

Modern Science Fiction and ancient narrative myth occupy similar cultural positions: both forms offer comprehensible but to some degree otherworldly tales dislocated from 'reality' by temporal liminality or some similar narrative conceit. In addition to entertaining their audiences, both genres also feature the exploration of human identity, the investigation of social structures, and the search for man's place in the *cosmos*. The narrative and thematic characteristics shared by Frank Herbert's *Dune* series and the Homeric epics are easy to enumerate (from the name Atreides to Paul's Oedipal blinding). Equally noteworthy is the sustained rumination on heroism to be found in both works. The causes of these similarities may be quickly adumbrated: Frank Herbert worked self-consciously in a western literary tradition, drew exhaustively on its narrative patterns and myths, and crafted a series thematically worthy of the title epic in the modern sense.

In this paper, I will examine two themes central to Homer's *Iliad* and Frank Herbert's *Dune* that surmount simple parallelism: (1) the relationship between 'history' and the narrated tale and (2) self-reflexive knowledge of the power of myth. In short, the first theme marks both works out as sophisticated narrative achievements whereas the second underscores essential concerns about the dangers of storytelling. First, I will suggest that through the motifs of 'fate/prophecy' and 'genetic memory/prescience' respectively, both Homer and Herbert create a synchronic realm that is dependent upon and constrained by its diachronic consciousness. (Sciences unknown to us do the work of the *Iliad*'s gods and fate on Herbert's Arrakis.) Then, by briefly examining Homeric deployment of prior tales and metapoetic references to its narrative alongside *Dune*'s expressed consciousness of the power of myth, I will argue that both tales acknowledge the dangers of myth and foreshadow their own paradigmatic power. Where the *Iliad* anticipates its future reception optimistically, *Dune* sees the hegemonic dangers of a powerful narrative; this contrast is nicely encapsulated in the central choices of Achilles and Paul Atreides. Herbert sets his "Atreides" in a context that deliberately misreads his ancient forebears and invites investigation into not only the nature of mythic heroism but also of the perils of the literary tradition. This discussion, in closing, will address both the complexities of Herbert's relationship with myth and epic form (and through this science fiction's classical inheritance) and the enduring themes that unite *Dune* and the *Iliad* as paradigmatic works of art.