rather than a hindrance. With critical attention focused on prescient abilities, which are linked to male characters like Paul, though, the extraordinary number of abilities both mental and physical that the Bene Gesserit possess has remained largely unexamined.

In this chapter, I set the foundation for an analysis of embodied agency in the *Dune* series by examining the development of the Bene Gesserit's mind-body synergy and physical and mental feats. I show how a more holistic understanding of the human as situated in the body serves to dismiss the idea that the female body limits women's agential capacity, and I examine alternatives to dualistic thought in Simone de Beauvoir's theory, Eastern philosophical traditions, and Jungian psychology that I argue help to illuminate certain characteristics of the Bene Gesserit. I argue that the description of their feats helps to characterize them as capable and skilled women with a high degree of embodied agency, and that the balance they maintain between the mind and the body is positioned as superior to the preference for logic of the Mentats. Yet I also discuss how the series' use of sexual difference as a justification for why male characters can fully embrace prescience can serve to undermine the representation of women as agential. I thus introduce the tensions over sexual difference that I will explore throughout the remainder of the thesis—tensions that reinforce the series' speculation that sometimes men and women have different abilities, and that women do not have to be equal to men in every respect to be agential and may even benefit

from leveraging essentialist notions, as some do in the feminist science fiction narratives with which I compare the series.

## Theories of the Mind and Body

In the following section I discuss Rene Descartes' and Beauvoir's perspectives on the body in order to establish the framework I will use to analyze the mind-body synergy that appears in the *Dune* series. One of the main obstacles to overcome in an understanding of embodied agency for women is the type of Cartesian dualistic thinking wherein the mind and body are considered to be separate, and the body is regarded as a limitation, a weak vessel that entraps the mind. This thinking was promulgated by philosophers as far back as Aristotle, but it was Descartes in the seventeenth century who popularized the concept of a separation between mind and body, believing that the body was an obstacle to having an objective outlook on the world. In his *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641), he describes his attempt to shut out bodily sensations in pursuit of purer thinking: "I shall now close my eyes, I shall stop my ears, I shall call away all my senses, […] I shall esteem them as vain and false; and thus […] I shall try little by little to reach a better knowledge of and a more familiar acquaintanceship with myself" (Descartes 79). His famous dictum that "I think, therefore I am" reflects his belief that the mind is what constitutes being. According to feminist theorist Susan Bordo in *The Flight to Objectivity: Essays on Cartesianism and Culture* (1987), Descartes views the body as a type of prison that is the main source of humans' inability to achieve clear, untainted perception (Bordo *Flight* 89). She argues that he believes it is possible for the mind to be liberated from the body and its distractions, and although he was not the first philosopher to view the body in negative terms, he was the one responsible for defining the body and mind as mutually exclusive (Bordo *Flight* 93). From this, she concludes, he develops his idea of objectivity, where he could transcend the body and "relate with absolute neutrality to the objects he surveys, unfettered by the perspectival nature of embodied vision" (Bordo *Flight* 95). However, according to John Cottingham in *Cartesian Reflections: Essays on Descartes's Philosophy* (2008), Descartes's theories on the mind and body are more complex than scholars like Bordo suggest, being that Descartes is "a greatly misunderstood thinker" (Cottingham v). He asserts, "It is of course true that the perspective adopted in Descartes's most famous work, the *Meditations*, is that of the solitary thinker, cut off from all contact with the outside world, and immersed in his own reflections," but in many other instances Descartes "approaches things from the *outside*, and asks how various kinds of observable phenomena (in humans and in animals) can be explained" after

being apprehended by sensory awareness (Cottingham 19-21). Although Descartes's theories regarding sensory awareness are the subject of continued scholarly debate, as discussed by Joseph W. Hwang in "Descartes and the Aristotelian Framework of Sensory Perception" (2011), it is undeniable in Descartes's work that the body plays at least some role since he maintains that "the process by which sensory ideas are obtained is partially a mechanical one," such as when light stimulates the eye and the nervous system sends a signal to the brain which results in the "perception of an idea in the mind" (Hwang 125). Descartes also theorizes a "distinction between simply reacting to stimuli in a patterned way [as animals do], and being able to respond in a thoughtful and rational manner to all the contingencies of life— something only genuine humans can do (Cottingham 21). This suggests that he views the mind-body relationship in humans as unique, wherein the mind is master over the body and its instincts which makes humans rational. Yet he does not see this unique relationship freeing humans from an "essentially embodied nature" and a need to rely on their sensory perceptions to understand their environment (Cottingham 18). But what is significant about Descartes remains the legacy of Cartesian dualism, that is, the separation of the mind and body such that the mind is considered superior, and how this mind/body dualism has had the effect of categorizing other things into pairs, such as male/female and rational/irrational.

The relevance of dualistic thinking for feminist thought is that it not only sets up an artificial mind-body split, but it tends to privilege things associated with the mind—such as rationality and men—and denigrate things associated with the body—such as emotions and women (Bowden and Mummery 48). Thus, due to women's supposed closeness to the body and its natural rhythms of menstruation and childbearing, women have historically been deemed less able than men to achieve higher levels of thinking and rationality, even to the point they are associated more with animals reacting on instinct than humans who supposedly act rationally. Even when men are associated with the body, such as in physical combat as warriors, the implication is that they have a greater ability to rationally control the body than women do. The tendency for women to be considered unequal or inferior in this type of dualistic thought is apparent; however, according to feminist theorist Elizabeth Grosz, the dominance of dualistic philosophy in Western society has meant that even twentieth-century feminists are the heirs of Cartesianism in that they are susceptible to regarding the body as an object, a tool, or a medium and thus themselves reinforce a problematic dualism (Grosz 8-10). She argues that feminist theory must move beyond such limiting views of bodies in order to escape the trap of dualism, lest it continue to "participat[e] in the social devaluing of the

body that goes hand in hand with the oppression of women" (Grosz 10). Hence, recognizing the female body as a potential vehicle for agency requires a move away from Cartesian dualistic thinking that treats the body as a limitation and toward recognition that the mind-body separation is an artificial assumption that has contributed to problematic stereotypes about women's capabilities.

As a philosopher in the Western tradition, Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* relies on some dualistic notions regarding the female body and its constraints, but her insistence that women are beings situated in bodies who have the capability of being active and independent offers a valuable theoretical lens through which to analyze the embodied agency of women in fiction. I choose Beauvoir as the first feminist theorist with which to engage in this thesis for several reasons. As discussed in Chapter 1, she was a key influence on second-wave feminists and their understanding of the body. Her critique of dualistic thinking and her analysis of sexual difference laid the groundwork for how feminists thought about women and their situatedness in the body, and she continues to be the subject of feminist scholarship seeking to understand how to reconcile the idea of equality with that of differences between women and men. Thus, I find that engaging with her theories in an analysis of the depiction of the mind and body of female characters is not only historically relevant, but theoretically valuable in that it enables an exploration of ideas circulating in the mid-twentieth century that continue to find resonance in more recent feminist thought. In her introduction to *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir acknowledges the type of Cartesian thinking where a man "thinks of his body as a direct and normal connection with the world, which he believes he apprehends objectively, whereas he regards the body of woman as a hindrance, a prison, weighed down by everything peculiar to it" (Beauvoir xxxix). She then proceeds to argue that men have used this perception to construct their belief that humanity is male, thus setting themselves up as the Subject and defining women in relation to themselves as the object, or Other. This duality reinforces the binary behind the Cartesian mind-body split, so that characteristics associated with women such as femininity, irrationality, and passivity are consigned to the supposedly inferior side of the body, meaning that women seem to be unable to have an active existence like men have. However, Beauvoir's main argument is that even though women are subject to biological functions like menstruation that may 'limit' them at times, it is men who have "created artificial distinctions between masculine and feminine functions, and thus kept woman in a false, passive role" (Leighton 34). As discussed in Chapter 1, Beauvoir believes that women are socialized to be passive rather than born that

way, and this allows her to see hope for change. Indeed, she calls for women to reject the definition of themselves as passive, irrational beings and instead embrace an active, independent existence.

However, due in part to the language Beauvoir uses about the female body, critics have expressed concern that she actually reinforces the problematic idea that the body is an obstacle for women. Genevieve Lloyd in *The Man of Reason: 'Male' and 'Female' in Western Philosophy* (1984) understands Beauvoir's remarks about female biology to make the female body appear as an obstacle that reinforces a "stark dualism" between what a woman wants to do and what she can do because of her confinement to her body (Lloyd 99). Toril Moi writes of Beauvoir's "visceral disgust for the female sexual organs" as being "disparaging to women" and notes that many feminist intellectuals have denounced Beauvoir "for hating the female body […] [and] not being *positive* enough in her representation of women" (Moi *Simone* 200). These criticisms understand Beauvoir to be reinforcing dualistic notions wherein the body is shown to be something holding women back. There are certainly passages in *The Second Sex* that portray the female body in unflattering terms, including one where Beauvoir calls it "a burden: worn away in service to the species, bleeding each month, proliferating passively […]; it is no certain source of pleasure and it creates lacerating pains; it contains menaces" (Beauvoir 651). Her language is distinctly negative and depicts the female body as uncontrollable and painful. In these instances, Beauvoir appears to accept the dualism that relegates women and their bodies to a lower status.

Yet there are other ways of reading her work that bring to light the importance of the body to her theory and thus are valuable in a discussion of embodied agency. Fredricka Scarth in *The Other Within: Ethics, Politics, and the Body in Simone de Beauvoir* (2004) finds that Beauvoir was not reproducing dualisms but critiquing the Western philosophical tradition. She analyzes Beauvoir's portrayal of the body as being "more nuanced than many of her feminist critics would grant" due to the presence of an ethical demand within Beauvoir's work that calls for humans to understand themselves as embodied and relational individuals rather than seeing the body negatively (Scarth 164). Similarly, in Karen Vintges's defense of Beauvoir in "Simone de Beauvoir: A Feminist Thinker for the Twenty-first Century" (2006), she argues that the interpretation that Beauvoir wanted women to aspire to rationality by leaving the body behind is an incorrect view of her work. Instead, Vintges believes that "Beauvoir's appeal to women in *The Second Sex* to grasp their chances at developing into a self cannot be considered a plea for women to become pure Cartesian,

rational selves" because Beauvoir wanted both women and men to become sensitive selves that were situated in the body (Vintges 218). Such interpretations of Beauvoir's ideas are helpful in that they illustrate that embodiment is important to Beauvoir, in spite of her ambivalent attitude toward the experience of reproductive cycles (Moi *What* 66). When she writes that woman "endeavors to combine life and transcendence, which is to say that she rejects Cartesianism, with its formal logic, and all related doctrines," she suggests that women want more than an existence on one side of a mind/body divide (Beauvoir 652). In this way, Beauvoir's theory opens room for women as embodied beings to strive for an active and independent existence, or in other words, to have the capacity for autonomy and the taking of an active role in shaping history that constitutes embodied agency.

In addition, Beauvoir's recognition that female and male bodies are different but that this biological difference does not have to be eliminated for women to be liberated presents a feminist perspective on the concept of sexual difference with which this thesis will engage. As Sara Heinämaa argues in *Toward a Phenomenology of Sexual Difference* (2003), part of the core of Beauvoir's argument is "that women's and men's experiences of their own bodies are partly different" but that there are also similarities, leaving space for new ways of understanding the human experience that validate women's experiences of embodiment (Heinämaa 133). In the conclusion of *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir clearly states that

> there will always be certain differences between man and woman […]. This means that her relations to her own body, to that of the male, to the child, will never be identical with those the male bears to his own body, to that of the female, and to the child; those who make much of 'equality in difference' could not with good grace refuse to grant me the possible existence of differences in equality. (Beauvoir 766)

In realizing the existence of differences in how women and men relate to their own bodies as well as the bodies of others, Beauvoir does not concede that women are somehow lesser beings than men but instead recognizes that women's liberation will come from not being defined solely in relation to men. For her, independence does not necessitate the removal of all differences but the cultivation of a mutual respect. Thus, Beauvoir understands sexual difference as a reality that can coexist with women's liberation. I find this a necessary perspective to consider when examining the *Dune* series because it does depict differences between women's and men's abilities, as in the matter of prescience discussed in this chapter, but the absence of complete equality should not preclude a recognition of women's agency and liberation from restrictive ideas about the female body.

## Alternatives in Eastern Philosophies

In my understanding of Beauvoir's conception of women as beings whose situatedness in the body is part of what makes them human, rather than something to be overcome, I see a more holistic understanding of the human that is important for my analysis of the mental and physical feats of the Bene Gesserit. This holistic understanding entails the mind and body working together and reinforcing each other such that they are both necessary for a person to function, and thus the body becomes an integral part of the expression of agency. Before closely examining the Bene Gesserit's skills, though, I will discuss some of the influences of Eastern philosophies in the series since these also envision a more holistic, interdependent relationship between mind, body, and spirit than the Western Cartesian tradition. I find that these influences are necessary to consider when examining the representation of the Bene Gesserit not because they offer a feminist perspective like Beauvoir's or eschew dualities, but because they offer an alternative to Western modes of thought that denigrate the body and instead emphasize the concept of balance. In showing the foundations for the Bene Gesserit's training as being an amalgamation of elements from Eastern religions like Taoism and Hinduism, and Eastern-influenced Jungian psychology, I demonstrate that such influences help enable the series' refutation of some aspects of dualistic thought patterns that regard the body and women as inferior or passive, which then opens space for female characters to appear agential in their balancing of mental and physical abilities.

First, I must acknowledge that I have only attended to the aspects of Eastern philosophies that I see appearing in the series and relating to a discussion of embodied agency. For the purpose of this thesis, I define Eastern philosophies as primarily those which were impacting the culture in the U.S. in the mid-twentieth century, though Herbert conducted his own research into Eastern disciplines and, according to Timothy O'Reilly, should be credited with having written predictive science fiction since "Oriental religion had not yet become widely popular in the West" at the time of *Dune*'s publication (O'Reilly 61).[10] In *Eastern Spirituality in America* (1987), Robert S. Ellwood argues that religious traditions such as Hinduism and Taoism played a large role in making up "the Eastern spiritual presence in America" (Ellwood 34). Of the Taoist influence, he asserts that "[t]his great mystical and aesthetic tradition of China has had a real impact on American Eastern

[10] It should be noted that the Theosophy movement, which originated in the late nineteenth-century in the U.S., had already been "concerned with ancient wisdom and Oriental religions" and arguably "was a major force for the introduction of Asian religious ideas" in the West before the 1960s (Campbell 1).

spiritual consciousness at least since the sixties" and that "East Asian exercises and martial arts, from Tai chi chuan to Aikido, profoundly shaped by Taoism, have grown rapidly in popularity" (Ellwood 41). In *Virtual Orientalism: Asian Religions and American Popular Culture* (2011), Jane Naomi Iwamura asserts that Hindu traditions became popular in large part due to Maharishi Mahesh Yogi and his Spiritual Regeneration Movement, which taught youth how to practice Transcendental Meditation and gained widespread interest in the U.S. in the 1960s and 1970s—especially after Yogi became the Beatles' personal guru (Iwamura 63). Given this cultural environment, it is not surprising that some of these ideas would make their way into the literature of the time, and Herbert was not the only science fiction writer to draw on Eastern philosophical traditions in his work. In *Trillion Year Spree: The History of Science Fiction* (1986), Brian W. Aldiss and David Wingrove note that it was common for science fiction narratives in the mid-twentieth century to have elements of "strange religions," although this terminology assumes a Western audience unfamiliar with religious traditions other than the Judeo-Christian one (Aldiss and Wingrove 315). Peter Nicholls defines the New Wave science fiction narratives of the 1960s and 1970s in part through their interest in "oriental religions" (Nicholls "New Wave"). Yet although critics have acknowledged the Taoist elements in the work of writers such as Ursula K. Le Guin and Philip K. Dick, there has been little examination of the appropriation of Eastern religious and philosophical traditions by other writers, including Herbert, or the degree to which this may be problematically Orientalist in nature. Betsy Huang is one of the few critics to explore how Dick and Le Guin engaged in cultural appropriation and altered the source ideas to fit their fictions. In "Premodern Orientalist Science Fictions" (2008) she argues that they are guilty of using a "Westernized brand of Dao" in order to advance their critique of reality and progress in the West through their fiction (Huang 25). In finding parallels between Le Guin's "esteem for the chief Daoist tenets of restraint and inaction," which Huang critiques, and Herbert's esteem for Taoist principles shown through the Bene Gesserit, I see that Herbert's series is also problematic in the way it borrows from Eastern tenets in a dehistoricized manner and that there remains a need for the type of detailed critique that Huang offers in order to further investigate the use of Eastern philosophies by science fiction authors, though this is outside of the scope of this study (Huang 29). For the purpose of this thesis, I look at these influences to see how the series, like Le Guin's works, is able to draw on Taoist philosophy to show the limitations of Western thought patterns and thus legitimize the type of embodied agency that female characters have.

The parallels in the texts between the philosophical and religious system of Taoism and the Bene Gesserit Way allow the body to take on an important function from which women who subscribe to this way of thinking can benefit. The name Bene Gesserit Way makes clear there is a link with Taoism, which revolves around the Tao, or Way. From Lao-tsu's *Tao-te-ching* (The Book of the Way and its Power) (circa fourth-third centuries BC) derives the concept of the Tao, an "all-embracing matrix of the patterns by which things happen in the world" (Keown). Attaining knowledge of the Tao leads to an understanding of the interconnectedness of all things, longevity, and even supernatural powers; however, one must first find a balance between the opposing cosmic energies of yin and yang (Keown). This understanding is existential, not intellectual, and found through emulation of nature's rhythms rather than language and thought (Keown). Taoism attends to the "connection between the body and the Tao" because practicing the Tao means observing it with the body, which does not align with Descartes' belief that the mind can be independent of the body (Guangbao 177, 179). There is also an expectation of a "strict regimen of practice" in Taoism (Guangbao 184). By drawing parallels between Taoism and the Bene Gesserit's practices, the *Dune* series enables the depiction of women who harness the capabilities of the body and maintain balance. Another Taoist concept relevant to how the body functions in the world is that of *wu-wei*, or a strategy of nonaction that is a "paradoxical way of allowing the most effective and perfect action to occur" (Moeller vii). One example in the *Tao-te-ching* is the image of the wheel, whose hub seems to be inactive but is required for the wheel to actually function; if one only looks at the hub, it appears passive, but if one looks at the bigger picture, the hub enables activity to occur (Moeller 34). Thus, even if the body appears to be inactive, it may be facilitating action through other means, a concept which opens up more avenues through which to analyze the behaviors of the Bene Gesserit. By acknowledging the importance of the body, Taoist philosophy offers an alternative to the circumscribed position of the body in Cartesian thought and a useful perspective on how Bene Gesserit characters may train and use their bodies to accomplish their goals.

The series also adapts concepts from Indian philosophy and Hinduism, which understand the interconnectedness of body and mind as a way to acquire knowledge through extraordinary perceptions, and thus reinforces the importance of the body and the characters that can maximize its potential. In *Indian Philosophy and the Consequences of Knowledge* (2007), Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad explains the differences between Indian and Western philosophical ideas, arguing that in the former there is no Cartesian dualism because the mind

is considered to be part of the body complex rather than independent (Ram-Prasad 90-91). Ram-Prasad states, "Common to the brahmanical (and Jaina) schools (and most Buddhist ones) is the thought that embodiment is a psychophysical complex, including both the gross body and its apparatus, sensory and mental" (Ram-Prasad 90). This view of embodiment as including the mind reinforces the idea in an earlier work by Sarasvati Chennakesavan, *The Concept of Mind in Indian Philosophy* (1960), that the mind is the instrument that acquires knowledge through active involvement in gaining and coordinating sensations of the body (Chennakesavan 83). In his view, the mind needs the body and both must be kept fit in order acquire knowledge (Chennakesavan 45). Those who have mastered the basic level of understanding may then seek to attain a higher level with super-normal perceptions. In light of a heightened interest in parapsychology and psychokinetic experiments at the time, which was only a few years before *Dune*'s publication, Chennakesavan states that there is evidence to show that this is indeed possible: "While the Westerner says these capacities [like ESP] are to be found in just sporadic chance specimens of humanity, the Yoga says every man can attain these capacities provided he undergoes certain discipline and practises dispassion" (Chennakesavan 112-113). He believes that under the correct conditions the mind can control and concentrate itself enough to exercise seemingly super-normal powers. Although critics of *Dune* have noted the presence of special mental powers, especially in Paul, they tend to skim over the importance of the body and its training in the Bene Gesserit Way as a necessary precursor to extraordinary abilities. Juan Prieto-Pablos is an exception in his recognition that, unlike other superhero characters, Herbert's characters "*grow* their superhuman ability out of a strict control of mind and body gained from the application of mystical philosophies and techniques" (Prieto-Pablos 67). But what superhuman abilities the Bene Gesserit have and how they are related to their mental and physical training is left unexplored, even though the implication is that this training has an important role.

A more obvious nod to embodiment and Eastern philosophy is the use of the Sanskrit terms 'prāṇa' and 'bindu' to name a key aspect of the Bene Gesserit's training, and these help to craft the Sisterhood's philosophy as one that highly values the body's capabilities. In Hinduism, prāṇa is "vital breath," the "force that animates the human body" (W. J. Johnson). Bindu is a "drop or particle" and can signify "highest consciousness," the "material cause of pure creation," or an "object of meditation" (Bowker "Bindu"). These words "provide a vocabulary that describes the order's unique programming of the miniscule" known as prana-bindu (Mack 55). In the *Dune* appendix, prana, alternatively known as prana-musculature, is

defined as “the body's muscles when considered as units for ultimate training” (*Dune* 526). Bindu, or bindu-nervature, is defined as “relating to the human nervous system, especially to nerve training” (*Dune* 514). On the surface, then, prana-bindu appears to be solely about the training of bodily functions, but the Hindu terminology suggests a deeper meaning in which the body is part of a larger picture. In “*Prana* and the Presbyterian Fixation” (1983), Leonard M. Scigaj ties Herbert’s comments in an interview about *prana* as the vital principle of life with its definition in Yogic meditation as the feeling of harmony achieved by balance and right thinking (Scigaj 345). It is about more than moderation, he writes, being “an ideal of self-control based upon a dynamic and necessitous *fusion* of the internal and the external” (Scigaj 349). Drawing a parallel between the life-sustaining properties of *prana* and that of the spice, Scigaj states that this metaphor “destroys the Cartesian illusion of subject/object dissociation in a rigidly empirical universe and reinforces the Yogic tenet that life must be managed *from the inside*” (Scigaj 345). In his interpretation, the concept of prana links the *Dune* series more with Eastern philosophy that does not separate the mind from the body or external things from internal things. Relating this to the Bene Gesserit, whom the reader comes to understand as masters of prana-bindu, it can be argued that their organization is built on a foundation of Eastern philosophical formulations of a holistic mind-body relationship that were gaining popularity in the West in the twentieth century. As Don Riggs writes in “Future and ‘Progress’ in *Foundation* and *Dune*” (1988), “Herbert’s use of such terms as ‘prana-bindu’ implies disciplines of self-control developed by Eastern mystics long before the twentieth century” (Riggs 115). For a person to gain strength through super-normal abilities and focused attention on the body was not out of the realm of possibility, and the series’ inclusion of this idea opens up avenues for a depiction of women who exert agency through their bodies in line with a philosophy that values the body’s capabilities.

Another important influence on the series is that of Eastern-influenced Jungian psychology, whose incorporation of the unconscious serves to critique the Western emphasis on rationality and the ‘masculine’ and open space for ‘feminine’ elements to be revalued. Carl Jung himself was influenced by Eastern ideas from Taoism and Indian philosophy as he attempted to differentiate himself from his mentor, Sigmund Freud, in the early twentieth century (Coward 477-478). The emphasis on balance and interdependence in Taoism—“the idea of a middle way between the opposites” of introvert and extrovert personality types—attracted him (Coward 478). He took on the task of adapting Eastern concepts to be more palatable to a Western audience that he believed was too focused on rational thought to see

the potential in other ways of thinking (Coward 486). This resulted in him valuing aspects such as the unconscious and led to his theory of the collective unconscious and its archetypes that operate at a level imperceptible to human consciousness. Because he "conceived of the unconscious as 'feminine' in general," his theory of the psyche "revalue[d] some qualities, in particular those he labeled as 'feminine,' which he felt had become recessive in culture as well as in individuals" (Wehr 116; Lauter and Rupprecht 5). Thus, part of Jung's contribution to understanding the human lies in his challenging of "the subject/object split and the delusion of 'pure objectivity' characteristic of Western philosophical dualism" (Wehr 125). His understanding of individuals to be in a lifelong process of balancing attributes of their psychic life offers a more holistic view of the human than Western thought.

In the *Dune* series, the influence of Jungian thought manifests in the attention given to the unconscious and archetypes, which other scholars have analyzed (see McLean, Palumbo, and McNelly and O'Reilly). In Timothy O'Reilly's brief biographical explanation for Herbert's pursuit of Jungian ideas, he explains that Herbert became interested in Jungian and Freudian concepts through his friendship with psychologists Ralph and Irene Slattery. Irene studied directly under Jung in Europe in the 1930s and shared her notes with Herbert, giving him a unique opportunity to gain second-hand knowledge of Jung's teachings (O'Reilly 18; B. Herbert 71-72). Out of this likely came Herbert's interest in biofeedback, which was briefly used by Jung, and his "vision of the holism of human awareness—physical, psychological and mental—which has only just begun to come into its own today" (O'Reilly 36). As in Herbert's story "The Priests of Psi" (1960), the *Dune* series includes an organization (the Bene Gesserit) with an "emphasis on Eastern-style self-discipline," which involves more attention to the interdependence of mind and body (O'Reilly 96). The inclusion of Jungian concepts thus offers a way to speculate on the potential value of holistic thinking for humans once they accept that rationality has its limits.

However, Jung still propagated dualistic thinking through his categorization of ideas into opposites, and the problematic nature of some of his theories in relation to the characterization of women can be seen in the *Dune* series. Although he discusses the unconscious as an important aspect of the human experience, he still tends to place it "on the downside of a seesaw, with consciousness, rationality, and masculinity on the up end" (Pratt 5-6). He also gives the impression in his work that "women and the feminine represent the embodied side of being human" (Wehr 112). Therefore, Jung continues in the Cartesian tradition by associating men with certain aspects and women with others and implying that

'masculine' elements are superior, which makes some aspects of his theories problematic from a feminist perspective. The idea that the feminine side of the psyche is weaker, for example, surfaces in the novels as an explanation for critical plot points: the Bene Gesserit cannot look into their masculine past because they are terrorized by it, so they are breeding for a male who will be able to look into both feminine and masculine pasts; and Ghanima says that her twin, Leto II, was always the stronger one of them and thus is the one to take on the burden of becoming the prescient God Emperor. In "An Epic Impression: Suspense and Prophetic Conventions in the Classical Epics and Frank Herbert's *Dune*" (1984), Robert Cirasa discusses this issue in his analysis of Paul's expanded abilities, noting that the Bene Gesserit's experiences are different because they are bound by the limits of the "inaccessible male principle," alluding to Jungian theory (Cirasa 209). Miriam Youngerman Miller raises it as a critique of the limitations of the Bene Gesserit when she writes that the "Kwisatz Haderach will not merely add access to the male past, but will in fact be able to reach the consciousness of both male and female ancestors" (M. Miller 183). Acknowledging that this inequality exists does not mean having to overlook the other areas in which women have agency, though. To look at an example from feminist science fiction, Ursula Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* draws on Taoist influences and "reified masculine and feminine principles pervade the text," yet her work is acknowledged as offering a valuable perspective on gender issues in other ways (Lothian 384). It is in Jung's critique of the overemphasis on rationality that neglects the unconscious that his theory is valuable, rather than in his adherence to a dualism that prioritizes the masculine over the feminine.

A crucial point to make is that none of the Eastern traditions that Herbert draws upon are necessarily feminist and in fact may contain dualistic notions about gender roles that seemingly relegate women to a lesser status, as discussed with Jungian theories. Taoism, for example, lacks a concept of gender equality: "Just as water occupies the lower position, so does femininity—and this is certainly to be understood not only socially, but also sexually" (Moeller 38). There is no equality when femininity and females maintain a lower standing than masculinity and males. But as with the concept of *wu-wei*, although the female seems to be in a passive position, by receiving the energy of the male above, the "female overcomes the male" and gains strength (Moeller 38). The analogy between femininity and water in Taoist thought can thus be seen as a way of showing the strength in their means of operation. Although both are considered soft, they can overcome the hard like when water reshapes mountains by carving paths in them (Moeller 40). As Ellwood explains it, Taoism is "the way

of water that seeks the downward course of least resistance yet in time wears away the hardest rock" (Ellwood 195). Paradoxically, then, the female may actually be stronger than the male despite seeming more passive or less agential. A viewpoint such as this allows space for the idea that there are multiple ways of changing one's environment, some of which are not obvious if one is only looking for the most immediate and active way. For example, the Bene Gesserit's breeding program discussed in Chapter 3 is described as having taken place over many generations, but this appears to be the necessary timeframe for them to produce their desired result. This kind of perspective represents an alternative to Western thought that enables the reader of the *Dune* series to better understand the ways in which the Bene Gesserit operate, even though it may involve an element of dualism that seemingly consigns women to a lesser status.

## The Foundation of Bene Gesserit Skills

I now turn to an analysis of the Bene Gesserit's skills in light of the above philosophies and how an understanding of the human as situated in the body—depicted as a vital component of their being instead of a hindrance—affords these characters a high degree of embodied agency. I do not argue that there is an absence of dualism in the series but rather that the Bene Gesserit are characterized as more willing than others, such as the Mentats, to seek a balance between the mind and body such that there is room for a productive synergy between them. I show how the skills of the Bene Gesserit appear to increase throughout the series, which builds a picture for the reader of women whose abilities are virtually limitless and provide them with a substantial degree of bodily autonomy and the ability to actively control their environment.

### Perception

A close examination of the Bene Gesserit reveals that the basis of their training appears to be the development of a capacity for acute sensory perception, which enables them to scan their environment and register the smallest details in body language as a regular part of their routine. Because such perceptive abilities are established early in *Dune*, this both obviates the need for further explanations of other related skills and demonstrates to the reader that the Bene Gesserit are fully capable of analyzing their surroundings and actively determining their course of action. The opening scene of *Dune* has Paul as the first one to give an indication of these skills, taught to him by his Bene Gesserit mother. He studies "the hint of tension in her shoulders" which someone else not trained in the "minutiae of

observation" might have missed (*Dune* 5). The choice of words like 'hint' and 'minutiae' reveals that the perception extends beyond the normal range of human awareness. When he meets Reverend Mother Mohiam, she studies him "in one gestalten flicker," which enables her to note his genetic similarities to his parents (*Dune* 6). The Bene Gesserit thus "depend upon highly developed *gestalt* awareness" to aid in "their reading of minute signals" (D. Miller 20). The term gestalt means that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts; this idea forms the basis of the school of gestalt psychology, associated with Jung's work, wherein humans are believed to experience things as a whole rather than as isolated pieces (Seel 1366). The use of the term gestalt marks the Bene Gesserit's ability as a psychological phenomenon—even though other characters may regard it as a magical one—and indicates their ability to make conclusions based on sensory data. By showing a character like Jessica relying on her skills to assess danger in new, potentially hostile situations, the series establishes the significance of the Bene Gesserit's perception as a part of their skillset. In a dinner banquet scene that occurs shortly after the Atreides arrive on Dune, Jessica follows and interprets the conversation among various parties "with Bene Gesserit intensity" (*Dune* 136). She uses her training in "voice inflection and speech pattern" to realize that a Guild Bank representative is actually working for the Atreides' enemy, the Harkonnen (*Dune* 136). She later hears and sees his nervous reactions to a question by Imperial Planetologist Liet Kynes and knows that he is terrified of Kynes, which adds to her understanding of the political situation in her new environment. Similarly, she registers a stillsuit manufacturer's reactions and decides to mention him to the head of Atreides security, Thufir Hawat, because she realizes the manufacturer "was a fearful little climber and could be bought" (*Dune* 145). The reader can clearly see that Jessica's perceptive skills give her a political advantage over the other parties at the table. Later, in her encounter with Stilgar's Fremen tribe in the desert, her skills show her capable of preparing in advance for a violent altercation because she is constantly analyzing the situation with an additional level of detail. With Mohiam and Jessica having established the importance of perception as part of the Bene Gesserit's skill set, instances of other Bene Gesserit-trained characters using similar perceptive abilities throughout the series reinforce that the cultivation of these skills is a foundational part of their training.

By the later novels, the Bene Gesserit's ability to read even the notoriously secretive members of the Tleilaxu becomes key to their outmaneuvering one of their greatest rivals, showing that their perceptive skills are a critical component of their agency in a hostile world.

In Reverend Mother Odrade's encounter with Tleilaxu Master Waff in *Heretics of Dune*, she uses a combination of sensory perception and educated guesses to uncover part of the Tleilaxu's plan to control the universe. Although to him "[s]he was reading his mind!" she is actually reading the betrayals of his body, like when the "reek of his pheromones announced his deepest fears" (*HD* 211, 206). Her capacity to read and register others thus allows her to analyze him and pass on her findings to the Sisterhood. Indeed, her astute analysis of his behavior ultimately leads to the Bene Gesserit uncovering the prized secret of the Tleilaxu's axolotl tanks, which becomes vital to their survival at the end of the series when they use the tanks to grow their own gholas (*HD* 361). In the case of the Tleilaxu's Face Dancer pawns, the Bene Gesserit are the only ones in the Imperium capable of detecting their disguises. Because they maintain a constant level of physical and mental alertness, the Bene Gesserit can detect when a Face Dancer has been substituted for someone else and then use that information to thwart the Tleilaxu's plot. An extended memory of Miles Teg under the tutelage of his Bene Gesserit mother, Janet Roxbrough-Teg, demonstrates this capability in action, showing the reader that Janet is able to detect Face Dancers by virtue of her skills in discovering "the identifiable incongruities that betrayed a Face Dancer to trained eyes and ears" (*HD* 68). Thus, although the new Face Dancers are supposed to be "extremely difficult to detect," constituting a test of Bene Gesserit capabilities by the Tleilaxu, the Bene Gesserit are still able to rely on their expertly trained perceptive abilities to accomplish the task of detection, thus countering the Tleilaxu's infiltration plans (*HD* 153). The series positions the Bene Gesserit's abilities in perception as the means by which they actively control their surroundings rather than passively exist in them, outmaneuver their enemies even in challenging circumstances, and thus shape history themselves rather than succumb to their enemies' plans.

Although the exact nature of how the Bene Gesserit are able to be so perceptive remains unexplained, I interpret their sensory perception as a combination of their physical and mental abilities which shows the body to be an integral part of women's activity. In this view, their eyes and other sensory organs register information that their mind then processes and relates to their existing knowledge, and they then prepare their body if necessary to react to potential threats. I argue that they cannot be considered passive even if they appear so to other characters because they are not merely existing in their environment but actively perceiving and responding to it. Even though such perception is unlikely to lead to accurate conclusions all of the time, because errors are not focused on in the novels, the Bene

Gesserit's abilities appear very reliable and thus women appear to be masters of sensory perception which gives them an advantage over other characters. The body is depicted as a help instead of a hindrance and an active part of their being in the world, which helps to refute the idea that the bodily senses are a distraction from mental activity. To Descartes, the body is "the organ of the deceptive senses" and the senses can mislead one from 'true knowledge' (Bordo 94). But the Bene Gesserit's senses are shown to be precisely what help them explore and analyze the many different situations to which they must react. Furthermore, their acute perception is important as it relates to their other abilities, for as O'Reilly states, the Bene Gesserit's "conquest of perception is the key to both their 'prana-bindu' training in Yogic inner control and their observational skills," which I discuss below (O'Reilly 61).

**Prana-Bindu**

Building on the affordances of the Bene Gesserit's skills in perception is their prana-bindu training, which positions the body both as an organ of agency and a substance driven by instinct that needs to be controlled. Although in some ways this reinforces a dualism wherein the mind is superior, it also reinforces the necessity of the body in unlocking one's agential potential. As stated previously, prana-bindu refers to the body's muscles and nerves, and prana-bindu training is a large part of following the Bene Gesserit Way. The first mention of the terms comes when Jessica and Paul are in the desert and encounter a dangerous sandslide. After he realizes that his mother has been buried in the sand, Paul panics and forgets his training in his desperation to find her, "scrambling[,] digging, throwing sand like a wild man" and crying out for her (*Dune* 249). Then he calms himself, understanding that she has a little time because "[s]he'll compose herself in bindu suspension to reduce her oxygen needs" (*Dune* 249). Bindu may be an unfamiliar term to the reader, but in this context it is clearly related to a person being able to initiate a type of bodily hibernation in order to require less air. Mastery of the breath is an essential component of many meditation practices, especially yoga in the Indian philosophical tradition, and the implication that Jessica can easily control her breath indicates that the Bene Gesserit possess a fine degree of control over this particular bodily function (Bowker "Breath"). After Paul successfully pulls her out and speaks the word to wake her up, she is remarkably composed and shows no sign of fear. It is not until the end of the chapter that the reader learns more about what prana-bindu lessons involve, when Jessica chides Paul on his earlier panic:

> You know your mind and bindu-nervature perhaps better than I do, but you've much yet to learn about your body's prana-musculature. The body does things of itself sometimes, Paul, and I can teach you about this. You must learn to control every muscle, every fiber of your body. You need review of the hands. We'll start with finger muscles, palm tendons, and tip sensitivity. (*Dune* 254)

Here she speaks of the body as something that can act without a person's consciously directing it—acting on instinct—and that this is undesirable; what the Bene Gesserit aim at is active, conscious control of the body in order to avoid panicked responses to crises. This philosophy is akin to Descartes' in that it distinguishes between a body that reacts instinctively and one that is controlled by the mind. Although this may seem to be a view of the body as an obstacle, it is the untrained body that Jessica sees as an obstacle to her son's control and ability to manage a tense situation. She implies that once he completes his prana-bindu training, the body will be an asset. The entire chapter serves to position Jessica as the master of her body, able to survive being buried in a landslide because she can regulate it appropriately, and Paul as her disciple, still acting impulsively and requiring further training. The text implies that the body can only be a means for agency when it is properly trained, and that the Bene Gesserit can maintain a high degree of autonomy because they have unlocked a precise level of bodily control via their prana-bindu training.

As new abilities of the Bene Gesserit appear over the course of the series, the reader sees that women are able to extend bodily control into a variety of areas beyond those that Jessica discusses, which suggests that the body is not a hindrance to women who have such precise control over its functioning. Prana-bindu abilities in later novels include adjusting bloodflow during external changes in temperature (*HD* 416), regulating perspiration while sleeping so as to avoid "unnecessary excesses" (*CHA* 25), changing circadian rhythms when moving between planets or workshifts (*CHA* 103), and regulating internal metabolic chemistry (*CHA* 309). With such examples, the series is effective in showing the Bene Gesserit Way to be "an intensive, scientific regimen of physical and mental exercises that grant them complete control over physiological processes" without spending narrative space on elaborate descriptions of how it works (Mack 43). Hints from earlier novels build on each other such that newly-described Bene Gesserit abilities remain congruent with what the reader knows of the women's bodily control yet make it appear like their abilities are limitless, extending control over myriad internal, automatic processes of the body so that women can actively adapt to a range of changing conditions.

The series implies that the Bene Gesserit's prana-bindu training and aversion to instinct are the means by which women are able to embrace the affordances of the body and better cultivate a synergy between the body and the mind. As discussed earlier in the case of Paul's panicked reaction, the Bene Gesserit appear to view instinct negatively because it prompts the body to react subconsciously before the mind can properly process information. This view is reflective of the series' inclusion of principles from general semantics, discussed in more depth in Chapter 4, one of which is that all humans are susceptible to acting before they have given sufficient thought to their behavior, and that this tendency has contributed to great catastrophes like wars and should be avoided. In one of the early memorable scenes in *Dune*, the reader sees Paul undergoing the Bene Gesserit's gom jabbar test designed to determine if he is human, that is, if he can override his animal instincts and keep his hand in the box of pain upon fear of death if he removes it. To help calm himself, he recites the Bene Gesserit's Litany against Fear, which begins "*I must not fear. Fear is the mind-killer*" (*Dune* 8). The reoccurrence of this litany throughout the series emphasizes the importance of setting aside instinctual fear in order to be able to think clearly and process one's situation; however, it complicates the treatment of the relationship between the mind and the body because, on the one hand, it shows the body to be bound by instinct that must be overridden by the mind, but on the other hand, it shows that the body becomes better able to act in a purposeful way when a person is not driven by instinctual behavior. In seeing how Paul handles this experience, the reader is able to see an aspect of this conflict as Paul withstands his body's pain signals and resists the urge to flee. It is only after Paul passes the test that the administrator, Reverend Mother Mohiam, reveals its secret: that the pain is engineered through nerve induction so does not actually injure the hand. As Paul is still reeling from the painful experience, Mohiam is unsympathetic, confident in the ability of humans to rise above their animal nature—"'Pain,' she sniffed. 'A human can override any nerve in the body'" (*Dune* 10). Her demeanor suggests a high degree of confidence on the part of the Bene Gesserit to control their nerves such that even pain is not a problem for them. They are characterized as having moved past learning "tainted by instinct" which was aided by discovery of the "concept of total muscle/nerve training" (*DM* 113). The ability to pass the gom jabbar test is but one graphic demonstration of their "fantastic feats of psychological and physiological control" that are possible once they master their unconscious reflexes (O'Reilly 46). Even Leto II, later the God Emperor, is described as being laid low in his youth by Jessica's forcing him to submit to a human gom jabbar test in order to ensure he has "conscious-level instincts" (*CHI* 291). It is possible to view the Bene Gesserit's aversion to

instincts as replicating the aversion in dualistic thought to the body and its associated processes, like instinctive reactions. However, a reading that takes into account all of the abilities that their bodies afford them suggests instead that their aversion to instinct should be viewed as an acknowledgement of the obstacle that instinctive behavior creates to achieving a synergy between the mind and the body. A body driven by instinct, rather than a woman's conscious control, is less likely to enable her to actively react to her situation and think carefully before acting. Thus, the Bene Gesserit's training of the body ensures that it is an advantage instead of a hindrance and that instincts do not jeopardize their autonomy.

Furthermore, the characterization of prana-bindu training and the abilities it enables is key to the series' development of a more holistic understanding of how the mind and body work together that emphasizes holistic aspects of Taoist thought over the dualism found in Cartesian thought. This becomes clear in *Children of Dune* in scenes when Jessica is training Farad'n of House Corrino in the Bene Gesserit Way. First, Jessica tells him that he will have to learn the art of patience and start with basic prana-bindu exercises for his legs, arms, and breathing before moving on to hands and fingers. She then proceeds to explain the importance of the exercises:

> To learn patience in the Bene Gesserit Way, you must begin by recognizing the essential, raw instability of our universe. We call nature—meaning this totality in all of its manifestations—the Ultimate Non-Absolute. To free your vision and permit you to recognize this conditional nature's changing ways, you will hold your two hands at arm's length in front of you. (*CHI* 250-251)

The description of this lesson shows her linking the ability to learn patience both with a mental understanding of the constantly changing nature of the universe and a physical ability to control the body. For the reader unfamiliar with Taoist philosophy, Jessica appears as a master figure who attempts to bring enhanced awareness to her pupil, in the process giving more clues to how prana-bindu works. The text uses her dialogue as a teacher to depict her attempt at expanding Farad'n's limited viewpoint to make him see that every system is relative, that he will "be astonished at what you can make your body and your senses do" (*CHI* 252). As the reader sees him learning that his mind controls his reality and that he can demand that his hands appear old and then young again, the scene establishes the beginnings of the synergistic relationship of prana-bindu balance that makes the Bene Gesserit so skilled. The connection with Taoism is first evident in the name of the "Ultimate Non-Absolute," a description of nature which references the Tao, which is "the primordial root of all beings and creatures" yet something that is "invisible, inaudible, subtle, formless, infinite, vague, [and]

mysterious" (Xiaogan 48). As shown through Jessica's teaching, the Bene Gesserit's view is that change is an important aspect of this nature, and thus the first lesson that Farad'n must learn is that nothing is absolute or fixed. In the focus on mastering the body to attain a better understanding of the world and oneself, Jessica's instructions reflect the Taoist view that "human nature is to be understood as the vitality that flows throughout the body and that could be cultivated in a variety of ways" including exercise, meditation, or other rituals (J. Miller 54). When someone cultivates oneself in these ways, they are also cultivating the reality of the Tao (J. Miller 55). The text depicts Jessica's attempt to show Farad'n how to train his body so he can access a more expansive vision of the world, and although she does not mention the Tao, the synergy she hints at is based on a Taoist understanding of the interrelation between mind and body. In Taoism, there is not a divide between the metaphysical and the physical—the Tao connects everything (Xiaogan 48). In the Bene Gesserit Way, the body is something to be controlled, but in turn the ability to manipulate one's senses enables the mind to take on a new perspective and worldview, thus reinforcing the interconnectedness of mind and body. The text does not show Jessica telling Farad'n to distance himself from his body or his senses to obtain some kind of objective view of reality because this would not fit with an understanding of the mind and body as reinforcing one another. The series suggests the Bene Gesserit's feats are only possible because they value the body's role in the cultivation of a mind-body synergy. Thus, through these scenes the reader gains a better understanding of the mysteries of Bene Gesserit training as influenced by Taoist thought and how it sets aside notions of objectivity and dualisms in the Western philosophical tradition.

