Crip Gholas: posthuman disability and strategies of containment in Frank Herbert's Dune novels
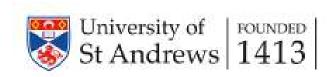
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Abstract: Michael Bérubé has recently argued that representations of disability in science fiction are almost ubiquitous but heavily underrecognized. This article builds on Bérubé's remark to discuss the constructive effects of adding critical disability studies to the approaches that have focused on Frank Herbert's *Dune* series. I argue that a disability-informed reading of the character Duncan Idaho across all six original *Dune* novels exposes a range of ableist assumptions upon which the narrative relies. Genetically engineered, the reincarnations of Idaho might be read as implying posthuman possibility. In contrast, I demonstrate the ways in which Herbert's characterisation of Idaho and the latter's relationship to *Dune*'s society represent ableist ideologies. By discussing Idaho's storyline and *Dune*'s ableist social constructions, the article highlights a series of narrative anxieties and strategies of containment that undermine any possible interpretation of Idaho's disability as socially acceptable and limit the ways in which Herbert's portrayal of Idaho may be used to imagine a positive presence of disabled people in future scenarios.

Crip Gholas: Posthuman Disability and Strategies of Containment in Frank Herbert's *Dune* novels

Introduction

A study of disability in Frank Herbert's *Dune* novels is long overdue. Back in 2005, Michael Bérubé remarked that "the genre of science fiction is as obsessed with disability as it is with space travel and alien contact" (568), and he declared himself surprised that the topic of disability still goes underrecognized in critical responses to popular science fiction (SF) narratives, which often perform as productive sites to discuss the possibilities of disabled and nondisabled people in imagined future scenarios. Bérubé's observation elicited several critical analyses of disability in SF. In 2013, Ria Cheyne published an article on the ways critical disability studies contribute to exposing several previously unexplored narrative

tensions underlying Anne McCaffrey's short story "The Ship Who Sang". Later that year, Kathryn Allan edited a collection of academic articles focusing on the use of technology as cure for disability in SF. Not long ago, this very journal dedicated a special issue to "Science Fiction, Disability, Disability Studies" (Allan and Cheyne). Since this is a fairly new concern of critics, there are lots of works of SF that could be, but have not been, analysed through a critical disability studies lens. This article builds on Bérubé's remark to engage with the topic of disability in *Dune*, which has recently been dubbed the greatest series in the SF canon (Kunzru).

Dune has a prolific critical history. Existing SF studies of *Dune* have explored the effects of history within *Dune* for the development of the series' subplots (DiTommaso), analysed *Dune*'s aesthetic integrity (Palumbo, "Plots") and its compliance with the monomyth pattern (Palumbo, "Monomyth"), and made comparisons with other prominent SF texts (Grigsby). Adding to this array of critical approaches, I draw upon Cheyne's methodology of disability-informed criticism to investigate the three most prominent reincarnations of the character Duncan Idaho as a ghola, a being reconstructed from the dead flesh of the original Idaho. In doing so, I borrow Donald Palumbo's way of referring to the gholas as Idaho-2 (the first Idaho ghola created for Paul) in *Dune Messiah* and *Children of Dune*; Idaho-4 (the last ghola created for Leto II, although an Idaho-3 briefly appears) in *God Emperor of Dune*; and Idaho-5 (the final Idaho ghola created for the Bene Gesserit) in *Heretics of Dune* and *Chapterhouse: Dune* ("Monomyth," 435). As the only character to re-appear in all six of Frank Herbert's original novels, the original Idaho and his reincarnations offer a more consistent example of disability than any other disabled character in the series (consider emperor Leto II's physical struggles as a giant sandworm in *God Emperor of Dune*). Firstly, I outline how disability is a category that can apply to both humans and gholas alike. Later, I explore the Idaho gholas' disability, which manifests itself in the creatures'

lack of access to their past selves. I suggest that, via the repetitive and ever-successful awakening of the gholas to their memories, there may seem to be some justification for viewing the representation of disability positively.[1] By contrast, a disability-informed reading of the gholas' storyline exposes the strategies of containment at play in Herbert's series and its overall reinforcement of ableist ideologies. To this end, I also consider the mechanisms of control over the Idaho gholas in the fictional world of *Dune* to investigate how Herbert uses both physical spaces of enclosure and internalized norms of behaviour to construe a futuristic society that thrives on ableist practices. My focus in this piece is on the original series of *Dune*.[2]