The significance of the depiction of the Bene Gesserit's mind-body synergy is that the series elevates the body from its low status in dualistic thought to the status of being an integral part of the human experience, and it links this synergy with women's development of a large number of skills that provides them with a high degree of embodied agency. They move about their environment actively perceiving and registering information, they constantly maintain autonomy over themselves, even while asleep, and they use their skills to take precautionary measures against potential enemies and avoid a life lived according to instincts rather than conscious control. Those who understand and encourage this synergistic relationship, then, are in an advantageous position compared to other characters. When Murbella—an Honored Matre training as a Bene Gesserit—asks Duncan Idaho why the Sisterhood mixes mental and physical teaching, he answers, "Mind and body reinforce each

other" (*CHA* 254). But she sees it a little differently, as "pressures locking one to the other" (*CHA* 254). Both conceptualizations, though, emphasize the value in a harmonious relationship between mind and body. This conversation in the final novel is a rare moment where it is explicit that the Bene Gesserit are concerned with the connection between mind and body, which is reflective of the influence of Eastern philosophies in their characterization. Moving away from the mind/body dualism, active perception and prana-bindu control of the body offer a more holistic understanding of the human that then enables female characters to be agential as embodied beings.

**Hand-to-Hand Combat**

Turning to an examination of the Bene Gesserit's specific ability to engage in hand-to-hand combat, I argue that this presents a clear example of the embodied agency that their training in perception and prana-bindu affords them. In the novels, their combat methods appear to be a natural extension of their prana-bindu training. But consistent with the concealment that critic C. N. Manlove describes as a motif in the series, the characterization of the Bene Gesserit's combat skills is only achieved through occasional hints so that the reader is left to imagine how they are possible based on an understanding of the group's other bodily feats. In all of the six *Dune* novels, there are relatively few scenes of Bene Gesserit combat; the women appear to prefer to negotiate and preserve their abilities for cases of extreme need, lest they lose the aura of mystery that serves to obscure their political motives. In the scenes where they do fight, there are usually only a few sentences of description. As the first illustration of the capabilities of the Bene Gesserit, Jessica's confrontation with Stilgar in *Dune* serves to show her skills in both tactics and combat:

> Jessica's motion started as a slumping, deceptive faint to the ground. It was the obvious thing for a weak outworlder to do, and the obvious slows an opponent's reactions. […] She shifted as she saw his right shoulder drop to bring a weapon within the folds of his robe to bear on her new position. A turn, a slash of her arm, a whirling of mingled robes, and she was against the rocks with the man helpless in front of her. (*Dune* 281)

The language clearly marks Jessica as subversive for playing on her opponent's preconceived notions in order to gain the advantage: her "slumping, deceptive faint" that matches what should be "obvious" behavior for an offworlder like herself gives her the leverage she needs to disarm him. In the scene it is she who determines the outcome of the encounter by gaining an advantage over Stilgar, and her success becomes important for setting in motion the series of events that will lead to the Atreides taking control of the Imperium. The image created is

one of a triumphant woman, not a weak, helpless victim: her seemingly passive body suddenly becomes a strong, active one, turning and slashing, and the man's is helpless, shielding hers from retaliation from his companions. The impression is that Bene Gesserit women move quickly to subdue an enemy, using their body strategically in the blink of an eye. Since the reader has already seen Jessica capably handle her body in previous scenes, her combat skills are not a surprise but appear to be yet another component of her prana-bindu training that gives her precise control over her muscles.

In the last two books, there is an even greater emphasis on the body as the Bene Gesserit's primary weapon in combat, which reinforces the idea that embodiment is a crucial component of the Bene Gesserit's agency. In scenes where the Bene Gesserit engage in violent encounters with their opponents, the Tleilaxu and Honored Matres, they continue to find success in hand-to-hand combat, showing the reader that their bodies are more than capable of handling new threats. Odrade demonstrates her lightning-speed and precision in choosing how to neutralize Tleilaxu Master Waff, and she is the one slashing, serving blows, and breaking his bones, while his defense has already missed its mark and left her unscathed (*HD* 209). Waff's main reaction other than pain is awe for her abilities, which leads the reader to also be awed by Bene Gesserit speed and strength. In a similarly violent exchange, in Lucilla's fight with an Honored Matre, she "folded her body sideways, barely avoiding the woman's suddenly outthrust foot, and countered with a standard Bene Gesserit sabard that dumped the young woman on her back doubled up where the blow had caught her in the abdomen (*HD* 419). Here, the description of Lucilla's body movements along with the repeated mention of the Honored Matre's body parts—foot, back, abdomen—conveys an image of two women fighting with no need for other objects, and the description of the Bene Gesserit move as standard characterizes it as a normal part of their training in combat. This is confirmed by other passages that indicate that Reverend Mothers especially "tend not to carry visible weapons" because they already have "tricks of violence that few humans ever suspected" (*CHA* 371, *HD* 128). The few scenes of combat in the series show that the prana-bindu training helps the Bene Gesserit to move and react and turn their body into their primary weapon, thus making the body essential in their ability to successfully counter their enemies and maintain their autonomy.

The Bene Gesserit's fighting skills—though only briefly described—provide a straightforward refutation of the dualism that associates women with passivity and weakness. As discussed earlier, in *The Second Sex* Beauvoir argues that gendered socializations lead to

the ill-informed idea that women are naturally more passive and weak than men, that the female body should not or could not undertake the same activities as the male body. Relevant to the discussion of the Bene Gesserit's combat skills is her example of the early socialization of girls that restricts them in regards to the physical act of fighting. With the boy, she says, "he feels his body as a means for dominating nature and as a weapon for fighting; he takes pride in his muscles as in his sex; […] at the same time he absorbs the severe lessons of violence" (Beauvoir 294). But for the girl, "to develop grace she must repress her spontaneous movements; she is told not to act like a would-be boy, she is forbidden violent exercises, she is not allowed to fight" (Beauvoir 296). In this view, both males and females are embodied but understand and use their bodies differently. In the characterization of the Bene Gesserit as masters of a type of martial-arts fighting, then, the *Dune* series showcases women who stand in direct contrast to the woman in Beauvoir's example who is socialized to be graceful and passive. Its representation of women is one of strong, skilled fighters who continually emerge victorious and demonstrate their control in hostile situations. They have been trained to regard their body as fully capable of fighting when necessary, and how they come to be this way will be discussed in further detail in Chapter 5.

Although the Bene Gesserit show the body to be a means for female characters to be agential, there may still be an aversion to aggression that preserves sexual inequality in this regard. On the one hand, the Bene Gesserit's skills are shown to be even more advanced than those of the most feared soldiers in the Imperium, the Emperor's Sardaukar. The appendix in *Dune* defines them as men whose "military training emphasized ruthlessness and a near-suicidal disregard for personal safety. They were taught from infancy to use cruelty as a standard weapon, weakening opponents with terror […] and their cunning abilities at in-fighting were reputed to approach those of a Bene Gesserit adept" (*Dune* 528). When even these soldiers are lacking in comparison to Bene Gesserit women, women and their bodies cannot be accused of passivity or weakness. It is notable, though, that the Bene Gesserit appear to prefer to disable rather than eliminate their enemies, whereas men like the Sardaukar soldiers and Paul are shown killing others. Although there are not enough examples of Bene Gesserit engaged in combat in the series to draw definitive conclusions from these observations, it may reflect a distinction between women and men which considers women to be less susceptible to having a level of aggression that involves killing others, which may make them seem less capable in combat than men.

**Survival of the Spice Agony**

Although the Bene Gesserit's combat skills are characterized as being effective, the most significant example of their embodied agency is their survival of the spice agony, a complex process which tests the limits of their prana-bindu training and demonstrates how their mind-body synergy enables them to expand their psyche to encompass their female ancestors. The spice agony is the experience that the Bene Gesserit must survive in order to achieve the preeminent status of Reverend Mother, making it a type of sophisticated initiation rite. A Bene Gesserit woman must neutralize the poison in a spice overdose while absorbing the onslaught of all of the memories of her female ancestors, known as Other Memory (which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5). The body is the crucial site for this ordeal, just as it is for the gom jabbar test, and exerting it in this manner appears to be the only way the Bene Gesserit know how to open themselves up to the ancestral Other Memory. Although there is also a mystical aspect of Other Memory that seems to go beyond the sphere of the mind and body—based on the Jungian concept of the collective unconscious—the spice agony itself remains an arduous task requiring a syncing of physical and mental elements for success. Importantly, it is a trained body that can survive, for a woman must be able to endure intense physical agony that will open her unconscious and force her to direct her mind toward receiving the memories of the women who have gone before her. Only two scenes exist in the series showing a woman undergoing this process, one in the first novel and one in the last, and I focus on the one with Jessica because it provides a more detailed look at the intense nature of the experience that requires her active participation to survive.

The description of Jessica's spice agony characterizes the trained body as playing an important role in her experience, even though her mental workings are what enable her to complete her task. After ingesting what the Fremen call the Water of Life—their equivalent of the spice poison that is used by the Bene Gesserit—Jessica immediately begins down a challenging path of greater physical and mental awareness:

> Every fiber of her body accepted the fact that something profound had happened to it. She felt that she was a conscious mote, smaller than any subatomic particle, yet capable of motion and of sensing her surroundings. […] [S]he realized she had become aware of a psychokinesthetic extension of herself. She was the mote, yet not the mote. (*Dune* 354)

Although she is accustomed to constantly processing sensory data from her surroundings, here she experiences a unique sensation of shrinking to the level of a microscopic particle and yet still being fully aware of her environment. Thus, this process is not merely a mental

exercise but one where she experiences her own body from the inside in order to be able to analyze the chemical makeup of the poison and save herself. She pairs her new awareness at a micro-level and psychokinesthetic ability—moving things with the mind— with her knowledge of chemistry to reconfigure the molecules and initiate a catalytic reaction:

> Dancing particles. She began recognizing familiar structures, atomic linkages: a carbon atom here, helical wavering…a glucose molecule. An entire chain of molecules confronted her, and she recognized a protein…a methyl-protein configuration.
>
> *Ah-h-h!*
>
> It was a soundless mental sigh within her as she saw the nature of the poison. With her psychokinesthetic probing, she moved into it, shifted an oxygen mote, allowed another carbon mote to link, reattached a linkage of oxygen…hydrogen. The change spread… (*Dune* 355)

This passage shows the reader the necessity of Jessica's Bene Gesserit training to her survival: she brings her extraordinary perception of minutiae to bear as she analyzes the molecules and even on a micro-level maintains a mind-body synergy wherein she takes in sensory information and processes it, discovers the poisonous component, determines how to rearrange everything in order to neutralize the poison, and then uses her mind to shift elements to start a chain reaction. What is noteworthy about this scene in terms of mind-body synergy is that even though the focus is on Jessica's new ability, the body still plays an integral role in her experience. The use of the term 'psychokinesthetic' in *Dune* makes explicit a connection with parapsychology, a field that grew in popularity in the U.S. in the twentieth century after Joseph Banks Rhine's experiments at Duke University's Parapsychology Laboratory, which tested for extrasensory perception and psychokinesis (Samuel 36). So-called 'psi' abilities appear in many science fiction narratives, including in feminist science fiction novels like *The Wanderground*, which will be discussed in a later section.[11] Presumably, one of the benefits of psychokinesis is that it does away with the necessity of the body in the accomplishment of a task. But the text emphasizes the embodied nature of the spice agony through the inclusion of descriptions of Jessica's sensory experiences. She first smells the poisonous liquid and tastes "the most miniscule sip" on her tongue, then a "great gulp of the stuff surge[s] into Jessica's mouth" and she swallows it, "tast[ing] the sack's contents in her nostrils, in the roof of her mouth, in her cheeks, in her eyes" (*Dune* 353-354). As the reader visualizes the sensations spreading throughout Jessica's

[11] The popularity of psi in science fiction is partly attributed to *Analog* editor John W. Campbell, who himself was one of Rhine's volunteer subjects and encouraged writers to explore the applications of ESP in their stories (Enns 509).

head, they can imagine what it might feel like to be overwhelmed by an unfamiliar, bitter taste from a foreign drink. After Jessica neutralizes the poison, she is aware of the sack being "touched to her mouth" again, but this time "collecting a drop of moisture" (*Dune* 355). Then a dry hand touches her neck and she is catapulted into a connection with the dying Fremen Reverend Mother. Bodily sensations are essential to this scene and show that the process of the spice agony is both a mentally and physically taxing one, with the reminders in the text of Jessica's bodily participation reinforcing the embodied nature of the experience.

The implication that a synergy of mental and physical effort and control is required for the Bene Gesserit to pass through the spice agony to achieve the goal of Reverend Motherhood contributes to the sense that they must find a balance between the mind and the body and that the agony is a reliable test of their training. In one sense, they must overcome the body's sensations of pain, seemingly distancing themselves from the body and relying on the mind in a way that is reminiscent of one interpretation of Descartes' views on the mind-body split. However, the intense physicality of the experience and the language describing Murbella's spice agony in *Heretics of Dune* suggests to the reader that it links more with Eastern holistic traditions than the Western Cartesian one, for a Bene Gesserit woman explains that "We achieve an exalted form of s'tori, total. It involves every cell" (*HD* 147). Satori is a "Zen term for the experience of awakening or enlightenment" (Bowker "Satori"). Use of this term and the Bene Gesserit's explanation that it extends to all parts of the body, down to each cell, signals to the reader that the body is indeed intimately involved in the transformative process, and just as satori "is said to be unexplainable, indescribable, and unintelligible to reason and logic," so the spice agony is never completely explained (Doniger 972). It is significant that the series shows that the process of enlightenment is not achieved through "quiet sitting" in meditative contemplation or a solely mental exercise but rather by pushing the body to its limits, which the Bene Gesserit are equipped to handle only because of their prior training in prana-bindu control (Doniger 972). Thus, although there are only two examples, the women's experiences and the reverence that is accorded them and other Bene Gesserit upon completion—hence the term Reverend Mother—demonstrate that the agony is an adequate test of their training.

The depiction of women surviving the spice agony also contributes to the representation of women as agential by showing the reader how their active participation enables them to not only survive but thrive as Reverend Mothers in control of shaping history. Although the series shows that there are external pressures on both Jessica and

Murbella to undergo the spice agony, the reader can see that ultimately they make the choice and accept the consequences. Jessica chooses to undergo it in order to secure safety among the Fremen, and Murbella wants to know what it is like to become a Reverend Mother after all of her Bene Gesserit training. During the agony they are active participants and exercise control over their material reality, namely their body's reaction to the poison, which enables them to survive and gain access to their female ancestral memory, discussed in more detail in Chapter 5. Yet what becomes clear in the narrative is that surviving the agony means becoming a Reverend Mother, with the accompanying status and respect that ensures that they have more opportunities to take an active role in shaping history. For Jessica, this means assuming the role of a Fremen Reverend Mother, carrying the tribe's history, and advising other Fremen leaders in important decisions. For Murbella, this entails taking over the leadership of the Sisterhood after Odrade's death and beginning the process of merging the Honored Matres and Bene Gesserit. Although both women are depicted as agential before undergoing the agony, the scenes of them overcoming the challenge and gaining more influence add to their characterization as agential women.

## The Matter of Prescience

However, although the series shows the Bene Gesserit using the spice agony to become Reverend Mothers with enhanced awareness of ancestral memories, it does not show them gaining the abilities in prescience that male characters like Paul do when they are exposed to large doses of spice. Thus, even though the novels overall are largely successful at dismissing the idea that sexual difference limits the capacity of the female body to be agential, they may undermine this stance by showing how men are able to go one degree further and attain prescience. Several critics raise the point that Paul's ability to see the future makes him a more powerful figure than any of the Bene Gesserit. Adam Roberts argues that "there is something a woman lacks that this man has, something that will empower him to do things that a woman cannot do" (A. Roberts *Science* 46). M. Miller agrees, saying that the Kwisatz Haderach "is not just a male counterpart of the Reverend Mothers, sharing their limitations, but will have significantly greater power, the ability to see human experience in its totality" (M. Miller 183). David Higgins describes Paul as a "genetic superman who is 'super' because he can do what powerful men do better than the powerful women can" (Higgins "Psychic" 240). Critics are correct in recognizing that once Paul consumes the Water of Life as his mother did and becomes a type of male Reverend Mother, he is able to fully embrace prescience and thus gain a powerful ability of which the Bene Gesserit have

dreamed. He can look into the place in his consciousness that the Bene Gesserit dare not and surpass their awareness, which suggests that the male body is stronger and less limited than the female body. This is evident when Chani wakes him from his spice coma and he commands his mother to show him the area where Reverend Mothers cannot enter:

> Bludgeoned by the terrible force of him, she closed her eyes and focused inward—the-direction-that-is-dark. Paul's consciousness flowed through and around her and into the darkness. She glimpsed the place dimly before her mind blanked itself away from the terror. Without knowing why, her whole being trembled at what she had seen—a region where a wind blew and sparks glared, where rings of light expanded and contracted, where rows of tumescent white shapes flowed over and under and around the lights, driven by darkness and a wind out of nowhere. (*Dune* 444)

Using Jessica's point of view, the text offers a decidedly ominous description of the male psyche, where darkness and violent forces cause trembling and terror. Jessica's experience bears no resemblance to the one she has while bonding with her ancestors—there are no humans here, just contrasts of light and dark and shapes and sparks. Seen in the Jungian perspective discussed earlier, where the feminine side of the psyche is weaker, this scene demonstrates that sexual difference does matter, because Jessica shies away from the darkness while Paul embraces it to become a prescient superhuman. The reader sees her as a woman lacking something, unable to overcome the limitations of her body, psyche, or both in order to gain the ability that her son has, and her capacity for agency appears more limited by being contrasted with Paul's. In this way, the series shows its debt to Jungian influences because it is Paul's maleness that appears to enable him access to prescience, and this undermines the idea that the female body is just as capable as the male body.

However, on closer examination, the series does not necessarily equate prescience with a greater agential capacity, nor does it entirely exclude women from having prescient abilities, which suggests that sexual difference is not as much of a limitation on women as it may initially appear. As critics have noted, even if Paul's possession of a male body gives him an advantage over the female Bene Gesserit in obtaining prescient abilities, this also means he must "submit to the myth of the Kwisatz Haderach" (Kucera 244) wherein his prescience becomes a "suffocating destiny" (Mack 57) and a "curse" (Prieto-Pablos 70). Throughout *Dune* he is shown thinking about how to prevent the jihad he has foreseen, yet he fails to do so and by *Children of Dune* has become a blind prophet who criticizes his former government. Furthermore, the text indicates that he passes on his genetics to his son, Leto II, which results in Leto submitting to the destiny of the future he sees and taking on the likeness of a sandworm for thousands of years. Thus, despite the series showing these men with

abilities the Bene Gesserit do not have, it also shows that they pay a high price and become locked into the futures they have envisioned, while other characters maintain more autonomy over their lives. There is also the somewhat ambiguous matter of the prescient abilities of other characters, including the sisters of Paul and Leto, Alia and Ghanima: Alia appears to have some kind of prescience when she plants a message for Paul in the future at the close of *Dune*, and yet in *Children of Dune* she complains that prescience eludes her; Ghanima appears to share her brother's potential for prescience but does not take that path. These complicate the notion that sexual difference necessarily prevents women from gaining certain abilities, although Alia and Ghanima remain less well-developed characters than their brothers, which makes it difficult for the reader to understand how they differ from their male siblings. Even though the series does complicate the representation of women's embodied agency by showing limitations on women's ability to see the future, overall the series does not present sexual difference as a significant limitation for the women of the Bene Gesserit.

## Contrast with Mentats

Turning to a comparison with other male characters, I now look at the Mentats and how the depiction of their limitations serves to showcase the advantages of the Bene Gesserit's more holistic understanding of the workings of the mind and body. A comparison between these groups is especially necessary since the Mentats are perhaps even more neglected in *Dune* criticism than the Bene Gesserit. Many critiques of the series do not mention the Mentats at all, or only give a passing mention to their abilities. For example, C. N. Manlove writes that "A Mentat, or brilliant practical mind, helps Leto and the Baron with their plans" (Manlove 83), John Ower mentions that Paul "absorb[s] the detached, abstract power to analyze and to plan which is embodied in the 'mentat' (Ower 134), and A. Roberts notes that Mentats are "capable of computer-like rapidity of calculation and thought" (A. Roberts *History* 235). Of the three authors of book-length studies of Herbert's work, David Miller comes the closest to articulating a contrast between the Bene Gesserit and Mentats. He dedicates one small paragraph to a description of Mentats and another to the Bene Gesserit as service organizations, concluding that "A successful politician needs both a mentat and a Bene Gesserit" (D. Miller 20). He also argues that Paul's training in both Mentat and Bene Gesserit disciplines prepares him to become androgynous, while Farad'n's training in just the Bene Gesserit discipline leaves him bereft of "mentat training, the male force equivalent" (D. Miller 30). D. Miller thus recognizes the gender difference between the two groups and implies that they are meant to be on different ends of a spectrum, but does not

undertake a sustained consideration of his own descriptions: that men may have the ability of a super-computer, but women have abilities in many other areas. William F. Touponce just briefly describes Thufir Hawat as having "formidable intellectual and computational abilities (indeed, he is the human equivalent of a computer)" (Touponce 17), and O'Reilly focuses on the biographical inspiration for the Mentats and how the abilities relate to Paul's character. In fact, despite both O'Reilly and Brian Herbert noting that the basis for the Mentats was Frank Herbert's grandmother—who though uneducated had a remarkable memory when it came to facts and figures—neither takes the opportunity to speculate on why the Mentats in the novels are then male (O'Reilly 12, B. Herbert 34). The lack of critical consideration of the Mentats means that their association with the mind remains unexplored in the criticism, as does a comparison between their almost exclusively male group and the female Bene Gesserit organization.

For my comparison, I focus on the way that the series depicts the Mentats as human computers that prioritize the mind in order to show that they embrace the dualistic Cartesian philosophy and face limitations in doing so. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the setting of *Dune* is profoundly shaped by the Butlerian Jihad, "the crusade against computers, thinking machines, and conscious robots" that resulted in the commandment that "Thou shalt not make a machine in the likeness of a human mind" (*Dune* 521). This provides a narrative explanation for why humans want to free themselves from dependency on objects that think and instead rely on their own thinking capabilities. Yet the series implies there is still a need for some humans to imitate computers, and they are known as Mentats, a "class of Imperial citizens trained for supreme accomplishments of logic" (*Dune* 523). As the name suggests, the Mentats' focus is mental workings or the mind, which they and those who employ them value for its ability to accumulate data, calculate logical probabilities, and "process information as a super-computer might" (D. Miller 19). But the first mention of a Mentat in *Dune* reveals that their skills can result in their objectification, as shown in the conversation between Reverend Mother Mohiam and Paul after he has passed the gom jabbar test:

> "Have you studied the Mentat in your service?"
>
> "I've studied *with* Thufir Hawat."
>
> "The Great Revolt took away a crutch," she said. "It forced *human* minds to develop." (*Dune* 12).

Through this brief exchange, the reader understands that in this world, some like Mohiam consider Mentats to be both humans whose minds have had to develop to take the place of

forbidden technology, and objects that are worth studying. Paul's pointed answer indicates that he is affronted at the objectification of his tutor, Hawat—allowing the reader to adopt his point of view and empathize with his objection—but the lack of a defense of Hawat as a person signals that Mohiam's objectification of a Mentat is not entirely inappropriate. It is not until the following chapter during an exchange between the Baron Harkonnen, his nephew Feyd-Rautha, and the Baron's Mentat, Piter de Vries, that the reader gains more details on what Mentats actually do. Like Mohiam, Baron Harkonnen considers a Mentat to be both a human and a computer, evident in his use of the neuter pronoun as he explains to his nephew, "It has been trained and conditioned to perform certain duties" (*Dune* 17). The implication is that these duties involve accessing computational and analytical capabilities in order to process data and, in this case, provide his master with "several tangential possibilities" regarding what the Atreides family is likely to do after they arrive on Dune and how they will meet their downfall (*Dune* 18). Hawat is shown performing a similar task related more to financial concerns: "He closed his eyes in Mentat semitrance, said: 'Under the Harkonnens, maintenance and salaries were held to fourteen per cent. We'll be lucky to make it at thirty per cent at first. With reinvestment and growth factors accounted for, […] our profit margin will be reduced to a very narrow six or seven per cent until we can replace worn-out equipment'" (*Dune* 89). In the cases of the Duncan Idaho gholas who are also Mentats, the language similarly implies that the mind is their priority: one ghola "[gives] himself up to the computation" and another remarks, "My mind and its workings are my center" (*CHI* 127, *HD* 353). Thus, the series characterizes Mentats as men who highly value data and its logical processing as they were trained to, and whose association with the mind sets them apart from others enough for them to be considered more like an object than a human.

Their association with the mind becomes even more apparent through their body movement, or lack thereof, and the combination of these factors indicates that they embrace a dualistic worldview wherein the mind is considered superior to the body, which is seen as a distraction. When a Mentat enters into his processing mode, he appears to be accessing a large store of information as he discusses facts and speculations based on them. He also appears to be somewhat immobilized. In Piter's case, after he is commanded by Baron Harkonnen to "[f]unction as a Mentat," Piter "straightened, assuming an odd attitude of dignity—as though it were another mask, but this time clothing his entire body" (*Dune* 18). It is only once his body stiffens that he then proceeds to predict the Atreides' actions. In Hawat's case, he shuts out visual sensations by closing his eyes, only reopening them once he

comes out of the semitrance. His body movement is undoubtedly similar to that of Descartes mentioned earlier, who talks of closing his eyes and calling away his senses as false to attain better knowledge, although both of these figures still rely on perception and observation in order to have information to consider in this way. The description of the first Idaho ghola having to "[shake] himself out of the mentat trance" also shows that he is disassociated with his body during his computational processing and has to return to awareness of it (*CHI* 129). These descriptions of Mentats characterize them as having to withdraw into their mind to think and fulfill their Mentat tasks. Although the text does not specify how they might be able to recall so much data, there are real-world examples of memory training that show this aspect of their feat to indeed be possible. For example, the Jesuit missionary Matteo Ricci is known for bringing to China in 1596 the idea of the memory palace, a "way of ordering all one's knowledge" through mnemonic techniques such as imagining objects in rooms in a house whose names correspond to names of items that one wishes to remember (Spence 3). Accessing such a memory palace is an activity wholly of the mind, rewarding the recall of large quantities of data; the body is unnecessary, even though one may need to visualize a body walking through the rooms for the techniques to work. The Mentats' withdrawal into the mind combined with a lack of body movement can be considered a marker not only of their difference from others but also of the lack of need for the body in their abilities. Their ability is a specific one—to make their mind function like a computer—that requires data but little else, and the body appears to be a distraction in this regard.

Although neither the Bene Gesserit nor the Mentats is presented as infallible, the Mentats' prioritization of logic and the mind is presented as a limitation in a way that the Bene Gesserit's cultivation of mental and physical skills is not. Although the series initially implies that only men can be trained as Mentats, which potentially reinforces the dualism that associates maleness with matters of the mind and superiority over women, the presence of the Mentats as male characters is important in that it makes their limitations in the face of the Bene Gesserit more obvious to the reader. The series offers a number of examples of Mentats' limitations, the most prominent being when Hawat is misdirected by Baron Harkonnen's spies to focus on Jessica as a traitor rather than Dr. Yueh. Even when Jessica confronts Hawat and points out how he is being manipulated, he refuses to accept his own limitations. The depiction of his stubbornness continues with a touch of dramatic irony after he has fled into the desert after the Harkonnens' successful attack and yet still says: "I've always prided myself on seeing things the way they truly are […]. That's the curse of being a

Mentat. You can't stop analyzing your data" (*Dune* 207). It is not until the end of the novel that Hawat learns that he has been wrong about Jessica, showing the limitation of Mentats and the fault in relying too much on data analysis. It is not that the series demonizes logic, but rather that it characterizes the women of the Bene Gesserit as much more cautious in their use of it because they see "the limits of such machines [computers] [being] observed in Mentat behavior" (O'Reilly 119). In *Children of Dune*, Jessica recalls that "One of the first lessons of the Sisterhood had been to reserve an attitude of questioning distrust for anything which came in the guise of logic" (*CHI* 150). The language signals the weight of the Bene Gesserit's skepticism: they question, they distrust, and they look for what is being disguised as logical. Whereas the Bene Gesserit keep themselves open to a range of possibilities, the Mentats have "a tendency to depend upon absolutes, to see finite limits," which then becomes a "blind spot" (*CHI* 140). The Mentats represent a tool with limited uses because they are bound to a dualistic framework, while the Bene Gesserit represent the potential for humans to become skilled in multiple avenues once they value the mind and body and how they work together. The inclusion of a reflection by Jessica on a test the Bene Gesserit gave her to determine if she had begun to place too much trust in logic and Mentats reminds the reader of the differences between the groups. Jessica remembers Bene Gesserit members asking her if she wanted proof of their allegations about her daughter being an Abomination, and when she retorted that proofs are not infallible, they protested that they had answers from Mentats that might interest her. Jessica's astonished response—"I marvel that you have reached your present station and not yet learned the limits of mentats"—then satisfies them that she had not in fact "lost all touch with those balancing abilities which were at the core of Bene Gesserit training" (*CHI* 150). This passage again associates Mentats with limitations and implies that the Bene Gesserit are not likewise limited because they maintain a more holistic way of being.

By contrasting the Bene Gesserit and the Mentats, the series leads the reader to conclude that the mind cannot be truly separated from the body as a purely logical instrument and that the Bene Gesserit's holistic training is superior to the Mentats' more limited one. The advantage of the Bene Gesserit over the Mentats appears to be that the former seek to strike a balance between multiple sources of information, whereas the latter are more likely to "share the fallibilities of those who use them" and rely on absolutes in their compulsion to draw conclusions from the data they are given (*CHI* 151). Jessica's statement about the limits of Mentats does not invalidate the conclusions they draw, but it reiterates that she was trained

to understand them as having narrow uses. The series clearly shows that the Bene Gesserit do understand the value of computation and logic by depicting them using their own version of the Mentat mental trance to complement their sensory perception. For example, it shows Jessica engaging it in a potentially hostile situation with the first Idaho ghola and Farad'n to help her appraise the situation: "She took two deep breaths and triggered the mnemonic trance, rolled the data through her mind, came out of the trance and opened her eyes" within mere seconds, quickly enough to escape their notice (*CHI* 208). She even astonishes Farad'n with her projected conclusion about what the Sisterhood promised him, which turns out to be correct, and he steps backward and wonders if she can read his mind. This brief example of Jessica engaging in a type of trance akin to a Mentat's demonstrates to the reader that the Bene Gesserit are women who do see value in using such an ability; in fact, in later novels some of the Bene Gesserit are also Mentats, breaking the pattern of Mentats only being male, although this is likely too late to change the reader's impression of their limitations. But what is significant is that for the Bene Gesserit, Mentat ability remains but one of an arsenal of mental and physical abilities that does not necessitate them needing to become a human computer that is overly focused on the workings of the mind. They seek a balance in how they understand their environment and do not presume to rely on any one ability. Indeed, this explains why Paul, having received both Bene Gesserit and Mentat training, maintains a balance that seemingly enables him to avoid the trappings of Mentat thought patterns. Ultimately, the way the series characterizes the Bene Gesserit as better able to use logic without succumbing to the limitations of Mentats reinforces that their holistic training provides them with a wider skillset and should thus be considered superior.

## Anticipation of Feminist Science Fiction

Having examined some of the mental and physical abilities of the Bene Gesserit enabled by the mind-body synergy that they cultivate, I now briefly draw parallels with the female characters in *The Wanderground: Stories of the Hill Women* (1979) by Sally Miller Gearhart to show how the *Dune* series anticipates some of feminist science fiction's speculation regarding the possibilities opened up by a more holistic understanding of the human, but without the insistence that a women-only environment is the necessary setting for female characters to use their abilities. Gearhart's text offers a characterization of women who are like the Bene Gesserit in that they embrace a holistic understanding of the mind and body that opens additional avenues of perception and control. In *The Wanderground*, an all-female society that exists apart from men in the cities provides women with the space to

develop their mental and physical abilities. In her analysis, science fiction critic Sarah Lefanu notes that the women develop all their senses, including a sixth sense of telepathy, and calls the work "a vision *par excellence* of the unity of mind and body. Each feeds into the other; emotions, desires, states of knowledge affect the body and give a physical materiality to the experience" (Lefanu *Chinks* 66). One example is a character describing how in a deep dive underwater she decides to switch "to her lonth, to that deep part of her kinaesthetic awareness that could take charge of her bodily movements in involuntary fashion" (Gearhart 12). This then allows her to focus more of her attention on her awareness of her surroundings, knowing that her lonth will ration her remaining air until she reaches the surface. This example of a synergistic relationship between mind and body is similar to that of Jessica when she composes herself in bindu suspension while trapped under the sand. She too turns over responsibility for her breathing to part of her body while she goes unconscious in order to conserve oxygen until she reaches the surface. For both characters, additional avenues of perception as well as physical safety are opened due to their understanding of the complementary nature of their mind and body, and the body is a help rather than a limitation. But one key difference between the series and Gearhart's text is that women in the former still use their abilities in a world with men, whereas women in the latter appear able to develop and use their abilities precisely because of the absence of men. This idea is apparent in Lefanu's conclusion to her analysis: "*The Wanderground* takes us back to an earlier self, ignorant of the strictures and limitations concomitant with being female in a male-dominated world, a self whose imagination and desire are strong enough and clear enough to create a vision of the 'if only…' world that sweeps aside those limitations and explores instead the endless realm of potential" (Lefanu *Chinks* 69). In her view, the text makes uses of its speculative potential by releasing women from the restrictions placed on them and their bodies in the real world, giving them the freedom to develop a mind-body connection and telepathic abilities. Present in Lefanu's analysis is an echoing of Beauvoir's concerns regarding the pressure for women to conform to notions of passive femininity, and she offers Gearhart's novel as an example of science fiction's potential as a genre to address those concerns from a feminist perspective. The *Dune* series also addresses those concerns, yet rather than presume that women require a women-only environment in which to exercise their abilities, the series shows the Bene Gesserit operating in a society with men and women and even teaching certain men their skills. Thus, the series anticipates the holistic understanding of the female body and the avenues of agency it provides for female characters

in science fiction but without the insistence on a women-only environment that would later appear in the genre.

In this chapter I have laid the foundation for an analysis of the representation of women and their embodied agency in the *Dune* series by examining the basis of their skills in perception and prana-bindu and how these involve a holistic understanding of the mind and body working together rather than a dualistic one that regards the body as a limitation. I have argued that the series positions the body as a critical component of their ability to secure agency and characterizes them as capable and skilled. Yet I have also shown that even though their training affords them the ability to gain autonomy and control over their bodies and their lives, sexual difference does play a role in granting men more abilities in the area of prescience. This is one of the tensions regarding potential differences between women and men that makes the series more complex in its engagement with feminist issues, for women still appear to be hindered at times by virtue of being female. The difference in the capabilities of male and female bodies becomes even more apparent in relation to the issue of reproduction, yet the Bene Gesserit do not appear to be limited by their reproductive capability like they are by their fear of looking into the other parts of their psyche. In the following chapter, I examine perhaps the most contentious issue in feminist thought, the sexual difference that gives the female body the ability to reproduce, as well as the related issue of motherhood. I analyze how these provide an avenue for agency for the Bene Gesserit wherein the female body is a necessity but also binds them to participation in the breeding program.

## Chapter Three: Reproduction and Motherhood

Women's capacity to reproduce has historically served as the point of difference that defines them in opposition to men, but advances in technology threaten to alter the significance of sexually different bodies. In science fiction, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) depicts a male scientist attempting to harness reproduction on his own in his laboratory, and other narratives such as Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) speculate about the potential impacts both positive and negative of using technology to control reproduction by relocating it outside of the female body. Throughout most of the *Dune* series, traditional reproduction within the female body is positioned as preferable to artificial reproduction that resurrects dead persons into gholas: the Bene Gesserit with their secret breeding program are depicted as manipulative in some ways, but it is the Bene Tleilaxu with their ghola production that appear detestable. Their repugnance is further emphasized when it is revealed that their reproduction tanks, called axlotl tanks, are actually composed of female Tleilaxu wombs—a revelation that appears late in the series. This affords these women no opportunity to control their pregnancies or to mother their children as the Bene Gesserit do. Yet for all of the Bene Gesserit's disgust at this method, they themselves call for volunteers to become tanks so they too can control ghola production. This abrupt shift and the myriad issues surrounding reproduction demonstrate that it is a key concern in the series, but it has not been critically explored in any significant capacity nor examined in relation to the real-world societal debates regarding the role of women in reproduction and motherhood.

Having discussed how the mind-body synergy that the Bene Gesserit cultivate affords them a high degree of embodied agency, in this chapter I turn to examine the topics of reproduction and motherhood and how the sexual difference that enables women to create life plays a key role in the expression of the Bene Gesserit's embodied agency. Drawing on the theories of two major second-wave feminists—Shulamith Firestone and Adrienne Rich—I argue that the series shows women to be agential in matters of reproduction and motherhood and problematizes the radical feminist theory that motherhood is primarily oppressive for women. I also contend that the series complicates the representation of women as agential by focusing on the breeding program, which may reinforce biologically deterministic views of women as mothers but also shows how women can leverage sexual difference toward their own goals. Focusing on the examples of two Bene Gesserit women in the breeding program as case studies for the representation of Bene Gesserit mothers, I demonstrate that in the series female-controlled reproduction appears preferable to male-controlled reproduction, as

used by the Tleilaxu, and that there are tensions between individual and collective women's agency that complicate the idea of sisterhood and mirror similar tensions in the second-wave movement. I must note that in this chapter I respond to essentialist ideas about women's biology and what is considered 'natural' because they are present in both the theory and the texts. I argue that the series presents a vision of reproduction that is less speculative than some of the alternatives in feminist science fiction of the 1970s and 1980s, but that its depiction of traditional reproduction enables the reader to consider how this could be used as an avenue for female agency.

## Feminist Theories on Reproduction

Reproduction and motherhood have long been contentious issues in feminist thought, which indicates that there is no particular feminist way to represent them in theory or in literature nor an agreement on how sexual difference affects women's exertion of agency. Mary Wollstonecraft theorized in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) that giving women more choices would help reform motherhood, and Simone de Beauvoir argued in *The Second Sex* (trans. 1953) that the concept of women being inferior originally stemmed from her reproductive role. Such ideas influenced second-wave feminists, who did not agree on how to address one of the most obvious differences between women and men: women's ability to reproduce. Indeed, Wollstonecraft was both celebrated and decried by second-wave feminists for "her belief that motherhood should form the vital center of female cultural identity" since for many of them this did not go far enough in critiquing the restrictions of stereotypically feminine roles like that of being a mother (Ford 190). As historian Sara Evans writes, "The power of the women's movement lay in its capacity to stimulate such deep rethinking, to pose, *as a problem*, concepts such as femininity and motherhood and relationships previously taken for granted" (Evans *Born* 289). But feminists varied in the degree to which they questioned something that was historically considered women's "natural 'calling,'" as Beauvoir named it (Beauvoir 509). For example, even though Betty Friedan in *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) challenged the idea that middle-class motherhood should be women's highest achievement, she refrained from strongly criticizing mothering as a woman's task.

Radical feminists were more likely to see reproduction and motherhood as problematic, but they did not agree on how to theorize them in relation to women's liberation. Some radical feminists believed that women's interest in children was a sign of their

collaboration with the oppressive patriarchal system, and they encouraged women to become celibate so they "could at least achieve a degree of self-sufficiency and control over their lives" (Echols 160). One particularly extreme perspective on motherhood was the group The Furies' stance on sons: "that women should not waste their energies on male children and should relinquish custody to the father" (Echols 235). Although many feminists thought this was nonsensical, at least one woman did give up her two-year-old son to his father (Echols 235). Some saw hope in the new contraceptive and reproductive technologies being developed, which could free women from pregnancy and childbirth altogether, but also worried about potentially negative impacts on women. For example, in *Sisterhood is Powerful* (1970), Robin Morgan writes that "No one, clearly, has any answers yet" to the question of how to change the family, whether that include test-tube births, womb transplants, or choice of sex of the fetus (Morgan "Introduction" xxxiii). She expresses the concern that female babies will only be desired to become future breeders and the belief that "women must seize control over our own lives" to avoid the male-supremacist society controlling reproduction (Morgan "Introduction" xxxiv). In *The Dialectic of Sex* (1970), Firestone argues that once this major burden to women is removed, distinctions between the sexes will no longer matter. In other words, women will no longer be second-class people and thus everyone will theoretically be equal. These texts are valuable in providing a snapshot of certain radical thinkers' perspectives at the beginning of the movement and illustrating that control over reproduction was a key issue linked to women's liberation. Even when feminists attempted to address motherhood without overt hostility during the second wave, such questioning of mothers' role "was misread as an attack on mothers" by both mothers and nonmothers, and this period is still seen as anti-motherhood, as scholar D. Lynn O'Brien Hallstein notes in her discussion of the historical context of *Of Woman Born*'s publication (Hallstein 28). Part of what made cultural feminism like that described in Rich's text so attractive, then, was its ability to unify the movement, since it insisted on "women's essential sameness to each other and their fundamental difference from men" (Echols 244). Rather than giving up traditional markers of female experience, including pregnancy and motherhood, women could embrace them and create a retreat from patriarchal culture and radical feminist ultimatums. By the 1980s, the fear that women would continue to be oppressed by reproduction and potentially lose their reproductive agency altogether was apparent in texts such as the anthology *Test-Tube Women* (1984), whose introduction states that "we are *all* at risk of becoming TEST-TUBE WOMEN—at risk of being subjugated to a variety of controls" (Arditti, Klein, and Minden 6). Debates regarding reproduction were only

complicated by the introduction of new technology that held the potential to substantially reshape reproduction and motherhood, and these issues continue to be subjects of contention in feminist thought.

The contrasting radical and cultural feminist theoretical positions of Firestone and Rich are valuable to an analysis of the depiction of reproduction in the *Dune* series, for they help illustrate how the speculative environment of science fiction is able to preserve the tension over how to handle sexual difference. Both agree that women should be in control of their bodies, but Rich sees the potential for the transformation of biological motherhood into a liberating experience for women once dualistic thinking and passivity are rejected, and I use her understanding that women can have embodied agency while still being mothers to analyze the depiction of the Bene Gesserit. At the close of her book's first chapter, Rich states explicitly that she chooses to tell her story as the mother of three children along with her research in order "to heal—insofar as an individual woman can, and as much as possible with other women—the separation between mind and body" (Rich *Woman* 40). In sharing her challenges and joys as a mother, she rejects the idea that motherhood should be examined only in an objective, intellectual mode. She also makes sure to distinguish between motherhood as a "*potential relationship* of any woman to her powers of reproduction and to children" and motherhood as the institution that "aims at ensuring that that potential—and all women—shall remain under male control" (Rich *Woman* 13). She thus makes an "all-important distinction between motherhood as an institution and mothering as an experience" and suggests "for the first time that feminists could think about mothering as a potential source of power," or at least the first time in the second wave of feminism (Hallstein 23). Rich wants to see a new type of "mothering that invests mothers with agency, authority, [and] autonomy" because it will benefit both women and their children (A. O'Reilly 172). Thus, Rich presents a vision for woman-controlled reproduction that is not anti-motherhood, for it is the feelings of passivity and dehumanization that Rich felt as a woman giving birth in American hospitals that she wants to see eliminated, not the experiences of pregnancy and mothering. She is skeptical of technological advances supposedly for women's benefit and sees the potential for women to continue to have their agency denied, stating in no uncertain terms that there is "nothing revolutionary whatsoever about the control of women's bodies by men" (Rich *Woman* 55). Her text acknowledges that the female body can be problematic for women, but that this is likely to change once women take back control of their bodies and are able to choose what happens to them. Her assertion that "We need to imagine a world in

which every woman is the presiding genius of her own body" with the choice to bring forth children and mother them is a call for female-controlled reproduction and autonomy, and I suggest that the Bene Gesserit's control of reproduction offers a way for the reader to encounter this call in the series (Rich *Woman* 285).

Firestone is less willing to consider that any woman would willingly endure the experience of pregnancy and childbirth and views artificial technology as a positive alternative, and I use her theory to analyze the depiction of the Tleilaxu's version of reproduction. By dedicating her book to Beauvoir, Firestone indicates her influence and indeed appears to have taken her theory that women often violently resist the alienation of reproduction as a reason why women should seek to throw off this yoke altogether (Beauvoir 33). Firestone's main argument is that the "heart of woman's oppression is her child-bearing and child-rearing role," which means that changing this role is one way to liberation (Firestone 73). She writes that women have been oppressed because of their biology throughout history, but some of the technologies emerging in the 1960s point toward a way for women to become more autonomous, such as through better contraceptive methods and artificial reproductive methods like artificial insemination and an artificial placenta (Firestone 187). Her enthusiastic mentioning of concepts such as choice of sex, test-tube fertilization, and parthenogenesis (virgin birth) positions scientific developments as something people should look forward to, rather than worry about. She insists that "[a]rtificial reproduction is not inherently dehumanizing" and that it can allow women reproductive choice, essentially giving them the ability to control the material reality of their existence by not having to use their body for childbearing purposes (Firestone 189). But this positive outlook is not the one represented in the *Dune* series with the Tleilaxu characters, and I suggest that the series problematizes a view like Firestone's by making it appear overly naïve.

## The Bene Gesserit Breeding Program

Although most critics recognize the Bene Gesserit's breeding program and its goal of producing the Kwisatz Haderach as plot points, this aspect of the series has received little detailed attention nor been acknowledged as a subversive political project that is under female control and direction. Like other aspects regarding the depiction of the Bene Gesserit, there is a scarcity of descriptions of the Bene Gesserit's reproductive techniques and breeding program, meaning that the series requires a high degree of attention on the part of the reader to pick up on the clues regarding women's capabilities relating to reproduction. Although this

may align with the motif of concealment that critic C. N. Manlove sees in the series, it makes it less likely that the reader will closely consider the degree to which women are represented as agential in matters of reproduction. References to the Bene Gesserit's breeding program indicate that it is a type of eugenics project, and Willis E. McNelly and Timothy O'Reilly in their review of *Dune* provide a succinct articulation of how it works: "Mating its members to carefully chosen men, […] the Sisterhood has managed a centuries-long experiment in genetic engineering. They have cultivated the qualities they value in the race and weeded out others" (McNelly and O'Reilly 653). But this straightforward description conceals the novelty of having an all-female group in charge of making these decisions. Indeed, very few critics acknowledge the presence of any agency that Bene Gesserit members exert in reproduction, preferring to focus on the goal of producing the male Kwisatz Haderach. McNelly and O'Reilly note that members can "determin[e] the sex of each woman's offspring by delicate internal control" (McNelly and O'Reilly 653), and Hand briefly mentions Jessica's choice over the sex of her child "being hers through Bene Gesserit techniques" (Hand 26). The fact that they barely mention what amounts to an extraordinary capacity to manipulate fetal development shows how little attention this aspect of women's reproductive control has received. In order to provide a more detailed analysis of the characterization of the Bene Gesserit in relation to reproduction, in the following section I use examples within the Bene Gesserit's breeding program to argue that the series represents women with a significant degree of embodied agency and shows how they can use sexual difference to further their own political goals. I also show that the series speculates that the advancement of collective projects requires that women relinquish some of their autonomy, and in so doing I address one of the tensions between individual women and the collective Sisterhood in the series that anticipates the tensions in second-wave feminism relating to the policing of women's reproductive bodies. Because there is a lack of stability in the representation of reproduction in the sixth novel, when the Bene Gesserit adopt the artificial reproductive technology of the Tleilaxu, I save an analysis of this complexity for a later section after comparing the two forms of reproduction.

Descriptions of Jessica's reproductive decisions reveal that the Bene Gesserit secure agency in matters of reproduction by actively choosing not only whether to conceive but what the sex of their fetus will be. Control of reproduction appears to be a logical extension of the Bene Gesserit's prana-bindu skills discussed in Chapter 2 that give them complete command of every muscle and nerve in their body. Although this is not explicitly stated, the opening

chapters of *Dune* give the strong sense that women have complete autonomy over pregnancy, which begins to characterize women as active and agential in regards to reproduction. In a scene featuring Jessica and Reverend Mother Mohiam, Mohiam's first thought revolves around Jessica's disobedience in reproduction: "*If only she'd borne us a girl as she was ordered to do!*" (*Dune* 6). This phrase heavily implies that she had a choice in which sex her child was, and it also lightly implies that she may be able to choose to become pregnant. At no point is Mohiam shown doubting that these capabilities were inside Jessica's control—her complaint is that Jessica used them to disobey orders. Jessica's justification for her actions reinforces the idea that she was in control of her decision to bear a son:

> "You were told to bear only daughters to the Atreides."
>
> "It meant so much to him," Jessica pleaded.
>
> "And you in your pride thought you could produce the Kwisatz Haderach!"
>
> Jessica lifted her chin. "I sensed the possibility."
>
> "You thought only of your Duke's desire for a son," the old woman snapped. "And his desires don't figure in this." (*Dune* 22)

The passage is important for revealing not only that Jessica actively chose the sex of her child but that she did so for her own desire as well as the Duke's. This is evident in Mohiam's accusation that Jessica wanted to claim the honor of bearing the long-awaited Kwisatz Haderach of the Bene Gesserit breeding program and the image of Jessica pridefully lifting her chin in response. Yet critics use this encounter as evidence that Jessica is just depicted as a traditional woman who disobeys the Sisterhood because of the Duke's wishes, in effect dismissing any agency as being male-directed. They neglect to consider the contributing factors of the breeding program or feudal constraints wherein a son is preferred for inheritance reasons. Jack Hand chooses to interpret Jessica's decision as wholly based on her falling in love with Duke Leto and seeking to fulfill his desire, as do Miriam Youngerman Miller and Carolyn Wendell. All ignore the indication that Jessica has a selfish, prideful desire to birth and raise the Kwisatz Haderach. Although on one level she seems to have acquiesced to her duke's desire, all of her behavior in regards to training her son, Paul, in the ways of the Bene Gesserit without permission—rather than only seeing him trained to become a future duke—points to her having taken an agential role in her decision to become pregnant and bear a male child in the hope that he would be the fulfillment of the breeding program.

When the text characterizes her second pregnancy as a deviation from the normal Bene Gesserit pattern, this serves to emphasize that women usually exercise strict control

over their reproduction. The text indicates that due to her training Jessica is able to detect that she is pregnant before a woman usually would become aware of this change: "Only her own Bene Gesserit training had allowed her to read the first faint signals of her body, to know of the embryo only a few weeks old" (*Dune* 196). Yet although she knows it will be a daughter—the one she was supposed to bear instead of a son—she admits that she "conceived out of instinct and not out of obedience" to the Sisterhood (*Dune* 190). This phrase reflects the decision-making capacity of Bene Gesserit women in relation to pregnancy: they usually conceive out of obedience, indicating that they do indeed make a choice to conceive, but can also conceive based on a more instinctual desire to continue their lineage, though presumably this would be frowned upon due to their aversion to instinctual behavior, discussed in Chapter 2. In Jessica's case, she believes that she did so to continue her lover's legacy, knowing his days were numbered. Having another child essentially allows her one last way of connecting with her deceased Duke. Thus, it appears that even with all of her Bene Gesserit training to control every aspect of her body, she lapses into instinctual behavior in this instance. The contrast between the depiction of Jessica's decisions regarding her two pregnancies shows that the Bene Gesserit are not immune to being influenced by some level of biological determinism that drives a woman to reproduce, but that they usually exert control over this influence. Jessica's deviation serves to emphasize that the normal Bene Gesserit pattern is to actively choose to conceive according to the needs of the breeding program, such as to perpetuate desirable bloodlines, and thus demonstrates that women usually are strict and strategic about their reproductive decisions.

Although the series implicitly valorizes Jessica's agency in reproduction by focusing on her character, it also suggests that collectively women can use their abilities and bodies to advance long-term projects such as the breeding program. By setting up a narrative situation in which Mohiam chastises Jessica for her disobedience, the text prompts the reader to view the breeding program as significant to the Sisterhood and their long-term plans, although these are not specifically articulated. It also sets up Jessica's choice as one that jeopardizes the program and was only possible because the generations of women before her did loyally follow their reproductive orders. Indeed, other examples in the series show that most Bene Gesserit women loyally follow their orders, including the Emperor's wife, Anirul. Although she never appears as a character in the series, it is clear from other characters' statements that she was under orders to reproduce in a particular manner. Baron Harkonnen's Mentat, Piter de Vries, tells the Baron that "you know yourself these Bene Gesserit bear mostly daughters.

Even the Emperor's consort had produced only females" (*Dune* 17). Without the earlier scene between Jessica and Mohiam, the reader may have seen this information as an indication of an odd reproductive pattern or even a defect, but instead is inclined to see it as part of the organization's reproductive plans. Later, Anirul's eldest daughter, Princess Irulan, in an epigraph about her father reveals that the presence of only female royal offspring was in fact a decision orchestrated by the Sisterhood when she states, "But we denied him a legal son. Was this not the most terrible defeat a ruler ever suffered? My mother obeyed her Sister Superiors where the Lady Jessica disobeyed. Which of them was the stronger? History already has answered" (*Dune* 296). Although Irulan's simple observation about Jessica's strength stemming from her rebellion seems accurate, it obscures the importance of her mother's decision in making it so that there were no male heirs for Paul to defeat before challenging the Emperor for his throne. Furthermore, Irulan's statement also belies the fact that Jessica's agency in producing the Kwisatz Haderach was precipitated by the Bene Gesserit before her who did follow orders and consolidated the necessary genetic lines. By reminding the reader of other Bene Gesserit women's obedience to the Sisterhood, the series shows that collectively women hold the potential to use their abilities and bodies in service to a cause larger than themselves.

This line of argument that acknowledges that the series may at times validate collective agency over individual agency refutes the critical view that the reproductive nature of this project results in a reinforcement of biological determinism. Several critics of the series fixate on the reproductive nature of the Bene Gesserit's long-term project, viewing the entire affair negatively because it involves women having children. Wendell decries the Bene Gesserit for being "a stable of mares hoping to produce the perfect stallion" (Wendell 347). Hand argues that "[e]ven the eugenics plan, which might seem to give them a large say in the human future, is traditional, in that it uses and accepts the traditional role of women primarily as breeders" (Hand 26). Hand's analysis condemns women for being the sex that bears children but does not explain how a eugenics program would work without reproduction being involved. M. Miller calls the Bene Gesserit women "brood mares in a breeding program" to dismiss them as subordinate (M. Miller 186). These surface-level analyses avoid deeper consideration of the program, its aims, and the significance of it being managed by women over many years of careful planning. Since the series does not show women to be dissatisfied with their membership in the Sisterhood or resistant to the breeding program—even the portrayal of Jessica shows that she understands its importance and remains loyal to

the Bene Gesserit after her disobedience—this makes for little textual support for the argument that women are overly constrained by reproductive roles. Furthermore, their three-dimensional characterization makes it unlikely that the reader will view them as mere broodmares whose reproductive ability is their defining feature. I recognize that the series does seem to embrace the idea that biology is destiny by having the first novel revolve around a male hero produced from a ninety-generations-long reproductive plan that would have been impossible without women's involvement. The reader is still forming an impression of Jessica, Paul, and Mohiam in the opening of *Dune* when Mohiam tells Paul that the Bene Gesserit have a breeding program, which then associates the all-female organization with reproduction almost from the beginning. Unlike some other science fiction, which may not show reproduction at all or show an alternative form of it that does not involve women, the *Dune* series positions reproduction as a key factor affecting characters and events in the narrative, including the birth of and special abilities of Paul, Alia, the twins Leto II and Ghanima, and later Atreides descendants. But with the possible exception of the Bene Gesserit's adoption of the Tleilaxu's artificial reproductive techniques, discussed in a later section, this emphasis on reproduction does not contribute to a representation of women as subjugated by their reproductive role. Instead, their ability to control and manage reproduction constitutes one of their myriad abilities and appears as a way for them to exert autonomy.

Rather than portraying the breeding program as a means of limiting women to their reproductive role, the series suggests that it offers a way for women to leverage essentialist notions in order to accomplish larger political goals and actively shape history. As discussed earlier, the series implies that each individual Bene Gesserit woman is expected to actively manage her reproduction according to the needs of the organization. The series also then shows how this results in the Bene Gesserit being able to use their reproductive role to shape the political landscape without implicating themselves. For example, Irulan's epigraphs indicate that not only does the Emperor have no legal sons because of her mother, which opens up the throne to an alliance with another House, but he cannot divorce her due to a "compact forced on him to place a Bene Gesserit on the throne" (*Dune* 203). This statement establishes that the Bene Gesserit wield enough political influence to bargain for the imperial wife to be one of their own, who can then produce daughters and raise them to become Bene Gesserit as well (although it is unclear how many were raised Bene Gesserit—in *Dune*, it states that all of the marriageable princesses are Bene Gesserit trained, and Irulan certainly is,

but in *Children of Dune*, it is clear that Wensicia is not). Although the Bene Gesserit are not in the ultimate position of leadership, they effectively prevent the Emperor from continuing his line and thereby maintain control over the imperial dynasty without his knowledge. Thus, by controlling the very genes that compose key figures in the Imperium and matching them in calculated combinations in their breeding program, these women actually have their finger on the very essence of life and can harness the expectation that they will reproduce into a program that aims to produce the Kwisatz Haderach, a figure that Timothy O'Reilly argues was always planned to be a way through which they could wield temporal authority (O'Reilly 49). Though the series does not show this occurring, through the consequences that follow from Jessica's disobedience, the reader can see how influential a Bene Gesserit's reproductive choices are in shaping the course of history. The Kwisatz Haderach is born a generation too early and escapes the Bene Gesserit's control, then Paul's son, Leto II, becomes a tyrant who subjects the Imperium to 3,500 years of his rule and limits the Sisterhood's activities. Yet, although Paul and Leto II were not in the Bene Gesserit's plans, their being raised in the ways of the Bene Gesserit still ensures that their leadership is influenced by Bene Gesserit knowledge and training. They cannot change the circumstances of their birth nor escape Jessica's maternal influence. Likewise, the mother of Miles Teg, discussed later, raises him in such a way that he becomes a critically important military leader for the Bene Gesserit, so much so that he is resurrected as a ghola in the final novel to help them defeat the Honored Matres. Their reproductive functions may seem traditional since women have often been constrained by their ability to give birth, but through the characterization of the Bene Gesserit's breeding program and individual women's ability to control reproduction, women are shown to be capable of leveraging biology to shape the future unbeknownst to those around them rather than passively accepting a role as childbearers.

Although the depiction of women obeying reproductive orders certainly complicates the representation of women as fully autonomous, I argue that this tension between individual and collective agency anticipates a key debate regarding second-wave feminism's attempted policing of women's reproductive decisions and speculates that the securing of collective agency may necessitate the relinquishing of individual women's agency to the cause. The tension between individual and collective agency in the series can be said to mirror similar tensions among many feminist groups in the second wave regarding female autonomy in the areas of reproduction and motherhood. With Friedan opening the door to a critique of

motherhood and Firestone calling pregnancy barbaric, reproduction and motherhood became important topics for critique by second-wave feminists, as discussed above. This led to a key debate about the extent to which some radical feminists policed the reproductive decisions of other women ostensibly in allegiance to the cause. Such policing arose from critiques of the institutions of marriage and motherhood as oppressive, which meant that individual decisions like whether a woman should have children often became politicized. Anti-motherhood sentiment can be found throughout radical feminist writings, and though it is framed as a critique of the institution of motherhood, it nonetheless implies that it would be better to avoid having children altogether. For example, the radical feminist group The Feminists' manifesto heavily implies that motherhood does not contribute to women's self-development and is an institution "built on the myth of maternal instinct" that needs to be eliminated (The Feminists 375). The Feminists rejected the institution of marriage and allowed no more than one-third of their membership to be participants in a relationship with a man (The Feminists 374). The New York Radical Feminists' manifesto similarly calls marriage and motherhood oppressive institutions that make women believe motherhood and child rearing are her function rather than an option she can take or leave (N.Y. Radical Feminists 381). Part of the difficulty of the movement's belief that the personal is political was that it emphasized "personal openness and transformation, [which] tended strongly to create assumptions of or demands for commonality—a normative foundation of 'sisterhood'" (Evans *Born* 294-295). This included ideas about whether women should become mothers, turning what may have seemed like an individual decision into a political one that other feminists felt free to critique. Writing from the perspective of the 1980s, Robyn Rowland in *Test-Tube Women* acknowledges that there was a "feeling that the women's movement coerced [women] to give up having children" (Rowland 358).

What I see in the radical feminists' policing of women's reproductive decisions was an attempt to free women from oppression but also to build a movement where women could devote more energy to the cause, being liberated from the expectation that they should bear and raise children. From one point of view, they were giving women a path to greater autonomy by reinforcing the idea that they could be liberated from societal pressures. However, this entailed them denying women autonomy over their own lives by assuming that they as women were better positioned to tell other women what to do than the male-dominated society. Similar tensions exist in the *Dune* series, but in almost the opposite sense: where women are expected to reproduce in particular ways to help the Sisterhood they are a

part of, and their expression of individual agency is to have a son instead of a daughter or to train a child in the Bene Gesserit Way against the rules. Yet although women must relinquish any desires they have that differ from the directives of the Sisterhood, the series shows that this method successfully results in the birth of the Kwisatz Haderach, albeit too early, and thus speculates that women may need to prioritize the securing of collective agency toward the cause over their own individual agency. In this way, the series anticipates some of the tensions that would later fracture second-wave feminism and generate continuing debate regarding the role of reproduction and motherhood in women's lives.

## Reproduction as Oppressive or Transformative

Having discussed the characterization of the Bene Gesserit as agential through their control of reproduction and their operation of their breeding program, I utilize Rich's and Firestone's theories in order to argue that the series offers a unique speculation on what reproduction and motherhood look like in a world where women have complete control over their bodies but still choose to secure agency through traditional reproduction and motherhood. I suggest that this represents a type of combination of elements from radical and cultural feminist theories and anticipates the split in the movement regarding whether reproduction and motherhood should be considered oppressive and therefore avoided. The series thus problematizes radical feminism by suggesting that women may not see motherhood as oppressive and aligns more with cultural feminism in showcasing mothers' agential potential.

Although the series illustrates radical feminists' desire for women to be in control of their bodies, it also problematizes the belief of Firestone and other radical feminist thinkers that motherhood is an oppressive structure from which women need to be liberated. As I have shown, critics of the series appear to hold the view that the Bene Gesserit lack agency because they engage in reproduction and that their characters perpetuate the idea that women are only useful in this capacity. When critics use the term traditional in a pejorative way, this reinforces the impression that women in traditional roles such as mothers are hindered by them. I see this as reflective of a radical feminist view of motherhood—that if the goal is to eliminate inequality between the sexes, women must be released from the institutions that have helped oppress them, including motherhood. Firestone's text shows a prime example of this view, wherein she discusses "the tyranny of [women's] sexual-reproductive roles" (Firestone 37). She cannot see biological reproduction as being "in women's best interests"

especially since she regards pregnancy as "the temporary deformation of the body of the individual for the sake of the species" (Tong 75, Firestone 188). By concentrating on all of the harms and oppression she sees as being linked to women's reproductive role, she paints a very grim picture of pregnant women and mothers, who appear to be deluded in thinking that reproduction could ever be of benefit to them. But looking at how Firestone describes women's reproductive role, it is difficult to align her negative description with the characterization of reproduction in the novels, which appears to be in women's best interests because it is one of the means by which the Sisterhood can enact its long-term political plans. Where the Bene Gesserit do reflect a degree of the liberation that Firestone discusses is in their control over their reproductive bodies, for they choose when to become pregnant and could refuse to take a reproductive role if they wanted. It is in the lack of a challenge to existing institutions such as motherhood where the series problematizes radical feminist theory, because it indicates that women may not actually see motherhood as an oppressive structure from which they need to be freed. By starting from this premise, the series speculates that traditional motherhood may have more redemptive value than feminist thinkers like Firestone have considered, and may prompt the reader to see radical feminism as too overarching in its critique.

Thus, in regards to reproduction and motherhood, the series aligns more with Rich's cultural feminist view that these aspects of women's lives can be reevaluated as a positive result of sexual difference, rather than an obstacle to liberation. By no means does Rich deny that reproduction can be oppressive. She writes of the history of motherhood as involving "the regulation of women's reproductive power by men" virtually everywhere and acknowledges issues such as the lack of availability of birth control that negatively affect women (Rich *Woman* 34). But she is much more willing than feminists like Firestone to see women's lifegiving nature and mothering role in a positive light, drawing on her own examples as a mother. She believes that feminism will eventually view women's "physicality as a resource, rather than a destiny" and that the sharing of her private and painful experiences will help advance this movement (Rich *Woman* 40). She makes the observation that even if women are considered to be mere vessels for reproduction, "in primordial terms the vessel is anything but a 'passive' receptacle: it is *transformative*—active" (Rich *Woman* 98). Her understanding of women as active and transformative influences, both during pregnancy and afterwards, helps show that the depiction of Bene Gesserit mothers such as Jessica and Janet Roxbrough-Teg challenges the idea that women's role as mothers is

necessarily oppressive or passive and showcases the agency that women who are mothers can exert.

Through its very intimate description of Jessica interacting with her fetus during pregnancy, *Dune* offers a characterization of the Bene Gesserit as mothers who can actively control what occurs in the womb and thus a speculation regarding the type of transformative influence that Rich acknowledges as a positive capacity of mothers. The backdrop for the scene is Jessica facing the difficult choice between either attempting to become a Reverend Mother by undergoing the spice agony which may harm her fetus, or refusing and losing the opportunity to establish herself and Paul as trustworthy to the Fremen. Though this choice is assumed by Hand to be "a traditional move by a mother to protect the son" and her "acting out the values of the male-dominated society in which she lives," a more generous reading sees it as the only available option for a family to survive amid a society that routinely kills strangers (Hand 27). Jessica's thoughts clearly indicate that she is thinking of both of their survival: "*I had no choice but to do this* […]. *We must move swiftly if we're to secure our place among these Fremen*" (*Dune* 349). Regardless, this description of her undertaking of this dangerous ritual while pregnant enables the reader to have an intimate glimpse into pregnancy and how a Bene Gesserit woman can manage the fetal environment. First, Jessica experiences the presence of the dying Fremen Reverend Mother Ramallo: "It was like an ultimate *simpatico*, being two people at once: not telepathy, but mutual awareness" (*Dune* 355). Then, she must connect with her fetus to protect it from the onslaught of Ramallo's memories being poured into her:

> [Ramallo says,] "Be thankful it's a daughter you carry. This would've killed a male fetus. Now…carefully, gently…touch your daughter-presence. Be your daughter-presence. Absorb the fear…soothe…use your courage and your strength…gently now…gently…." […] [Jessica] reduced herself to basic emotional reactions, radiated love, comfort, a warm snuggling of protection. The terror receded. Again, the presence of the old Reverend Mother asserted itself, but now there was a tripling of mutual awareness—two active and one that lay quietly absorbing. (*Dune* 356)

This passage is significant for reversing the impression of Jungian dualism elsewhere in the series that views the female psyche as weaker, as discussed in Chapter 2, which indicates an inconsistency in how sexual difference is treated within the series. But it is also important for being one of the rare instances that the reader sees Jessica behaving in a stereotypically maternal way, snuggling her offspring. Negative language terms—"killed," "fear," "terror"—contrast with positive ones—"courage," "strength," "love," "comfort," "snuggling"—to depict an intimate image of a woman actively aware and responsive to the being who is part

of her and yet not part of her. As Rich explains, "The child that I carry for nine months can be defined *neither* as me or as not-me. Far from existing in the mode of 'inner space,' women are powerfully and vulnerably attuned both to 'inner' and 'outer' because for us the two are continuous, not polar" (Rich *Woman* 64). In this scene, Jessica is indeed attuned to her womb and the need to be actively engaged in making the environment as safe as possible. Once Ramallo passes away, Jessica senses her "daughter-mote still touching her inner awareness" and probes it, waiting for a response to see if it is alright (*Dune* 357). Finally, a "tiny outflowing of love-comfort, like a reflection of what she had poured into it, came from the other mote" (*Dune* 357). Here, the reader knows that the fetus has survived, that Jessica was able to envelop it with enough comfort and love to protect it. Her emotional intervention makes the fetal environment safe in the midst of a difficult situation and initiates an emotional relationship with her daughter before birth. Although Jessica risks the life of herself and her fetus by undergoing this ritual, she makes the most out of the process by actively creating a loving connection with her daughter inside the womb and thus demonstrating that she is not confined to a passive role as a pregnant woman.

The Bene Gesserit's agential role in motherhood does not end after pregnancy either, for the series shows how women extend their control to actively raise and train their children in the Bene Gesserit Way. The relationship between Jessica and Paul is the most detailed example showcasing the influential role of the Bene Gesserit mother; however, her pivotal role in his upbringing has been largely neglected by critics or overlooked entirely. Some prefer to view Paul as a self-made man rather than an adolescent who is reliant on his mother's guidance throughout *Dune*. For example, David Higgins manages to analyze Paul as a genetic superman, a self-contained system, without mentioning her, and Adam Roberts describes Paul's survival "by virtue of physical strength and bravery, ingenuity and determination," erasing the influence of Jessica and the Bene Gesserit entirely (Higgins "Psychic"; A. Roberts *Science* 41). Paul is indeed characterized as a strong young man who, like all royalty, has received education in swordfighting, avoidance of assassination, and history. But the text reiterates that Jessica as his mother has also taken it upon herself to train him as a Bene Gesserit even though he is a male child. The signs are sprinkled throughout the opening chapter: "Paul sensed his own tensions, decided to practice one of the mind-body lessons his mother had taught him;" "she had trained him in the Bene Gesserit Way—in the minutiae of observation;" and "He recalled the response from the Litany against Fear as his mother had taught him out of the Bene Gesserit rite" (*Dune* 5, 8). The text implies that

Jessica has had such autonomy in raising her son that it is too late for anyone to stop her or question her motives or methods regarding his training. The Sisterhood only comes to test Paul when he is fifteen, at which point he is already well-trained in perceptive abilities. Another of his teachers, the Mentat Thufir Hawat, suspects that Jessica is "giving him the deep training" but does not know what this entails and does not attempt to end it (*Dune* 28). Once Paul and Jessica flee into the desert and lose access to the other teachers in the Atreides household, she becomes the only one who can continue his education, placing her largely in control of his final stages of maturity. She is hardly "follow[ing], literally, in his footsteps" as Hand suggests (Hand 27). Instead, she continues to be a transformative influence in his life, teaching him prana-bindu skills, ensuring he does not enjoy his first kill, and advising him on how to accommodate Fremen customs. Certainly the reader can see that how Jessica mothers and trains Paul is influenced by her own Bene Gesserit upbringing, for she would not have been placed in the Atreides household, capable of choosing to bear a son, or knowledgable about the Kwisatz Haderach if she had not been trained by the Sisterhood. However, the depiction of her as being influenced by the Sisterhood does not negate her characterization as a strong maternal figure in Paul's life, and she remains a significant influence in his life from the first to the last scene in *Dune*.

Like Jessica, Janet Roxbrough-Teg is depicted as being part of the Bene Gesserit's breeding program and exerting her own autonomy in her mothering of her son, Miles Teg, but she is presented as more capable of transforming her son into one loyal to the Sisterhood. In *Heretics of Dune*, Miles is shown to be an older man reflecting on his placement in the Sisterhood's long-term plans: "What a prize [Janet] had been for the Sisterhood! That she had wed Loschy Teg and lived out her life here, that was the oddity. An undigestible fact until you knew how the Sisterhood's breeding designs worked over the generations. *They've done it again*, Teg thought. *They've had me waiting in the wings all these years just for this moment*" (*HD* 43). This passage shows that not only is Miles aware of the Bene Gesserit's breeding program and that he fits into it somehow, but he appears to be at peace with their involvement in his life, even in awe at their grand design. It concludes a chapter in which he agrees to return to the Sisterhood to train their Duncan Idaho ghola, which characterizes him as a willing servant. How he comes to this positive view of the Bene Gesserit is revealed in a later chapter, where a memory from his childhood demonstrates how Janet took an active role in his training. He recalls a detailed conversation with his mother where she teaches him about Tleilaxu Face Dancers so he is prepared for future encounters with this enemy. In this

memory he is only seven years of age yet able to understand that her teaching needs to remain secret: "'They do not yet know that we are aware of this.' Miles understood. He was not to speak of this to anyone, not even to his father or his mother [lest someone overhear]. She had taught him the Bene Gesserit way of secrecy" (*HD* 66). His perceptive questions about the Tleilaxu "sen[d] a surge of pride" through his mother, who sees his Mentat potential and later sends him to advanced Bene Gesserit schooling, presumably so that like Paul he can balance his various abilities and draw on logic when needed (*HD* 67). Just as Jessica is shown to have trained Paul in hope of him becoming an extraordinary figure, Janet is shown to have trained Miles to become "the Warrior Mentat [the Sisterhood] had hoped for" (*HD* 68). The difference is that for Miles, "the love-awe he had felt for his mother was deftly transferred to the Sisterhood itself, as originally intended" and even though he knows this was planned, "[i]f anything, it bound him even more strongly to the Bene Gesserit. It confirmed that the Sisterhood must be one of his strengths" (*HD* 68-69). The text thus suggests that by successfully bonding Miles to herself by raising and training him, Janet ensures he remains loyal to the Sisterhood even once he knows that she was actively positioning him to be one of their military commanders. However, like Jessica, Janet is also described as having deviated from her orders—though to a lesser degree—and having taken the initiative to show Miles "ways of reading through her own masks, a forbidden teaching, which he had always concealed," as well as how to resist the sexual imprinting that the Sisterhood has developed (*HD* 70, 196). By focusing on these two examples of Bene Gesserit mothers, the series is able to illustrate how women exert their own individual agency as mothers and use their traditional role to significantly mold and influence their offspring.

The depiction of the agency of Jessica and Janet in relation to their sons reflects the type of autonomy in mothering that cultural feminists like Rich longed for—albeit within the context of the series' feudal setting and the demands of the Sisterhood—where motherhood becomes an active and positive choice and experience rather than a passive and oppressive one. Rich's feminist forecast in her conclusion to *Of Woman Born* is a hopeful one, envisioning

> a world in which every woman is the presiding genius of her own body. In such a world women will truly create new life, bringing forth not only children (if and as we choose) but the visions, and the thinking, necessary to sustain, console, and alter human existence—a new relationship to the universe. (Rich *Woman* 285-286)

The pivotal issue is choice—that women should be free to control their body and control reproduction—which will then allow women to be mothers on their own terms and also shape

humanity from a position of strength rather than subjugation. Represented as being equipped with the reproductive autonomy and skills gained through her Bene Gesserit training, Jessica offers a prime example of what this may look like in literature. Far from keeping her constrained, motherhood enables her to not only choose to birth a son but prepare him for a larger purpose without needing permission from male authorities. In the scene when Paul questions her, "Did you ever consult my father in this?" it becomes clear that his father did not know that Jessica was taking her own initiative in training him in "the things that… awakened… the sleeper," otherwise known as his prescience (*Dune* 195). She thus fulfills her desire to produce and train the Kwisatz Haderach. Janet, too, primes her son to become an extraordinary being, and he spends a lifetime as "the most reliable military commander the Sisterhood had ever employed" (*HD* 37). For the Bene Gesserit women discussed here, motherhood is anything but a passive, oppressive experience—they appear as competent and influential mothers who actively shape history through their children.

## Contrast with Bene Tleilaxu

Yet there is a competing 'unnatural,' male-controlled version of reproduction in the series that contrasts sharply with that of the Bene Gesserit, and I now turn to analyze this in relation to feminist fears expressed by both Firestone and Rich regarding women's agency in the face of technological interference. First, I need to define the terms 'natural' and 'unnatural' as I will use them in this thesis in relation to reproduction. I use the term natural in reference to reproduction that occurs through the physical sexual act between female and male bodies resulting in conception and pregnancy in the female body. I consider the Bene Gesserit's interference in reproduction in terms of choosing whether to become pregnant and the sex of the fetus to still be part of this natural process because they involve a woman's manipulation of her body via internal prana-bindu control rather than via external chemical or technological means. I use the term unnatural to refer to forms of reproduction that fall outside these parameters, namely those with the aforementioned chemical or technological interference. This includes cases where activities take place outside the female body, such as in in-vitro fertilization. I consider the Tleilaxu's version of reproduction to be unnatural because they use skin scrapings from corpses and their mysterious scientific manipulation to create new humans. I note, however, that cultural perceptions regarding changes to reproduction are likely to have shifted since the publication of the *Dune* novels such that readers in later time periods may be less concerned with technological interference and artificial reproduction. As reproductive technologies proliferate, they can become normalized

such that they begin moving into the realm of what is considered natural. As Sarah Franklin explains in *Embodied Progress: A Cultural Account of Assisted Conception* (1997), the existence of reproductive innovations "does not mean reproduction is no longer seen as 'natural': to the contrary, new forms of reproductive technology are ubiquitously re-naturalised. Technology is seen to be 'giving nature a helping hand', as one pamphlet describing the technique of IVF [in vitro fertilization] analogises this relationship" (Franklin 29). Although the Tleilaxu's tampering with reproduction may be seen as helping nature out in that they can essentially bring people back to life, the series indicates that their methods are overwhelmingly viewed as unnatural by other characters. In my analysis of the contrast between the versions of reproduction, I argue that the series harnesses its speculative potential and validates feminist fears by representing an unnatural, male-controlled version of reproduction as an exploitation of women's sexual difference and a closing down of female agency.

The Tleilaxu's methods can be read as an extrapolation of the ideas of Firestone, but where unnatural or artificial reproduction does not liberate women but enslaves them. Firestone's view of artificial reproduction is optimistic, assuming that it will be positive for women. She challenges feminists for fearing that they will be seen as unnatural or anti-motherhood if they express interest in new methods of reproduction, and cannot imagine why any woman would want to undergo the physical experiences of pregnancy and childbirth. She speaks of the development of an artificial placenta with a hopeful tone, arguing that scientific discoveries like artificial reproduction "are liberating—*unless* they are improperly used" (Firestone 187). Yet this allusion to potential problems with scientists is never explained further, and she only briefly mentions sexual bias in the area of science by noting that "women are excluded from science" and wondering whether "women are thought to make better guinea pigs because they are considered by male scientists to be 'inferior' (Firestone 188). In fact, Firestone avoids an explanation of how feminists will prevent such an improper use of science in relation to women and their reproductive bodies by stating that "we shall assume flexibility and good intentions in those working out the change" (Firestone 193). But in the *Dune* series this would be an incorrect assumption, for the men in control of reproduction are characterized as being engaged in a very corruptive use of science: the Tleilaxu take the natural process of pregnancy within the womb and harness it to create an unnatural, technologically-controlled production chamber to help them carry out their plan: "Ascendancy. The human universe must be made into a Tleilaxu universe" (*HD* 241).

The full extent of the unnaturalness unfolds gradually across the series, making the revelation that much more shocking. In *Dune Messiah*, the Guild Navigator Edric and Tleilaxu Scytale tell their fellow conspirators that the Tleilaxu have created a ghola from the corpse of Duncan Idaho, who was killed defending Jessica and Paul during their escape into the desert during the events of *Dune*. Through Edric's explanation—that a "wise Sardaukar commander had Idaho's corpse preserved for the axolotl tanks"—the reader senses that Duncan was resurrected by unnatural means in some kind of tank (*DM* 23). In *Children of Dune*, there is mention of "that marvelous metabolic balance which the Tleilaxu tanks always imparted," indicating that the tank is able to affect a ghola's metabolism (*CHI* 217). It is not until *Heretics of Dune* that a more complete but unnerving description of the tanks appears as one of the Idaho gholas remembers "bright lights and padded mechanical hands" along with "a great mound of female flesh—monstrous in her almost immobile grossness…a maze of dark tubes linked her body to giant metal containers" (*HD* 426). This is an image of a horrific distortion of the female body in an industrial-like setting—it is vague enough to allow the reader to imagine it in their own way but is definitively gendered as a female body that has been unnaturally manipulated with technology. When the Bene Gesserit begin to understand what the tanks involve, they too call them "monstrous" and insist that the "Tleilaxu take shortcuts. Their view of genetics is not our view. It is not a human view. They make monsters" (*HD* 361, 338). They are characterized as believing their own interference with reproduction to still be within the range of normal human behavior, in contrast to that of the Tleilaxu who have taken genetic manipulation to an unnatural level. At the same time, the Bene Gesserit seem to admire that a woman's womb is still considered the best way of creating life:

> Clever, clever, the Bene Tleilax. Far more clever than we suspected. And they have dirtied us with their axlotl tanks. The very word "tank"—another of their deceptions. We pictured containers of warmed amniotic fluid, each tank the focus of complex machinery to duplicate (in a subtle, discrete and controllable way) the workings of the womb. The tank is there all right! But look at what it contains.
>
> The Tleilaxu solution was direct: Use the original. Nature already had worked it out over the eons. All the Bene Tleilax need do was add their own control system, their own way of replicating information stored in the cell. (*CHA* 54-55)

With this Bene Gesserit insight, the reader now understands that the term tank is indeed a type of euphemism for the womb and that it is not an artificial womb but a real one that becomes part of unnatural reproduction through the layers of technology added and the loss of the rest of the woman. The language and point of view of the Bene Gesserit lead the reader

to see the tanks as they do: as a dirty deception that has obscured the turning of a woman into a womb. The insinuation is that females have been enslaved in order to create these tanks, reduced to the one part of their body that men see benefit in using, and have clearly not been liberated by a move away from natural reproduction.

In this way, unnatural reproduction becomes associated with male-controlled reproduction and dramatizes in science fiction the reducing of women to wombs and the loss of female agency that many feminist thinkers critique. Simone de Beauvoir opens *The Second Sex* with a discussion about woman being defined as "a womb, an ovary" and the imprisonment in biology that this definition enforces (Beauvoir 3). But it is Rich who clearly articulates the problem with women being defined by reproduction when she writes, "In transfiguring and enslaving woman, the womb—the ultimate source of this power—has historically been turned against us and itself made into a source of powerlessness" (Rich *Woman* 68). In other words, throughout history women have not been in control of their own bodies and have had their reproductive capability used against them. Rich believes that "[n]o more devastating image could be invented for the bondage of woman: sheeted, supine, drugged, her wrists strapped down and her legs in stirrups, at the very moment when she is bringing new life into the world" (Rich *Woman* 170-171). What the reader can imagine to be the experience of the females in the tanks—if they had consciousness—appears to be eerily similar to Rich's description of the experience of alienated childbirth:

> We were, above all, in the hands of male medical technology. The […] fragmentation of body from mind [was] the environment in which we gave birth, with or without analgesia. […] The experience of lying half-awake in a barred crib, in a labor room with other women moaning in a drugged condition, where "no one comes" except to do a pelvic examination or give an injection, is a classic experience of alienated childbirth. The loneliness, the sense of abandonment, of being imprisoned, powerless, and depersonalized is the chief collective memory of women who have given birth in American hospitals. (Rich *Woman* 176)

These women are not agential—they are passively lying down in hospital beds being treated as if they are merely delivery vehicles for children. In her chapter on reproduction in science fiction, Marlene Barr finds that science fiction has been used as a way to explore real-world women's helplessness in matters of reproduction, noting, "Throughout the 1960s, women in labor routinely became helpless, their bodies controlled by machines and (usually) male doctors. Women's awesome power to create life, a natural female act, is co-opted by the intrusion of technology. Speculative fiction writers have responded to this juxtaposition of mother and machine" (Barr *Alien* 125-126). In the *Dune* series, however, the extrapolative

potential of science fiction is used to show an even grimmer image than Rich describes, where women have been drugged beyond the point of personhood and their reproductive power coopted by their male counterparts. They are shown to be even more alienated from childbirth, having been turned into mounds of flesh on which male scientists perform checks as if they were machines. The representation of men who value women only for their reproductive capacity takes feminist fears to the extreme, with men enslaving women and reducing them to fleshy wombs with no voice, doomed to provide nothing more than a nurturing environment for cells to grow. The "padded mechanical hands" that pull one of the Idaho gholas from the tank are indeed the "hands of male medical technology" with no woman conscious at his birth (*HD* 426; Rich *Woman* 176). As Janice G. Raymond argues in *Women as Wombs: Reproductive Technologies and the Battle over Women's Freedom* (1993), "The new reproductive technologies represent an appropriation by male scientific experts of the female body" and often result in the loss of women's autonomy and rights (Raymond xix). The series speculates on this very scenario through its depiction of the Tleilaxu with their artificial reproduction and their definition of woman solely as a passive womb that is an efficient means of production, rather than as a being with a right to autonomy.

Furthermore, the way this artificial reproduction is described heavily suggests that Tleilaxu females have lost any agency they may have had as maternal figures, exemplifying another feminist fear: that men will take complete control of reproduction and eliminate mothering altogether. When Rich imagines a society engineered by men, she sees science and technology being used to perpetuate only those traits that they desire:

> [L]et us imagine a laboratory in which men—the most powerful men in history, it is said—are engaged in work of extreme delicacy and precision, preparing a new series of multiple, identical embryos from cells derived from selected human tissue. The embryos will come into consciousness with their identity already prepared, for they will have been selected to provide the patriarchy of a new generation, selected by the patriarchy of the current generation, to perpetuate its own characteristics […]. (Rich *Woman* 82)

Her fear is that rather than humans receiving genes through natural reproduction with its variety, the process will be manipulated by men to ensure that only the characteristics and identities they approve of will be passed down, akin to what occurs in Huxley's *Brave New World*, which explores the "eugenic regulation of population growth […] and the desire to control Nature" (Seed "Aldous" 478). Rich's description of men preparing embryos from human tissue that will have pre-prepared identities sounds similar to the characterization of

the Tleilaxu creating gholas. The limited descriptions of the Tleilaxu imply that when they make gholas, they manipulate the gholas' abilities in order to, as much as is possible, pre-program their new identities which will merge with that of the original person. Their control over the womb also appears to enable them to make modifications based on their own desires or those of their customers. Duncan Idaho is recreated into a ghola many times over the course of the series, making him the only character to appear in every book. Each reincarnation is different: sometimes he is altered to be a Mentat, or more reckless than usual, or given accelerated reflexes (Palumbo "Monomyth" 440). Yet with the reproductive process in the hands of the "amoral, twisted scientists" of the Tleilaxu, there is never a woman involved in this process (O'Reilly 151). As only a womb, a woman has no opportunity to speak, have a sense of self, or exert maternal influence, like Jessica and other Bene Gesserit do, and raise her child her own way. In addition, the series strongly suggests that the Tleilaxu in a sense are indeed attempting to continue their patriarchy and eliminate any need for women or mothers by creating gholas of themselves, with the texts showing no female gholas. Rather than fathering children who will carry their genes into the future, certain Tleilaxu Masters order gholas of themselves which are then awakened to their original memories and enable them to defy nature to attain a type of immortality. The Masters have a "fleshly continuity in [their] Council that no other people had ever achieved;" once they determined how to restore original memories in the gholas, they began replicating themselves and "condensed this power into a single government" whose members spanned the millennia (*HD* 50). These descriptions of the Tleilaxu show them using technology to transform reproduction into a self-serving process that literally perpetuates their patriarchy and has no need for women except in their enslaved state in the tanks. The series thus offers an example of some feminists' fear that men might eliminate mothering by taking over reproduction via technology.

Hence, the Tleilaxu offer a nightmarish example of men in control of reproduction, which serves to position female-controlled reproduction as preferable for humanity. On the surface, the Bene Gesserit and Tleilaxu are similarly portrayed as attempting to control aspects of reproduction, and they both could have been depicted in a negative light. But the representation of these groups, and their versions of reproduction, clearly differs: it is the Bene Gesserit's reproduction that appears to be natural with room for female autonomy, whereas the Tleilaxu's version of reproduction appears to be unnatural and unquestionably dehumanizing. The Bene Gesserit still conceive through the sexual act; the Tleilaxu create

life by placing scrapings of cells inside a fleshy womb tank. It is not made clear whether the Tleilaxu actually engage in any kind of sexual activity. By not reproducing through natural means, they defy the Imperium's strong taboos against artificial reproduction, which even extend to God Emperor Leto II, who refuses "to follow the Tleilaxu pattern of gene surgery and artificial insemination" because it is unnatural (*GE* 101). The contrast between the representations of these versions of reproduction makes the reader likely to see the natural one as preferable—a human activity that does not rely on the kind of technological advancement that led to the Butlerian Jihad or the taking away of someone's existence as a person. This implies that what is preferable is female-controlled reproduction, in which women are actively involved in regulating their reproductive bodies.

Yet in the final novel, the Bene Gesserit themselves resort to adopting the artificial reproduction of the axlotl tanks, which is significant for two key reasons. First, this complicates the previous representations of natural and unnatural reproduction in the series in relation to female agency. Second, this offers a speculation that women may acquiesce to artificial reproduction that is far from liberatory despite the feminist warnings that were emerging in a period with a growing fear and fascination with artificial reproduction in the U.S. In a sense, the final novel challenges the reader to take a second look at 'unnatural' reproduction and consider that it may have a role to play in a changing world even if the price is female autonomy.

The Bene Gesserit's use of axlotl tanks disrupts the distinction that I argue most of the series makes between natural reproduction as female-controlled and artificial reproduction as male-controlled and necessitating female enslavement, thus complicating the depiction of female agency in matters of reproduction. *Chapterhouse: Dune* opens with the phrase "When the ghola-baby was delivered from the first Bene Gesserit axlotl tank," which the reader likely finds surprising since the Bene Gesserit are characterized in the previous novel as shocked and disgusted at the idea of the tanks (*CHA* 1). This phrase signals that reproduction for the Sisterhood has changed—that they are engaged in the very thing for which they scorned the Tleilaxu. However, lest the reader assume that the Bene Gesserit are exploiting female Tleilaxu as tanks, the text later reveals through Reverend Mother Odrade's reminiscing that Bene Gesserit women voluntarily sacrificed themselves: "Oh, how we recoiled from the 'debasement.' Then, rationalizations. And we knew they were rationalizations! 'If there is no other way. If this produces the gholas we need so desperately. Volunteers probably can be found.' Were found! Volunteers!" (CHA 55). Although the text

indicates that Odrade is somewhat surprised that women would volunteer, to the reader this behavior makes sense within the context of what Bene Gesserit women are often asked to do: use their ability to reproduce for the good of the organization. According to Touponce, the "Bene Gesserit have lost their repugnance toward Tleilaxu axolotl tanks […] in the interest of survival and in fulfilling their quest for the grail of human maturity" (Touponce 101-102). In the face of the threat that the Honored Matres pose, then, the Bene Gesserit rationalize their engagement with technology that enables them to recreate people from the past—namely Duncan Idaho and Miles Teg—that they consider essential to their survival. The reader can see the benefit to the Sisterhood from this concession, for they no longer have the problem of the Tleilaxu meddling in the genetics or conditioning of the gholas that they had previously been purchasing, but the price is that the Bene Gesserit must assume the role of the scientist, tampering with genetics and turning their own women into wombs. It is notable that they asked for women to voluntarily give up their lives for the cause, but their actions mean they are submitting to a reproductive means whereby women lose all agency, which is incongruous with their heretofore characterization as agential, especially in the area of reproduction. It appears that for the larger organization to exercise control over its destiny, some individual women are required to relinquish their autonomy, indeed their lives. Even though reproduction is still female-controlled for the Bene Gesserit, for those who volunteered to become tanks, to reproduce is to lose all embodied agency, which represents a significant shift in how the Bene Gesserit approach reproduction.

This shift in the Bene Gesserit's method of operation to embrace the Tleilaxu's technology is a fruitful area for future scholarship that engages with posthumanist theory, for it raises the issue that theorist Rosi Braidotti discusses in *The Posthuman* (2013): "that contemporary science and biotechnologies affect the very fibre and structure of the living and have altered dramatically our understanding of what counts as the basic frame of reference for the human today" (Braidotti 40). What the Bene Gesserit once decried as unnatural and perverse has become normal; furthermore, their acquiescence to this change in reproduction suggests that they have shifted their view of what it means to be human and even female in a world where women can control the growth of new beings in an enhanced tank. Although the novel does not dwell on their use of the tanks, this is an area that would benefit from more critical attention from other theoretical perspectives. In my analysis, I argue that it represents a significant departure from the Bene Gesserit's usual ability to accomplish their goals

through their embodied agency and presents the speculation that women may someday give up natural reproduction if their survival is at stake.

The greater focus on artificial reproduction in the series likely reflects the growing fascination with and fear of artificial reproduction in the U.S. and suggests that even if artificial technology necessitates a loss of female autonomy, this does not mean women will reject it. Writing in the late 1960s and early 1970s, both Rich and Firestone anticipate changes in contraception and reproduction, arguing that technological advances can potentially be liberatory but also can be threatening to women's bodily autonomy. By the 1980s, over thirty authors had contributed to the anthology *Test-Tube Women* (1984) to continue to explore the conflicted arguments surrounding reproductive technologies and their implications for motherhood, with the editors hopeful that the book would "contribute to women's *active* resistance" to subordination based on female biology (Arditti, Klein, and Minden 7). For example, in her article, "Reproductive Technologies: The Final Solution to the Woman Question?" in *Test-Tube Women*, mentioned above, Rowland writes alarmingly of the takeover of women's bodies as living laboratories for men and a future with artificial wombs, asking "Will this last act of power make woman obsolete; permanently unemployed; disposable?" (Rowland 365). This historical context represents a likely influence on the appearance of more detailed descriptions of the Tleilaxu's axlotl tanks over the course of the series and the characterization of the Bene Gesserit as curious about how the tanks function. Although the Tleilaxu appear as a name in the appendix of *Dune*, and their tanks are mentioned as early as *Dune Messiah*, the mechanisms of these mysterious tanks are only unveiled in *Heretics of Dune* (1984), as discussed earlier. Once the Bene Gesserit learn how they work, they tell the Tleilaxu in no uncertain terms that "None of us is now nor will ever become […] an axlotl tank" (*HD* 411). Yet in the following novel, published in 1985, it is revealed that Bene Gesserit women have become tanks. This suggests an acknowledgement that the capabilities of technological control over the creation of life may ultimately be too great for anyone to resist, even for women who pride themselves on their control of reproduction and understand the loss of autonomy that artificial reproduction involves. The text thus prompts the reader to consider a situation where the chance to control reproduction more precisely outweighs any concern for women's liberation from being a mere womb. By depicting women themselves as being complicit in embracing this 'unnatural' reproduction, the series implies that, despite feminist warnings, women in the real world may also embrace non-traditional reproduction.

## Alternative Means of Reproduction in Feminist Science Fiction

Feminist science fiction narratives postulate alternative means of reproduction in a more positive light than that of the Tleilaxu and their tanks, but some of their supposedly liberatory versions of reproduction avoid grappling with the difficulties presented by sexual difference and thus are more limited in this respect than the *Dune* series in that they do not show female agency in the context of natural reproduction. The beginning of the turn toward feminist science fiction and utopias that envisioned new reproductive pathways is generally acknowledged to be Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness*, which features people who have bodies that can alternate between being male and female, thus enabling the sentence: "The king was pregnant" (Le Guin *Left* 80). But as discussed in previous chapters, critics have pointed to the absence of women in the text, caused in part by Le Guin choosing to set "the action of the book so much in the public rather than the private sphere that her Gethenian 'men-women' seem more like men with wombs than radically unsexed and ungendered people" (Hogeland 111). Without scenes of people engaged in stereotypically feminine activities like caring for children, then, there is also an absence of characters who can be considered mothers. Suzy McKee Charnas's *Walk to the End of the World* depicts women enslaved as fems, and though they reproduce naturally, there is only one character who is able to assert herself and escape from the world of men. It is in Charnas's sequel, *Motherlines*, where reproduction and motherhood appear to be positive experiences for women, and the women-only community's process of impregnation via horses removes the need for human men's involvement in reproduction. In a similar way, the all-female societies in Joanna Russ's *The Female Man*, Sally Miller Gearhart's *The Wanderground*, and James Tiptree Jr./Alice Sheldon's "Houston, Houston, Do You Read?" can reproduce without men, though the processes are not described in a high level of detail. As Karen Bruce notes in her entry on pregnancy and reproduction in science fiction and fantasy, feminist science writers found biotechnology to be a popular alternative to traditional reproduction, either through cloning facilities, artificial wombs, or genetic engineering, all of which enabled female characters to reproduce without male involvement (Bruce 245). Although these narratives represent important speculations on alternative means of reproduction and changes to motherhood, they largely avoid the issue of how women might express agency and have influence without giving up natural reproduction. I argue that there is also important speculation on what an agential mother looks like who controls her body but still reproduces naturally, as I have shown to be the case in the *Dune* series. The series should be considered

significant for being "a story in which that rarest of beings in the world of science fiction, a mother, is central and powerful" without making many alterations to reproduction or having to exclude men from the process (Lefanu *Chinks* 15-16).

Looking at Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* in particular, I find that this text's vision of reproduction wholly divorced from the female body removes the need for female agency in reproduction altogether, and differs significantly from the *Dune* series by suggesting that the elimination of natural reproduction is preferable to giving women more control over it. Piercy's novel is often considered to be her fleshing-out of Firestone's proposal in *The Dialectic of Sex* that "[c]hild-*bearing* could be taken over by technology" and child-rearing responsibilities "would be diffused to include men and other children equally with women" (Firestone 221-222). Through the medium of science fiction, Piercy is able to engage with Firestone's ideas on technology and what the elimination of sexual difference might look like (Lefanu *Chinks* 59-60). In her novel, the main character Connie travels to a future society where the people there show her the brooder, a technological innovation where human embryos grow that has made it unnecessary for women to give birth and possible to make customized genetic mixes. As a mother, Connie is sickened at the sight of "seven human babies joggling slowly upside down, each in a sac of its own inside a larger fluid receptacle" (Piercy 95). At first she does not agree with the people's logic that women "had to give up […] the only power [they] ever had, in return for no more power for anyone" and that everyone had to become mothers to break up the family structure (Piercy 98). For her, the giving up of the sexual difference that provides women with the "ancient power" to create and nurture life appears to be a mistake until she compares it with the suffering of women and children in her own time and decides that the future society "represents a life worth living" (Piercy 126, Lefanu *Chinks* 62). Piercy's text was very influential, becoming "a kind of scripture for the women's movement in the United States" due to its feminist critique of Western culture (Donawerth and Kolmerten 11). But although it "construct[s] a comprehensive alternative family: a non-gender-specific world" where women are no longer associated with their reproductive capabilities, in so doing it reinforces the idea that pregnancy and childbirth are a burden on women (Bartkowski 69). This is understandable since it is so closely aligned with Firestone's work, but it means that the text is limited in that there is little room for the depiction of a strong, agential mother like Rich imagines in *Of Woman Born*. In contrast, the *Dune* series lifts up women's traditional role as childbearers and mothers but makes it a means through which they exert influence. Having the women of

the Bene Gesserit take on this role in addition to other ones allows space for female agency in the area of reproduction rather than closing off this avenue by having women eschew motherhood or outsource it like the characters in Piercy's novel. Although the Bene Gesserit characters have predominantly received criticism for their role as mothers, the series presents a potentially liberatory vision of reproduction that deserves recognition alongside the more speculative vision in feminist science fiction texts such as Piercy's novel.

With the *Dune* series' inclusion of reproduction as an important concern, it contributes a unique perspective on this recurring theme in science fiction that has heretofore been overlooked or dismissed. Although the Bene Gesserit's reproductive choices may be understated in the novels, they are significant in that they explore the fulfilment of a critical feminist desire for reproductive control and are achieved without the need for artificial aid, making them truly a form of embodied agency. On the one hand, the series represents women with a high degree of embodied agency as they control pregnancy and the sex of their fetuses and conduct an extensive breeding program that helps them gain political influence. They thus leverage the sexual difference that gives them childbearing bodies to pursue their own goals in a way that men cannot. On the other hand, the series can be seen as reinforcing a biologically deterministic view of women as mothers by showing an all-female organization that requires many of its members to reproduce in service of a greater cause, implying that women at times must forgo their own desires and autonomy in reproductive decisions. Yet despite the series contrasting female-controlled and male-controlled reproduction and showing the latter to be unnatural and monstrous, by the final novel the Bene Gesserit have themselves succumbed to the temptation of the tanks. I see this as a position that neither radical feminists nor cultural feminists would be able to justify—since it involves the sacrifice of a woman's existence to become a tank. It is thus a way of complicating the representation of women in relation to reproduction for as merely a womb, a woman has no voice with which to have a say in what occurs to her or around her and thus no agency. But the silencing of some Bene Gesserit who become tanks does not mean that Bene Gesserit women's voices are silenced elsewhere in the series, and in the following chapter I examine how the Bene Gesserit are characterized as being able to use their voices in a variety of ways that provide them with a significant degree of agency.

## Chapter Four: Voices

When women's voices are absent or silenced, whether in the real world or the worlds of fiction, this can serve as an indicator of women's subordinate status. It signals that their ability to participate in decision-making and have their ideas listened to and validated is compromised. For much of the history of science fiction, it was the case that male voices dominated, those of both authors and characters. Over time, and with pressure from feminists for better representation of women, increasing numbers of female authors and characters have appeared and contributed to a more substantive presence of women's voices in the genre. The relatively high number of vocal and influential female characters in the *Dune* series, then, both anticipates and parallels this trend, with women's voices featuring prominently in the first novel and coming to almost completely dominate the narratives of the later novels. Each chapter of *Dune* opens with an epigraph authored by a Bene Gesserit woman, Princess Irulan, and Jessica's dialogue, thoughts, and presence are woven throughout such that she can be considered a main character alongside Paul. What clearly positions women's voices as authoritative, though, are the Bene Gesserit's skills in the Voice and Truthsaying, abilities which are extrapolated from real-world techniques of language and enable women to control others with their voice and determine truth in others' speech. Although the impressive ability of the Voice has been critically examined, its relationship to women's agency and the other ways in which women's voices appear as authoritative within the novels have not been thoroughly explored.

Therefore, I see the Bene Gesserit's mastery of the Voice and Truthsaying—emphasized through the capitalization of these terms—as an important aspect to examine in relation to the representation of women and their embodied agency in the *Dune* series. In this chapter, I discuss second-wave feminist initiatives to reclaim the female voice as authoritative, influential, and truthful as a way of facilitating the exertion of female agency, and I use this as a framework with which to analyze female voices in the novels and argue that women are shown securing agency by speaking their mind and influencing those in their environment. I argue that the Voice in particular affords women embodied agency but is not grounded in the female body, thus making it an ability that relies on training rather than sexual difference. I also demonstrate how despite the reinforcement of the importance of women's voices via these abilities and the frequent epigraphs by the Bene Gesserit, their voices are at times associated with traditional roles such as wives and mothers, which are culturally subordinate, or are silenced by men, thus limiting the liberatory potential of the

series. Yet by drawing comparisons with the vocal and agential female characters in feminist science fiction, I demonstrate that the *Dune* series too provides significant narrative space for female voices and thus decidedly challenges the absence of female characters and perspectives in science fiction.

## Feminist Resistance to Limitations on Women's Voices

In the following section I provide an overview of feminist resistance to limitations on women's voices and feminists' views on speaking and writing in order to establish the cultural context and theoretical framework through which I analyze the representation of women in relation to the female voice in the *Dune* series. I argue that the main thrust of feminists' concern was that the female voice needed to be considered authoritative, influential, and truthful to facilitate women's liberation and exertion of the degree of agency over their bodies and their lives that men already had. In this way, I link these attributes relating to the female voice with women's agential capacity.

At various periods in history the female voice, being of woman born, has been regarded as irrational and inferior to the male voice—whether written or verbal—and denied a place in public discourse. Thus, an integral part of many feminist movements has been women's resistance to limitations on their speech, which illustrates the importance for women of not only being able to speak and write, but being accorded authoritativeness. In examining this resistance, I find it to be relevant to a conception of agency in that the act of speaking or writing in itself may not necessarily enable women to be agential if the social context denies them an authoritative position. In looking at the issue of women speaking in public, linguist and feminist scholar Deborah Cameron in "Theorising the Female Voice in Public Contexts" (2006) notes that in the context of Western modernity, the association between male and public and female and private meant that even when women did make their voices heard in public spaces, they were not able to participate equally in the public contexts considered important, such as courtrooms, churches, and lecture halls, since these were not in the proper domain of women (Cameron 8). She sees clear documentation that women in the U.S. saw participation in public discourse as an important right alongside suffrage, seen through references in the *Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions* at the landmark Seneca Falls Convention on Women's Rights in 1848. She writes, "It is striking how frequently the Declaration adverts to the question of women's right to speak publicly before mixed audiences, and to write for publication, on moral, religious and political subjects (Cameron

7). Being prevented from public speaking and writing for a public audience appeared to be an injustice similar to disenfranchisement at that time, Cameron argues. Writing in the decade after suffrage was won, Virginia Woolf in *A Room of One's Own* (1929) emphasizes the importance of women having "the habit of freedom and the courage to write exactly what [they] think" and implores them to participate in the tradition of women writers (Woolf 171). Writing and speaking were thus recognized by women in the first wave of feminism as agential acts that enabled them to participate in society and share their opinions with others. During the second wave of feminism, linguist and feminist Robin Lakoff introduced the term 'women's language,' and her groundbreaking works on issues of sex differences were "enormously influential" and heavily cited as other researchers answered her call for more empirical studies on women's speech (Crawford 23). In *Language and Woman's Place* (1975), she argues that the way a woman speaks is used to undermine or dehumanize her: "If she refuses to talk like a lady, she is ridiculed and subjected to criticism as unfeminine; if she does learn, she is ridiculed as unable to think clearly, unable to take part in a serious discussion: in some sense, as less than fully human" (Lakoff 6). Lakoff thus postulates a relationship between women's language, defined as a deferential, powerless style, and the fact that "women are systematically denied access to power, on the grounds that they are not capable of holding it" (Lakoff 7). As she implies, women are caught in a double-bind due to the fact that they are socialized to remain on the side of the binary that relegates them to irrationality and femininity, as discussed in Chapter 2, yet are then blamed for not being able to attain the status of rationality that would enable them to speak with authority. The persistent stereotype of women as irrational and passive beings means that the female voice is then associated with these qualities, rather than being considered authoritative, and thus more easily ignored or silenced—a phenomenon that continues to be studied by feminists, as in the language and gender anthology *Speaking Out: The Female Voice in Public Contexts* (2006), in which Cameron's article appears. Since "[p]owerful speech has long been associated with masculinity and powerless speech with femininity," women find it difficult to claim authority in speaking due to the strong link between femaleness and feminine behaviour (Baxter xvi). This indicates that the act of speaking or writing may not provide women with much agency if they lack an authoritative position, which was a challenge that the second-wave feminist movement had to address.

Authoritativeness is thus a critical component in understanding how women can exert agency by speaking and writing, and as the second-wave feminist movement gained

momentum, it prompted many women in the U.S. to speak out about gender discrimination and demand change, in the process reclaiming the female voice as authoritative. Credited as one of the main factors that resparked interest in feminism, Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) prominently gave voice to white middle-class women's frustration with the cultural myth that marriage and motherhood would fulfill them. Friedan found herself overwhelmed at the thousands of women's voices she had unleashed, with women writing to her about their struggles with 'the problem that has no name' (Evans *Born* 275). After the creation of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission by the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the commission likewise "found itself flooded with women's grievances" as women spoke up about unequal practices in their workplaces (Evans *Born* 276). Consciousness-raising groups sought to make space for women to verbally share their experiences and discover that their personal experiences could be politicized and that sexism could be challenged (García). The 1960s thus saw the floodgates begin to open and women speak out about experiences that had previously been largely invisible or deemed unimportant. The silence that they were breaking was the one that surrounded taboo topics such as sex and notions of womanhood that they felt pressured to adhere to, a silence that had prevented individual women from realizing that they were not alone in their struggles. In 1970, *Sisterhood is Powerful: An Anthology of Writings from the Women's Liberation Movement*, edited by Robin Morgan, was published, which contained over sixty articles, poems, and historical documents from women in the vanguard of second-wave feminism and provided an important avenue for women's textual voices to be distributed. Literary critics began the process of recovering the tradition of women writers and analyzing their works from a feminist perspective. In her book *Thinking About Women* (1968), Mary Ellmann wrote a critique of feminine stereotypes in literature and differences in the reception of works by male and female writers. She argued outright that "[w]omen's voices diminish their plausibility" and "not even the word *hysterical* recurs as regularly as *shrill*," which results in authority appearing to be the domain of men (Ellmann 150). Tillie Olsen in *Silences* (1978) discussed the silences in literary history left by those who failed to write due to their life circumstances as well as the women writers who had overcome the obstacles to write, while Elaine Showalter in *A Literature of Their Own* (1977) pioneered gynocriticism, a feminist criticism concerned with recovering neglected women writers and analyzing their works with consideration of their female authorship (Buchanan). Showalter has been criticized for "focusing on the only female writers traditionally accepted as canonical, nineteenth-century British novelists" such as the Brontë sisters and George Eliot (Griffin 371). Yet she did make an effort to look "beyond the famous novelists who have

been found worthy, to the lives and works of many women who have long been excluded from literary history" and thus was "instrumental in the recovery of a number of 'lost' British women writers" (Showalter 36, Griffin 371). In the increasing number of demands for change and for recognition of women's accomplishments as writers, I see a determined move toward claiming the female voice as one with the authority to demand to be heard and to influence others.

The 1970s thus saw the silence of women become a focus of feminism (Hedges and Fishkin 4), and I link feminists' desire to move past this silence with their longing for women to be considered authoritative speakers so that they could participate in society as active agents of change rather than passive bystanders. Historians use the language of voices and silences in their descriptions of the second wave, writing that women were "full-voiced and mobilized" like the suffragettes before them (Flannery 1). It was not that women had not spoken out previously, but that there was a greater volume of activities and publications concentrated into a short time period. In her essays included in *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence* (1979), Adrienne Rich explored the concept that "language is power" and that one of the major catalysts of change is when women talk with one another about their struggles; indeed, her weaving of personal experiences throughout *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (1976) had already been influential in shaping the discourse around motherhood (Rich "Teaching" 67, "Motherhood" 259-260). But Rich also recognized that women have to face the issue of truthfulness, which is a characteristic usually accorded to men's speech; because women are stereotyped as dishonest and deceitful, their claims to speak truth will be undermined (Rich "Women" 186-188). In 1982, Carol Gilligan challenged prevailing views of women's development by offering a new theory in her book *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*, signalling her interest "in the interaction of experience and thought, in different voices and the dialogues to which they give rise, in the way we listen to ourselves and to others, in the stories we tell about our lives" (Gilligan 2). Like other feminists, she used the concept of voices and silences to explain the need for women to have their time to vocalize their experiences: "As we have listened for centuries to the voices of men…so we have come more recently to notice not only the silence of women but the difficulty in hearing what they say when they speak" (Gilligan 173). Ultimately, what feminists were exploring were "the tensions between the relatively powerless position of being a woman and the relatively more powerful position of being a speaker or author," which they arrived at through their concern with "finding 'the woman's

voice'" (Tirrell 140). Looking at social practices related to language, feminists could then analyze and address the "politics of discourse, specifically asking who gets to speak, when, where, and why" and encourage women to claim an authoritative position as a speaker both in the written and spoken word and be better placed to act as agents of change (Tirrell 140). Thus, the idea that female agency is closely tied to an understanding of the female voice as authoritative, influential, and truthful provides a valuable perspective through which to analyze various aspects of the female voice in the fictional world of the *Dune* series and argue that it contributes to the representation of women as agential in spite of some limitations on women's speech.

## The Voice and Women

Given the importance of the female voice in feminism, the Bene Gesserit's technique of the Voice represents a potentially significant avenue for the expression of female agency. It is interesting, however, that although the Voice is the ability of the Bene Gesserit that has received the most critical attention, critics have managed to largely avoid analyzing its gender implications. Timothy O'Reilly and William F. Touponce in their book-length studies of Herbert spend little attention on the Voice, with O'Reilly briefly discussing its basis in theories of the unconscious and general semantics and Touponce mentioning it in a few sentences in relation to Reverend Mother Mohiam and Paul and the Bene Gesserit and Honored Matres. Paul Q. Kucera in "Listening to Ourselves: Herbert's *Dune*, 'the Voice' and Performing the Absolute" (2001) pioneers the use of critical theories by Mikhail M. Bakhtin and Wolfgang Iser as a lens through which to examine the problem of absolutes. For him, the Voice enables the Bene Gesserit to assume an authorizing, aggressive position that removes the option of choice from listeners: "Speaking in the Voice, the speaker speaks the subject, expresses the will/desire of the subject, even as that will/desire is being shaped, performed, by the one speaking in the Voice" (Kucera 237). According to Kucera, even though *Dune* is a novel, which can offer freedom from hegemony through heteroglossia, the Voice may be aligned with the novel's "authorial presence, 'a center of language,' as Bakhtin calls it" and close down opposing voices (Kucera 237). In this analysis, despite Paul's seeming mastery of Voice, he is ultimately controlled by the myths and conforms to others' desires, a powerless pawn. But whose desires these might be is left unclear, and Kucera only mentions gender in a footnote: "We should also take note of the fact that, as the Voice is peculiar to the Bene Gesserit sisterhood, issues of gender become topical" (Kucera 244). Kucera appears to be uncomfortable with the lack of agency of those who are subject to the Voice, but reluctant to

engage with the issue of the gender of the characters who make the most use of the Voice or how the Voice may represent an important avenue of agency for women. Another critic, Ronny Parkerson, in "Semantics, General Semantics, and Ecology in Frank Herbert's *Dune*" (2010) also avoids commenting on the female-controlled nature of the Voice. But he does imply that it is an important avenue through which characters control their environment and a technique based on the use of general semantics principles. Parkerson focuses on several key scenes where a successful outcome for Jessica and Paul relies on their communication skills, both in analyzing the situation and responding to it. He is the only critic to note the significance of the many times the word 'voice' is used, and his observation that life and death in *Dune* "often hang precipitously on a word" points to the significance of the Bene Gesserit being the ones with the most precise control over language (Parkerson 411). It is critic Robert L. Mack in "Voice Lessons: The Seductive Appeal of Vocal Control in Frank Herbert's *Dune*" (2011) who brings gender into his analysis. He argues that the Voice is a powerful tool of embodied speech that forms a bond between self and other, and for his analysis relies on Roland Barthes' notion of grain, Julia Kristeva's definition of the chora, and Mladen Dolar's theory of the acoustic psychoanalytic drive. He explicitly characterizes the Voice as "a quality unique to women and motherhood" in his discussion of Jessica's maternal chora which serves to "structure Paul's subjectivity" (Mack 48). But Mack does not view this as a positive characterization and severely critiques the Voice as too powerful a tool, believing that such general semantics-inspired vocal control offers a dangerous mastery of the human voice. Although he constantly acknowledges that the Voice is a powerful ability, he only speculates on its attraction to readers in general. There is no discussion of how the Voice may represent a way for women to speak with authority in a manner not always granted to them in the real world and that it may be attractive in part for this reason. Thus, I aim to build on the existing criticism of the Voice by exploring it more generally as an avenue for female agency.

First I discuss how the Voice is characterized as an authoritative and influential type of speaking, primarily associated with women, that is intimately bound up with the body. In order to do this, however, I need to examine definitions of the Voice by critics and offer the definition that I will use for my analysis. The appendix in *Dune* defines it as "that combined training originated by the Bene Gesserit which permits an adept to control others merely by selected tone shadings of the voice" (*Dune* 532). The three critics who have focused on the Voice each describe it slightly differently, evidence that its mechanisms are left open to

interpretation. For Kucera, it "functions by absorbing then suppressing heteroglossia and channeling it toward the desire of the speaker" (Kucera 233). For Parkerson, it "refers to an aspect of Bene Gesserit training where, through shadings of tone in voice utterances, a user can control others" (Parkerson 407). For Mack, it is a physiological trick which is "the meticulous adjustment of personal vocal tones to mirror a target's own" and "results in a frighteningly irresistible mental suggestion directed toward a hapless pawn" (Mack 39-40). In this chapter, I define the Voice as a particular vocal tone that Bene Gesserit like Jessica learn how to use that can be customized to affect others on an unconscious level, whether that be to compel, frighten, or soothe them.

The series indicates that the Voice is an ability reliant on the Bene Gesserit's skills in perception and prana-bindu bodily control and thus an avenue for agency that relies on the body. Mack is one of the few critics to note the embodied nature of the Voice and its connection to the Bene Gesserit's mental and physical training, discussed in Chapter 2. He argues that "the voice is especially important in Herbert's characterization of the powerful Bene Gesserit" and that it "somehow links impersonal linguistic systems to the biology of the throat" (Mack 45, 51). The Voice's origination in the bodies of Bene Gesserit women thus links it with their ability to control other aspects of their bodies. Relying heavily on "[t]imbre, accent, tricks of atonal inflection, the common stamp of Bene Gesserit speech mannerisms," the Voice first requires the speaker to read others' body language and verbal patterns, which the Bene Gesserit are characterized as being readily able to accomplish through their discipline in prana-bindu (*HD* 194). Although the text does not show this occurring, it often implies it when a character is planning on using the Voice. For example, when Jessica prepares to use it on the Fremen men Stilgar and Jamis, the reader gains access to her internal thoughts showing that she has already analyzed these men sufficiently to use the Voice on them: "*I have his voice and pattern registered now*, Jessica thought. *I could control him with a word*" (*Dune* 280) and "*He has talked enough*, Jessica thought. *I've the key to him. I could immobilize him with a word*" (*Dune* 300). In each instance where she uses the Voice, it appears to be a tool that requires close attention and precision, rather than a generic command tone, and uses a combination of words and tones to work on a bodily level, taking charge of the physical movement of others. Thus, although the Voice is never completely explained, it appears to build upon the Bene Gesserit's other skills and enable their voice to achieve "a depth of control" that other characters, and presumably the reader, "had not dreamed possible" (*Dune* 156). In this way, the Voice becomes a significant avenue for embodied

agency through which the Bene Gesserit can actively affect the behavior of others in their environment.

Another aspect important to a definition of the Voice is its basis in the theories of the pseudo-scientific field of general semantics, which characterizes it as an extrapolation of communication methods rather than a magical ability. General semantics is a field that can be difficult to explain and about which there are few scholarly resources published by sources external to general semantics organizations.[12] I label it a pseudo-scientific field because although some of its theories were later used in the fields of communication and the social sciences, it has been criticized for aspects that lack scientific merit and for its excessive claims about the degree to which it could fix all of humanity's problems through language (Steinfatt). However, it did appear in science fiction narratives as a potentially credible scientific field worthy of exploration. Both Parkerson and O'Reilly provide helpful explanations of general semantics in relation to the *Dune* series. Parkerson provides a definition of general semantics as being "the scientific study of the use and abuse of language, the study of the effects of communication on behavior, and…the application of the scientific method to problem solving" (Campbell qtd. in Parkerson 405). O'Reilly, meanwhile, labels it a philosophy and training method wherein "language must be viewed as a map, which is useful only insofar as it is similar in structure to the world it describes," and people must continually question "the unconscious assumptions built into our language" so as to avoid old habits and word-associations (O'Reilly 60). At its core, general semantics involves an attempt to be more scientific about language because of its capacity to shape people's worldviews. The concept gained popularity in the U.S. after first being proposed by Alfred Korzybski in his seminal work, *Science and Sanity* (1933), the subject of which was "speaking about speaking"—his discussion of the problems that occur when humans jump to conclusions and forget that speech is an abstract way of discussing reality (Korzybski 46). One example he uses is the common use of the 'to be' verb, which can leave out an object's qualities and obscure the process of abstraction to the point that people forget that it is more accurate to say 'This is called a rose' than 'This is a rose' (O'Reilly 60).

Through general semantics, Korzybski and his followers believed that humans could advance their achievements and avoid catastrophes like the world wars by more careful

[12] I have thus had to draw on information from several sources that have direct connections to such an organization: Lance Strate's article, which includes the statement "With the permission of the Institute of General Semantics," Martin H. Levinson's article, which is published in *ETC*—the research journal of the Institute of General Semantics, over which he presided as president at the time of publication, and Ronny Parkerson's article, which is also published in *ETC*.

attention to language and logical conclusions (Strate 9). As O'Reilly points out, it would have been almost impossible for general semantics not to influence the *Dune* series in some way since one of Korzybski's famous followers, S. I. Hayakawa—author of the most popular book on general semantics, *Language in Thought and Action* (1941), which is in its fifth edition (Strate 22)—employed Herbert as a ghostwriter for his nationally syndicated column (O'Reilly 60). Both Parkerson and O'Reilly note the strong influence of general semantics on the characterization of the Bene Gesserit in particular. Parkerson calls the Bene Gesserit an "excellent example of how Herbert brings the principles of general semantics to life" because of their concern with effective communication on a conscious level (Parkerson 405). O'Reilly believes that "in the Bene Gesserit, Herbert has taken the concepts of general semantics one step further, combining them with yoga, Zen, a kind of internal body awareness that was later to be associated with biofeedback and nonverbal communication" (O'Reilly 60). He states that "even though the power of Voice is still beyond current scientific belief, it is so soundly based that one has no doubt of its possibility" (O'Reilly 61). As evidence of Herbert's intentions, he includes an excerpt from an interview where Herbert explains the logical premise behind the Voice and how a speaker might be able to influence someone fairly easily once they knew certain background details:

> I'll give you an example. I'm going to describe a man to you, and I'm going to give you the task of controlling him by voice after I've described him. This is a man who was in World War I as a sergeant, came home to his small town in the midwest, married his childhood sweetheart and went into his father's business, raised two children whom he didn't understand.…Now, on the telephone, strictly by voice, I want you to make him mad.…Simplest thing in the world! Now, I've drawn a gross caricature, but we're saying that if you know the individual well enough, if you know the subtleties of his strengths and weaknesses, that merely by the way you cast your voice, by the words you select, you can control him. Now if you can do it in a gross way, obviously with refinement you can do it in a much more subtle fashion. (Herbert qtd. in O'Reilly 61-62)

This offers a clear indication that the Voice is grounded in real-world philosophies of language and that it represents a skill that humans could hypothetically develop in the future with more precise training.

By characterizing the women of the Bene Gesserit as the masters of such a skill, then, the *Dune* series offers a unique speculation on what a world might look like where the female voice becomes authoritative and influential through women's own initiative. Herbert is not the only science fiction writer to take elements of general semantics and add his speculations on how they might function in alternate worlds: "Korzybski and general semantics appear in

the writings of science fiction novelists A. E. Van Vogt, Robert Heinlein, and Robert Anton Wilson, and less directly in Frank Herbert, Samuel R. Delaney, and Phillip K. Dick" (Strate 23). Van Vogt and Heinlein, for example, explicitly acknowledged the influence of general semantics in their works (Mack 57) and represented its concepts through their male protagonists (Westfahl 183; Levinson 139). In fact, by incorporating general semantics into *The World of Null-A* (1948) through an emphasis on the potential of the human mind, shown through cerebral superheroes rather than physical ones, Van Vogt began the shift toward the so-called 'soft' science fiction that would become prominent in the following decades (Ashley 171-172). What is significant in the *Dune* series is that rather than placing male characters in charge of this general semantics-inspired training, Herbert makes the women of the Bene Gesserit the ones who master it and then go on to teach men like Paul and Leto II. Although the latter may still fulfil the role of cerebral male superheroes like that found in other science fiction stories, they are indebted to and indeed never fully free from the training and voices of the Bene Gesserit. As O'Reilly notes, in general semantics it is both desirable and "possible to *train* human beings into new semantic habits," and the reader understands the Bene Gesserit's ability to use the Voice and teach the skill to others to be a direct result of their rigorous training (O'Reilly 60). O'Reilly believes that this kind of characterization resembles that of Sherlock Holmes in that the Bene Gesserit's skills appear to be based on a high level of perception and deduction; the skills are reasonable enough that Herbert "gives the reader at least the illusion (perhaps more) that he can learn techniques of heightened awareness for himself. And it gives many the itch to try" (O'Reilly 62). This analogy is compelling because it points toward a characterization of the Bene Gesserit as linguistic innovators who have figured out how to analyze others and manipulate them merely by altering features of their voice, making the Voice an ability they can control. This makes the representation of women stand apart from the one that Joanna Russ critiques in "The Image of Women in Science Fiction," where female characters' abilities are often innate and cannot be controlled, including unconscious psi power and perfect pitch (Russ "Image" 83). She argues that these representations make women's abilities seem passive. In the *Dune* universe, though, female characters develop the Voice and actively affect others' behavior according to their needs, rather than possessing an uncontrollable ability. As noted earlier, Mack severely criticizes Herbert for even suggesting that a type of vocal mastery like the Voice is possible or desirable (Mack 53). But I argue that the Bene Gesserit's control of the Voice is a way for them to speak with authority and influence through their own initiative, thus offering a unique way of showing women claiming the right to speak and be heard.

How the reader can conclude that the Voice is an authoritative and influential form of speaking comes through several narrative situations in which women are able to directly control others' behavior using nothing more than the Voice. At the beginning of *Dune*, the reader sees how easily Reverend Mother Mohiam orders Paul around using the Voice before and during his undergoing of the trial of the gom jabbar:

> "Now, *you* come here!"
>
> The command whipped out at him. Paul found himself obeying before he could think about it. *Using the Voice on me*, he thought." (*Dune* 7)

The language makes clear that it is a special type of voice, both through the capitalization of the word and the use of the words 'whipped' and 'obeying,' which indicate that it commands immediate obedience from another person. The exchange continues after Paul places his hand in the black box and she positions a needle at his neck:

> He saw a glint of metal there and started to turn toward it.
>
> "Stop!" she snapped.
>
> *Using the Voice again!* He swung his attention back to her face. (*Dune* 8)

Though the text shows that Paul is aware of her use of the Voice, it depicts him as still unable to resist, and this scene clearly demonstrates its ability to directly affect another person's physical movements. But because of the large age difference between the characters, the reader may assume that the Voice is authoritative only in the case of children. This scene is thus a precursor to the second scene in which the Voice is used—when Jessica employs it in her face-off with the Atreides' Mentat, Thufir Hawat. At this point the Voice is confirmed to be an authoritative and influential form of speaking even though the term itself is not used, requiring the reader to make the connection with the earlier scene between Mohiam and Paul. After a long, heated exchange in which Hawat tacitly accuses her of being a traitor, Jessica attempts to prove to him that she could control anyone if she wished but chooses not to:

> Hawat started to leap from his chair.
>
> "I have not dismissed you, Thufir!" she flared.
>
> The old Mentat almost fell back into his chair, so quickly did his muscles betray him. She smiled without mirth. "Now you know something of the *real* training they give us," she said. Hawat tried to swallow in a dry throat. Her command had been regal, peremptory—uttered in a tone and manner he had found completely irresistible. His body had obeyed her before he could think about it. (*Dune* 155-156)

This passage further demonstrates the ability of the Voice to control another person's body and includes Hawat's perspective as well, which builds on Paul's understanding from the opening scene. Both become helpless to resist when a Bene Gesserit gives a command in this

way, showing that the Voice commands obedience from not only a boy but also an older man. Through such depictions of the Voice, the text shows it to be a means for the Bene Gesserit to be the authority figure in their environment, exerting a clear influence over others using nothing more than their voice.

The embodied nature of the Voice and its authoritativeness contribute to the representation of the Bene Gesserit as women who are able to control their environment and actively direct the course of events due to their embodied agency. As Kucera states, "The knowledge necessary to use the Voice, knowledge of the 'tone shadings,' seems to guarantee not only the temporary safety but also the more permanent security power appears to afford" (Kucera 237). He calls authority a property of the Voice due to the fact that the "listener's thoughts, opinions, and actions are ultimately shaped and directed by those tone shadings" (Kucera 234). In this view, anyone using the Voice becomes authoritative because they are harnessing the ability to direct both the internal thoughts and external behaviors of those who listen to them. In the above example with Jessica and Hawat, she is discernably positioned as agential: she exercises control over the room by commanding him to remain in place, and she shapes how he will respond going forward to the intelligence of a threat to the Atreides family. The analogy that the text offers via Hawat's thoughts—"*I am the bull and she the matador*"—confirms that she has secured agency through her use of the Voice (*Dune* 157). Within later novels, use of the Voice continues to be important as a mechanism for the Bene Gesserit to direct events toward a course of their choosing, such as when Jessica uses it to compel courtiers to assist a dying treacherous priest (*CHI* 159), Reverend Mother Odrade uses it to gain intelligence from a key asset (*HD* 140), and Reverend Mother Lucilla uses it to protect an Idaho ghola from an attack (*HD* 159). What these passages show is that the Voice helps contribute to the ease with which the women of the Bene Gesserit move through the Imperium, for they possess the ability to use words to make things happen virtually anytime they please. Kucera calls them "the characters who most clearly adopt authoring positions, seeking to direct the course of events" (Kucera 235). The series marks out the Voice as a tool of great persuasion that gives the Bene Gesserit a substantial level of authority and control over the behavior of others and contributes to their characterization as women with a high degree of embodied agency.

Unlike the critics who are suspicious of the Voice for its suppression of heteroglossia, I find the Voice can represent a necessary adaptation of speech on the part of women who lack access to traditional means of enforcing authority such as a military force. Kucera is

concerned with the Voice as a "movement toward dominance" that reinforces the authoritative discourse that Bakhtin argued could be subverted by heteroglossia (Kucera 237). Instead of allowing space for multiple voices and perspectives, the Voice only makes room for that of the speaker: the listener's "choice and all the responsibility that comes along with it is a non-issue under the influence of the Voice" (Kucera 239). Mack's analysis is also concerned with the dominance and "inescapable authority" of the Voice, including how it inspires fear in others such as Baron Harkonnen (Mack 52). Although it is clear that the Voice privileges one voice to the exclusion of others, the existence of only a few examples of the Voice being used throughout the six-book series indicates that this Bene Gesserit ability is used sparingly and in times of need, meaning that it does not appear to be the way the Bene Gesserit communicate most of the time. It is characterized as a means for them to exert authority only on occasion, such as when dealing with a particularly hostile individual or needing to accomplish a task quickly. Jessica points out to Hawat almost chidingly that there would be no point to the Bene Gesserit constantly controlling others with the Voice, because then they would lose their position in the Imperium: "Yet, what would I accomplish? If enough of us Bene Gesserit did this, wouldn't it make all Bene Gesserit suspect?" (*Dune* 156). It is not until the later novels that the Sisterhood is shown to have a military force; thus, the Voice functions as a way for them to exert their authority or defend themselves quickly and unobtrusively on their own. The few instances of Bene Gesserit women using the Voice do not serve to glorify the temporary suppression of heteroglossia but rather make the ability to speak with authority available to women who need it.

Although in most cases the Voice functions as a tool that provides women agency by denying it to men, there are also examples of men using it, and this complicates the representation of women as the masters of this ability and suggests that sexual difference is not an important factor in the use of authoritative speech. As soon as the reader sees Mohiam advising Jessica to train Paul in the Voice for his own safety at the beginning of *Dune*, the reader knows that both women and men have the potential to use this ability, although Paul may be a special case due to being part of the Bene Gesserit breeding program. The text soon implies that Jessica has trained Paul in the Voice since he uses it several times in the series, and that his son, Leto II, also has "mastered the powers of Voice," having been prematurely awakened with his ancestral memories and so having a head start on the necessary knowledge (*GE* 29). The ability for men to become skilled in the Voice indicates that sexual difference is not the reason why it works—that authoritative speech is not a mysterious phenomenon only

accessible to a particular sex but rather something that can be practiced toward the goal of mastery. On the one hand, this avoids essentialist notions by showing both female and male characters speaking authoritatively. It also makes it less likely for the reader to associate the Voice's irresistible nature, as Mack describes it, with stereotypically feminine seduction, which otherwise might suggest that there is something about women or their sexuality that causes their voices to be able to control others. Thus, having a figure like Paul using the Voice is integral to the reader's understanding of it not as a skill reliant on a female or male body but one requiring mastery of perception and the kind of bodily control to be able to pitch one's vocal tone in a certain way. However, at the close of *Dune* the text shows Paul not only using the Voice, but using it against the Bene Gesserit, discussed below, such that he appears to have mastered this ability more than women have. This undermines the characterization of the Bene Gesserit as the most skilled users of the Voice and the representation of women as able to secure agency through their voice.

### Silencing of the Bene Gesserit

There are also a few narrative situations in which women who have the ability to use the Voice are noticeably silenced, and I argue that these serve to remind the reader that women still face limitations on their speech and therefore their agency. I focus on two scenes featuring Jessica and Mohiam being silenced by men, which diminishes or removes their autonomy. In *Dune*, the reader discovers how much men fear the Voice not only through the exchange between Jessica and Hawat, but by seeing how many precautions the Baron Harkonnen takes to silence Jessica lest she interfere with his conquest over the Atreides family. She is captured and gagged by the Baron's forces and realizes that there is a deaf man to dispose of her because the "Baron knows I could use the Voice on any other man" (*Dune* 166). Through this thought, Jessica reveals that the Voice is a tool of influence known to at least some in the Imperium, and that even a gag is not considered protection enough against her ability. As Mack states, "For the Baron, the grain of Jessica's Voice marks her as a deadly creature" (Mack 47). The text clearly indicates that her voice is a force to be reckoned with, one that requires the utmost precautions. What is notable in the efforts the Baron goes to is that he considers her dangerous for what she might say, the Voice being an invisible weapon customizable to any of his troops except those who are deaf. He fears her skilled body and believes the best way to remove her autonomy and prevent her resistance is to literally silence her. The irony is that while the Baron is concerned with silencing the woman who he knows can use the Voice, he has overlooked the young man who can also use the Voice. Although

this paves the way for a plausible escape by Jessica and Paul later in the narrative, it signals to the reader the idea that the autonomy of women can be compromised by silencing them and that once compromised they will need the assistance of a man to recover.

At the close of *Dune*, Mohiam's autonomy is limited when Paul publicly silences her after she attempts to chastize him for openly discussing the breeding program in front of the Emperor and his entourage. In this scene, his use of the Voice indicates that he can exercise greater control over himself and others in his environment than she can: "'Silence!' Paul roared. The word seemed to take substance as it twisted through the air between them under Paul's control. The old woman reeled back into the arms of those behind her, face blank with shock at the power with which he had seized her psyche" (*Dune* 478). *Dune* is thus bookended by showing Paul using the Voice to control Mohiam just as it showed her using it to control him at the beginning, with her loss of agency clearly demonstrated through her loss of physical control as she stumbles backwards and her refraining from addressing Paul again. Parkerson argues that this scene shows the hero coming full circle to control the woman who brought him awareness of his power (Parkerson 409). However, Mohiam lives to plot against Paul in *Dune Messiah*, so it must be acknowledged that the series shows her voice and agency recovering to some degree. But like Jessica, Mohiam eventually encounters a deaf guard—in her case, ordered by Paul to prevent her from escaping—and the reappearance of this type of character is a way for the series to visibly demonstrate the limitations women face based on others' fear of the Voice.[13] On the one hand a relatively straightforward plot point, the deaf guard also represents a way to silence women in that even if they did speak, they would not be heard. Each time women are silenced in the series, this reminds the reader that it is women who are historically more likely to have their speech and agency limited than men.

## Women's Truthsaying Ability

Related to the Bene Gesserit's use of Voice is Truthsaying, which functions to position the female voice not only as authoritative and influential but as truthful and able to assess truthfulness in others. In the series, Truthsaying is characterized as the ability to detect when a person believes what they are saying to be true. Although it is never fully explained, it appears to be a skill that the Bene Gesserit cultivate as part of their training in the perception of minute details. A Truthsayer, therefore, can be considered a kind of human lie

[13] In *Children of Dune*, a deaf guard is also used by Farad'n with orders to kill Jessica and the first Duncan Idaho ghola if they try to harm Farad'n (*CHI* 201).

detector who notices the smallest of details in a person's vocal expression and analyzes these markers to make a determination about whether or not someone is lying. The only named Truthsayer in the series is Reverend Mother Mohiam, who is the Truthsayer for Emperor Shaddam IV. Her conversation with Paul in the beginning of *Dune* and the definition of Truthsayer in the appendix indicate that all Bene Gesserit have the ability to detect falsehood, but that only a woman who has undergone the spice agony can become a Truthsayer, a "Reverend Mother qualified to enter truthtrance and detect insincerity or falsehood" (*Dune* 531). Rather than building on this characterization by showing scenes of Truthsayers at work, the series instead chooses an indirect route whereby the depiction of other characters' fear of telling falsehoods is what demonstrates the authority and influence of Truthsayers. This occurs most notably in a scene containing Baron Harkonnen, his Mentat Piter de Vries, and the captive and gagged Jessica, as the Baron reassures himself that he can wash his hands of Jessica and Paul's fate if he remains ignorant of it:

> The Baron glanced down at Jessica. "[…] Well, I leave now. This is much better. Ah-h, much better. You understand, Lady Jessica? I hold no rancor toward you. It's a necessity. Much better this way. Yes. And I've not *actually* ordered you destroyed. When it's asked of me what happened to you, I can shrug it off in all truth."
>
> "You leave it to me then?" Piter asked.
>
> "The guard I send you will take your orders," the Baron said. "Whatever's done I leave to you." He stared at Piter. "Yes. There will be no blood on my hands here. It's your decision. Yes. I know nothing of it. You will wait until I've gone before doing whatever you must do. Yes. Well…ah, yes. Yes. Good."
>
> *He fears the questioning of a Truthsayer*, Jessica thought. *Who? Ah-h-h, the Reverend Mother Gaius Helen, of course! If he knows he must face her questions, then the Emperor is in on this for sure*. (*Dune* 165)

Through this brief scene, the reader can easily see that in this universe, high-ranking men acknowledge the authority of Truthsayers and their ability to assess truthfulness in the speech of others. The Baron is characterized as nervous through the repetition of 'much better' and 'yes' and frequent references to his ignorance of Jessica's fate—he does not appear to know how to fool a Truthsayer or feel confident enough to try, which means he must prepare to submit to her testing and pass. Thus, even though there is no vocal female character in the scene, through the depiction of the Baron's posturing and Jessica's thoughts that fill in the details for the reader, the female voice of the Truthsayer is characterized as an important influence in the *Dune* universe, one that can hold authority over men such as the Baron.

The significance of this characterization of Truthsaying is that women and their voices are not represented as inferior but rather as able to wield a high degree of political influence, which enables them to shape history through their judgements or the threat of them. The series is able to indicate that Truthsayers have significant political clout by having the fear of judgement serve as the main factor explaining why characters like the Baron must choose a certain course of action. In the case of the Baron, the function of his fear of the Emperor's Truthsayer is to drive the most crucial plot point of *Dune*: his decision not to kill Jessica and Paul out of hand but instead give them to Piter de Vries, who also fears a Truthsayer and so does not oversee their removal but has guards leave them in the desert. The dialogue of one of the guards reinforces the impression of Truthsayers as women to be feared: "Me, I wouldn't like the thought of facing that Truthsayer after this night's work" (*Dune* 166). The text thus shows how the threat of Mohiam's judgement makes her the one to indirectly cause the Baron to leave his enemies alive and thus facilitate them surviving to overthrow him and upset the politics of the entire Imperium. Even though this is an indirect influence, it nonetheless positions her voice as holding the potential to greatly shape the political environment and thus contributes to the representation of the female voice as influential and not to be dismissed. Awareness of the influence of a Truthsayer also drives the narrative in *Children of Dune*, for Ghanima and Leto II decide she will force herself to believe that Leto is dead so a Truthsayer can attest to her testimony and leave him to his secret plans. By the end of the novel, this narrative point gains additional significance as the reason Ghanima was able to avoid becoming an Abomination like her aunt Alia, and the reader can see the far-reaching effects of Truthsayers as depicted within the world of the novels. Again, the series shows that the threat of having to go before a Truthsayer influences politically significant characters in the noble families.

Later novels remind the reader of this early characterization through passages which make it even clearer that Bene Gesserit women are trusted to reveal the truth in others' speech and thus respected as a part of the fabric of the society. In *Heretics of Dune*, the existence of Truthsayers is explained as fulfilling the need for "arbiters with clout" since the Imperium is too large for an adequate legal system (*HD* 37). By the era of *Chapterhouse: Dune*, the text indicates that the destruction of Reverend Mothers by the Honored Matres has left a void, and people miss having access to reliable adjudicators: "*Once, when problems arose in our civilization, the cry went out: 'Bring a Reverend Mother!' […] 'It was better in the old days when the Bene Gesserit could help us. Where do you go for reliable Truthsayers*

*these days? Arbitration? These Honored Matres have never heard the word! They were always courteous, the Reverend Mothers"* (*CHA* 273). These statements indicate that the Bene Gesserit's Truthsaying is valued, and with this ability they can position themselves as a type of judge capable of actively presiding over human affairs. Although explicit examples of a Truthsayer at work would craft a more solid image of the Bene Gesserit as women who help shape history through their Truthsaying ability, the above narrative situations are sufficiently capable of representing the female voice as influential.

With the inclusion of Truthsaying as an ability associated with women, the series makes use of its speculative potential to show a world wherein women are listened to, trusted, respected, and feared for their skill, which is gained and exercised independently of men. Women have historically *not* been listened to, which is reflected in the feminist calls discussed earlier for women to demand the right to be heard. One of the early second-wave feminist texts, Ellmann's *Thinking About Women*, offers a list of examples of women's voices being unwanted or disregarded since the time of Adam and Eve: "During the first conversation on earth Eve's voice caused Adam the first earache on earth. In subsequent history this pain has persisted, impervious to all efforts to control or eliminate its source" (Ellmann 149). The list includes references to Talmudic law and literary figures like Shakespeare, Yeats, and Beckett to prove Ellmann's point that men desire women's voices to be soft and low so they do not agitate or disrupt anyone around them, and that one result of this societal pressure is that only men's voices appear to offer a "promise of truth" and be worthy of attention (Ellmann 148). Compounding the issue of the female voice being listened to is the greater difficulty many women have in considering themselves as authorities, expressing themselves in public, gaining respect for their minds, and using their capabilities and training for work purposes, as shown in research on differences between women and men (Belenky et al. 4-5). As Cameron notes, women in the time of the suffragists through to the twenty-first century face the representation of speaking in public as "something that both unsexes and de-classes women" and often engenders feelings of shame (Cameron 15). In the *Dune* series, though, the Bene Gesserit Truthsayers are characterized as an established part of the world whose voices carry significant weight in the political arena, including in public audiences. The reader can see that the Emperor's Truthsayer denotes the importance of an event by her mere presence, as indicated by her visit to test Paul in the opening chapter of *Dune* and then her accompaniment of the Emperor to confront Paul in the closing chapters. The reader can also infer that there is a deep implied trust for Truthsayers to be employed and

relied on by men like the Emperor. Their representation offers an alternative to the stereotype of women whose speech is considered irrational or unimportant. It is also significant that they are represented as having a skill that they use independently of men. The text implies that Mohiam, for example, will always be a Truthsayer, regardless of whether she is employed by the Emperor, and thus that the respect and trust she gains because of her ability are not dependent on being associated with him, though she certainly gains more status in the reader's mind by this association. Even when the series shows other characters being resentful of the Bene Gesserit's influence, it never suggests that these women provide bad counsel or act in bad faith; as Jessica tells Farad'n, "We survive in part by the complete confidence which people can have in our truthfulness. That has not changed" (*CHI* 250). This indicates that the Bene Gesserit have earned a reputation for truthfulness based on the unique abilities that they cultivate and their own commitment to being reliable arbiters, and through this characterization the series offers a vision of a world where women do not face the same limitations on being listened to, trusted, and respected that many feminist thinkers have critiqued.

## Women's Roles as Advisors

Because the series refrains from representing women in traditional leadership positions until the final novels, they still appear to be limited by sexual difference throughout most of the series, which detracts from their representation as agential women. Even though the series includes a variety of scenes showing Bene Gesserit women to be trusted and influential, they are not shown as leaders themselves but rather as advisors to male leaders such as the Emperor. This is not to say that advisory roles cannot be important, but that the texts reinforce the notion that women cannot or should not hold certain positions that men do.

Mohiam presents a clear example of a woman who is characterized as an important advisor who yet remains in a position where she can never have the final say. *Dune* presents a situation in which there is no doubt she is a close advisor to the Emperor whom he trusts to provide counsel. First, the reader encounters an image of her looming over the Emperor, her authority indicated with the small physical gesture of her hand:

> Pages brought the throne. […] They placed it on the dais and the Emperor mounted, seated himself. An old woman in a black aba robe with hood drawn down over her forehead detached herself from the Emperor's suite, took up station behind the throne, one scrawny hand resting on the quartz back. […] The presence of the Reverend Mother Gaius Helen Mohiam, the Emperor's Truthsayer, betrayed the importance of this audience. (*Dune* 457)

Then, the reader sees her leaning over and whispering into his ear on four occasions throughout the scene. Combined with the image of her taking up position behind the throne of the highest ranked figure in the Imperium, the repetition of the image of her speaking to the Emperor reinforces the reader's perception of her influential status. However, the reader also sees that Mohiam can be dismissed, as when the Emperor at one point silences her and then later "pushe[s] her aside" (*Dune* 462, 480). The inclusion of these moves on the Emperor's part serves to remind the reader of his greater authority and her lesser ability to make change from an advisory position. Such imagery lends support to Jack Hand's surmise that the Bene Gesserit "are seen publicly only in their religious guise, as supporters of the male status quo" (Hand 26). The text does not show her protesting, and so the scene undermines the representation of Mohiam as a woman with agency, for it implies that regardless of how influential she may be, she will always be under a higher male authority figure.

The representation of Jessica as an agential woman, too, is affected by the roles she holds, for the series implies that her advisory influence is linked to her status as a concubine, mother, and Reverend Mother and that there is always a male figure to whom she must defer. The text describes Jessica's position in the Atreides household as a concubine and secretary to Duke Leto and a mother to their son, her tasks having expanded beyond the parameters of the ones associated with these roles such that she is one of Leto's most trusted advisors. Through a scene with Dr. Yueh and Jessica, the reader discovers that Leto appears to rely on Jessica's advice without her having to manipulate him using the Voice, for according to Dr. Yueh, Jessica "could make [Leto] do virtually anything" (*Dune* 64). When Dr. Yueh asks why she has not made Leto marry her, she replies that using this kind of persuasion would be degrading to both of them, which suggests that her 'informal' influence is satisfying enough for her (*Dune* 65). The text later confirms the closeness of their relationship in Leto's dialogue with Paul, wherein he says that "the Harkonnens think to trick me by making me distrust your mother. They don't know that I'd sooner distrust myself" (*Dune* 103). According to critics Willis E. McNelly and O'Reilly, women like Jessica are portrayed as having significant influence in their traditional roles: "Many of the wives and concubines of the great men of the Empire are Bene Gesserit trained practitioners of a psychology so advanced that it appears magical to the uninitiated. By using it to guide their mates, they exert an indirect but powerful role in shaping galactic events" (McNelly and O'Reilly 652). I do not argue that the indirect nature of their role negates the influence these women have, but rather that the lack of female representation in the roles that men hold reinforces the concept

that sexual difference prevents women from holding traditional positions of leadership at the highest levels of authority. By depicting Jessica in a subservient position to Leto, no matter how respectful and loving their relationship appears, the text limits the extent to which she can appear agential. Similar situations occur regarding Jessica's role as a mother to Paul and the Reverend Mother to the Fremen Stilgar's tribe. She is characterized as an important source of counsel to Paul, as discussed in Chapter 3, as well as to the Fremen, as indicated through Paul's note that "Stilgar and all the other troop leaders ask her advice in almost every major decision" (*Dune* 426). This passage demonstrates that Reverend Mothers are counselors who offer their perspective on issues impacting the welfare of the tribes, meaning that Jessica's voice constitutes an integral part of Fremen politics. Even Hand, whose critique of the female characters in *Dune* finds them to all be more or less subjugated, acknowledges that this may be an area where Jessica attains equality in the male-dominated Fremen culture (Hand 28). Yet the representation of societal hierarchies within the feudal environment that constitutes the setting of the series means that the reader sees final authority resting with men like Paul and Stilgar. Thus, I find that the bounds of her roles at times detract from the representation of Jessica as an agential female character.

It is not until the series shifts its focus away from the noble families and feudal environment that it provides narrative space for the depiction of women in a clear leadership role in addition to the role of advisor, and this constitutes a significant removal of limitations to female agency shown in earlier novels. By the later novels, the Bene Gesserit are depicted as leaders and advisors to their own members, indicating that their voices have outlasted those of the ruling men who have long since passed away and that women do not have to rely on relationships with men for a position of influence. *Heretics of Dune* and *Chapterhouse: Dune* accomplish this shift by showing women to be part of a hierarchy in the Sisterhood through the introduction of the role of the Mother Superior and the depiction of her small circle of female advisors. Scenes are frequent in which these characters discuss important matters of survival of the Sisterhood and ways to counteract the growing threat of the Honored Matres. This constitutes a change from the previous novels in that there is no longer a male figure to whom they must defer, since the texts focus on the Bene Gesserit who live on their base, Chapter House Planet, rather than those who live in noble households. Without seeing references to traditional rulers such as dukes and emperors, the reader is led to view Bene Gesserit characters such as Mother Superior Odrade and members of her Council, Tamalane and Bellonda, as the most authoritative:

> Bellonda's face went soft-bland, a frequent accompaniment to her darker moods. Her voice came out little more than a guttural whisper. "I strongly urge that we eliminate Idaho. And as for that Tleilaxu monster…"
>
> "Why do you make such a suggestion with a euphemism?" Tamalane demanded.
>
> "Kill him then! And the Tleilaxu should be subjected to every persuasion we—"
>
> "Stop it, both of you!" Odrade ordered. (*CHA* 55)

The diction contributes to the creation of a serious and anxious tone—with Bellonda strongly urging, Tamalane demanding, and Odrade ordering—which prevents the reader from viewing the exchange as an ordinary conversation and instead prompts them to interpret it as a part of a war council session dealing with crucial life-and-death decisions. Unlike earlier novels where the Bene Gesserit were limited to advisory roles, this novel shows women as fully capable of making decisions and exerting agency without deference to men. There are occasions when Odrade is shown listening to advice from male characters like the Duncan Idaho and Miles Teg gholas, but the text positions her Sisters as her main advisors, who appear to be trusted to speak truthfully and openly to her, as seen in the above example. Although the depiction of this hierarchy means that female advisors still are shown with someone in authority over them, they no longer appear to the reader to be limited to this role by sexual difference since the person in charge is also female. The later novels thus illustrate that women can exert agency both in advisory and leadership roles.

The inclusion of so many exchanges between female leaders and advisors also further develops the characterization of the Bene Gesserit as more heteroglossic than monolithic, yet nonetheless confirms that tensions between individual and collective agency are resolved in favor of the latter. In the above scene, Tamalane is characterized as old and reflective, while Bellonda is characterized as very critical and oriented toward violent solutions, and the text shows Odrade having to temper their advice on how the Sisterhood should act with her own ideas and occasionally intervene in their arguments over strategy. The text thus gives these Sisters on the Bene Gesserit Council their own personalities rather than portraying all of them as thinking, talking, or behaving in a similar way. These exchanges are thus important for showing the existence of a diversity of thought among the Bene Gesserit—that they are not a monolithic organization or hive-mind that has no need of counsel but rather one that tolerates heteroglossia as a way of respecting women's different views and soliciting the most productive advice. However, the texts still demonstrate that the order is composed of a collection of women who share loyalty to the Sisterhood and are expected to obey the Mother Superior, as indicated by an early passage in *Heretics of Dune*: "Once [Mother Superior]

Taraza had accepted counsel and advice and then made her decision, the Sisters were committed to obedience" (*HD* 3). This depiction of the workings of the Bene Gesserit at its higher hierarchical levels serves to build on the characterization of the Bene Gesserit from earlier novels by providing the reader with more information about how the organization functions, showing that women have autonomy to voice their opinions and be listened to. Yet it still indicates that women are expected to relinquish their autonomy if necessary to further the Sisterhood's goals, as decided by the Mother Superior. Even as it shows a range of female voices and perspectives, then, the series makes the most authoritative and influential female voice among the Bene Gesserit that of the woman at the head of the organization, the Mother Superior.

## The Use of Epigraphs

The female voice is also positioned as authoritative and influential via the narrative structure of the series, and I now turn to examine the epigraphs penned by Bene Gesserit women and how they serve to position the Bene Gesserit as agential and important. Each novel in the series is structured into unnumbered chapters, with italicized epigraphs prefacing each one. In *Dune*, the epigraphs are comprised of short excerpts from twenty different works by Princess Irulan, almost all of which concern Paul's life and legacy, including: "Manual of Muad'Dib," "Analysis: The Arrakeen Crisis," "Conversations with Muad'Dib," and "The Wisdom of Muad'Dib." It is her voice that continually interrupts the narrative and signals changes in settings and character perspectives. Yet Irulan's role in the narrative structure is only mentioned by a few critics, and none of them comment on the fact that she is a woman and a Bene Gesserit. Thus, although they acknowledge her influence as the author of the epigraphs, critics have overlooked a significant feature of the narrative: that it is a female voice that is influential in shaping the reader's initial impression of the story and characters and their understanding of the events of each chapter.

Irulan's voice is the one that opens the *Dune* series, and it is her words which give the reader their first impression of the universe and the story to follow. This gives her an important function but especially so because she is in a science fiction story, where the author is creating a new world rather than one with which the reader is already familiar. In discussing the importance of this creative endeavor, science fiction and fantasy author Ursula K. Le Guin remarks that such a world is one "where no voice has ever spoken before; where the act of speech is the act of creation. The only voice that speaks there is the creator's voice.

And every word counts" (Le Guin "Elfland" 81). It is quite significant then that *Dune* opens with a Bene Gesserit woman's voice, that Irulan's is the first to speak into and thus shape the new world that the reader is imagining:

> *A beginning is the time for taking the most delicate care that the balances are correct. This every sister of the Bene Gesserit knows. To begin your study of the life of Muad'Dib, then, take care that you first place him in his time: born in the 57th year of the Padishah Emperor, Shaddam IV.* […] –from "Manual of Muad'Dib" by the Princess Irulan. (*Dune* 3)

It is also noteworthy that Irulan introduces the sisters of the Bene Gesserit before she mentions Muad'Dib (Paul), thus signaling their importance as she creates an impression of these women as cautious and knowledgeable. This epigraph serves several purposes such as setting the tone and introducing the otherworldly locations and characters. But it also directly addresses the reader and advises them how to approach the story that follows, which places Irulan in the position of a kind of primary narrator who is aware of her influence in shaping history.

Indeed, Irulan's voice shapes the reader's understanding of the events of each chapter just as she shapes Paul's legacy as his historian. As Manlove writes, the "whole book is draped with a mind that knows its end long before we do: the mind of the Princess Irulan […]. It is between the knowledge of her mind and ours that the whole book moves" (Manlove 88). For example, her observation preceding a chapter where Paul and the Atreides warrior Gurney Halleck are reunited—"*When law and duty are one, united by religion, you never become fully conscious, fully aware of yourself. You are always a little less than an individual*"—sets the reader up to empathize with Halleck's perspective that Paul has been hardened and cares more about the loss of spice machinery to a sandworm than the men who perished along with it (*Dune* 408). Irulan's epigraph thus sets the tone of the chapter in a sense and makes the reader more likely to see Paul as having lost touch with his values. The reader "move[s] between ignorance and knowledge, the knowledge of the epigraph playing against the ignorance in the material until the gap is closed" (Manlove 88-89). Another epigraph preceding Paul's test of calling and riding a sandworm sets up the reader to view the test as an interplay between politics and religion: "[…] *Because of this pressure, the leaders of such a community inevitably must face that ultimate internal question: to succumb to complete opportunism as the price of maintaining their rule, or risk sacrificing themselves for the sake of the orthodox ethic*" (*Dune* 401). Through the epigraphs, Irulan is influential in crafting a certain way of thinking about Paul that is taken up by the reader, which mirrors

how she shapes Paul's legacy within the world of the novels. As Touponce writes, "In Irulan's writings […] an image of Paul is created for his descendants" and as a historian, she assumes an "authorial position in relation to her subject matter" with the ability to create "a counternarrative of events" according to her desires (Touponce 30). Her writings give her a platform for philosophizing and reflecting on Paul's legacy as the messiah, Muad'Dib, despite her being the daughter of his enemy, the Emperor. With commentary like "*And that day dawned when Arrakis lay at the hub of the universe with the wheel poised to spin*," for example, Irulan helps to build up his mythic stature which will later come crashing down on him in *Dune Messiah* (*Dune* 447). Because Irulan's appearance as a character in the main text is saved until the ending, it may be true that readers "neither know, nor much care, who Princess Irulan is until very late in the novel" (D. Miller 17). However, they are not required to know who she is in order to be shaped by her words. The significance of the frequent presence of Irulan's voice is that it continually reinforces the notion that the Bene Gesserit are influential and authoritative in relation to other characters as well as the reader, whose understanding is constantly shaped by Irulan's reflections on the events she describes.

Subsequent novels also contain epigraphs from the Bene Gesserit, and the highlighting of women's voices across the series in this way emphasizes the presence and voices of the Bene Gesserit in the main text. The novels succeeding *Dune* feature a variety of authors in the epigraphs, rather than just one, but Bene Gesserit sources return to prominence by the final two novels. There are excerpts from the Bene Gesserit Coda and Archives, along with sayings from Odrade, which are positioned as offering additional perspectives from the secretive order. For example, in an epigraph from "Analysis of the Tyrant, the Taraza file: BG Archives" the Bene Gesserit's critical reflections on God Emperor Leto II and belief structures are displayed: "*Your beliefs order the unfolding of daily events. If enough of us believe, a new thing can be made to exist. Belief structure creates a filter through which chaos is sifted into order*" (*HD* 123). In an epigraph authored by Odrade, she reveals her attitude that she is beholden to her fellow Sisters: "*They say Mother Superior can disregard nothing—a meaningless aphorism until you grasp its other significance: I am the servant of all my Sisters. They watch their servant with critical eyes*" (*CHA* 136). Each time the reader encounters these epigraphs, they are reminded of the presence of the Bene Gesserit as an influential organization whose members use their voices and express opinions on a multitude of topics. Such featuring of women's voices so prominently at the start of chapters helps to undermine the view of the series as a masculine fantasy—wherein boys become emperors

and women are silent spectators—and instead gives prominence to the depiction of the words and thoughts of knowledgable and influential female characters.

## Female Voices in Feminist Science Fiction

Having discussed the affordances and limitations in the depiction of the Bene Gesserit's agency as users of the Voice, Truthsayers, and advisors and their important role in the narrative structure, I now draw comparisons with the representation of women as speakers in feminist science fiction to demonstrate that although these texts may be more liberatory in freeing women from traditional roles, they share an interest in representing women as vocal and agential. As discussed in Chapter 1, feminist science fiction writers were dissatisfied with the reliance on stereotypical depictions of women in science fiction or the absence of women altogether, and they began to address these issues in their own works by including more female perspectives, narrators, and voices. Rather than presenting women as "squeaking dolls" with low status and little agency compared to men, women authors could center their narratives around female characters and purposefully prioritize women's voices (Le Guin "American" 83). This is not the case with all of the key works that critics routinely categorize as feminist science fiction though. As noted in Chapter 1, there is only one woman identified as such in Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness*. An excerpt from this character's field notes comprises one chapter called "The Question of Sex," wherein she describes the sexual physiology of the people on the planet Winter. Her voice is important in explaining to the reader in more detail how the people are ambisexual and speculating on how they came to be that way. Her character even anticipates the criticism that Le Guin received regarding the novel, that the reader does not see the people as androgynous because "the very use of the pronoun [he] in my thoughts leads me continually to forget that the Karhider I am with is not a man, but a manwoman" (Le Guin *Left* 76). For this reason, a recognizably female voice is much more absent in this early feminist science fiction text than it is in subsequent texts such as Joanna Russ's *The Female Man*. Russ's text concentrates on the perspectives of four female characters such that men's voices are only a small part of the book's dialogue. It is the voices of Jeannine, Joanna, Janet, and Jael that dominate the book as they are shown discussing issues facing them in their respective worlds and time periods. For author Suzy McKee Charnas, after depicting a world in *Walk to the End of the World* where women were utterly subjugated and many had to bear their burdens in silence, she boldly includes only female characters in her sequel *Motherlines*, proving that a science fiction novel can be constructed without men's voices as a necessary component. She believes that "excluding

males from [*Motherlines*] gave her room to create women characters with the full range of human behaviors, rather than the restricted roles assigned to women in patriarchal societies" (Stein 124). Her story revolves around the outsider woman Alldera from *Walk to the End of the World* integrating into the societies of the free fems and the Riding Women, who have different worldviews, customs, and ways of speaking. For Charnas, the absence of men gives her the freedom to make women's voices take up the entire space of the novel. In both *The Female Man* and *Motherlines*, it would be almost impossible for women to not be vocal because they are the majority of the characters who drive the narrative.

In such texts that prioritize women's voices, women are represented as capable of being authoritative and influential speakers with agency, but in a way that differs from the women in the *Dune* series. Because Russ's and Charnas's narratives have few or no male characters, there is little need for them to balance the narrative space given to men's and women's voices. Women are already the main characters and so the reader is influenced by their perspectives first and foremost. In the *Dune* series, though, the first several novels focus on male characters as the main characters—although arguably Jessica is a main character as well—so the presence of women's voices in the epigraphs and throughout the story challenges the dominance of male voices and perspectives. Another difference is that women in feminist science fiction narratives lack the kind of special abilities that the Bene Gesserit women have, especially with regards to the Voice and Truthsaying. Although female characters in Sally Miller Gearhart's *The Wanderground* possess the special ability to speak with animals and plants, other female characters do not have the kind of perceptive abilities that afford the Bene Gesserit mastery over speech. The feminist science fiction narratives are certainly more liberatory in terms of freeing women from potentially restrictive roles as concubines, wives, and mothers. However, I argue that on the whole, the characterization of the Bene Gesserit as vocal women who influence others and command respect results in the *Dune* series resembling feminist science fiction texts in that they all noticeably challenge the absence of female characters and perspectives.

By examining various aspects of the female voice in the *Dune* series, I have shown that the series anticipates and parallels second-wave feminists' calls for women to be able to express themselves and for the female voice to be reclaimed as authoritative, influential, and truthful rather than dismissed. It also represents a significant departure from the type of science fiction stories that disappointed feminist critics due to the absence or marginalization of women's voices. The series does leave itself open to criticism for not offering women

more traditional markers of authority and for at times confining women to traditional roles as wives and mothers, but the abilities of the Voice and Truthsaying in particular offer a unique contribution to the representation of women as agential speakers in science fiction. The series shows the women of the Bene Gesserit developing the most advanced speaking capabilities in the universe, in part based on concepts from the field of general semantics, which gives them an impressive embodied ability to control others and their environment. The Voice becomes "the crowning achievement" of their mastery of physical, mental, and verbal abilities and enhances their characterization as embodied agents in the *Dune* series (Mack 55). Furthermore, because their abilities stem from their training in perception and precise control over their bodies rather than something unique to the female body, this prevents sexual difference from becoming the reason why they can exercise such control, which the reader can see when Paul and Leto II are able to learn how to use an ability like the Voice. In a similar way, although male characters like Paul and Leto II can access Other Memory, the ability to do so is characterized as a Bene Gesserit skill that women have mastered due to their education and training, and in the next chapter I examine how education and Other Memory comprise another important avenue of agency for women in the series.

## Chapter Five: Education and Memory

The importance of education in the socialization of women has long been a topic of concern, with some believing that women should only be prepared for lives as wives and mothers and others arguing that women should be prepared for a variety of roles and have more autonomy over the direction of their lives. The second-wave feminist movement also raised awareness about the need for school curricula to include women's history and literature by women writers, which would provide important examples of influential women throughout time. Although for the most part the genre of science fiction was slow to challenge the idea that women were best suited for traditional roles, the *Dune* series plays with this idea by showing women in these roles but also showing women subverting them by operating as agents in the Bene Gesserit's breeding program and Missionaria Protectiva—modeled after the missionary work of the Jesuits. Furthermore, just as there is a strong Jesuit influence in the characterization of the Bene Gesserit, there is a strong Jungian influence in the depiction of the Bene Gesserit's special access to the memories of their ancestors through Other Memory, resulting in women appearing able to embody and shape history in significant ways. Yet the woman-controlled aspects of the Bene Gesserit's education and memories have garnered little if any criticism, even though their alternate name, the Sisterhood, invites comparisons with second-wave feminist groups that called for solidarity as the basis for political action to liberate women.

Given the significant shifts in concepts of education and history occurring in the twentieth century, in this chapter I use this context in order to draw connections between the textual depiction of women's education and history and feminist calls for women to secure agency through more comprehensive and inclusive education. I look at women's voices and influence specifically in the role that they play in the depiction of the early education of future Bene Gesserit women and the historical memories that they gain access to in Other Memory. I argue that the series represents the Bene Gesserit's agency as contingent upon their education for they are socialized and trained to become agents with skilled bodies that can function in virtually any environment. However, the series also represents aspects of their education as an acquiescence on the part of the Sisterhood to others' desire for women to be prepared for traditional roles as concubines and wives. In this way, I argue that the series can be interpreted as presenting a problematization of radical feminist theory by suggesting that women may be served in the short-term by embracing difference because of the leverage it can provide. In this chapter, I also look at the characterization of Other Memory as an

expansion of women's knowledge and argue that it functions as a woman-controlled historical narrative that is embodied and enables women to take an active part in controlling and shaping history, yet is still problematic in being based on Jungian theories that tend toward dualistic distinctions. In addition, I argue that the depiction of solidarity among Bene Gesserit women showcases in fiction the potential in the second-wave feminist concept of sisterhood, in a similar way to feminist science fiction narratives that explore how female communities and the sharing of history can facilitate strong female bonding.

## Shifting Conceptions of Education and History

Shifts in concepts of education and history in the U.S. in the twentieth century contributed to debates about women's education and feminist challenges to the notion that women required different education from men, and I contend that this context helps elucidate the significance of the comprehensive education of the Bene Gesserit that appears in the *Dune* series. The debate over what education for women should entail had been occurring in the U.S. since its colonial era, but it was the twentieth century that saw both large increases in women entering higher education and demands that women's history and viewpoints be incorporated into the curriculum. As many feminist thinkers had long been stating, it was difficult for women to attain their full potential as human beings if they were not educated and aware of their place in history. A major contribution to the argument that women should receive a comprehensive education in the same subjects as men was made in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) written by early feminist and English writer Mary Wollstonecraft, who had a "keen and vital concern with education, especially the education of girls and women" (Richardson). In fact, Wollstonecraft had earlier co-founded a girls' school and used her teaching experience to write *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* (1787), a book which first established her as an author (Richardson). She advocated for coeducation on the basis that women would be better citizens and mothers if they were not condemned to remain ignorant and dependent, refuting the idea that "woman would be unsexed by acquiring strength of body and mind" (Wollstonecraft *Vindication* 304). In her view, education was a way for women to grasp not only the concepts of anatomy, the sciences, the arts, and political history, but the freedom that such knowledge could provide by enabling women to become equal to men. According to Barbara Miller Solomon's *In the Company of Educated Women: A History of Higher Education in America* (1985), Wollstonecraft's work was widely discussed in the U.S., and "[w]hether one agreed or disagreed with the *Vindication*, thinking about women would never be the same again"

(Solomon 11). Wollstonecraft thus constitutes an important feminist theorist in relation to education, although aspects of her argument still rested on biological determinist notions of women as mothers and thus did not necessarily liberate women from the idea that they had maternal duties.

The tension between educating girls because it benefited them and educating girls because it benefited others continued to exist, but girls began to gain a more equal education over time regardless. For example, whereas in the colonial era "[i]nstruction in domestic skills constituted the education common to all girls," eventually the idea that an informed citizenry was needed in the new republic led to the promotion of literacy and some liberal education for both sexes, for girls were expected to become mothers who were then expected to assist in the creation of such a citizenry (Solomon 3, 12). By the twentieth century, though, the U.S.—once known for its commitment to co-educational primary and secondary schooling—began offering domestic science courses on sewing and cooking targeted at women, which led to de facto segregation between the sexes that emphasized different roles for women and men, according to education scholar John L. Rury. In his examination of the changes in education at the turn of the century, he argues that coeducation "gave way to a studied sexual differentiation in secondary schools, guided by educators' images of the roles men and women were supposed to play in the social order" (Rury 22). Prominent critics of coeducation such as psychologist G. Stanley Hall and sociologist David Snedden believed that women should be trained to be effective wives and mothers, which required a different type of education (Rury 38). Such beliefs, along with those of public education leaders, arguably reflect a nostalgia for an ideal of domesticity amidst the increasing numbers of women in the laborforce. By resisting feminists' objections to the idea that only men should be trained for the workforce, they helped perpetuate the notion that sexual difference should matter in education and that women were not entitled to equality of educational opportunity or preparation for life outside of the home (Tyack and Hansot 207). Though increasing numbers of women would pursue college education and careers, these attitudes constitute part of the social fabric of the U.S. and help explain some of the seeming contradictions I analyze in regards to the portrayal of the Bene Gesserit's education, which is both comprehensive yet also geared toward preparing women to be concubines, wives, and mothers.

Even education did not necessarily free women from the constraints of socialization, and the arguments of feminists like Simone de Beauvoir and Betty Friedan are important for enabling a critique of the socialization of the Bene Gesserit to become wives and mothers in

noble families as a potentially significant limitation on their agency. The kinds of education and socialization mechanisms that reduce women to their childbearing and homemaking capacities were pointedly criticized by Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* (trans. 1953), who blamed them for women's lack of confidence and independence. She dedicated a section of her book to an analysis of "The Young Girl" and saw the "lack of initiative that is due to women's education" as one of the factors that doomed them to passivity and norms of femininity, which she argued were learned rather than natural (Beauvoir 352). Although Beauvoir did not prescribe a certain manner of education for women, she believed that if girls were raised in the same manner as boys, with fewer inhibitions, they would be more likely to become active beings with ambitions of their own. As noted in Chapter 2, Beauvoir did not deny the existence of differences between the sexes but dismissed the idea that they should bar women from equal opportunities, thus providing a key refutation of sex difference as a limiting factor and pointing to socialization as the more pressing target for feminist critique. Not long after, American feminist Betty Friedan in *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) would famously critique the irony resulting from women's socialization: even though they attended higher education, many women were buying into the myth that femininity and homemaking would completely fulfill them and obviate the need for them to utilize their intelligence through avenues such as paid employment (Tyack and Hansot 201, 245). Friedan wrote about the shift that had occurred where a "century earlier, women had fought for higher education; now girls went to college to get a husband" with education a secondary concern (Friedan 16). She refuted the idea of some of the leading women educators of her time who said that "women must of course use their education, but not, heaven forbid, in careers that will compete with men" (Friedan 373). It was not that Friedan argued against women's roles as wives and mothers, but that she saw that if women only had these roles, it would often lead to limitations on women's sense of autonomy and ability to choose the course of their lives. In its rejection of the passivity and wasted energy of women, albeit mainly white middle-class women, her work helped spur the second-wave feminist movement and bring about the very cultural shift that she believed was necessary in addition to education to enable women to be fulfilled and complete human beings. The significance of these critiques is that they highlight that in spite of women's greater access to education and work opportunities, societal pressure and indeed educational institutions did not seem to foster female agency and independence to the degree that many feminists hoped for. Thus, I complicate my analysis of the comprehensive nature of the Bene Gesserit's education system by looking not only at the ways in which it secures women's agency but also the ways in which it may limit it.

In an effort to transform education and make it more inclusive of women, many second-wave feminists sought to recover the stories of women throughout history as a necessary part of the curriculum, and I argue that their inclusion of the voices and experiences of women represents a challenge to traditional, male-dominated history just like the inclusion of Other Memory in the *Dune* series. Women's studies programs and consciousness-raising groups sought to raise the profile of women and expose primarily women to a variety of issues that were not covered in the traditional school curriculum. Systematic patterns of bias against women included textbooks with "many more male than female characters and illustrations" and "history books [that] ignored, distorted, or trivialized the role of women" (Tyack and Hansot 250). Feminist researchers asserted that male domination resulted in men determining what knowledge was most important and which values should guide educational policy and instruction, and that an important strategy to counteract this was the offering of more women's studies courses, which numbered around 64 in 1970 and grew to over 1,200 by 1973 (Tyack and Hansot 251, 253). They helped make women visible and challenged the male canon in academic fields, "questioning the very nature of history" (Spender *Invisible* 148). Indeed, the creation of the term 'herstory' illustrates the commitment of some second-wave feminists to prioritizing women's history and openly acknowledging that women's lives had often "been neglected or undervalued in standard histories" (Miller and Swift 121). For example, editor Robin Morgan explicitly states in her introduction to *Sisterhood is Powerful* (1970) that the Women's Liberation Movement is "creating history, or rather, *herstory*," and positions the book as a creation of women that will help make real change in other women's lives (Morgan "Introduction" xxxvi). Yet despite growing awareness of biases against women, many feminists found that institutions were resistant to change. Adrienne Rich published several essays on the topic of women's education and the challenges women faced when trying to learn in institutions that were not designed to accommodate them. Like Beauvoir, she critiqued the types of education "in schools which reward female passivity, indoctrinate girls and boys in stereotypic sex roles, and do not take the female mind seriously" (Rich "Taking" 239). She built on the observations of prior feminists to show the ongoing importance of uncovering women's history as a way of encouraging women to be active rather than passive. Dale Spender was similarly concerned with the impact of education on women, arguing in her book *Women of Ideas: And What Men Have Done to Them: From Aphra Behn to Adrienne Rich* (1982) that women of the present were "cut off from women of the past" because of education that obscured women's influence in society (Spender *Women* 4). In her recovery of women's

biographies and exploration of the invisibility in feminist circles of Mary Ritter Beard and her famous work *Woman as Force in History* (1946)—about how women have always been active contributors to society—there is a clear signaling of female agency as an important factor in human history which challenges traditional history's neglect of women's voices. What the above examples illustrate is that through their writing and activism, many feminists challenged traditional conceptions of education and history and what was considered important. Thus, they uncovered the male bias that meant "men have proceeded to describe and explain the world from their own point of view" and worked to make education more inclusive (Spender *Women* 5). In the *Dune* series, the characterization of the Bene Gesserit education system, Other Memory, and skepticism toward traditional historical accounts represents a similar challenge to traditional education and history, and though I do not argue that there are direct causal links, I find that the series does appear to anticipate and react to feminists' calls by offering women-focused alternatives for readers to consider.

## Bene Gesserit Education

Before examining the Bene Gesserit's system of education, I must note that even though it presents a challenge in that there are very few clues as to what it entails, there is enough textual evidence to enable the reader to speculate on the women's early education based on the characterization of the Bene Gesserit's abilities. The lack of overt description contributes to the motif of concealment that critic C. N. Manlove describes as a core part of the series, as discussed in Chapter 1, with no detailed description of the curriculum nor any estimation of how many girls are being educated in Bene Gesserit schools. Like with other aspects of the Sisterhood, their educational training has received little critical attention. Critics often provide only a few sentences about the Bene Gesserit's skills to explain their organization, neglecting to analyze how the series proposes that women acquire such skills. Others, like Jack Hand and Miriam Youngerman Miller, go further and imply that despite their skills the Bene Gesserit are little more than glorified noblewomen, resigned to marry and birth children according to the desires of their male partners or the Sisterhood. Hand appears to base this idea on the example of Jessica in *Dune*, since his article only concerns this novel. M. Miller sees the prominence of their reproductive capacity as indicating the "fundamentally traditional view of the role of women expressed in *Dune*," a concern I noted in Chapter 3 (M. Miller 182). But the Bene Gesserit's characterization is more complicated than these critics' analyses imply, and it is worth exploring how the series proposes that these women gain such comprehensive education and training—some of which was examined in

Chapter 2 and the rest of which is detailed below—and how these factor into the depiction of their strong loyalty to the Sisterhood. It also becomes pertinent to explore the significance of the resemblance between the Bene Gesserit and the real-life Jesuit religious order as a strong indication that the Sisterhood is not supposed to be understood by the reader as interested merely in offering finishing schools for noblewomen. Considering the limited evidence as well as the ways in which the representation of the Sisterhood is similar to the Jesuits, I argue that the series characterizes the Bene Gesserit's education system as a cover for their recruitment and network of loyal female agents and thus a way to secure and promote embodied female agency, but in most cases only to the extent that it aligns with the goals of the Sisterhood.

When considered together, the examples of the Bene Gesserit's skills described in the series point toward an educational philosophy that prioritizes a combination of training and socialization that produces women with mental acuity and skilled bodies. As discussed in previous chapters, the series depicts the Bene Gesserit as masters of prana-bindu as well as the Voice, skills which comprise the most obvious outcome of their educational program. However, the series also hints that this program is much more extensive. Offering a compact summary of what their training is likely to encompass based on the characterization of their abilities as adult women, Robert L. Mack writes, "An ancient and mysterious order of women, the Bene Gesserit train (almost exclusively female) acolytes in diplomacy, espionage, sex, martial arts, lie detection, and mind control" (Mack 39). Lorenzo DiTommaso adds that their "extensive education program" must also include instruction about "poisons, narcotics, politics, and genetics" (DiTommaso 318). The sheer scope of this kind of education points to an intensity of mental and physical training, even though the reader does not see girls engaged in it. The reader instead is encouraged to extrapolate based on brief mentions by Reverend Mother Mohiam and Jessica in the opening chapter of *Dune* and the portrayal of their seemingly strained relationship. Through Mohiam's response to Paul's outrage at her seemingly dismissive treatment of his mother—"Jessica *was* my serving wench, lad, for fourteen years at school"—the reader gains an image of a hierarchical school with young girls like Jessica performing menial tasks for superiors like Mohiam until they are assigned elsewhere (*Dune* 7). Yet through Jessica's response to Mohiam's question about whether Jessica has ever stopped hating her, the text is able to add depth to this relationship and show that the women formed a bond in the process: "I both love and hate you […]. The hate—that's from pains I must never forget. The love—that's…." (*Dune* 11). The language is

specific enough to convey the presence of strong emotions, yet vague enough to leave the reader wondering what happened at the school. Due to the scene's placement in the text near the scene featuring the arduous gom jabbar test, which the reader knows Jessica has already passed, it is likely that the reader connects the 'pains' Jessica mentions with the rigor of her training and undergoing of other tests. In this way, without needing to provide detailed descriptions of Bene Gesserit schools, the text gives the reader the sense that they provide many years of rigorous training that results in a woman like Jessica emerging skilled in a variety of ways and desirous of putting her son through a similar schooling regimen. Another example of how the series hints at Bene Gesserit schooling is in a scene with Jessica and her new Fremen housekeeper, the Shadout Mapes, wherein her explanation of her skills to Mapes serves as a clue to the reader that the Bene Gesserit gain a broad set of communication abilities: "'Tongues are the Bene Gesserit's first learning,' Jessica said. 'I know the Bhotani Jib and the Chakobsa, all the hunting languages'" (*Dune* 53). Each time the series mentions another ability of the Bene Gesserit, it builds their characterization as women who, in a universe of unknown size, can almost effortlessly remember an incredible amount of information on many topics as well as how to use their body in myriad ways. This prompts the reader to speculate that the successful impartation and memorization of this broad scope of knowledge require an educational environment where girls are trained and socialized to become both mentally and physically skilled and prepared to actively use their abilities, as Jessica is shown doing.

The characterization of this kind of comprehensive education complements the characterization of the Bene Gesserit as agential, resulting in the series offering a representation of women who have a pathway out of the stereotypically feminine passivity that many feminists critiqued. Beauvoir is a harsh critic of the type of unequal education that she views as consigning women to a passive and alienated role. For her, the upbringing that teaches girls "cooking, sewing, [and] housekeeping" and encourages them to role-play with dolls limits them to a vocation of motherhood (Beauvoir 296-297). She believes that girls pressured to act in stereotypically feminine ways eventually lose their initiative and fail to move into the realm of work and intellectual achievements. To avoid this fate, then, Beauvoir advocates for equal education so girls have more freedom to choose their path of existence, stating that "[w]omen should be given just as much instruction as boys" (Beauvoir 253). In one sense, the *Dune* series never indicates that boys and girls receive equal education. Rather, it suggests that a girl like Jessica is trained for a variety of tasks, some of which include

becoming a suitable partner and mother in the household of a nobleman. However, due to the many abilities shown in the series, it is more likely for the reader to see their education system as overpreparing them than underpreparing them. There is no indication that the Bene Gesserit are missing out on learning about an array of topics or being limited to a preparation for motherhood because they are female. Instead, their education system appears to take them seriously as students, unlike many of the educational systems that Rich critiques for opening up to women only to deny them and their learning any importance. She poses the questions: "What has been the student's experience of education in schools which reward female passivity, indoctrinate girls and boys in stereotypic sex roles, and do not take the female mind seriously? How does a woman gain a sense of her *self* in a system […]?" (Rich "Taking" 239). Here Rich critiques the way that girls receive an education but are still restricted by stereotypes about their capabilities and indeed still rewarded for passivity. I argue that the representation of the Bene Gesserit's schooling offers a model counter to this, implying that girls learn a variety of topics that traditionally females may not be expected to need to know—such as history, languages, hand-to-hand combat, and political science. This then helps them understand themselves as active participants, though still within the constraints of the systems of both the wider Imperium and the Bene Gesserit, which seeks to leverage their individual agency toward securing collective agency. Nonetheless, I see this as a way for the series to represent women as having a pathway out of the ignorance and passivity that feminist writers were critiquing, a way for girls to be socialized to become women who are knowledgeable and skilled in a variety of ways.

## Parallels with the Jesuit Order

A convincing indication that the Bene Gesserit's education system prepares women to be agential is its connection with the real-life Jesuit religious order, which provides a short-hand way of characterizing the Sisterhood as an order whose education has a specific purpose of training agents to subversively advance its own goals. As the reader comes to understand throughout the *Dune* series, the Bene Gesserit do not provide comprehensive education to girls like Jessica for unselfish reasons—they prepare girls in part to further their stated mission of 'improving' humanity and guiding political affairs in the Imperium. In this, they resemble the Society of Jesus, founded by Ignatius Loyola in 1540, which quickly gained a reputation for its successful education and missionary programs. Herbert was personally familiar with the order due to the fact that his ten Irish Catholic maternal aunts insisted that he receive Catholic training over the protestations of his agnostic father, which resulted in

him being taught by Jesuits (B. Herbert 21). In fact, Herbert himself called the Bene Gesserit "female Jesuits" according to Timothy O'Reilly and Herbert's son Brian (O'Reilly 89; B. Herbert 21). Use of the name Bene Gesserit, "essentially, good Jesuits," prompts the reader to draw on their perception of the Jesuits as a guide to the Bene Gesserit's education and missionary work, precluding a need for detailed elaborations on these aspects of the order (Kennedy 102). In his comparison of the two groups, O'Reilly sees a resemblance due to the Jesuits being "[a]n order whose political power and long-term vision silently shaped a great sweep of world affairs, and who were once famed for their training and asceticism" (O'Reilly 89). M. Miller calls the Sisterhood

> a politico-religious organization that has overtones of the popular perceptions of the Society of Jesus; the Bene Gesserit are cunning, resourceful, manipulative, secretive, sophistical, and fanatically devoted to the advancement of their order. Like the Jesuits, the sisters of the Bene Gesserit seek to further their cause by an elaborate and rigorous educational system that teaches key females, among other things, exquisitely subtle means of perceiving and controlling the behavior of themselves and others and an overriding loyalty to the aims of their order. (M. Miller 182-183)

Although she is highly critical of female characters in the series, she does acknowledge that the Bene Gesserit share similarities to the Jesuits such that they both offer a thorough education that provides their members with a significant degree of control in their world, and both critics hint at the subversive nature of their operations by using words like 'silently,' 'secretive,' and 'subtle.' According to histories of the Jesuits, they were able to achieve a large degree of influence in the world relatively quickly through their education and missionary programs. In *The First Jesuits* (1993) by John W. O'Malley, one of the principal historians of the Jesuits, he discusses how by the second decade of their existence, the Jesuits had begun to open schools and discover their ability to influence both students and their families (O'Malley 207). They believed that both the body and the mind should be engaged in their studies and saw that the schools "would be powerful instruments […] for building the future" as they imagined it (O'Malley 214, 207). The Jesuits soon pioneered the use of education as a ministry for a religious order on a worldwide scale, establishing within two centuries a "remarkable network of more than eight hundred educational institutions" and becoming known for their extensive missionary network (O'Malley 239, Bangert 498). But although some, like English author H. G. Wells, praised the Jesuits' military-like discipline, others were critical of their political maneuverings, helping "to account for the cloak-and-dagger attraction of this most controversial and mythologized of Christian orders" (Mitchell 11, 8).

By including an organization that similarly combines rigorous education and missionary work, the *Dune* series is able to tap into some of the mythology surrounding the Jesuits in its characterization of the Bene Gesserit, though this may result in the Sisterhood being associated with some of the negative features of the mythology as well. In addition, the series is able to position them as influential agents in a way that would have been difficult to do had they been based on a female religious order, for it was the Jesuits who had the global reach, notoriety, and still-active influence in the world that the reader could draw upon in imagining the Bene Gesserit. Once the reader makes the connection, they can more readily understand the Bene Gesserit as a politically-oriented organization that performs teaching and missionary work for a certain purpose: to train women to further the Sisterhood's goals across the Imperium.

The link between the Bene Gesserit and the Jesuits is confirmed through the use of the term Missionaria Protectiva, and the depiction of this program strongly indicates that one goal of the Bene Gesserit education system is to prepare the female body to be an active political instrument in the farthest and potentially most hostile reaches of the universe, not just in the courts of the nobles. Using the limited information available in the series, the reader can view the Missionaria Protectiva as being similar to the Jesuits' missions in that it sends people out into different regions to spread a particular message. The term first appears when Mohiam mentions it to Jessica before the latter's arrival on Dune, or Arrakis, explaining that the "Missionaria Protectiva has been in there and softened it up somewhat" (*Dune* 24). What this vague reference means becomes clearer in a later epigraph by Irulan:

> *With the Lady Jessica and Arrakis, the Bene Gesserit system of sowing implant-legends through the Missionaria Protectiva came to its full fruition. The wisdom of seeding the known universe with a prophecy pattern for the protection of B.G. personnel has long been appreciated, but never have we seen a condition-ut-extremis with more ideal mating of person and preparation. The prophetic legends had taken on Arrakis even to the extent of adopted labels (including Reverend Mother, canto and respondu, and most of the Shari-a panoplia propheticus).* (*Dune* 47)

Here the reader understands the Missionaria Protectiva to be a means for the Bene Gesserit to spread legends and prophecies as they move throughout the universe, what David Miller calls "self-serving mumbo jumbo sowed […] against future crisis" and Kevin Mulcahy describes as a "parody of Christian missionary organizations" (D. Miller 21, Mulcahy 32). This is an important passage for establishing that the relationship between the Bene Gesserit and the Fremen is one akin to that of a missionary and her converts, wherein a woman is sent to a place in order to seed it with information that will reap benefits if the people believe her. The

epigraph thus sets the context for Jessica's behavior toward Mapes and prepares the reader to see via Jessica how Bene Gesserit training prepares women to participate in and benefit from the Missionaria Protectiva, though the text later shows Jessica's inability to opt out of this participation, which I explore in a later section as a limitation on her autonomy. In the scene with Mapes, the reader sees Jessica relying on her knowledge of other languages and religious mysteries to impress Mapes: "'I know the Dark Things and the ways of the Great Mother,' Jessica said. She read the more obvious signs in Mapes' actions and appearance, the petit betrayals. 'Miseces prejia,' she said in the Chakobsa tongue. 'Andral t're pera! Trada cik buscakri miseces perakri—' Mapes took a backward step, appeared poised to flee" (*Dune* 53). Through descriptions of Mapes' body movements and Jessica's thoughts, the scene presents an image of a tense encounter between two strangers, with Mapes testing Jessica to see if she is the Bene Gesserit foretold in the prophecy and Jessica relying on her education to answer correctly and preparing her body for combat in case she fails. Lacking a detailed description of Jessica's vast knowledge, the reader nonetheless understands that she is supposed to possess it and would also be prepared for similar encounters on other planets where the Missionaria Protectiva had been active. The reader can extrapolate from the brief information given that in order for women to believably be able to be sent on missions to the farthest reaches of the universe—including rugged desert planets like Arrakis—and survive there, they must indeed be given extensive education and bodily training beforehand in Bene Gesserit schools. By implying that Bene Gesserit women are armed with religious sayings, fluency in multiple languages, and bodily skills in martial arts and vocal control, the series is able to characterize them as being prepared to be political instruments whether they are the missionaries themselves or those who come along later and need to use the prophecies for their safety in a new environment.

The basis of the Sisterhood being the Jesuits, an order well-known for exerting agency in the areas of education and missionary work, adds a level of complexity to the depiction of the Bene Gesserit's agency by making them appear subversive not only in relation to women's education but also in the means by which they influence others. The Bene Gesserit thus resist some of the gender stereotyping that feminists like Beauvoir and Rich critique, for rather than being steered into an education focused on homemaking, they receive a comprehensive education that prepares them for a host of life situations, including missionary work. Beauvoir argues that with better education, a girl "would be interested in what she was *doing*, she would throw herself without reserve into undertakings," and that "[i]t would be

beneficial above all for the young girl not to be influenced against taking charge herself of her own existence" (Beauvoir 762). She speaks here of the initiative that girls would be more likely to take if they were not relegated to inferiority and passivity, if more were expected of them. Rich also highlights the lack of self-affirmation that girls receive and their relegation to housework and raising children, seeing in them obstacles to an equal education (Rich "Taking" 243). The series implies that all Bene Gesserit women receive a thorough education regardless of the role that the Sisterhood has planned for them, which arms them with the capabilities to actively take on new challenges wherever they find themselves rather than remain passive. But the depiction of the Fremen as a gullible people—unaware of the Bene Gesserit's role as agents of the Missionaria Protectiva—and Jessica's willingness to exploit their beliefs, shows the Bene Gesserit to only be interested in safeguarding their own agency, even if it necessitates the loss of agency of those around them, which is similar to what occurs when they use the Voice. Paul Kucera notes this dominating tendency of their mission work in his article on the Voice, writing that it is the "person aware of the source of the voice of legend and prophecy […] [who] secures safety and self-preservation" (Kucera 236-237). Yet his call in a footnote for a postcolonial reading of *Dune* that could explore the Missionaria Protectiva in depth has yet to be taken up; indeed, the characterization of the Fremen has hardly been examined in the criticism, and I see this as an important avenue for future scholarship that can, like this thesis, provide critical perspectives on characters other than Paul or Leto II. The linking of the Bene Gesserit with the Jesuits enables the reader to see women as subversive in that they are actively working to propagate protective legends for themselves, but also in that they are restricting the autonomy of others like the Fremen by manipulating their beliefs and behaviors without their knowledge.

## Limitations on Women's Autonomy

Because the Bene Gesserit are depicted as fully willing to use subversive means to secure women's agency, it is not at odds with their characterization to show them at times selling women when it suits their purposes, which contributes to a stereotypical representation of women as objectified rather than autonomous. This aspect has likely contributed to the argument that the Bene Gesserit are subservient characters who lack agency, with several critics pointing to women's positions as concubines and wives as evidence of this. Hand argues that despite their secret breeding program goal, the Bene Gesserit's conditioning of women to be concubines and companions "amounts to an acquiescence in the dominant male value system to the point of approving a kind of female

servitude" (Hand 26). M. Miller notes that even though female characters are strong they still "willingly accept subordinate positions as concubines" (M. Miller 186). In the series, the Sisterhood is characterized as having a method of operation that relies on women partnering with men, which means the Bene Gesserit are not shown challenging the family structure of a male-headed household wherein women are defined in relation to men. Instead, they are shown content to administer their secret breeding program that requires them to produce children with a variety of men by maintaining a low profile. On the one hand, the reader may understand this representation of women to be a necessary part of their characterization as women who do not want the rest of the Imperium to know they are socializing girls to become strong, agential Bene Gesserit Sisters with bodily abilities that will enable them to carry out the Sisterhood's wishes. This may explain why Bene Gesserit schools are implied to be places where at least some girls are educated for a life among nobility and then go on to become the partners of noblemen without the men realizing the extent of women's mental and physical capabilities. Yet this cannot explain why the series depicts the Bene Gesserit selling women to men. There is only one example of this in the series, but the text offers no commentary that would indicate to the reader that the practice is unusual or distasteful, which implies that it is acceptable and common within the world of the novels. In an early chapter in *Dune*, the references to Jessica being sold to become Duke Leto's concubine are brief but paint an image of a scared young woman being removed from her home by strangers: "Not since the day when the Duke's buyers had taken her from the school had she felt this frightened and unsure of herself" and "He remembered that the lay sisters at the school had called her skinny, so his buyers had told him" (*Dune* 48-49). There is no reason for the reader to think that Jessica had any choice in the matter, and even her training is not enough to prevent her from doubting herself. Carolyn Wendell criticizes the organization for selling its women "to the highest bidders—or at least to the bidders who have the right set of genes" and therefore making them "manipulated in the crassest sense—bought and sold like animals" (Wendell 347-348). Hand believes that this means "the Bene Gesserit accept the traditional role of women as property" (Hand 26). The schools do appear to sell women into service without qualms, and the text could have offered a different explanation for Jessica's entrance into the Atreides household or left it ambiguous. Having her sold denies her humanity and treats her like a chattel in a series that does not otherwise objectify women in this way. Although a later novel implies that there is a practical reason for the practice—that of fundraising for the Bene Gesserit's operations—this is too late to change the reader's impression formed early in *Dune* (*GE* 74). The references to the Bene Gesserit's practice of

selling women to noble families detract from the representation of individual women as agential, for they recycle the trope of the objectified woman who lacks autonomy.

The series thus indicates that in order for women to function as agents for the Sisterhood, at least some of them have to function in an indirect way within households by conforming to stereotypically feminine norms, and in this way the series can be interpreted as problematizing radical feminist theory by suggesting that women may gain more politically from maintaining inequality than by resisting it. Indeed, when looked at over the course of the series, the portrayal of the Bene Gesserit indicates that they have operated successfully not by being equal to men but by functioning in traditional structures where they have less autonomy. Based on Jessica's example, the reader can speculate that Bene Gesserit women are desirable for their intelligence and their beauty, making them ideal companions who can move seamlessly between roles in a noble household. Jessica is described as having a "regal beauty" and moving with grace, and she appears as a hostess in the first formal banquet on Dune as well as a tutor to her son and a secretary to Duke Leto (*Dune* 49). The series certainly implies that the Bene Gesserit have been conditioned to make good companions, which involves them being beautiful women who can enhance a nobleman's reputation and raise his children. However, it also suggests that the Bene Gesserit are crafty enough to know how to use existing systems for their advantage rather than try to overturn them, that they prefer to use their leverage to access high-ranking families for their breeding program and accept any restrictions as a necessary cost. Although Hand's description below is exaggerated and lacks textual evidence, it does accurately convey the sense that the Bene Gesserit's appearances can be deceiving: "The women, always physically attractive, are sought after avidly, because they have been conditioned as perfect concubines and companions, seeming to bend to their lord's every wish, but conditioned secretly to obey the Bene Gesserit without question" (Hand 26). Seen in this way, the series problematizes radical feminist theory—in which gender roles and traditional structures should be dismantled to ensure equality between women and men—because it suggests that women can strategically use the system in the short-term for political goals. By having women appear to be genteel and loyal companions even while they are passing on information to the Sisterhood and bearing children according to a secret breeding program, the series shows the reader one way for women to gain political influence without resisting the inequality that prevents them from being in traditional leadership positions themselves. Yet by characterizing the Bene Gesserit as content to operate in this way, the series suggests there is no pathway in which women can refrain from

upholding these structures and conforming to stereotypical feminine norms. This means it cannot be viewed as wholly liberatory even as it shows expressions of female agency in an unequal system.

Neither can the series be seen as liberatory in relation to its resolution of a tension between individual and collective agency in favor of the latter, as seen through the depiction of Jessica perpetuating the work of the Missionaria Protectiva seemingly against her will. In the scene where Jessica encounters Mapes, Jessica recognizes that she is manipulating her Fremen housekeeper but appears unable to stop because such manipulation affords her safety and authority after her arrival on a new planet. As alluded to earlier, almost as soon as Jessica and Mapes meet, they begin an exchange wherein Jessica must correctly answer Mapes' probing questions in order to prove that she fulfills the prophecy:

> "I recognized the word. It's a very ancient word."
>
> "You know the ancient tongues then?" Mapes asked, and she waited with an odd intensity.
>
> "Tongues are the Bene Gesserit's first learning," Jessica said. […]
>
> Mapes nodded. "Just as the legend says."
>
> And Jessica wondered: *Why do I play out this sham?* But the Bene Gesserit ways were devious and compelling. (*Dune* 53)

Use of Jessica's point of view and the inclusion of her internal dialogue is essential to the reader's understanding of the effect of the Bene Gesserit's education in the subject of the Missionaria Protectiva, enabling the reader to see that Jessica has been trained and plays along with the line of questioning even as she wonders why she is doing so. Her seeming helplessness to resist suggests that both women are caught in the Bene Gesserit's sham. After Jessica successfully convinces Mapes that she is indeed the figure foretold in the prophecy, Mapes says, "Now the thing must take its course" and Jessica realizes this is "a specific catchphrase from the Missionaria Protectiva's stock of incantations—*The coming of the Reverend Mother to free you*" (*Dune* 56). Here the text confirms for the reader that Jessica was drawing on her Bene Gesserit education in the Missionaria Protectiva to align herself with the criteria of the prophecy, thus securing her safety as well as her authority, since Mapes will spread her awe among other Fremen. This scene offers a cynical view of religion and prophecies—implying that they are completely fabricated and useful only for someone to gain authority—but it also reveals a tension between the agency of Jessica as an individual woman and the collective agency of the Sisterhood, which relies on women like her perpetuating the myths in order to maintain the Bene Gesserit's influence in the Imperium.

Although in the series Jessica disobeys the order by having a son instead of a daughter, at no point does she expose the Missionaria, showing she remains loyal in this avenue. Instead, she exploits "the long chain of Bene Gesserit scheming that had forged another link here" and not only "survive[s] a deadly crisis" but helps herself and her son to gain acceptance among the Fremen, which enables Paul to overthrow the Emperor within the space of only a couple of years (*Dune* 57). As Kucera argues, the text shows that Jessica "can only continue her hold by entering further into the text of the myth" (Kucera 236). Thus, the reader sees no resolution of Jessica's initial discomfort at manipulating Mapes and no indication that Jessica will be able to break free of her training as a Bene Gesserit agent who upholds the prophecies and legends that she knows to be fabrications. Instead, there is the representation of a woman perpetuating the 'devious and compelling' work of the Bene Gesserit, a role for which she has been prepared. Overall, in spite of limited descriptions of the Bene Gesserit's education system, the series is able to characterize it as a means for their recruitment and network of loyal female agents, but not one that guarantees women's individual autonomy.

## Women's Access to Other Memory

Having examined the affordances and limitations of the Bene Gesserit's education and socialization, I now turn to examine Other Memory—an access within a woman's own body to first-hand experiences, memories, and wisdom from others, meaning her female ancestors—that I argue is a way that the series shows women expanding their education and developing a woman-controlled historical narrative that offers another avenue for female agency. First I discuss how Other Memory is characterized as an embodied access to history through the depiction of Jessica becoming a Reverend Mother. The text implies that it is the mind-body synergy that the Bene Gesserit cultivate through their intensive training that enables girls when they are older to successfully undergo the spice agony, as discussed in Chapter 2. In this process, the spice overdose a woman consumes requires her to physically neutralize the poison and mentally withstand the opening up of her unconscious to the collective memories of her female ancestors if she is to survive and become a Reverend Mother. In Jessica's case, the Water of Life ceremony that she undergoes in *Dune* is the Fremen's version of the spice agony, and her survival provides her with the Fremen Reverend Mother Ramallo's memories, "permitting a view down a wide corridor to other Reverend Mothers until there seemed no end to them" (*Dune* 358). The reader can see that Jessica gains access to not only Ramallo's memories, but those of countless Fremen women, and that they are all stored in her body. In this way, she continues the tradition of "the thread of the past

[being] carried by Sayyadina after Sayyadina," this being the Fremen term for another type of religious leader (*Dune* 359). The sense created by the text is that just as the women of the Bene Gesserit school helped educate and socialize Jessica in her early life, so the memories of Ramallo and other women will influence Jessica by exposing her to new ideas and perspectives. This sense is conveyed through the description of historical scenes that appear to be in a type of slide reel that Jessica is flipping through and the repetition of words of sight such as 'saw' and 'seeing.' She sees images of Fremen being hunted and enslaved, "[s]cenes of brutal ferocity" (*Dune* 359). She also sees how all of this history has been preserved and passed down through women, first through oral tradition and then through the psychic exchange through the Water of Life ceremony. Through these images and the description of Jessica's experience, the text clearly positions Other Memory as a way in which women gain embodied access to history—they can see historical events and their causes as no other characters can and they become responsible for maintaining this access to history and passing it on when their time comes. Although the series does not show Jessica relying on this Other Memory very often, it does remind the reader in the later novels that this ability enriches Bene Gesserit women by enabling them to draw on the experiences and wisdom of other women to better inform their own decisions, as shown in examples of Reverend Mothers Lucilla and Sheeana relying on Other Memory to guide their decisions (*HD* 7, *CHA* 47). This characterization of Other Memory makes it a unique and immediate means of accessing others' perspectives, something which enables the Bene Gesserit to constantly learn from others rather than be limited to their own point of view. Thus, Other Memory becomes an expansion of the education they receive at school and the network of women from whom they can find support.

With the basis for Other Memory being Jungian theories about the collective unconscious, the series shows that sexual difference is a factor in enabling different abilities for women and men. However, critics have not explored Other Memory or its strong gendered component in any depth. O'Reilly never uses the term Other Memory and only mentions the collective unconscious in relation to Paul as a mythic hero, leaving its role among the Bene Gesserit unexamined. D. Miller, in explaining the sources of Bene Gesserit authority, describes the women as being guided by Reverend Mothers who have "joined the collective memory of all their female ancestors" but does not proceed to analyze this phenomena (D. Miller 20). Other critics acknowledge the significance of the unconscious without deeper examination, as when John Ower notes that Bene Gesserit discipline "opens

the treasurehouse of the unconscious mind" (Ower 133). Susan McLean's article "A Psychological Approach to Fantasy in the *Dune* Series" would seem to be the most likely to engage with the Jungian themes in Other Memory, but she focuses on Oedipal themes instead. Yet there is a recognizable influence from Jung's theory of the collective unconscious in the creation of Other Memory, as well as some of the problematic dualisms regarding the female and male psyches discussed in Chapter 2. Jung theorizes that the collective unconscious is "the deposit of all human experience right back to its remotest beginnings" (Jung 44). He believes that it resides in the mind of every person and is "the universal, collective matrix out of which" all humans live their lives (Wehr 51). The portrayal of Other Memory appears to incorporate key aspects of these theories, being characterized as the psychic linkage of one's ancestors that the Bene Gesserit open their mind to while undergoing the spice agony. Instead of the text showing them being able to access all human experience or history, though, it shows them only being able to access female experience and history. The text also indicates that it is only through this process that a Bene Gesserit can become a Reverend Mother, linking with Jung's use of the term 'matrix' derived from Latin meaning womb or breeding female, or 'mater' meaning mother (Colman). Since Jung conceived of the unconscious as feminine, it is understandable that the series replicates this dualism by associating primarily women with Other Memory. However, this Jungian influence results in the creation of a strong gendered component to Other Memory that not only emphasizes that there is something unique about the female body that enables women to access Other Memory, but may limit agency by showing that women face limitations on their capabilities, such as being unable to gain access to both sides of the ancestors in the way that men like Paul and Leto II can, discussed below.

Indeed, the first half of the series strongly promotes the idea that women's capabilities in relation to matters of the psyche such as Other Memory are inferior to men's. The whole plot of *Dune,* in fact, revolves around the notion that Paul is a male uniquely bred to be able to undergo the spice agony and access memories that the women of the Bene Gesserit cannot. The reader discovers this early in the novel when Mohiam explains to Paul that a Bene Gesserit woman "can look many places in her memory—in her body's memory. We look down so many avenues of the past…but only feminine avenues. […] It is said a man will come one day and find in the gift of the drug his inward eye. He will look where we cannot—into both feminine and masculine pasts" (*Dune* 13). This statement sets out straightforwardly that women face limitations on their skills whereas this chosen man will

not. The reader sees this occurring when Jessica gains access only to her female memories while Paul is able to look where she cannot. But even though Paul drinks the Water of Life and becomes like a Reverend Mother, he is characterized as more concerned with his unlocked prescient abilities than others' memories. There is only a brief hint in *Dune* that he can access ancestral memories when he feels "the old-man wisdom" within and the chuckle of his maternal grandfather, Baron Harkonnen (*Dune* 456). Indeed, it is not until the end of *Dune Messiah*, when his newborn son Leto mysteriously shares his consciousness, that Paul is clearly shown to have access to his male ancestors: "His own life whipped past him. He saw his father. He *was* his father. And the grandfather, and the grandfathers before that. His awareness tumbled through a mind-shattering corridor of his whole male line" (*DM* 316). Although this portrayal of men's access to Other Memory is imprecise, *Children of Dune* makes clear that women have weaker psyches through the characterization of Alia and Ghanima. Based on an understanding of Jessica's experience, the reader would assume that Alia cannot access male ancestors, and yet the reader sees that she is possessed by the one who had previously haunted Paul: Baron Harkonnen. This suggests that she is unable to resist the ancestral voices within her while Paul faces no such issue. With Paul's twin children, Ghanima and Leto, the text states explicitly that "the female had more weakness in that inner assault" of ancestral voices and that "[t]here lay the origin of the Bene Gesserit fear" (*CHI* 75). Regardless of all of the physical and mental feats that the women of the Bene Gesserit can perform, then, this statement shows that they are not quite as able to control their access to Other Memory and thus have capabilities inferior to those of men like Paul and Leto.

However, in a similar way to what is shown with women in traditional leadership roles, discussed in Chapter 4, once the series turns its focus to the Bene Gesserit in later novels, sexual differences which had been presented as limitations become less pronounced. After the series moves on from depicting the core Atreides family, it portrays the Bene Gesserit women in *Heretics of Dune* and *Chapterhouse: Dune* having no trouble accommodating the Other Memory gained through the spice agony as well as through Sharing with living Reverend Mothers, to be discussed below. There is no sense that they are lacking because they do not have access to male ancestral memory, nor that they seek to pursue it. In this way, the reader may see sexual difference as a limitation for women early in the series, but they are less likely to see it as such once a majority of the characters are women shown to be functioning well without a need for access to the masculine past.

In spite of the lack of consistency regarding the gendered nature of Other Memory, overall the series associates it more closely with women such that it represents a woman-controlled version of historical memory housed within the female body, thus prioritizing a bodily-based means of storing information and showcasing the capabilities of the body. As the series indicates, the transmission and commemoration of experiences are embodied in women and require their involvement such that the Bene Gesserit in effect become the repository through which memories are preserved, rather than requiring social institutions or traditional historians to keep the past alive. As seen in Jessica's example, all of the female ancestors' experiences become embodied in her once she becomes a Reverend Mother, making her part of the chain passing along this knowledge from woman to woman. The reader can see that the Bene Gesserit carry perpetual access to historical memory through their body and appear to be enriched by this knowledge. Thus, access to Other Memory is characterized as something the Bene Gesserit gain based on the strength of their body, not a technological gadget. With the inclusion of passages like "Reverend Mothers embodied history," the series makes clear that it is not externally sourced and therefore not subject to theft or erasure in the way that books or other physical objects might be (*CHA* 5). It is significant that the series elevates such non-written, bodily-based memory in the genre of science fiction—as do some of the feminist science fiction narratives discussed later—since other science fiction stories showcase the freedom that humans might attain by entrusting memories, personalities, and other information to computers and memory banks. The concept of mind uploading, or "the preservation of an individual's personality and the instantiation of it in a biological or digital body," is one example of a technology-enabled means of saving and transferring information about humans (Geraci 55). It appeared in science fiction in Sir Arthur C. Clarke's novella *The City and the Stars* (1956)—with "a world where people's personalities are stored in a computer memory and then downloaded into bodies cloned for them at predetermined times"—and eventually became a staple in the genre (Geraci 54). Clarke put forth the idea that "[i]f you got enough information out of the brain and reproduced it with enough accuracy elsewhere, then you'd have a way of re-creating that person's memories, their innermost thoughts, feelings and everything else. […] You might even be able to transfer an entire human mind into a computer" (Regis 150). In this view human memories become pieces of data that can be stored, recreated, or transferred with the help of digital technology and the body becomes unnecessary, raising the question that critics within posthumanist or transhumanist studies have posed: "What might be in store for the human body as it becomes increasingly vulnerable to technological intervention and

transformation?" (Hollinger "Posthumanism" 268). In contrast, the view in the *Dune* series is that the body is fully capable of storing memories without needing an external device and that this is a preferable means of accessing memories. The depiction of the Bene Gesserit's preference for woman-controlled, embodied memory and history aligns with the series' focus on the development of the human mind as opposed to technology on which humans become dependent. It is the body in partnership with the mind—in line with the mind-body synergy discussed in Chapter 2—that houses human memory, rather than books or memory drives. It is also the female body that the series most closely associates with this type of memory.

This becomes an important factor in the depiction of female agency by showing women shaping and controlling the historical narrative and thus having an alternative to the traditional, male-dominated history that both the series and many feminists decry as problematic. Throughout the series are indications that traditional history is more susceptible to falsification and bias than the type of history found through Other Memory. Frequent warnings by characters make them appear to be very skeptical of traditional historical accounts, which the reader may see as ironic considering the entire first novel relies on Princess Irulan's ostensibly royally-commissioned histories in the epigraphs, which I argued in Chapter 4 showcased an influential female voice that shapes the reader's understanding of each chapter. In an epigraph by Leto II in *Heretics of Dune*, he notes that historians "exercise great power" to change the past to fit their interpretations and so change the future (*HD* 371). Miles Teg calls the writing of history "largely a process of diversion. Most historical accounts divert attention from the secret influences around the recorded events" and those that survive may be ignored or destroyed (*HD* 468). In *Chapterhouse: Dune*, Reverend Mother Odrade advises her pupil to seek out the words of the cynics on historical events because historians are prejudiced, seeking to please those who are ruling. The text indicates her firm belief in the ability of the Bene Gesserit to avoid making the same mistakes in their survey of history through her statement that "Reverend Mothers search out the *somethings* and learn the prejudices of historians" (*CHA* 216). The series also suggests that traditional history is flawed because it is overly focused on upheavals and confrontations like war, despite the fact that everyday activities are also an important aspect of human life. This becomes quite clear in an exchange between Murbella (before she undergoes the spice agony) and Duncan, where he encourages her not to trust the type of history that would only see a husband with a weapon off at war and completely neglect his wife working in the rice paddy and providing for her babies. "A Bene Gesserit would never miss such a thing," Duncan says,

because they are very perceptive and know that the "[w]oman and plow are life-reality" without which there is no humankind (*CHA* 255). In one brief image, the text critiques traditional history and shows that the Bene Gesserit's way of understanding events avoids overlooking a more complete narrative.

In its critique of history, the series reflects an awareness of real-world challenges to history like those that were occurring in second-wave feminism. It echoes the critiques of history circulating around the time of the postmodern or 'linguistic turn' in the twentieth century, which called into question the idea that there was one truth or 'meta-narrative' that historians could uncover. In his influential work *Metahistory* (1973), for example, historian Hayden White suggested that 'real' history had much in common with 'fictional' literature—a controversial claim that led others to accuse him of saying that "everything is fiction" and undermining their discipline (Korhonen 12). As Hélène Bowen Raddeker explains in *Sceptical History: Feminist and Postmodern Approaches in Practice* (2007), a postmodernist view of history challenges the implication in mainstream history that "there is only one possible 'true story' of something or someone in the past" that can be found by a historian, and she contends that feminists contributed to the development of this critique by objecting to not only the exclusion of women but also disciplinary tenets such as so-called disinterestedness (Raddeker 10, 121). Thus, the "field of history has exploded both within and beyond traditional boundaries" since the previous generation, with women's history and world history presenting a challenge to the idea of history as a way for men in certain countries to celebrate their public and political achievements (Reilly xii). This has resulted in a growing recognition that "[a]ctivities in which women have played more important roles than men […] are as important a part of the human past as the largely male-dominated 'outside' activities of traditional history books" such as "city, state, war, and foreign relations" (Reilly xi-xii).

When I use the term traditional history in this thesis, I refer to this male-dominated and male-controlled history that often excludes women, and I argue that this is similar to the definition of history that is critiqued in the *Dune* series. In second-wave feminism, a "fundamental tenet of women's liberation was that women had to learn to rely on one another because, it was argued, much that had been written was written by men for men" (Flannery 1). In general, feminist challenges to traditional history aimed to make history more inclusive and give women more control over their stories, although there continue to be debates about how race, class, and other factors result in certain women's stories still being more likely to

be told. Rich was a prominent proponent of the need for women to recover their culture, meaning their knowledge, perspectives, and histories. In *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence*, she considers this project to be "the most complex, subtle, and drastic revaluation ever attempted of the condition of the species" (Rich "Foreword" 12). It involves a woman becoming truly educated and self-aware only through being "able to discover and explore her root connection with *all women*" (Rich "Toward" 145). This scenario is similar to what occurs in *Dune* as Ramallo passes her memories to Jessica, who then gains access to a flood of experiences of women from the past and becomes connected to these women forever. These memories fill Jessica with what scholars of social memory James Fentress and Chris Wickham describe as "images of 'the way we were', recounted by a line of female narrators, [which] can stretch back for generations" (Fentress and Wickham 142). The text shows Jessica's transformation through her dialogue admitting that she had no idea what she was unaware of until this exchange: "I'm like a person whose hands were kept numb, without sensation from the first moment of awareness—until one day the ability to feel is forced into them" (*Dune* 359). As a part of the portrayal of Other Memory, this newfound awareness unmistakably revolves around women: their view of historical events, their emotions, and their personal lives. It upholds the "value and significance of women's experience, traditions, [and] perceptions" about which Rich writes (Rich "Taking" 240). In a way, Other Memory in combination with the Bene Gesserit's education is a science fictional answer to the questions that Rich poses regarding women's education:

> What does a woman need to know? Does she not, as a self-conscious, self-defining human being, need a knowledge of her own history, her much-politicized biology, an awareness of the creative work of women of the past, the skills and crafts and techniques and powers exercised by women in different times and cultures, a knowledge of women's rebellions and organized movements against our oppression and how they have been routed or diminished? (Rich "Taking" 240)

The series answers in the affirmative, showing Bene Gesserit women being able to know a great deal about women of the past, carry it with them throughout their lives, and then pass it along with their own memories when their time has come. Thus, the series pairs its critique of traditional history with an alternative that not only acknowledges but prioritizes women's history.

The series establishes Other Memory as an avenue for female agency by showing how it enables women to shape and control the historical narrative by determining what is remembered. It accomplishes this in part through its characterization of the Bene Gesserit as women who manipulate the idea that women have a supposedly closer connection with nature

in order to give themselves a privileged hold over ancient wisdom and become a type of living museum. In a sense, this means that the series positions them as keepers of memory in an influential role harkening back to the ancient Muses of Greek mythology. The tradition of women being the keepers of the mysteries and memories of a culture has a long history in Western culture. The recognition of the apparently mysterious nature of the womb harkens back to the ancient Greek goddesses Gaia, Demeter, and Persephone, who are associated with the mysteries of life, death, and rebirth (Christ 109). Women's supposed connection with nature and cyclical rhythms of life leads to the idea that "only females understand the ancient mysteries," which appears in the series as one of the "illusions of popular history which a successful religion must promote" according to the instruction manual for the Missionaria Protectiva (*CHI* 66). Perhaps because only women are seen as able to understand the cycle of reproduction, there is an area open in which they can be the authority, and the characterization of the Missionaria Protectiva indicates that it merely serves the Bene Gesserit's purposes to pretend that women are uniquely qualified to embrace ancient wisdom. The link between the mysteries, memory, and women is a long-standing one in the form of the Muses from Greek mythology. The name of the Muses comes from a Greek word meaning "to explain the mysteries" (Findlen 161). These nine goddesses of the fine arts are the daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne, or Memory, and "possess absolute control over that part of the human imagination which endures: memory and the arts" (Auerbach 5). The Muses each control a particular aspect of the arts, ranging from poetry to history, and have long been invoked by artists for their gifts of inspiration and memory (Hard 204). Homer appeals to the Muses in the *Iliad* before including a long list of Greek commanders and forces, and "although this might not seem the most poetic part of the poem, it contains quantities of detailed and irreplaceable information about the heroic past that needed to be remembered if it was to be passed on to future generations" (Hard 205). Long before they were written down, epic Greek poems like the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were part of an oral tradition that depended heavily on memory for the transmission of information and narratives. Thus, the Muses' role in determining what and who is remembered gives them the ultimate control over a hero's survival in the cultural memory, in a similar way to the role of Reverend Mothers or historians like Irulan, whose control over Paul's legacy is discussed in Chapter 4. The original museum, in fact, was a place consecrated to the Muses and eventually became "an institutional setting in which the cultural resources of a community were ordered and assembled" (Findlen 162). For artists and scholars, the museum represented a way for them to access the world of antiquity, despite being separated by time and distance (Findlen

163). Seen in this light, the access that the series shows the Bene Gesserit maintaining to the past through Other Memory makes them a type of living museum or repository where their female bodies control cultural memory in a similar way to the Muses.

Furthermore, the series suggests that the Bene Gesserit have considerable autonomy in shaping historical narratives. It indicates that unlike a traditional museum with curators who choose what aspects of the past will be presented, each Reverend Mother is home to a multitude of memories about the past that she herself must curate and control as a dynamic source of information and wisdom. The past is depicted as a fresh experience accessed through the female body, meaning that "Other Memory was not an attic storeroom" with dusty artifacts seemingly frozen in time (*CHA* 204). Thus, it "is not a passive receptacle, but instead a process of active restructuring, in which elements may be retained, reordered, or suppressed" (Fentress and Wickham 40). In this way, the series indicates that the Bene Gesserit actively use the past as seen through Other Memory "to change it and renew it" and thus shape the present, just as people may alter their understanding of the past to fit the present or vice versa (*CHA* 204).

Although this implies that the past is never stable, since it is manipulatable, the series does give a sense that there are some stable elements in history and that women's access to them through Other Memory enables them to bear witness to important events that traditional history might erase. Rather than characterize women as eager to forget the disagreeable aspects of their ancestors' experiences, the series shows them admitting that they "are descendants of people who did nasty things" (*CHA* 328). It implies that being able to see through the eyes of one's ancestors means that one can bear witness to historical events and preserve both the favorable and unfavorable aspects of history. The idea of bearing witness is often associated with the accounts of people like Holocaust survivors—telling one's story of trauma prevents the erasure or silencing of social groups not traditionally in power, including women and minorities, according to Paul Connerton in *How Societies Remember* (1989) (Connerton 15). By sharing, witnesses also hope to prevent history from being rewritten to exclude their stories or blanch them. The tendency to alter history to suit one's needs is not limited to dominant groups either. Feminist historian Sally Alexander finds that even radical feminism is susceptible to writing "women's subjectivity and active agency out of history" by propagating the view that history is just "one long death knell of women's independent activity and consciousness" (Alexander 101). In this view, women cannot be seen as both dependent and independent at various times because it might de-emphasize their oppression,

even if that more accurately reflects women's experiences. In the series, showing women with direct internal access to what women of the past saw and how they felt means that the reader sees that "what women actually did and accomplished" is not "forgotten and lost to history" (Lerner 9). Because the Bene Gesserit are characterized as having myriad female ancestors ever-present in their psychological awareness, acting as witnesses to trauma, pleasure, and a host of other experiences, they represent women who bear witness to history by experiencing it themselves and keeping a kind of historical record intact through the mediation of their ancestors.

Yet the series implies that Other Memory is not merely a needed corrective to traditional history but something that obviates the need for any other form of history or interpreters, potentially reinforcing essentialist notions of women as 'naturally' different from men. Through inclusion of the passage above concerning the illusion that only females can understand the ancient mysteries, the series positions the Bene Gesserit as very self-aware of essentialist tendencies and willing to use them to their advantage. Seeing that this passage comes from the Missionaria Protectiva's instruction manual, the reader is prompted to view the Bene Gesserit as manipulating this illusion but not themselves believing it. But later in the series, the reader sees the Bene Gesserit seemingly believing that women do have a unique access to ancient wisdom due to their skills in using Other Memory, as evidenced by a lack of mention of any flaws in this access. The series does not outright state that memories are perfect, but it does imply that seeing historical events through first-hand lenses—or direct primary sources—offers a measure of accuracy beyond that of more layered or distanced records of traditional history. In fact, the series never seems to offer a rebuttal to Odrade's argument for the superiority of the Bene Gesserit's woman-controlled history: "We are the best historians. We were there" (*CHA* 216). For a series that sets up a deeply skeptical attitude toward history to not take a critical view of Other Memory implies that women can be trusted to decide what is important to remember and bring to bear on current events, that they are 'naturally' more reliable controllers of the historical narrative than men. In this way, the lack of textual attention to possible limitations of Other Memory may reinforce to the reader a representation of women as 'naturally' different from men and somehow superior, which then contradicts the earlier characterization of women as skeptical of this idea as an illusion.

## Solidarity and Forging Bonds of Sisterhood

Turning to examine Other Memory in light of the second-wave feminist movement's conceptions of sisterhood, I argue that not only does it function as an embodied historical narrative that secures women's agency, but it serves as a means of facilitating the forging of stronger bonds of solidarity between women which can be politically influential. The series represents Other Memory as a way of helping to strengthen the Bene Gesserit by solidifying their loyalty to the larger organization, giving members a firm sense of solidarity, which in second-wave feminism meant fighting for common goals and supporting other women that I discuss in more detail below (Bowden and Mummery 144). This kind of solidarity is often missing in science fiction outside of the feminist science fiction narratives, as Susanna J. Sturgis notes in her examination of the genre from the vantage point of the mid-1980s: "What abounds in the field is the woman protagonist who has brains, courage, physical strength, beauty—everything in the universe, it seems, *except female peers*" (Sturgis 13). In this view, even when texts depict strong female characters, if these characters are solo, the texts cannot show them gaining the strength that can emerge from relationships with other women or a women's network. In their brief discussion of women's memories, Fentress and Wickham note that there have been all-women groups and institutions throughout history, such as nunneries, with the potential to deviate from the norms enforced by a male-dominated society and exert some degree of agency; however, resistance was often individual and therefore easier to marginalize (Fentress and Wickham 138-139). A challenge then becomes how to characterize agential women who can be part of a community of women even if they are dispersed across an expansive science fictional universe.

The *Dune* series is able to portray a sense of solidarity among women by showing the Bene Gesserit psychically connecting with their female ancestors and past Reverend Mothers through Other Memory. They thus represent a fulfillment of Spender's desire for women to "reconstruct [their] past, draw on it, and *transmit it* to *the next generation*" (Spender *Women* 12). In the scene where Jessica absorbs Ramallo's memories, she is shown gaining intimate access to the long line of female Fremen in Ramallo's memory, thus bonding her to both past Reverend Mothers and the Fremen community. The reader understands that Jessica's 'family' has multiplied enormously in that instant and she is no longer a woman stranded among strangers with her son but someone connected to the women who have gone before her and able to summon guidance from them. Even while she is still within the spice trance, she calls upon Ramallo's memory to summon the ritualistic words she must say: "*Now, where did I get*

*those words?* Jessica wondered. And she realized they came from another memory, the *life* that had been given to her and now was part of herself" (*Dune* 358). This language makes clear that this experience has bonded Jessica with the women whose memories she now holds so that she will never again be completely alone. An example that more decisively portrays Other Memory as a way of strengthening loyalty to the Sisterhood is in *Chapterhouse: Dune*, when the former Honored Matre Murbella undergoes the spice agony. This experience is essential to the narrative for it explains how she is able to sever her loyalty to the Honored Matres and succeed Odrade as the leader of the Bene Gesserit. The imagery conveyed in the ruminations from her point of view—"Agony? It seared the psyche and remolded her. One person entered and another emerged"—shows that her perspective is irrevocably altered (*CHA* 330). The reader can see that the character who emerges is now Bene Gesserit, a part of the group. Connerton argues that the "narrative of one life is part of an interconnecting set of narratives; it is embedded in the story of those groups from which individuals derive their identity" (Connerton 21). By portraying the Bene Gesserit as women who choose to open themselves up to awareness of a diverse set of interconnecting narratives and memories, the series shows a way that they solidify their identity as members of the Sisterhood. This does not mean that they lose their individuality but rather that they appear to stand together and work toward shared goals, even if sometimes they lapse as Jessica does. As the text makes clear, "No Bene Gesserit appeared capable of completely removing herself from that binding absolute she achieved in the Spice Agony: loyalty to her Sisterhood" (*CHA* 73). Once they are depicted as successfully becoming Reverend Mothers with access to Other Memory, the Bene Gesserit appear to be even more bound by loyalty to the Sisterhood and unlikely to sever their close relationship with it.

By introducing a way of bonding women that works separate from the spice agony, known as Sharing, the last novel emphasizes the importance of the mind-body connection and the unbreakable nature of certain ties between women not only in the past, but in the present. *Chapterhouse: Dune* characterizes Sharing as a technique that involves a Reverend Mother merely touching another woman in order to share memories with each another. It appears to differ from earlier examples of women sharing memories by requiring an impending peril but not requiring one of the women to be dying, which explains how the Bene Gesserit are able to have more opportunities to preserve the memories and wisdom of their peers. Like Other Memory, Sharing is emphasized through capitalization in the text, but it does not appear until the final novel, when the narrative is focused on the struggle between the Bene Gesserit and

the Honored Matres. Despite it being a technique never before described, Sharing appears to fit seamlessly in with the Bene Gesserit's myriad abilities in the scene when Lucilla Shares with the outsider woman Rebecca before Lucilla is captured:

> Lucilla had to be certain. "Can you Share?"
>
> "I have never done it, lady, but I know it." As Rebecca spoke, she approached Lucilla and stopped when they were almost touching. They leaned toward each other until their foreheads made contact. Their hands went out and gripped the offered shoulders. As their minds locked, Lucilla forced a projective thought: "This must get to my Sisters!"
>
> "I promise, dear lady."
>
> There could be no deception in this total mixing of minds, this ultimate candor powered by imminent and certain death […]. (*CHA* 42)

The scene is reminiscent of the one with Jessica and Ramallo in *Dune*, and by creating an image of two women physically and mentally touching—through foreheads, hands, shoulders, and minds—the text reminds the reader of the importance of the mind-body connection to the Bene Gesserit. It goes on to illustrate the allure of Other Memory and its role in forming ties between women by showing Rebecca to quickly treasure her newfound solidarity with the women to whom she is connected: "*Other bodies, other memories*, […] [h]aving experienced this she knew she could never willingly abandon it. *Perhaps I have indeed become Bene Gesserit*" (*CHA* 61). In other examples of Reverend Mothers Sharing, because their characters are shown as still being in contact, the text is able to illustrate the change in their behavior toward greater intimacy. In a scene after Sheeana and Tamalane Share, Odrade notes that "[t]hose two had become like a single person since yesterday's Sharing, not an unexpected occurrence," and she has "the curious feeling that the two women standing there had become a Janus figure: back to back but only one persona" (*CHA* 317-318). The sharing of memories and the elimination of any secrets build upon the already-present notion of sisterhood to depict a virtually unbreakable tie between the women. With its late introduction in the series, Sharing stands out as an additional means by which the reader can see the formation of ties between women but in a way that strengthens their ties with women in their present lives rather than women solely in the past.

The significance of the depiction of these bonds in relation to feminism and female agency is that they represent a speculation on how women might constitute themselves in order to realize the potential in the second-wave feminist slogan 'sisterhood is powerful.' Each time the series shows an exchange of memories between Bene Gesserit women through the medium of the body, it builds on the characterization of Bene Gesserit women as

maintaining a sense of loyalty to the organization that was first formed during their education. This draws on the idea of social memory, which is a feature that identifies a group by providing a collective past and defining a hoped-for future (Fentress and Wickham 26). Whenever memories are shared with others, they derive meaning partially based on the nature of the group and also contribute to group bonding (Fentress and Wickham 88). Thus, Other Memory and Sharing become productive ways for the Bene Gesserit to become closer with one another. In fact, the series indicates that the Bene Gesserit are so closely bonded that they are largely unconcerned with traditional family connections, though they can discover them if they desire: "The idea of family seldom was expressed among the Bene Gesserit but it was there. In a genetic sense, they *were* related. And because of Other Memory, they often knew where. They had no need for special terms such as 'second cousin' or 'great aunt'"(*CHA* 32). Having this kind of family structured around shared memories and tight bonds between women represents a way for them to organize into a group with a common goal—that of perpetuating the Bene Gesserit and its political activities—and maintain solidarity over generations.

I see the alternative name of the Bene Gesserit, the Sisterhood, as an interesting anticipation of how the term would be used in the second-wave feminist movement—as a way to connote a bonding and allegiance between women that was invoked as part of the building of women's solidarity to progress women's liberation. In an article in *The New York Times* on March 15, 1970, entitled "Sisterhood is Powerful: A member of the Women's Liberation Movement explains what it's all about," radical feminist Susan Brownmiller detailed her experience as the host of a small group of women who gathered weekly to "explore another aspect of what we consider to be our fundamental oppression in a male-controlled society" (Brownmiller para. 1). She mentioned a women's rights button with the slogan 'sisterhood is powerful' and saw this representing the idea that it would be a different world if women had more power and used it to get rid of oppression altogether. That same year, editor Robin Morgan used the slogan as the title for her collection of women's liberation movement writings and called the writers 'sister contributors.' At the end of the decade, Sara Evans' history of the roots of the women's liberation movement, *Personal Politics* (1979), ended with the hopeful statement: "And sisterhood, powerful in its infancy, holds the potential to transform the future" (Evans *Personal* 232). Looking back on the movement, Evans, in *Born for Liberty* (1989), linked the formation of sisterhood with the consciousness-raising group that Brownmiller had written about where women were able to bond over their shared experiences:

> The central organizing tool of the women's liberation movement, the small consciousness-raising group, proved an effective mechanism for movement building. Within such groups, women discovered that their experiences were not unique but part of a larger pattern, and they rediscovered female community. The intensity and power of the new bonds among women prompted them to name themselves a sisterhood, a familial metaphor for an emerging social and political identity […]. (Evans *Born* 289)

When I compare this emphasis on bonding through female community as a political move with the description in *Chapterhouse: Dune* of how the Sisterhood has survived, I see a clear connection with second-wave feminist ideals:

> Any claim the Sisterhood might have to making its own way in a hostile universe lay in scrupulous adherence to mutual loyalty, an agreement forged in the Agony. Chapterhouse and its few remaining subsidiaries were nurseries of an order founded in sharing and Sharing. Not based on innocence. That had been lost long ago. It was set firmly in political consciousness and a view of history independent of other laws and customs. (*CHA* 360)

Seen in light of the series' focus on the Bene Gesserit in the later novels and depiction of women Sharing with one another in a time of peril, this passage prompts the reader to see the necessity of solidarity between women in creating a strong political force. In other words, it sets out a clear image of a group of women who hope to secure agency by maintaining loyalty to each other using their knowledge of history to shape their goals, a group not unlike many within second-wave feminism. Sisterhood, then, appears to be a concept whose definition can be specific or broad but that signals a grouping of women who can work together for a common purpose. Looking at the series as a whole, I argue that it both anticipates the notion that sisterhood can be powerful on the basis of strong bonds between women and expands on it in the later novels, allowing the reader to see how the concept of sisterhood develops in the context of a fictional female group even while women during the second wave were themselves exploring this idea.

## Female Communities in Feminist Science Fiction

In comparing the depictions of female communities and sharing of histories in the *Dune* series with those in some of the feminist science fiction of the 1970s, I find similar representations of women who are freed from ignorance about the women who have gone before them and able to draw strength from their history, but without the attention to embodiment that Other Memory provides. The *Dune* series indicates that Reverend Mothers gain a type of immortality due to the fact that women continue to 'live' in other women as ancestors with memories and historical knowledge: "Reverend Mothers did not die when

their flesh died. They sank farther and farther into the Bene Gesserit living core until their casual instructions and even their unconscious observations became a part of the continuing Sisterhood" (*HD* 219). With this explanation, the reader can see the Bene Gesserit providing strength and support past the barrier of death as they contribute to a network of knowledge. Such a representation of a women's network arguably resembles the immortal feminist communities in science fiction that feminist critics Marlene S. Barr and Sarah Lefanu discuss in *Alien to Femininity* (1987) and *In the Chinks of the World Machine* (1988), respectively. Barr notes that the "recent explosion of feminist speculative fiction" has opened an opportunity to represent communities of women whose female heroes are fully realized characters capable of self-sufficiency who are further strengthened by their place in a community of strong women (Barr *Alien* 5). She analyzes feminist science fiction stories and their treatment of female communities, including Suzy McKee Charnas' *Motherlines* and James Tiptree Jr./Alice Sheldon's "Houston, Houston, Do You Read?", to show an active engagement with women's history that counteracts the usual disappearance of women's stories in traditional histories. In her analysis of *Motherlines*, she discusses how children are characterized as exact replicas of their mothers, thus forming "an immortal feminist community whose immortality results from an unending succession of replicas" (Barr *Alien* 7). Looking at Tiptree/Sheldon's story, Barr discusses how the female characters are similarly represented as being copies of their mothers, which safeguards them from being forgotten or cast aside in society. They record their memories and problems in books, just as the women in *Motherlines* record them in self-songs. As Barr notes, "These women do not need to re-claim their 'lost' female past. They cannot forget their individual characteristics, their unique female heritage" (Barr *Alien* 11). Instead, they are always connected to their past and "derive strength from a community of productive female people" (Barr *Alien* 11). The Bene Gesserit, too, are characterized as gaining strength from their connection to their ancestors through Other Memory. The past is not lost to them, which Rich points to as an obstacle for feminists and women whose work is received "as if it emerged from nowhere; as if each of us had lived, thought, and worked without any historical past or contextual present" (Rich "Foreword" 11). Lefanu points to Sally Miller Gearhart's novel *The Wanderground* as another example of a text that depicts an immortal feminist community that keeps women's stories and knowledge alive. She describes how "[w]hen one of the Wanderground women dies, her life and her memories are incorporated into a body of knowledge that is transmitted through songs and stories and rememberings to all the other women: she becomes a part of the Wanderground women's culture" (Lefanu *Chinks* 65). Such a feminist narrative can be

seen as a fictional realization of a safeguarding of women's history, a situation where, as Rich says, women are able to "know our foremothers, evaluate our present historical, political, and personal situation, and take ourselves seriously as agents in the creation of a more balanced culture" (Rich "Toward" 141). Here Rich links women's knowledge of their history with their agential potential and indicates the importance of women sharing and remembering their histories, an idea that manifests itself in both the *Dune* series and the above examples of feminist science fiction narratives. Where the *Dune* series differs is in its encapsulation of this knowledge in the body, thus prioritizing dynamic, embodied access rather than access through external mechanisms such as books and songs and showing the role that the body can play in securing female agency.

Published during a time of societal shifts in what education and history meant to women in the U.S., the *Dune* series presents avenues of embodied agency in education and Other Memory that are complex, bound up with both a subversion of and an acquiescence to traditional expectations for women's socialization and roles in society. By drawing connections to the influential order of the Jesuits, the series is able to convey to the reader the idea that the Bene Gesserit's education system is a way for girls to receive a comprehensive education that prepares them to go forth in the world ready to perform a wide range of tasks and call upon an impressive skill set. Yet the reader can still see that female agency within this context is limited to the degree to which it aligns with the goals of the Sisterhood rather than those of individual women. The portrayal of women gaining access to an enormous storehouse of ancestral female memory appears to be more liberatory, with Other Memory functioning as a woman-controlled historical narrative that enables women to take an active part in controlling and shaping history. Having women shown as physical carriers of women's history, ever in touch with women's experiences and able to draw upon their wisdom in their own lives, offers a significant speculation on what it would look like if women's lived experiences and history were elevated as valuable and important. However, the series still depicts the Bene Gesserit acquiescing to societal demands for women to serve in traditional roles as concubines and wives and being limited in their access to ancestral memory because they are female, which limits the liberatory potential of the series by suggesting that women should accept restrictions based on sexual difference. In the next chapter, I examine the Bene Gesserit's embodied agency in relation to their sexuality and how sexual difference is again a complicating factor, with women represented as sexually

active and self-determining but also potentially associated with negative stereotypes surrounding female sexuality.

## Chapter Six: Sexuality

From psychoanalysis and sexology, to the sexual revolution and women's liberation, sex and sexuality gained increasing prominence throughout the twentieth century as they were studied, theorized, and debated in the scientific fields as well as in popular cultural and political movements. They also became more overt in the genre of science fiction, with key figures like Judith Merril advocating for more attention to contemporary concerns such as sexology and New Wave writers responding to cultural changes in the 1960s and 1970s by including more explicit sexual content in their narratives. The *Dune* series is no exception, with subtle references to sexuality making appearances throughout, but attention to sexuality markedly increasing in the final two novels. Suddenly there are Bene Gesserit women called Seductress-Imprinters who initiate sexual intercourse with men so as to imprint on them some kind of long-lasting control. In *Heretics of Dune*, an Imprinter named Reverend Mother Lucilla is described as having ample breasts and being assigned to seduce a young male ghola, then later standing naked in front of a mirror and transforming her features into those of an ancient love goddess to accomplish her task. She later boasts about having mastered the three hundred steps of orgasmic amplification, a clear reference to knowledge of sexological studies. But another group is introduced that does more than sexually imprint men—the women called the Honored Matres use sex to enslave men and thereby subjugate entire planets. The Bene Gesserit call the Honored Matres 'whores' in disgust at their sexual practices, even though their own practices are not shown to be all that different. Yet neither sexuality nor the final novels have received much critical attention, leaving this interesting shift toward explicit depictions of sexual matters and the contrast between groups of women largely unexamined.

Having analyzed four avenues of agency that are depicted as significant for women in the *Dune* series, in this chapter I examine the role that sexuality plays in the representation of the embodied female agency of the Bene Gesserit, especially in the later novels when it becomes more pronounced. Situating the series within the historical context of changing perceptions of sexuality in the U.S. and second-wave feminist conceptions of female sexuality in terms of women's liberation, I argue that the series shows the Bene Gesserit securing agency by being sexually active, self-determining, and free from male oppression, but only within a heteronormative context wherein manipulation of male desire is the principal means through which women gain autonomy. This results in a representation of women who have sexual autonomy but not liberation from a biologically deterministic

framework of sexuality, meaning the series could arguably have been more thought-provoking and liberatory if it were not constrained by assumptions about what is 'natural.' The introduction of the Honored Matres as 'whores' to counter the Bene Gesserit 'witches' and the depiction of homosexuality also complicate the representation of sexuality by at times reinforcing negative stereotypes in the reader's mind rather than challenging their construction. However, through the contrast between the Bene Gesserit and the Honored Matres, the series is able to offer a compelling problematization of both radical and cultural feminist theories by showing that both rest on naïve assumptions about what will occur when women have sexual autonomy—that women will still be trapped in domination cycles rather than able to be full sexual agents. Although the series does not contain the most liberatory or radical depictions of sexuality in science fiction, it does reflect changes in the genre's treatment of sexuality and aligns with the prioritizing of female sexual autonomy in feminist science fiction narratives, making it a relevant case study in which to examine sexuality as an avenue for female agency.

## Changing Conceptions of Sexuality

The historical context of the sexual revolution, triggered in part by sexologists like Alfred C. Kinsey and William H. Masters and Virginia E. Johnson, is important to an analysis of sexuality as an avenue for female agency because it helps explain how the shift away from Freudian notions of passivity opened up space for women to demand more sexual autonomy. The twentieth century saw an increasing amount of information and theories about sex and sexuality in fields like psychology and sexology, which contributed to changes in the U.S. in the public consciousness and language surrounding sexual behaviors as well as traditional gender roles. According to Jane Gerhard in *Desiring Revolution: Second-Wave Feminism and the Rewriting of American Sexual Thought, 1920 to 1982* (2001)—a comprehensive analysis of the relationship between sexuality and second-wave feminism—beginning in the early twentieth century Sigmund Freud and his followers used psychoanalysis to explain how women had to "repress and convert their initial 'masculine' libido into mature, passive vaginal sexuality" (Gerhard *Desiring* 32). Their theories painted a picture of healthy female sexual development that depended on girls transferring their clitoral orgasms into vaginal ones. They also labelled women as abnormal or frigid if they moved outside of the bounds of what psychoanalysts considered to be normal female sexuality, including if women were unable to reach orgasm through intercourse, did not care for sexual

pleasure, were too sexual, or were too aggressive (Gerhard *Desiring* 40). However, as historian Miriam G. Reumann argues in *American Sexual Character: Sex, Gender, and National Identity in the Kinsey Reports* (2005), by the 1940s and 1950s Freudianism was facing challenges as "sexuality was surveyed, mapped, and theorized as never before" in the emerging field of sexology, and American popular culture began reflecting a new concern with sex, evidenced in frank questions in newspapers, formerly taboo topics in fiction, and sexual images such as lingerie-clad women in advertising (Reumann 6, 30-31). *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (1948) and *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (1953), known as the Kinsey Reports, were two studies compiled by zoologist Kinsey and his research team that quickly became best-sellers in the postwar period and sparked public discussion about sexuality and changing sexual norms in American society. Kinsey believed that "[n]othing has done more to block the free investigation of sexual behavior than the almost universal acceptance, even among scientists, of certain aspects of that behavior as normal, and of other aspects of that behavior as abnormal" (Kinsey et al. *Male* 7). His idea that sexual behaviors should be viewed on a continuum rather than placed into distinct categories with moral judgments made his reports "important statements about gender difference, social change, and American identity" and opened a way for women to escape the dichotomy labelling them either as virgins or whores (Reumann 5, 86). Thus, Kinsey made a significant contribution to the understanding of female sexuality by "legitimat[ing] female sexual pleasure, or orgasm" and thus rejecting Freudian views of the female sexual body (Gerhard *Desiring* 57). Masters and Johnson also challenged traditional conceptions of sexuality in *Human Sexual Response* (1966), their groundbreaking study of the physiological responses of women and men during sexual activities. Their "construction of the interdependent, responsive vagina and the sexually precocious clitoris leveled a serious blow to Freudian ideas of female sexuality," even though their work was later criticized for a lack of scientific rigor and replicability (Gerhard *Desiring* 70, Segal 100). The challenging of Freudian notions of female passivity helped pave the way for women to demand more autonomy in their expression of sexuality and for many feminists in the second wave to make sexuality a significant political issue in their struggle for women's liberation.

Yet without acknowledgment of sexuality as a construct or researchers' biases, sexology often reinforced traditional views of sexuality, and this becomes relevant to an analysis of a seemingly contradictory idea within the *Dune* series: that sexual liberation does not necessarily lead to a liberatory view of sexuality. As Joseph Bristow explains in *Sexuality*

(1997), "Since its inception, sexology has left modern society with a contradictory legacy" because it both enables sex to be more widely debated but also "often remains worryingly insensitive to the historical contingency of the scientific methods it employs" and continues to seek to "produce some everlasting truth about the sexual capacity of human beings" (Bristow 15). Sexologists relied on the notion that they were liberating society from the repressive Victorian regime of silence about sexuality and sexual desire, which theorist Michel Foucault in *The History of Sexuality* (trans. 1978) famously critiqued as a problematic construct. He postulated that "the demand for sexual freedom, but also for the knowledge to be gained from sex and the right to speak about it—becomes legitimately associated with the honor of a political cause" when placed in the context of fighting the sexual repression of the previous era, for there must be something against which to rail (Foucault 6). By challenging the notion that there existed an underlying sexual drive or instinct in humans that could then be studied and freed, he opened up space for a closer examination of sexuality and how it was a constructed rather than a 'natural' concept. But sexologists still had and continue to have a large influence on conceptions of sexuality, and without acknowledgement of the constructedness of sexuality as a category or their own biases in relation to topics including non-heterosexual sexual activity, abnormality, and desire, their supposedly objective data often reinforced normative views of sexuality by giving such views the legitimacy of scientific backing. In their essay "Social and Behavioral Constructions of Female Sexuality" (1980), Patricia Y. Miller and Martha R. Fowlkes argue that "Masters and Johnson must be faulted for overriding their physiological data in a way that maintains rather than challenges traditional social constructions of women's sexuality" (Miller and Fowlkes 261). Lynne Segal in *Straight Sex: Rethinking the Politics of Pleasure* (1994) notes that "[f]ar more consistently than Kinsey, Masters and Johnson present marriage maintenance as the single, over-riding motivation for their work (and funding)" (Segal 94). They also "ignore the prevalence of women's social subordination to men, and their frequent experience of violence from men" to the point that they saddle women with a new set of duties to ensure women are doing their part to achieve good sex, which Segal points to as a suspiciously "old conservative agenda: women servicing their men" (Segal 97-99). This helps explain how the sexual revolution ended up being a disappointment for many women, from the perspective of some feminists, because "the demand for women to sexualize themselves deepens the already exploitative framework of heterosexuality" (Bristow 53). Indeed, many feminists were conflicted about the impact on women of the sexual revolution, "which increased women's sense of sexual vulnerability by acknowledging women's right to sexual pleasure while ignoring the risks

associated with sexual exploration for women" (Echols 289). Thus, if sexological research can be considered to provide one vision of liberated female sexuality, it was one that presumed it would be contained within heterosexual relations and most likely traditional marriages, making for a narrow definition of liberation. This becomes relevant to my analysis because I argue that the Bene Gesserit have sexual agency in a variety of ways, but it is limited to the framework of women having sexual autonomy by harnessing male desire rather than pursuing alternative expressions of sexuality.

With many feminists disagreeing that the sexual revolution had truly liberated women from traditional sex roles or exploitation, though they did not all agree on what women's sexual liberation would look like, they agreed that female sexuality needed to be redefined from a woman-centered viewpoint, creating new feminist theories regarding sexual autonomy and self-determination that I use in my analysis of the Bene Gesserit. Although sexological accounts of sex, gender, and desire were not always progressive nor inclusive, they were used by second-wave feminists as they formulated their own views on liberated female sexuality. As Gerhard writes,

> In contrast to the psychoanalytic view of women as passive, dependent, and less sexual than men, sexology discovered a responsive, sexually capable and potentially autonomous female body underneath social and expert myths of feminine passivity. […] By challenging the dominant role ascribed to the vagina and, by extension, to intercourse and reproduction in ideas about normal female heterosexuality, sexology provided a crucial bridge between Freudianism and radical feminism. Second-wave feminists in the late 1960s and 1970s drew selectively on postwar sexology to construct a new liberated woman, one who based all her sexual encounters on self-determination rather than on what experts deemed normal. By doing so, feminists offered not just a modern but a revolutionary view of female sexuality. (Gerhard *Desiring* 53)

Thus, many feminists demanded that women have self-determination and freedom from male oppression as well as an active role in sexual matters if they were to secure sexual agency in their lives, and I use this understanding of the female body in relation to sexuality as the basis for discussing female embodied agency in the *Dune* series. Feminist writers built on the critique of Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* (trans. 1953) to argue that it was unacceptable for women to be assigned "a passive sexuality" or "restricted to marriage" while men were free to be active sexual beings (Beauvoir 397, 392). In *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), Betty Friedan discussed the harmfulness in societal acceptance of the Freudian vision of women as naturally inferior to men, which led women to forgo their desires, including sexual ones, in favour of those of the men in their lives (Friedan 121).

Along with feminist writers Kate Millett and Shulamith Firestone, Friedan helped to reveal that the ideal woman in psychoanalytical thought was a myth and to reclaim the female body's sexual potential (Gerhard *Desiring* 98).

By the 1970s 'The right to define our sexuality' had become one of the key demands of radical feminists (Kemp and Squires 319). One of the first to articulate this need quite specifically was Anne Koedt, a founder of the radical feminist movement in New York which included New York Radical Women, The Feminists, and New York Radical Feminists. At the first national women's liberation conference in 1968, she presented the paper "The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm" which called on women to redefine their sexuality and no longer let it be defined only in terms of male pleasure (Koedt 199). After publication in early feminist journals, the article became a widely disseminated feminist classic and "set out what would become major concerns of the emergent movement—the meaning of sexual freedom, the political significance of sexual pleasure, and the psychological roots of male domination and female subordination" (Gerhard "Revisiting" 449). Koedt helped establish early on in radical feminism that "women must become full sexual agents" and that sexual self-determination should be a feminist value, making her work significant for linking sexual agency with women's liberation (Gerhard *Desiring* 105). Her views on sexuality were echoed by other radical feminists, with an entire section of Robin Morgan's feminist anthology *Sisterhood is Powerful* (1970) featuring contributions on the topic of "The Invisible Woman: Psychological and Sexual Repression." Some feminist groups specifically targeted male domination and oppression as obstacles. For example, the "Redstockings Manifesto" noted that men are the ones who exploit women as sex objects and use their power to keep women in an inferior position (Redstockings 533). The Feminists similarly viewed men's oppression of women as corrupting sexual relations but took the provocative stance that institutions like marriage, sex, and love must be eliminated in order for women's liberation to be possible (The Feminists 370, 375). Writing as a radical feminist in 1984 looking back on the second-wave movements in which she participated, Ellen Willis argues that The Feminists' perspective "was a minority view within radical feminism" and that the Redstockings' view was more generally accepted (Willis 103). She also discusses some feminists' affirmation in sexual separatism—that is, that women should reject men completely—but notes that this idea was impractical and unappealing for most women (Willis 104). Alix Kates Shulman agrees in her article "Sex and Power: Sexual Bases of Radical Feminism" (1980), noting that most radical feminists did not renounce heterosexual relations but advocated for them to change (Shulman 30). The

above examples indicate that although feminists had different thoughts on how women might achieve more sexual agency, theories surrounding sexuality that emerged from the movement were broadly concerned with concepts of activity over passivity, self-determination, and freedom from male oppression that I will argue appear in the characterization of the Bene Gesserit as sexually agential in the *Dune* series.

Even though the branch of feminism that developed from radical feminism—cultural feminism—still shared a commitment to sexual self-determination, it maintained that female sexuality was superior to male sexuality because it was more gentle and egalitarian, and I suggest that the later *Dune* novels respond to this shift in feminist thought by largely refuting this premise through the introduction of the Honored Matres. Segal describes the shift toward cultural feminism as a movement away from what feminists had "once asserted as the *similarity* between women's and men's sexuality" and toward the idea that "there was a fundamental *difference* between the sexuality of women and men, with women's once again the inverse of men's: gentle, diffuse and, above all, egalitarian" (Segal 57). Gerhard too discusses the emphasis on sexual difference, the idea that female sexuality should be distinct from and more egalitarian than unrestrained male sexuality (Gerhard *Desiring* 152). Cultural feminism was attractive for offering a potentially simpler vision of women's sexuality, one that positioned women's as loving and tender in contrast to men's as genital, objectifying, and promiscuous (Echols 256). But in so doing it reinforced the idea that sexual difference meant women were 'naturally' predisposed toward certain expressions of sexuality and in effective limited their sexual agency. This stance ran counter to radical feminist theories and contributed to increasing tension between the branches in the mid to late 1970s, as Echols details in her chapter on the ascendance of cultural feminism. This becomes relevant to an analysis of the *Dune* series due to the fact that the fifth novel introduces an all-female group, the Honored Matres, whose expression of sexuality incorporates virtually none of the characteristics that cultural feminist theories on sexuality espoused. Therefore, I suggest that the Honored Matres can be viewed as a refutation of cultural feminist thought regarding female sexuality.

## The Bene Gesserit as Case Study for Treatment of Sexuality

An examination of the Bene Gesserit in relation to sexuality is important both because this topic has been neglected by science fiction scholars and because the publication of the *Dune* series across a period of significant cultural change regarding attitudes toward sex in

the U.S. makes it a unique case in the science fiction genre through which to study the treatment of sexuality across a series. Timothy O'Reilly's and David Miller's studies hardly discuss sexual concerns at all and were published before the completion of the series, thus making a comparative analysis of sexuality across the series impossible. Susan McLean is one of the few critics to explicitly discuss female sexuality, offering a psychoanalytical analysis of the first four books in her article "A Psychological Approach to Fantasy in the *Dune* Series" (1982). Yet because her argument centers around Oedipal conflict and finding symbolic meanings in objects, there is little room for a positive depiction of women or any sexual agency they may have. Furthermore, there is no follow-up article to analyze the development of sexuality in the final two books. William F. Touponce acknowledges a relationship between the mid-twentieth century's cultural concern with sex and *Heretics of Dune* when he notes that the all-female group introduced in *Heretics of Dune* as the Honored Matres is the means by which Herbert can "introduce the science of sexuality, and sexual discourse in general, into the *Dune* series" (Touponce 94). But there is no extended analysis of this decision or its significance in the cultural moment. I see this as a missed opportunity to examine changing representations of sexuality across the series. Between the initial serialization of *Dune* in the science fiction magazine *Analog* in 1963 and the publication of the final books *Heretics of Dune* and *Chapterhouse: Dune* in 1984 and 1985, respectively, "the nation experienced perhaps the greatest transformation in sexuality it had ever witnessed" (D'Emilio and Freedman 327). I find that the initial characterization of the Bene Gesserit as a group of women with an array of bodily abilities that include sexual ones means their later characterization can further develop to include greater sexual agency described in more detail, and I see an attention to cultural issues reflected in how the last two novels seem to be responding to the more open discourse on sex and sexual roles occurring in U.S. society. Although issues of sexuality are present throughout the series, the detailed descriptions of specific bodily functions like orgasm emerge only after the male heroes Paul and Leto II have passed into memory and women in the Bene Gesserit and Honored Matre groups have become the main characters. The increased focus on sexual concerns, then, is linked with the rise of women—women who possess a high level of control over their sexuality through which they can control men—and parallels the attention and prominence given to female sexual agency during the time that second-wave feminism was seeking women's liberation.

## Ways that the Bene Gesserit Secure Agency

I now turn to an examination of the characterization of the Bene Gesserit in relation to sexuality in order to argue that they are shown to secure agency by being sexually active, self-determining, and free from male oppression. I also argue that the depiction of this agency is predicated on the notion that manipulation of male desire—defined within the heteronormative context of the series—is the principal means through which women gain autonomy. Thus, I show how these factors result in a representation of women who possess sexual autonomy but are not liberated from a biologically deterministic framework of sexuality, and that the assumption that only female-male pairings are 'natural' prevents the series from being more liberatory in its overall representation of sexuality.

### Activity over Passivity

The series shows the Bene Gesserit expressing their agency through their initiation of sexual activity and their knowing manipulation of male desire. Though the series only alludes to a few sexual encounters in total, they are overwhelmingly initiated and controlled by Bene Gesserit women, upending the Freudian notion of women being passive and dependent in regards to sexual behavior, as discussed earlier. The establishment of this dynamic appears in the first novel in the relationship between Lady Margot, Count Fenring's Bene Gesserit spouse, and Feyd-Rautha, Baron Harkonnen's nephew. Feyd-Rautha appears as a seventeen-year-old man who is mesmerized by a beautiful woman and wishes to impress her at his gladiatorial games. In fact, their descriptions at first paint them as specimens of traditional conceptions of masculinity and femininity, contrasting his melancholy yet masculine physique with her feminine grace: Feyd-Rautha has "dark hair" and "sullen eyes," and Margot specifically notes the "sure flow of muscles" under his clothing (*Dune* 322). Meanwhile, he sees her as "golden-haired and willowy, her perfection of figure clothed in a flowing gown of ecru—simple fitness of form without ornament" (*Dune* 323). However, although he may seem to objectify her with his stare, this is turned on its head as he becomes disturbed by her "serene Bene Gesserit repose" and realizes that her outward appearance belies a control that he cannot unmask (*Dune* 323). She promptly denies him permission to dedicate his kill to her with a "voice [that] carried whiplash" (*Dune* 324). Then, after he succeeds in the arena and proves himself to contain a valuable bloodline for the Bene Gesserit's breeding program, she decides to seduce him and believes that his desire will be an easy weakness to exploit:

> "You don't anticipate difficulty seducing him, my little brood-mother?" [asks Count Fenring.]
>
> "No, my love. You saw how he looked at me."
>
> "Yes, and I can see now why we must have that bloodline."
>
> "Indeed, and it's obvious we must have a hold on him. I'll plant deep in his deepest self the necessary prana-bindu phrases to bend him. […] Hypno-ligation of that Feyd-Rautha's psyche and his child in my womb—then we go." (*Dune* 338-339)

Margot thus plans to use Feyd-Rautha's desire for her to initiate a sexual encounter wherein she can not only conceive a child but also implant a control at the deepest levels of his subconscious. She specifically leverages his naïve attraction to a skilled Bene Gesserit woman in order to further the Sisterhood's goals without his awareness. At no point does the reader have the impression that her feminine appearance equates to passivity or helplessness. She appears as the initiator who will actively manipulate a young man in order to accomplish her task.

The marked increase in sexual language and details in the last two novels builds on the reader's understanding of the Bene Gesserit as agential in matters of sexuality by making it appear that their knowledge of sexuality has become more advanced and has enabled them to more precisely seduce men. As with other aspects in the series, the Bene Gesserit's training in sexuality is only discoverable through brief hints and inferences, although without further narrative clues the reader is led to assume that the Bene Gesserit's sexual abilities must stem from their superior prana-bindu ability to control every aspect of their bodies, detailed in Chapter 2. In the last two novels, their sexual activity is characterized as an extension of those behaviors alluded to in *Dune*, but it is discussed more explicitly and shown to be based on scientific knowledge. Touponce notes, "Terms such as 'orgasmic platform' and 'vaginal pulsing,' […] seem right out of a college textbook on sexology" (Touponce 94). The use of such specific terms thus links female behavior in the novels with the female behavior described by sexologists like Kinsey and Masters and Johnson whose ideas had entered the popular culture. In this way, the series suggests that knowledge of sexual behaviors combined with mastery of the body is what gives the Bene Gesserit their skills in sexuality. The account in *Heretics of Dune* of Reverend Mother Odrade's first seduction of a man gives a brief glimpse into the Bene Gesserit's sexual training and how they manipulate men through sexual intercourse and orgasm. Odrade thinks to herself: "All of the clinical data lay there in her awareness and she could read the sexual excitement in her partner even as she allowed it in herself. She had, after all, been carefully prepared for this role by men the

Breeding Mistresses selected and conditioned with exquisite nicety" (*HD* 117). Here, the reader can see that Odrade's ability to actively seduce this partner is the result of her prior training—that she has gained an advanced understanding of sexuality because her male training partners were conditioned to assist her in perfecting her techniques. Indeed, this training appears to have been essential to her avoiding falling into her 'natural' inclination to feel love and ecstasy, with her being "quite unprepared for the melting ecstasy of a simultaneous orgasm, a mutuality and sharing as old as humankind" and enjoying the feeling of love that is usually prohibited by the Sisterhood, but only for a moment (*HD* 117). When she quickly returns to her training, "employing calculated caresses where natural caresses would have been easier (but less effective)," this shows that she has regained autonomy and positioned herself in control of her partner (*HD* 117). The use of a flashback memory from Odrade's perspective rather than an omniscient narrator makes the man almost inconsequential in the story compared to Odrade and the valuable lessons learned from her sexual field work. The male is surrendering to her, unbeknownst to him, and the reader sees that her prior training is what enables her to actively control the sexual encounter and the orgasmic response.

With the introduction of characters who function as Seductress-Imprinters in *Heretics of Dune*, the series solidifies the characterization of the Bene Gesserit as agential and knowledgable in gaining control over men by manipulating male desire. Lucilla is introduced as an "Imprinter of the best training, no doubt of it," a title that is later expanded to "Seductress-Imprinter" (*HD* 2, 195). What the reader can gather about Imprinters is that they are "trained in orgasmic amplification to fix the unconscious ties—male to female" and initiate sex with men in order to create "powerful bonding lines not readily available to the common awareness" and thus obtain a long-lasting control over them for the Sisterhood's purposes (*HD* 196, 4). But before the text elaborates on this orgasmic amplification, it shows Lucilla in a seduction attempt with a young Duncan Idaho ghola that the Sisterhood has been raising. Lucilla begins her pursuit while she, Duncan, and Miles Teg are in hiding and assumes the role of a kind of predator, "put[ting] an arm around [Duncan] and strok[ing] his neck in a soothing, almost sensual way" (*HD* 221). Although Miles blocks her attempts to make Duncan her prey and enables Duncan to resist her by awakening his original non-ghola persona, Lucilla remains undaunted and continues to try to seduce him. The creation of the sense that each of their meetings has taken on "the nature of a battle" and that Lucilla is a formidable yet feminine opponent is achieved through careful diction: "Just now, she had

stood in the doorway to the practice hall, a solid figure saved from being stolid by her softening curves, the seductive movements obvious to both males" (*HD* 279). In this case, the alliteration emphasizes her sensuality as well as her stature, crafting an image of her as a woman who is fully capable of "gather[ing] her sexual forces around her now as only a Bene Gesserit Imprinter could" (*HD* 284). Although the text shows Miles interfering so that the reader never sees a successful imprinting of Duncan, it nonetheless suggests that under other circumstances an Imprinter like Lucilla would have been able to gain control over Duncan through sexual intercourse.

A later scene offers a much more specific elaboration on how an Imprinter completes her task by incorporating sexological terminology. By including dialogue between Lucilla and a stranger named Sirafa regarding Lucilla's sexual prowess, the text gives the reader the sense that the Bene Gesserit who are trained as Imprinters gain advanced abilities in matters of sexuality. In this scene, first Sirafa asks Lucilla if she can administer vaginal pulsing from any position, to which Lucilla replies that she can because she can control any muscle in her body. Then Sirafa presumes to call Lucilla's abilities mere sexual agility, which prompts Lucilla to boast about her broad range of sexual knowledge and skills:

> "Agility, you say? I can control genital temperature. I know and can arouse the fifty-one excitation points. I—"
>
> "Fifty-one? But there are only—"
>
> "Fifty-one!" Lucilla snapped. "And the sequencing plus the combinations number two thousand and eight. Furthermore, in combination with the two hundred and five sexual positions—"
>
> "Two hundred and five?" Sirafa was clearly startled. "Surely, you don't mean—"
>
> "More, actually, if you count minor variations. I am an Imprinter, which means I have mastered the three hundred steps of orgasmic amplification!" (*HD* 334)

The characterization of Lucilla as boastful of her sexual abilities—so proud that she would briefly lose her usual Bene Gesserit control enough to snap at Sirafa's incredulity—builds on the reader's earlier impression of Lucilla as a skilled woman in the area of sexuality. The scene also gives a glimpse into how the Imprinters manage to achieve their hold over men—they manipulate the body's pleasure points and orgasmic potential in whichever ways are suited to gaining control over the male body.

Through the Seductress-Imprinters' characterization, the series also confirms its adherence to the idea that attraction is fixed by biological determinism by presenting heterosexual lust as instinctual and natural. The indication that Seductress-Imprinters can

initiate sexual intercourse with any man and thereby create a bond with which they can control him rests on the assumption that men are heterosexual and lustful to the degree that they cannot resist being attracted to beautiful women. It also rests on the assumption that Bene Gesserit women are heterosexual and merely harnessing their preexisting desire when they operate as Imprinters. Thus, before the reader sees the scene wherein Lucilla attempts to imprint Duncan, they have been prompted to accept the idea that these characters are already instinctually attracted to one another.

A clear example of how the series foregrounds such biologically-driven attraction in earlier novels is in the characterization of Duncan himself as a strong, dark-haired male who is irresistible to women. His repeated appearance throughout the series in his ghola reincarnations reinforces the notion that in spite of the passage of thousands of years, he is still considered sexually attractive to women, which also signals that little has changed in regards to female desire. In *Dune*, he holds a reputation as a fierce fighter yet also someone who is always being called on "for special surveillance of the ladies," the implication being that he particularly enjoys such assignments (*Dune* 149). Donald E. Palumbo in "The Monomyth as Fractal Pattern in Frank Herbert's *Dune* Novels" (1998) describes him as a type of archetypal hero who is "both a 'lover' and a 'warrior'" (Palumbo "Monomyth" 442). When the Tleilaxu create the first Idaho ghola from the cells of the original, this younger version immediately interests the fifteen-year-old Alia, who finds a "magnetic attraction" and "positive desire to be near this new man, perhaps to touch him" (*DM* 98). Alia thinks to herself that her "flesh desired a mate" and ultimately gives in to her desires and secures Duncan by marrying him (*DM* 112). The allure of his demeanor and body reappears in *God Emperor of Dune*, when the newest Idaho ghola finds some of Leto II's retinue of female warriors, known as the Fish Speakers, eager to service him: "Luli grinned at him. 'Come. I shall bathe you myself'" (*GE* 48). Through Leto's dialogue, the reader is directed to understand the reason for this sexual dynamic as a physical and deterministic one: Duncan's "genotype is remarkably attractive to females. […] There's something about those gently observant eyes, those strong features and that black-goat hair which positively melts the female psyche" (*GE* 68). Use of the term 'psyche' rather than heart emphasizes the psychological nature of the attraction; it seems to be something primal and unconscious, something women cannot control, which leaves little room for them to be depicted as agential. The text also implies that Duncan is capable of prompting one of the Fish Speakers, Nayla, to orgasm when he succeeds in his heroic mission to climb an almost-sheer rock in

preparation to destroy Leto. The language describing her feelings and bodily reaction implies that she is being taken hold of by an unconscious desire: "She could feel her heart hammering, though. Idaho's venture was like sex, she thought. It was not passively erotic, but akin to rare magic in the way it seized her. She had to keep reminding herself that Idaho was not for her" (*GE* 399). Her eventual orgasmic reaction is notable not only for being the first specific description of an orgasm in the series, but for the fact that Nayla is watching from a distance and has no intention of being with Duncan, who is destined for her mistress, Siona. In this scene, at least, a woman feels pleasure for herself by herself outside of heterosexual intercourse. But this does not alter the reader's understanding that women will always be destined to find men like Duncan attractive due to their irresistible nature.

Through the depiction of Lucilla's preparation for her seduction of Duncan, the series characterizes the Seductress-Imprinters as holding a similar view of desire as fundamentally unchanging due to a procreative drive, thus supporting biological determinism as the underlying factor in sexual relations. In the following passage, Lucilla appears able to use her prana-bindu control over her muscles to make herself even more enticing to men in the hope of successfully seducing Duncan:

> Lucilla had posed naked before her mirror, forming the attitudes and motions of face and body that she knew she would use to obey Taraza's orders. In artificial repose, Lucilla had seen her own face appear like that of a prehistoric love goddess—opulent with flesh and the promise of softness into which an aroused male might hurl himself. In her education, Lucilla had seen ancient statues from the First Times, little stone figures of human females with wide hips and sagging breasts that assured abundance for a suckling infant. At will, Lucilla could produce a youthful simulation of that ancient form. (*HD* 157)

Here the text juxtaposes what seems natural—women who appear to be most predisposed to bear and breast-feed children—with what is artificial—a woman like Lucilla pretending to resemble them—in order to illustrate that the Bene Gesserit believe that male desire is driven by procreative urges and thus women who can make their body appear fertile have the best chance at successful seduction. The simile linking Lucilla's face to that of a voluptuous love goddess builds upon the earlier description of her as "a brown-haired charmer with full breasts and a motherly disposition" and implies that an Imprinter's prowess is partially based on her ability to appear soft and fertile, to seduce a man by tapping into his unconscious desire to sire children by her (*HD* 2). The reference to her education reminds the reader that Lucilla has been trained for this task and that her ability to transform herself into what a man will desire is key to securing her agency and long-lasting control over him. The importance of

the procreative drive is again emphasized when Lucilla names it as the "purest Bene Gesserit cant: moment of mystery, the Imprinter's ultimate specialty" (*HD* 282). Through the characterization of the Bene Gesserit as women who cultivate a deep understanding of and control over procreation, as discussed in Chapter 3, the series shows that women can harness sexuality to their advantage and use men's 'natural' lust to their advantage. The reader is left with the understanding that a need to procreate is what drives sexual behavior, a mysterious force that the Bene Gesserit have somehow been able to control. Even when Duncan realizes Lucilla's mission to seduce him and doubts her ability to accomplish it, she remains openly confident:

> "You think you will fail in your assignment?"
>
> "Surely not," she said. "You're still a male."
>
> And she thought: *Yes, that young body must flow hot with the juices of procreation. Indeed, the hormonal igniters are all intact and susceptible to arousing*. (*HD* 259)

Through the description of Duncan as a lustful male whose body will not be able to control itself around a female, the text indicates that sex is determined by biological necessities and confined to male-female pairings due to the procreative drive.

**Self-Determination**

What the above examples demonstrate is that the Bene Gesserit are depicted as self-determining in how they carry out their seductions but rarely in other aspects of their sexual expression, meaning that the series offers a representation of women with only limited sexual self-determination. Although the scenes wherein Margot, Odrade, and Lucilla are planning or engaging in seductions show these women with autonomy over how they carry them out, the reader can see that the Bene Gesserit as individuals do not appear to have much self-determination in terms of whom they are partnered with; women are assigned to particular men based on their genetic desirability and obliged to follow orders to reproduce per the requirements of the breeding program, or they are assigned to men whom the Sisterhood wants to be imprinted. For example, as discussed in Chapters 3 and 5, Jessica is sold to Duke Leto to become his concubine when she is young and instructed to bear a daughter. Although they do appear to have fallen in love with each other, she lacks self-determination in her initial move into his household and there is no discussion of what any courtship may have looked like. In Margot's case, it is not she who determines that she wants to seduce Feyd-Rautha but the Sisterhood, which wants his genetic line to continue, and the Seductress-Imprinters similarly receive their assignments from the Sisterhood. In sexual matters, then,

the series makes clear that it is the collective agency of the Sisterhood that is most important, and that the organization determines how women will use sex rather than individual women. This represents a woman-controlled sexuality, but only insofar as women agree to be loyal to the Bene Gesserit and give up a measure of control over their bodies to advance collective goals. What is notable is that there is no oversight from men, and women choose which alliances will be most beneficial and deploy women as concubines, wives, or Seductress-Imprinters accordingly. In this way, the organization determines a large number of its members' sexual activities but in so doing significantly limits their ability to express their sexuality outside of these bounds.

There are two brief statements in *Heretics of Dune* that allude to the Bene Gesserit having needs for heterosexual intercourse outside of their duties and having the ability to satisfy them by determining their own partners. When Lucilla thinks to herself that an "Imprinter enjoyed some latitude in selecting her own breeding partners, provided she had no prior commitments nor contrary orders," this statement implies that Imprinters do harbor feelings of attraction toward men and have preferences for the men with whom they have intercourse (*HD* 158). In Odrade's reflections on emotions like love, she notes that at the Bene Gesserit Chapter House headquarters, "Men were available—not for breeding, but for occasional solace. All such Bene Gesserit Chapter House males were quite charming and a few were even sincere in their charm. These few, of course, were much in demand" (*HD* 182). The inclusion of this detail characterizes the Bene Gesserit as women who are not immune to a desire for male companionship and intercourse that occurs outside of task-driven reproductive purposes. But the use of the term 'solace' leaves the reader with the sense that these women are more desirous of companionship than sex. Indeed, when Odrade acknowledges her own jealousy of women like Jessica who are "allowed to live out a lifetime with a mated breeding partner," she appears to lift up traditional heterosexual pairings as an enviable way of living (*HD* 182). She seems to scoff at the Sisterhood's reassurance that intercourse is an acceptable substitute for a committed relationship: "A life without love can be devoted more intensely to the Sisterhood. […] Do not worry about sexual enjoyment. That is available whenever you feel the need" (*HD* 182). Through the description of Odrade's attitude, the series suggests that the Bene Gesserit have the autonomy to access male lovers whenever they wish, but it also reminds the reader of how limited women's ability is to determine their own sexual expression outside of the bounds of both the Sisterhood and heterosexual norms. Indeed, in a series that depicts an increasing number of sexual

encounters and establishes women as sexual adepts with intimate knowledge of pleasure, desire, and orgasms, it is notable that the reader never sees them using their skills in pursuit of their own sexual satisfaction. In part, this may be due to the series' focus on scenes of political intrigue rather than romantic scenes or conversations. However, it results in a lack of speculation on what women having sexual autonomy or self-determination might look like outside of the heteronormative and biologically deterministic framework on which the series relies.

**Freedom**

By not depicting scenes wherein the Bene Gesserit submit to pressure for sex or pressure to be monogamous, the series is able to represent women who operate with a degree of sexual freedom or liberation. One noticeable aspect in the series is the depiction of women with clear control of access to their body. There is no indication that the Bene Gesserit ever submit to pressure from men for sex, either within or without marriage. Although there is no description of marital sex, the series suggests that both Margot Fenring and Janet Roxbrough-Teg are contentedly married, leading the reader to assume that there is no coercion occurring in these relationships. Meanwhile, despite showing Princess Irulan being maneuvered into a marriage of alliance with her father's enemy, Paul, the text never depicts her being forced into sexual relations with him; instead, it sets up a situation where Paul chooses to remain faithful to his concubine, Chani, and frees Irulan to have sex with others if she wishes as long as she is cautious. As Paul tells her, "I don't begrudge you any male alliance as long as you are discreet…and childless. I'd be silly to feel otherwise under the circumstances" (*DM* 42). Paul still appears to be in control in their relationship and denies her the chance to produce an heir, but the lack of coercion means that none of the few marital examples in the series indicates that women are anything but sexually free to make their own choices. Nor are there examples of women being sexually violated. There is a brief rape threat in *Dune* when Jessica and Paul are being shuttled by two male Harkonnen guards into the desert to be left to die and the guards express interest in 'having' a highborn type (*Dune* 168); however, at no point is Jessica shown to be overly worried, signalling to the reader that the guards do not pose a serious threat to her bodily autonomy. The lack of depiction of sexual violence in regards to female characters is significant because it adds to the Bene Gesserit's characterization as women who are not only sexually liberated but also liberated from dealing with rape threats that usually "serve as a powerful reminder of male privilege, constraining women's movement and behavior" (Vance 328).

The depiction of the Bene Gesserit as rarely married nor expected to be monogamous also plays a vital role in representing women as free from vilification for their choice of sexual activity. Few of the Bene Gesserit women across the six-book series are shown to be married: as mentioned earlier, only Margot, Irulan, and Janet are in traditional marriages. Although *Dune* centers around the Atreides family composed of Duke Leto, Lady Jessica, and their son Paul, Jessica is officially a bound concubine, not a wife, an important distinction that is discussed several times by various characters including Leto, who reminds her of the freedom it sometimes affords her: "Be thankful that I never married you, my dear. Then it'd be your *duty* to join me at table for every meal" (*Dune* 50). Yet in critiques regarding the traditional roles given to women, critics like Jack Hand and Miriam Youngerman Miller do not discuss why so few Bene Gesserit women take on the role of wife, which would seem to be an obvious traditional role for them to hold. Thus, they do not appear to see that by establishing the permissiveness of relationships outside of marriage, the series potentially offers women more freedom than if they were within the institutional boundaries of marriage, which, despite changes in its conceptions over time, rarely affords women the ability to be sexually promiscuous without negative consequences. Indeed, a condemnation of promiscuity could have played a large role in the *Dune* universe. However, the build-up of the importance of the breeding program to the Bene Gesserit, discussed in Chapter 3, appears to obviate any need to justify the sexual promiscuity of characters like Margot, whose own spouse makes no protest at her announcement that she will conceive a child with another man. In the later novels, Lucilla has "borne three children for the Sisterhood, two by the same sire" and Odrade has "borne nineteen children for the Bene Gesserit […], [e]ach child by a different father," without the reader finding this information inconsistent with their characterization or something that would negatively affect them (*HD* 11). Whether the implication is that men are ignorant of women's sexual activities or choose to accept a lack of control, the result is that Bene Gesserit women receive a respite from some of the social mores that readers would have been familiar with, in particular the one that Kinsey notes about how "sexual activities which lead to the begetting of children outside of marriage […] are socially undesirable" (Kinsey et al. *Female* 17). The series thus implies that for the Bene Gesserit, marriage is just one avenue by which they can facilitate the advancement of their organization's long-term goals, and there is no mention of them being 'fallen women' who should feel shame or guilt on account of their promiscuity. In fact, it is Duncan Idaho who frequently complains about being reduced to a 'stud' for their breeding program; he appears to feel a discomfort with his sexual activity that they do not (*CHA* 27).

The fact that the series does not show many of the Bene Gesserit as being married nor raise the issue of promiscuity—even to dismiss it—plays a vital role in characterizing the Bene Gesserit as sexually liberated women free from vilification for their expression of sexual agency.

## Contrast between Honored Matre 'Whores' and Bene Gesserit 'Witches'

The women who are vilified in the series for the way they use sexuality are the Honored Matres, introduced in the fifth novel. One of the few critics to analyze this group is Touponce, who suggests that the archetypes of the witch and whore are being deployed through the Bene Gesserit and the Honored Matres in order to question their construction:

> On a simple level, the level of our immediate and probably mostly unconscious response, Herbert is deploying two male archetypes of the feminine—the witch and the whore […]. But considered as one long dialogical novel, *Heretics* and *Chapterhouse* together raise these archetypes to the conscious level of rational analysis in the conversations that occur between representatives of the two societies. (Touponce 108)

In Touponce's view, by giving the reader "a richly detailed look at two female societies, their discourses and social practices, and the conflicts between them," the texts prompt the reader to view these archetypal images of women alongside and in conversation with one another and to think more deeply and critically about common stereotypes of women (Touponce 106). Yet because the Honored Matres are characterized as evil and sexually destructive, their introduction may negatively impact the representation of women with embodied agency in the series. I argue that the presence of the Honored Matres as 'whores' complicates the depiction of women as sexually agential by reinforcing negative stereotypes about women with sexual autonomy. I also suggest that the reconciling of these groups at the end of the series implies that women and their sexuality, due to sexual difference, will always involve an element of domination, thus problematizing radical and cultural feminist theories that assumed women could become full sexual agents without this element.

Although the two groups are similar in several ways, the reader can see that the Honored Matres are foils of the Bene Gesserit through the negative and dehumanizing descriptions used for them, which easily outpace that of any other group. The Honored Matres are introduced first by name—with the Bene Gesserit appearing suspicious of it: "*Honored Matres*! How like 'Reverend Mothers' the words sounded" (*HD* 3). As the reader learns more about the Honored Matres' capabilities, it becomes clear that the two groups have several commonalities, including extraordinary abilities in hand-to-hand combat and the

Voice as well as sexual techniques, discussed below. However, the language used to describe the Honored Matres serves to stigmatize and dehumanize them such that their differences stand out more prominently. The list of negative descriptions of the Honored Matres easily outpaces that of any other group, and there is a variety of pejorative adjectives and phrases used including "hell-spawned females," "wildly brutal women," "madwomen," and "grotesque" (*HD* 217, 323; *CHA* 2, 303). Their appearance is also depicted unfavorably, as revealed through the eyes of Tleilaxu Master Waff:

> She looked like an aged athlete or acrobat, slowed and retired but still maintaining her muscle tone and some of her skills. Her face was tight skin over a skull with prominent cheekbones. The thin-lipped mouth produced a sense of arrogance when she spoke, as though every word were projected downward onto lesser folk. (*HD* 73)

The text creates a sense of aging and death surrounding her with the mention of her aged appearance and her skull. Her colorful clothing—deep red leotards and a dark blue cape with pearls creating "strange arabesques and dragon designs"—then seems incongruous, as if it is a disguise, and clearly contrasts with the Bene Gesserit's standard robes of black (*HD* 74).

It is in the comparisons with animals and insects that the Honored Matres appear most noticeably different from the Bene Gesserit, who are characterized as highly concerned with ensuring that humans can rise above their animal instincts as evidenced by their use of the gom jabbar test, discussed in previous chapters. The Honored Matre above is described as having orange-tinted contact lenses that give her eyes a "feral appearance," with other adjectives also linking her to an animal: her grin "feral," her "clawlike hands" clutching the chair, and her voice with "such a weight of venom that Waff almost recoiled" (*HD* 74-75). She appears only marginally civilized, as if she is poised to strike at any moment in a swirl of color and anger, signaled by the aggressive colors and bestial imagery, and Waff quickly realizes her hunger for prey and does "not like the look of those stringy muscles, the calluses on her hands, the hunter's gleam in her orange eyes" (*HD* 76). The bodies of the Honored Matres are elsewhere likened to those of insects or arachnids. For example, trained as an Honored Matre before her conversion to the Bene Gesserit, Murbella can move "with no resort to her central cortex" in an "[i]nsect-like" attack (*CHA* 51). The head of the Honored Matres, known as Dama or Great Honored Matre, is named the Spider Queen by Odrade, and Touponce calls her an "overtly sinister character" (Touponce 103). Dama's replacement is no better, with Murbella comparing her to "some dried-up lizard, still poisonous, still with a bite but running on well-used angers, most of her energy gone. Disarrayed hair like the outer skin of a fresh-dug ginger root. There was a demon in her" (*CHA* 406). As with the Honored

Matre described by Waff, the sense of decay and death comes through—it is as if the years of her exploits have left her body a worn-out shell whose ugly appearance she cannot control. Without the opportunity to view the Honored Matres in a positive or even neutral light, the reader is led to see them as dangerous and even evil—foils for the Bene Gesserit who make the Sisterhood appear more benevolent in comparison.

Once the destructive nature of the Honored Matres' sexual bonding technique becomes apparent, this becomes one of the most defining features of their characterization and is significant for making the Bene Gesserit's sexual imprinting appear benign in comparison. Although the series does not explicitly state how the Bene Gesserit's sexual techniques differ from those of the Honored Matres, it implies that the Honored Matres descended from God Emperor Leto II's Fish Speakers and had "some Bene Gesserit input" which resulted in "Bene Gesserit sexual imprinting evolv[ing] into the Honored Matre sexual amplification technique" (Barbour 12, Palumbo "Plots" 70). The Honored Matres "have perfected the pleasures of sex far beyond that developed by any others. […] They went back to the primitive Tantric and developed their own ways of sexual stimulation […]. Through this, they accept the worship of their followers" (*HD* 82). Tantric refers to a series of sexual techniques that gained popularity in the U.S. during the sexual revolution. In *Tantra: Sex, Secrecy, Politics, and Power in the Study of Religion* (2003), Hugh B. Urban explains that Omar Garrison's widely read *Tantra: The Yoga of Sex* (1964) advocated "Tantric techniques as the surest means to achieve extended orgasm and optimal sexual pleasure" and was quite attractive to the countercultural generation since it was seen as a push back against repressive Western sexuality (Urban 223). According to Touponce, the characterization of the Honored Matres indicates that they "can deploy the entire arsenal of the Tantric *ars erotica*" (Touponce 94). The text explains that the Honored Matres have perfected Tantric techniques to the point that they are able to "magnify the sensations of the orgasmic platform, transmitting this throughout a male body. They elicit the total sensual involvement of the male. Multiple orgasmic waves are created and may be continued by the…the female for an extended period" (*HD* 412). How they pervert this sexual activity is by using it for sexual enslavement as they establish full control first over their own bodies and then over those of the men they choose to seduce. The reader sees that this activity causes men to obey an Honored Matre "without question in anything" and develop a "dreaming look in their eyes" once bonded (*HD* 412, *CHA* 348). Using the point of view of the Tleilaxu, the text describes the Honored Matres as "*sexual monsters*" who "*enslave men by the powers of sex*," and

shows that even though Waff is forewarned by his informants, it appears he is still tempted: "'How little you know the joys I could give you,' she said. Her voice coiled like a whip around him. How tempting! How seductive!" (*HD* 78). This perspective is similar to that of the Sisterhood: in the Bene Gesserit's estimation, shown through an epigraph from "Bene Gesserit Analysis," the Honored Matres are initiators of destruction: "[T]he people can be set against each other by sexual subversion, and then can be armed to destroy themselves. These Honored Matres appear to favor this latter technique" (*HD* 22). The reader is thus prompted to view the Honored Matres' use of sexuality as a means of sowing discord and enslaving others so as to subjugate entire planets.

In their function as foils, then, the Honored Matres are successful in highlighting that the Bene Gesserit do not use such destructive means in their operations. Palumbo calls them "perverse doubles of the Bene Gesserit" who want to "conquer and enslave the Old Empire" (Palumbo "Monomyth" 436). Brian W. Aldiss and David Wingrove note in *Trillion Year Spree: The History of Science Fiction*, the "contrast of the Honoured Matres—so palpably evil in their scheme to rule without responsibility—makes the Bene Gesserit seem gloriously benevolent" (Aldiss and Wingrove 399). In addition, as Douglas Barbour writes, "It is intriguing to note that they first appear on Gammu, the new name for Geidi [sic] Prime, the old Harkonnen home world. This seems symbolically proper, for the Honoured Matres manifest many of the Harkonnen 'traits of rule', using brutality and sexual depravity as weapons to control what they refer to as 'the muck'" (Barbour 11). The similarities between the Harkonnens and the Honored Matres reinforce the latter's characterization as malevolent and sexually perverted. When the reader compares the two female groups, although the Bene Gesserit also engage in a type of sexual bonding, their imprinting appears much more benign due to the negative characterization of the Honored Matres' techniques.

The use of the term 'whore' is a clear signal that the Honored Matres' sexuality is destructive in contrast to the Bene Gesserit's. In the series the term whore first appears as a descriptor for women in *Heretics of Dune* when the Bene Gesserit refer to the Honored Matres as "those whores from the Scattering" (*HD* 169). Perhaps because the reader might find this to be an unusually vulgar use of language by a member of the Bene Gesserit, the text soon offers an explanation during the depiction of a conversation between Waff and Taraza:

> "Why do you call them whores?"
>
> "They try to copy us, yet they sell themselves for power and make a mockery of everything we represent. Honored Matres!" (*HD* 170)

This piece of dialogue further develops the characterization of the Bene Gesserit, showing that they are aware of the similarities between their groups but view themselves as being very different, suggesting that the reader too should see the groups differently. But the use of the term whore, in particular, brings the reader's attention to sexuality, with Taraza's statement implying that whore is a suitable term because although both groups use sexuality as a tool, the Bene Gesserit harness it toward a productive purpose, whereas the Honored Matres use it for selfish reasons to enslave and destroy humanity. Here the series shows one female group casting aspersions on another female group by using a sexual slur, one that carries with it negative sexual connotations that other pejorative terms do not. It signals a destructiveness in sexuality among the Honored Matres that is not associated with the Bene Gesserit.

In addition, the repetition of the term whore and the insinuation that the Honored Matres are sexually destructive makes the reader more likely to view them as femmes fatales, reinforcing a negative stereotype about women that suggests that those who have sexual autonomy should be feared. In general terms, a femme fatale is a 'fatal woman' or female enchantress who can "stand in the way of the male hero's quest, providing an immediate goal that distracts the protagonist from the sacred one" (Leeming 133). She is also "represented as the antithesis of the maternal—sterile or barren" (Doane 2). Examples in literature include Circe and Calypso in Homer's *Odyssey*, who distract Odysseus from returning home, and Dido from Virgil's *Aeneid*, who distracts Aeneas from founding Rome. Christine Mains argues that the very "cornerstones of epic fantasy include the figures of the heroic male warrior or adventurer and the dangerously erotic woman, sometimes worshiped as a goddess because of her beauty and sexuality" (Mains 34). The femme fatale links women with sexuality such that they become dangerous and destructive to men as sexual beings who prey on male desire. When the series shows the Honored Matres being called whores and being condemned for their employment of sexuality toward a malicious end—that of enslaving men—this leads the reader to see them as femmes fatales who are a threat, in this case both to men and to the women of the Bene Gesserit. This helps to construct a negative image of sexually autonomous women who—especially if they are characterized as insect-like, as discussed previously—must be eliminated to remove the threat that they pose to society. Although the reader sees the Bene Gesserit refraining from this use of sexuality, the implication that women's sexual autonomy is something to be fearful of may negatively impact their representation as sexually agential.

On the other hand, the use of the term 'witch' serves the narrative purpose of showing that the Bene Gesserit have considerable agency, rather than being a label that negatively impacts their characterization. In the series, the Bene Gesserit are occasionally referred to as witches by the third-person narrator or by other characters, mainly male ones. In *Dune*, the word witch appears on the first page in the narrator's description of Reverend Mother Mohiam as a "witch shadow—hair like matted spiderwebs, hooded 'round darkness of features, eyes like glittering jewels" (*Dune* 3). Here the term links her to the image of a witch in fairy tales who is mysterious and ominous. Elsewhere in the novel, it is male characters who use the term witch to describe the Bene Gesserit: Baron Harkonnen, his guards, Emperor Shaddam IV, Thufir Hawat, and the Fremen employ it as a derogatory term, often when they are anxious about the successful completion of their plans. For example, Baron Harkonnen chides his Mentat, Piter de Vries, for incorrectly predicting that "the Bene Gesserit witch would bear a daughter to the Duke" and worries that Paul will be "potentially more dangerous than the father…with that witch mother training him" (*Dune* 17, 19). As Miriam Youngerman Miller points out, it is male characters who often use the term, and this pattern continues throughout the subsequent novels with the exceptions of Irulan's sister, Wensicia; the Honored Matres; and on rare occasions a Reverend Mother (M. Miller 183). In the latter case, though, the term appears to be used in a more neutral sense: for example, in one scene Odrade thinks to herself, "Acolytes were…well, acolytes, but Mother Superior was the supreme witch of them all. Nervousness was natural" (*CHA* 111). Even though the series indicates that the term is being used in a pejorative sense in most cases, it appears to be associated with a general male fear of female autonomy and authority rather than a specific fear or denunciation of female sexuality, as 'whore' is.

It is when the Honored Matres use the term 'witch' for the Bene Gesserit, though, that it becomes more than a signal of male fear and reinforces the idea that the Bene Gesserit's skills are enviable for the considerable agency that they afford women. For example, in one scene after Dama gives Odrade a glass of tainted wine, Dama uses the term witches as she expresses outrage at discovering another way in which the Bene Gesserit's skills are superior to those of the Honored Matres:

> The one sip was enough. Odrade's senses detected a foreign substance […].
>
> She adjusted her metabolism to render the substance harmless, then announced what she had done.

> Dama glared at Logno. "So that is why none of these things work with the witches! And you never suspected!" The rage was an almost physical force directed at the hapless aide.
>
> "It is one of the immune systems with which we combat disease," Odrade said.
>
> Dama hurled her glass to the tiles. She was some time regaining composure. (*CHA* 383-384)

Although here the reader sees Dama mainly as enraged, the text later indicates through Odrade's reflection that Dama is envious of the Bene Gesserit's immunity because of bacterial warfare in the Scattering from which the Honored Matres fled (*CHA* 390). The Honored Matres' dialogue and use of the term witch thus must be considered in light of their characterization as desirous of the Bene Gesserit's skills, and since the Honored Matres already have sexual bonding skills, the reader can see that it is the Bene Gesserit's other skills that they envy. Therefore, the use of the term witch by the Honored Matres does not impact the representation of women as sexually agential in the way that the term whore does. Rather, the term's appearance in the later books builds on its appearance in the earlier ones to provide a shorthand means of imparting to the reader that these female characters have a considerable degree of agency.

This analysis counters the critical view that the term witch is used as a negative epithet in the series that contributes to a representation of women as malicious. There remains a lack of critical attention to the use of the term in science fiction in general, with Phyllis J. Day's article "Earthmother/Witchmother: Feminism and Ecology Renewed" (1982) and Robin Roberts' book *A New Species: Gender and Science in Science Fiction* (1993) offering some of the few critiques of its appearance in this genre. Day argues that although it is true that "[t]hroughout science fiction, strong women with power are most often called witches," the "designation in most of their societies is as pejorative as it is in our own" (Day 14-15). In her analysis of several twentieth century science fiction narratives such as Joan Vinge's *Snow Queen* (1980), Marion Zimmer Bradley's *Darkover* series (1958 onward), and *Dune*, she continually states that female characters are feared and hated in the worlds of the novels in order to show how societal anxiety about witches is replicated in literature. But her analysis of witches in *Dune*—that the "Bene Gesserit matriarchy is feared and hated for seemingly supernatural powers of the mind, and the fear of death or ill treatment is always with its members"—is brief, and she provides no textual evidence for this statement (Day 17). Similarly, R. Roberts' brief but scathing critique of witches in *Dune*, as mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, cannot be supported by the text. Her argument that the Bene

Gesserit are associated with evil and corruption appears to be merely a way for her to claim that it is "male science fiction writers [who] characterize witches as magical and evil" and female writers who valorize women through their depiction of magic (R. Roberts 7). This forecloses the possibility of her seeing the many parallels between the depiction of the Bene Gesserit and the portrayal of so-called witches in female-authored science fiction stories; thus, she praises the female protagonist in Vonda McIntyre's *Dreamsnake* (1978) for her "witchlike" ability that "results from a program of advanced psychological training, making the skill potentially available to any of the characters in the novel" but makes no mention of the Bene Gesserit's abilities being similarly portrayed (R. Roberts 8). However, although both critics appear to denounce male authors' use of the term witch, in Day's conclusion she gestures toward the possibility of a different analysis, stating that it is not the authors who present witches as evil but other characters, and that there may be a truly redemptive reason why authors use the term:

> Perhaps it is only by calling strong women witches that authors in science fiction can make their points about feminism and women's rights to personhood. It may be also the only effective word we have for women of power is *witch*, and that authors, recognizing this, glorify women in this way. (Day 18)

From this perspective, the image of the witch in the *Dune* series can be seen as a symbol of strength and autonomy for women, showing that they have "the right to choose and direct their own lives," rather than a way of negatively stereotyping them as evil (Rountree 3-4).

However, when the final novel shows the 'witches' reconciling with the 'whores' and hints at the eventual merging of their sexual bonding practices, this implies to the reader not only that the Honored Matres are redeemable, but that women and their sexual expression, due to sexual difference, will always involve an element of domination. *Chapterhouse: Dune* sets up a narrative situation in which Mother Superior Odrade prepares Murbella to succeed her as head of the Bene Gesserit as part of "her successful scheme to co-opt the Honored Matres and thus end their systematic extermination of the Bene Gesserit" (Palumbo "Monomyth" 436). The text depicts Murbella arriving in a black Bene Gesserit robe on an Honored Matre-controlled planet just after Bene Gesserit forces have been defeated in a battle, then killing the Great Honored Matre, Sharing with the late Odrade before death has erased her memories, and finally donning a red Honored Matre robe as she takes back an entourage of Honored Matres to the Bene Gesserit planet Chapterhouse. Within the text the change in robes is understood by the Honored Matres to symbolize Murbella's loyalty to their group, but the reader can see that Murbella is Bene Gesserit and intends to marry the two

groups such that "[o]ne day, there would be no Honored Matres; only Reverend Mothers with improved reflexes and augmented knowledge of sexuality" (*CHA* 417). The merging of the leadership of the groups reflected in Murbella shows that they have been temporarily reconciled toward the hope of a complete reconciliation that will enfold the Honored Matres into the Sisterhood. The reader thus understands that in spite of the Bene Gesserit's aversion to the Honored Matres and labeling of them as whores, they are redeemable in that they can be re-trained just as Murbella was. However, rather than denounce their sexual practices and manipulation of sexuality to enslave men, Murbella appears to see the Honored Matres' sexual knowledge as something that will benefit the Bene Gesserit and be incorporated into their standard method of operation. This implies that rather than the femmes fatales being eliminated, along with the negative image of sexually autonomous women that they help construct, they will live on as part of the Bene Gesserit. Indeed, the text suggests that this represents a subversion of the Bene Gesserit through the character of Sheeana, who leaves the Sisterhood at the close of the final novel to chart her own course after disagreeing with Murbella's plan to merge the groups. The significance of the groups merging is that it shows the reader that the groups are not actually all that different—both manipulate sexuality and men to achieve their own purposes with the difference being the degree to which they control men. This can serve to validate the idea that women—because they are sexually different from men—and their sexual expression will always involve an element of domination.

This then problematizes radical and cultural feminist theories by suggesting that both of them rely on naïve assumptions about how women will use sexual autonomy and fail to see that women will continue to be trapped in domination cycles rather than being able to become full sexual agents. As discussed earlier, radical feminist theories centered around sexual agency and self-determination for women with the view that women needed liberation from the often coercive and exploitative sexual relations they experienced. They indicated the need for women to have control over their bodies and be sexually autonomous rather than subordinate to men and their desires. Although the ways in which the *Dune* series depicts women securing sexual agency do not completely align with this view of liberated female sexuality, the reader can clearly see that the Bene Gesserit have a high degree of control over their bodies and are able to use sexuality to control men, with the Honored Matres having expanded their sexual techniques to more fully control men by enslaving them. The implication when the groups reconcile, then, is that the Bene Gesserit plan to build on their knowledge that "sexuality can be a weapon as well as a source of weakness" by learning

more about the Honored Matres' bonding techniques and incorporating them, rather than eschewing them as destructive (McLean 153). This continues to link women's sexual autonomy with manipulation and control of men rather than speculating on what liberation from a sexually exploitative cycle might look like. As Echols writes in her analysis of second-wave radical feminism, "it was generally assumed by radical feminists that female desire when liberated from male constraints and expectations would be untarnished by fantasies of dominances and submission" (Echols 290). But the conclusion of the series suggests this is not the case and that the more women learn how to use sexuality to their advantage, the more they will replicate the dominant/subordinate paradigm that many feminists critiqued. The series also problematizes cultural feminist theories—which propagated the idea that women were naturally nurturing and loving, even uninterested in genital sex—through the presence of the Honored Matres and their integration with the Bene Gesserit. The characterization of the Honored Matres as aggressive, dangerous, and sinister women who enslave men suggests that the cultural feminist view is a naïve, inadequate, and essentialist view of women—that anyone can fall into the pattern of dominating others for malicious intent. Thus, the final two novels published in the 1980s—after the height of the women's liberation movement—speculate that a world with greater sexual autonomy for women may not in fact free women, and that neither radical nor cultural feminist theory is sufficient to explain what full sexual agency outside of domination cycles might look like.

## The Depiction of Homosexuality as Abnormal

By characterizing anything other than male-female relations as abnormal or merely a phase, such as homosexuality, the series reinforces the notion that desire is biologically determined, which further constrains how liberatory the series can be in its depiction of sexual agency. James D. Riemer in "Homosexuality in Science Fiction and Fantasy" (1986) argues for the potential in science fiction as a genre to accommodate more liberatory explorations of sexuality, writing that "[s]cience fiction and fantasy allow writers to create worlds freed of the moral values through which our own culture views homosexuality" and "more often the writer creates cultures in which homosexuality is not deviant behavior" (Riemer 146). But unlike the narratives of authors like Joanna Russ or Samuel Delany, in which homosexuality is presented as part of a normal range of preferences, the *Dune* series associates homosexuality with incest, pedophilia, and violence through the villainous character Baron Harkonnen. Although the Baron is marked as different due to his enormously fat body, which requires that he use suspensors to help him move around, he is "also

negatively portrayed as *sexually* different," and this is arguably what most explicitly differentiates him from other characters (A. Roberts *Science* 42). An early indication of the Baron's desire manifests during a discussion of his plans to attack the Atreides family and thus Paul when he laments the potential loss of "such a sweet young body" (*Dune* 19). Confirmation that the Baron is attracted to males occurs when he commands his guard to send him a diversion: "'I'll be in my sleeping chambers,' the Baron said. 'Bring me that young fellow we bought on Gamont, the one with the lovely eyes. Drug him well. I don't feel like wrestling.' […] *Yes*, he thought. *The one with the lovely eyes, the one who looks so much like the young Paul Atreides*" (*Dune* 186). These also indicate to the reader that the Baron wishes to possess Paul as he does the slave boys in his keep—by coercive, non-consensual means. He is also portrayed as being interested in his nephew, Feyd-Rautha, who is the same age as Paul; he thinks of him as a "*lovely boy*" with "*such a lovely body. Really a lovely boy*" (*Dune* 235, 241). This, along with the Baron's possession of his granddaughter Alia's mind and body, adds an incestual element to the Baron's desire. It is possible to "[locate] the Baron's villainy in his violent and coercive sexuality, not in his homosexuality as such," as Kevin Mulcahy argues in "*The Prince* on Arrakis: Frank Herbert's Dialogue with Machiavelli" (1996) (Mulcahy 35). But Mulcahy also notes that the negative portrayal should be acknowledged as being "culturally conditioned and quite offensive," and Adam Roberts suggests it "amounts to a crudely worked-through homophobia" (A. Roberts *Science* 42). Through the characterization of the Baron, the series implies that for a man to reject the 'natural' order of desiring women is abnormal and will end in his demise.

In *God Emperor of Dune*, the depiction of homosexuality appears to be less negative: when one of the Duncan Idaho gholas expresses rage upon seeing "[t]wo women in a passionate kiss," another character explains that "it's perfectly normal for adolescent females as well as males to have feelings of physical attraction toward members of their own sex. Most of them will grow out of it" (*GE* 320). But this still reinforces the 'naturalness' of male-female desire and implies that those who continue to have such feelings are immature or abnormal. Outside of these examples, there is virtually no narrative space given to explorations of sexuality beyond a biologically determined framework. Thus, the reader does not see even a hint that the women of the Bene Gesserit or Honored Matres might hold sexual attraction for other women or want the freedom to explore other ways of fulfilling sexual desires. Upholding this framework closes down avenues of sexuality that could extend

beyond male-female relations and constrains how liberatory the series can be in terms of representing women as sexually agential.

## Reflection of Changes in the Treatment of Sexuality in the New Wave

Although the *Dune* series does not contain the most liberatory or radical examples of sexuality in science fiction, its publication across the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s and its increasingly overt concern with sexual matters make it well-positioned to be a relevant example of the changes in the depiction of sexuality in the genre—a type of bridging between the relative absence of sexual activity and its presence as a key part of human interactions. Concerns about the depiction of sexuality, or lack thereof, in the science fiction genre as a whole were increasingly voiced by authors and critics during the mid-twentieth century. As discussed earlier, this was a period when debates and fears about sex were prominent in the cultural consciousness in the U.S. due to movements including the sexual revolution and second-wave feminism. In her chapter "Fiction, 1964-1979" in *The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction*, Helen Merrick writes that sexuality had always been latent in the genre, but it found more overt expression during the New Wave of the 1960s, discussed in Chapter 1, which saw the inclusion of more radical content like explicit language and sexual references (Merrick "Fiction" 103). In "Sextrapolation in New Wave Science Fiction" (2006), Rob Latham postulates that censorship in science fiction magazines before the 1960s was partly responsible for the lack of sexual content; even midway through the 1960s, *Analog* editor John W. Campbell felt he had to defend himself against the charge that his magazine did not address erotic desire by saying that it was because men were motivated by achievement, not sex (Latham 253). Other factors include cultural changes in society, leading authors to include in their texts some of "the qualities of the late-1960s counterculture, including […] a satisfaction in violating taboos, [and] a marked interest in sex" (Nicholls "New Wave"). Merrick notes that science fiction author and critic Judith Merril was a "key figure in promoting the New Wave to American audiences" and someone who wanted to promote science fiction that meaningfully responded to contemporary concerns in scientific thought (Merrick "Fiction" 105). Latham also discusses Merril's significance, calling her a visible apostle of the New Wave and pointing out that she was waging a battle in the 1960s to persuade the genre to turn its attention to interpersonal psychology and sexology, as well as include more adult content like sexuality (Latham 251-252).

Rarely categorized as belonging to the New Wave or making a contribution related to the depiction of sexuality, the *Dune* novels' positioning within and on either side of the height of the New Wave as part of one series with recurring themes and characters suggests that the series presents a relevant case study regarding changes in how the genre responded to requests by Merril and others for more sexuality-related content. *Dune* was first serialized as "Dune World" in Campbell's *Analog* magazine in 1963, the year before the New Wave is considered to have begun. The last novel, *Chapterhouse: Dune*, was published in 1985, a year after William Gibson's *Neuromancer* (1984) signalled the start of the cyberpunk movement in science fiction, which Nicholls calls another new wave with different concerns (Nicholls "Cyberpunk", "New Wave"). This series over its twenty-two-year span of publication does not remain static in its representation of sexuality; moreover, it gives a strong sense that it is adapting to the increased openness toward sexual concerns in the culture and genre by moving, for example, from having little description of intercourse in the pre-1977 novels to having several explicit sex scenes in the post-1977 novels. In this way, the series forms a type of bridge between, on the one hand, science fiction stories that would either ignore sexual behavior and motivations as a part of the human experience completely or merely imply they are a factor, and, on the other hand, stories that fully acknowledge the importance of sexuality by showing two groups of women who harness it in order to control others and achieve their goals. The inclusion of specific sexological terms in the later novels, though appearing only briefly, can be seen as a fulfilment of Merril's desire for science fiction to wrestle with contemporary scientific concerns such as sexology. Overall, the series' historical placement and the increasingly strong sense of embodied agency in the area of sexuality afforded to female characters demand its recognition as an important example of the changes in the depiction of sexuality in the science fiction genre.

## Visions of Sexuality in Feminist Science Fiction

Because of the *Dune* series' fixation on biologically deterministic notions of sexuality, its depiction of women with sexual agency is necessarily more limited in its scope than that of the narratives of feminist science fiction, which speculate about women with sexual autonomy and the capacity to express their sexuality in a variety of ways. As discussed by Merrick and Jeanne Cortiel, the male-dominated science fiction genre was subjected to a significant unsettling in the 1960s and 1970s with the publication of texts that advanced the concerns of the women's movement. Feminist science fiction writers helped transform the genre's treatment of gender and sexuality, offering new visions of sex and desire that

"extended and reconfigured the aesthetic freedoms attendant on the (male) sexual revolution embraced by the New Wave" (Cortiel "Reading," Merrick "Fiction" 108). Russ's *The Female Man*, Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time,* and Sally Miller Gearhart's *The Wanderground* represent three feminist science fiction texts that are particularly concerned with exploring what sexuality might look like if women were not exploited or did not require the presence of men to fulfil their desires. In Judith Spector's analysis in "The Functions of Sexuality in the Science Fiction of Russ, Piercy, and Le Guin" (1986), one of the purposes of sexuality in feminist science fiction is to make the reader think about the link between sexuality and hostility, and thus *The Female Man* shows the female character Jael resisting the Boss-Man's dehumanizing and aggressive sexual advances by killing him (Spector 200). The text implies that Jael would rather have sex with a robot, which she later does. In the all-women world of Whileaway where another character, Janet, lives, women marry one another and have no need for male sexuality and its implied violence, although labelling this as an expression of lesbian sexuality may not be accurate "in the absence of any possibility of heterosexuality" (Hollinger "Something" 153). In *Woman on the Edge of Time,* Piercy critiques the violence she sees as a part of men's sexual behavior toward women, presenting an alternative community with "nonviolent sexuality, love, and sharing" between men and women more in line with cultural feminist views of sexuality (Spector 204). Both Piercy and Russ eliminate the traditional family such that "women's bodies and their sexuality are no longer primary areas of appropriation" and women are freer to engage in sex on their own terms (Bartowski 77). In *The Wanderground*, the Hill Women have 'sex' with trees and bushes, as well as group sex with the moon and each other, being "free to express themselves sexually without experiencing any form of violence or exploitation" (Barr *Lost in Space* 43). As Sarah Lefanu argues, in all of these texts, "the implications of a different sexual organization are explored in depth: what if women were free from the authority of men? How might people live outside the conventional sexual hierarchy? How might relationships between women, and between women and men, be different?" (Lefanu "Difference" 164). They all center around the idea that women need to be in control of their bodies and their expressions of sexuality, whether they speculate on heterosexuality, lesbian sexuality, or other forms of sexuality. In comparison with the *Dune* series, these narratives are much more liberatory in their depiction of sexuality and what women might do with sexual autonomy, not being bound to a biologically deterministic view in which heterosexuality is the only 'natural' type of sexuality. This means that, although the series is similar in its depiction of

women who secure agency in sexual matters, its speculative potential remains limited by its fixation on sexuality situated within a biologically determined framework.

In examining the role that sexuality plays in the representation of the Bene Gesserit's embodied agency, I have shown that the issue is complex but that overall the *Dune* series offers a unique representation of the female body as sexually agential. I find that the analysis becomes even richer when the novels are situated in their historical context during a time when traditional conceptions of sexuality were being challenged and during a transitional period in the science fiction genre. The Bene Gesserit embody many of the characteristics that second-wave feminists wanted for women—including being allowed to be active, self-determining, and free from male oppression—and enable the reader to visualize a world where heterosexual sex is not necessarily oppressive for women. With the introduction of the Honored Matres as foils of the Bene Gesserit, and more emphasis on elements of sexology, women's sexual agency is given attention and prominence at a time when the science fiction genre was being challenged to incorporate more feminist concerns. However, the series' insistence on a biologically deterministic framework of sexuality means that almost all sexual expressions are heteronormative and assume that manipulation of male desire is the principle means through which a woman can gain sexual autonomy. The negative portrayal of homosexuality, too, limits how revolutionary the series' vision of sexuality can be and has likely contributed to the cursory critical attention that sexuality has received in the series. Nonetheless, the prioritizing of women's sexual agency still enables the series to make a significant contribution to the representation of women in science fiction, just as the feminist science fiction narratives do. In the concluding chapter, I will review the five avenues of agency that I have discussed in this thesis and their impact on the overall representation of women.

## Conclusion

In this thesis I have argued that the six novels of the *Dune* series show the female characters of the Bene Gesserit securing a high degree of embodied agency and thus offer a representation of women with self-determination and autonomy who actively exercise control over their lives and shape history. Shown through characterization and contrasts with other groups, this embodied agency manifests primarily in five different areas: mind-body synergy, reproduction and motherhood, voices, education and memory, and sexuality. By showing the Bene Gesserit to be capable of forging a mind-body connection through their training in prana-bindu and acute sensory perception, the series emphasizes the importance of the body as a key component in their ability to perform extraordinary feats such as those in hand-to-hand combat and the spice agony. In this way, the female body is depicted as a site of strength and the series avoids propagating the dualistic thinking that considers women and the body to be inferior. When the Bene Gesserit are shown to have control over pregnancy, and contrasted with the detestable men of the Bene Tleilaxu, this presents the reader with an image of women with reproductive autonomy who use it for their own purposes. The depiction of women mastering the special ability known as the Voice and functioning in roles as advisors and Truthsayers shows them gaining authority and influence in the world of the novels, a type of subtle control more in keeping with Taoist philosophy. The series also implies that the Bene Gesserit's education is comprehensive and subversive, preparing the female body to advance the goals of the Missionaria Protectiva and gain constant access to Other Memory, a storehouse of female ancestral memory that provides women with the wisdom of their foremothers and ensures that women's history is not forgotten. Finally, the Bene Gesserit are shown to be sexually agential in numerous ways, initiating sexual encounters and using sexuality as a tool but not in the destructive way of the Honored Matres. Together, these aspects of embodied agency point toward an all-female organization whose members have achieved one of the key goals of feminism: women's control over their bodies.

Yet I have also shown how agency in the series is complex and often bound up with the motif of concealment, such that determining the extent to which female characters have autonomy involves close examination of how they operate within and without traditional roles. Within the series, agency is bounded by the constraints of the feudal setting and the loyalties characters have to larger organizations such as the Sisterhood. The feudal framework constrains autonomy by providing a limited number of roles in which women can function—such as concubines, wives, and mothers—but it also allows room for an

organization like the Bene Gesserit to exist as one of the factions vying for influence. Similarly, the series shows that the Sisterhood does restrict its members' autonomy by directing their actions toward the larger organization's goals, but it also provides them with the training and positions with which they can exert influence and control to a certain extent. These make the depiction of agency anything but straightforward. In addition, there is the motif of concealment and the development of layers of meaning across the series, which requires more attention on the reader's part to understand the factors that play a role in three-dimensional character development. Yet this creates part of the richness of the texts, such that it is not enough to say, for example, that Jessica fulfills the traditional role of a mother to dismiss the presence of female agency in the series. I argue that the absence of critical attention to the Bene Gesserit suggests that sexual difference is still a key stumbling block in regards to feminism—that women who choose to reproduce are regarded with suspicion for participating in institutions that have historically oppressed women.

Returning to Touponce's question at the beginning of the thesis—"Is the *Dune* series ultimately feminist in the images and voices of women it projects?"—this thesis has demonstrated that the answer is yes, at least in the case of the women of the Bene Gesserit, who comprise most of the female characters. The images of women are not the stereotypes decried by feminist critics such as Joanna Russ and Ursula K. Le Guin: the type of women who are unrelatable mythic images or loyal little mistresses of the hero. Bene Gesserit women certainly have relationships with other characters, including men, and roles as mothers, daughters, wives, and concubines, but they are not defined solely in terms of them. They are not caricatures lacking internal motivation, nor are they objects to be used or manipulated by male characters. Rather, they are shown capable of securing the agency to make decisions and enact change in their world, whether for themselves or the Sisterhood. The images of women are also varied, ranging from the strong and influential mother Jessica to the embattled Mother Superior Odrade. Most tellingly, compared to the two-dimensional characterization of groups like the Tleilaxu and the Honored Matres, the characterization of the Bene Gesserit is much more complex and positive. The voices of women that the series projects can also be considered feminist because they reflect a range of viewpoints rather than appearing in a stereotypical or sexist manner and are accorded substantial weight and authority rather than being silenced. Although the Bene Gesserit may have overarching goals, individual members are free to speak their own minds and disagree with one another. They use their voice both as a command through the Voice and as a means of expressing

themselves frequently throughout the series. The depiction of the Bene Gesserit as highly invested in their breeding program, which relies on women's sexual difference and is often pointed to by critics as a fault, does not preclude the images and voices of women being considered to be feminist.

It is the representation of the female body, in particular, and the engagement with the concerns of feminism that truly show the series to be feminist in regards to the images of women. I have shown how the series anticipates and parallels developments in second-wave feminism regarding women's control of their bodies and demands for agency. As I have argued, the Bene Gesserit achieve these by mastering their bodies and having the autonomy to make choices about becoming pregnant, speaking and using the Voice, accessing Other Memory, and using sexuality to advance the goals of the Sisterhood. The body actually becomes an important part of women's agential potential, with critic Robert L. Mack recognizing "Herbert's narrative choice to extend the realm of training to include the bodily with the discursive, crafting a fictional order of women who are effective because of their mastery of physiological processes *in addition* to verbal and mental abilities" (Mack 55). Although the series indicates that the Bene Gesserit's abilities are based on bodily training that is potentially scientifically possible in the future, rather than being based on a character having a female body, the fact that few male characters complete similar training means that it is the female body that is valorized. Indeed, the series shows the Bene Gesserit with their many physical and mental skills to be the ones most capable of surviving and thriving amidst change and upheaval. Thus, the series offers a speculation on what it might look like to have a world where the female body is, as some feminists desired, "a site of strength, power, endurance and creativity, particularly with regard to its sexuality and capacity for motherhood" (Bowden and Mummery 52). I have also shown how the depiction of women maintaining loyalty and solidarity among themselves anticipates the notion of sisterhood being powerful, although this is complicated by the tensions between collective and individual agency and biological determinism that feminists struggled with in relation to women's liberation. The series problematizes aspects of radical and cultural feminism by speculating on a world where women use sexual difference, essentialist notions, and traditional institutions like marriage and motherhood to their advantage rather than fighting for equality. This results in the series not liberating women from all potential constraints on their agency but representing them as capable of exerting control even in traditionally feminine roles.

Regarding the series as it is positioned within the science fiction genre, I have argued that it should be considered part of both New Wave and feminist science fiction because Herbert's treatment of female characters makes a contribution to the development of feminist themes as well as elevating the genre's literary quality through a more complex characterization of women. So far, when Herbert is acknowledged as a New Wave writer, it is for his inclusion of the social sciences of psychology and ecology or aspects of the counterculture of the 1960s, such as drugs and Eastern religions. However, his representation of women should also be viewed as a break from that present in much science fiction, especially considering it shares attributes with some of the key feminist science fiction texts of the 1970s, which are considered to be feminist due to their concern with depicting agential female characters and rejecting stereotypes. Even critic Carolyn Wendell in "The Alien Species: A Study of Women Characters in the Nebula Award Winners, 1965-1973" acknowledges that Jessica in *Dune* is "[p]robably one of the most memorable characters in all of science fiction" and "vivid and solid" (Wendell 347-348). If Wendell had been able to examine Jessica's character and role as a mother in more depth, she might have viewed this female character as an example of a complex and agential woman rather than a mere stereotype, and viewed the first Nebula Award winner, *Dune*, as a change from the typical science fiction novel in which female readers "had to forget the possibility of feminine intelligence and independence" (Wendell 344).

Not only does the *Dune* series offer an exploration of several feminist concepts as demonstrated throughout this thesis, but it also moves away from a reliance on stereotypes of women, which helps to improve its literary quality as well. One of the key elements of the New Wave was the idea that science fiction could actually be literary and taken seriously by those outside of the genre and its fan base (Nicholls "New Wave"; A. Roberts *History* 231). Elevating the literary quality meant more sophistication in writing and more attention to the narrative strategies of mainstream fiction, with criticism being "leveled at the lack of characterization in sf—a problem that was seen to be at the root of sf's failure to portray (or even include) women and sex" (Nicholls "New Wave," Merrick *Secret* 45). Le Guin's novel *The Left Hand of Darkness*, for example, is often recognized as an example of the shift toward science fiction stories that were more mature and literary, with its "magnificently visualized planet," complexity of philosophical themes, and clear and precise prose, in addition to its use of androgynous characters (Aldiss and Wingrove 346, Nicholls and Clute). But although both *Dune* and *The Left Hand of Darkness* were honored by winning both of the

prized science fiction awards—the Hugo and Nebula—and continue to be popular novels, *Dune* has not received a similar amount of critical praise for its contributions to the maturation of the genre. Its status as a great world-building novel on par with J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-1955) is indeed deserved (Pierce 123). However, given that the series offers a complex, three-dimensional characterization of women, it should be recognized as making a valuable and significant contribution to the maturation of the science fiction genre and should be considered feminist even though it does not wholly liberate women from traditional roles or constraints due to their biology.

Ultimately, this thesis disrupts the narrative of science fiction criticism in general as well as the subset of feminist science fiction criticism by showing how their trajectories have overlooked key feminist aspects of Herbert's popular and successful *Dune* series. Even influential feminist science fiction critic Helen Merrick in her attempt to "disrupt the hegemonic narrative of academic feminist sf criticism, with its focus on a restricted canon of texts," does not appear to question the exclusion of most male authors from the category of feminist science fiction (Merrick *Secret* 105). She does, however, gesture toward "the wealth of opportunities for new forms of meaning-making, theorizing, reading, and production in the gaps and silences of [her] account" (Merrick *Secret* 287). There is certainly much more material in the *Dune* series available for analysis alongside theories of feminism, masculinity studies, and others that have emerged since the bulk of the criticism published in the 1980s. Yet there may also be other science fiction texts that have been missed that make meaningful contributions to the development of feminist concepts. What will remain significant about the *Dune* series, though, is Herbert's use of a traditionally male-dominated genre to position female embodiment as something that enables women to gain agency and influence in society, which ties in to the goals of feminism circulating in the culture at the time of writing. Thus, Herbert's contribution to the representation of women and feminist concepts in science fiction may be that he shows over the course of two decades a detailed example of an all-female group that struggles internally with how to best position women and their bodies in the world, paralleling real-world women in the twentieth century who were addressing similar concerns.

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