On Posthuman Disability: Why Gholas Can Also Be Disabled

Choosing to engage with disability in a text that revolves around posthumanism and artificially engineered creatures raises important questions about whether we can speak of disability with reference to gholas and other posthuman bodies in SF. Interestingly, most of the SF and critical disability scholars who have addressed the topic of posthuman disability have attended to the differences between human and posthuman, between physiological/psychological impairments and technological enhancements, but they have left little space to problems of disability as a social construct. Allan's collection *Disability in Science Fiction*, for example, mainly focuses on bodies, but raises intriguing questions about social relations in the posthuman world which are worth pursuing further. This is why my approach will focus on both the posthuman body as a factor in constructing disability and

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[1] Cheyne rightfully notices that critical disability studies scholars such as David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder have problematized the issue of reading texts as positive or negative representations of disability, but these approximations remain useful to describe reader response at certain points in time (140).

[2] For the sake of clarity, the chronological and publication order of the *Dune* novels is as follows: *Dune* (1965), *Dune Messiah* (1969), *Children of Dune* (1976), *God Emperor of Dune* (1981), *Heretics of Dune* (1984), *Chapterhouse: Dune* (1985). Two additional novels were written by Brian Herbert and Kevin J. Anderson to conclude the original series after Frank Herbert's death in 1986. However, they were only loosely based on notes left behind by Frank Herbert, and they will not be considered in any detail.

disability as "a socially driven relation to the body" (Davis 3). In an attempt to consider both elements evenly, I have grounded my study in Rosemarie Garland-Thomson's concept of the "normate".

In *Extraordinary Bodies*, Garland-Thomson defines the normate as both a medically and socially hypernormal[3] figure that embodies the form, function and appearances that conform to all the culturally praised traits of a sociocultural system at a particular historical time (8). Against the figure of the normate are measured all deviant others, including those with severely deviant traits who are broadly identified as disabled. Although Garland-Thomson originally coined this term to describe the disability-related workings of late-capitalist human societies, she has recently turned to the imagined world of Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* to consider whether we could also apply the normate/disabled dichotomy to cases of posthumanism ("Eugenic World Building"). As categories that Garland-Thomson frames in relation to each other – the deviant always being inferior to the normate of reference – and not according to a fixed range of sociocultural specific traits, normalcy and disability lend themselves to also describing the human/posthuman power relations in *Dune*. It will suffice to identify the image of the normate in Herbert's series to place the Idaho gholas accordingly.

Looking Inward: Containing the Disabled Body

A brief reorientation to the volumes of *Dune* may be helpful at this point. Set in an imagined future universe where thinking machines have been outlawed, *Dune* chronicles the attempts of warring noble houses to take control of Arrakis, a planet inhabited by giant sandworms

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[3] Garland-Thomson makes explicit reference to the normate as "hypernormal" in her article "Eugenic World Building and Disability: The Strange World of Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*," where she writes that "[t]he normate is medically and socially hypernormal" (135). It may be noted that this image of the normate as "hypernormal" resembles Lennard J. Davis's notion of the "ideal" (24-25), a premodern concept describing a condition that most of us aspire to achieve but that nobody can ever fully attain.

and the only place where melange – a life-extending spice that enhances human mental capacities and enables future vision – can be found. After the assassination of Duke Leto Atreides and of his right-hand man Duncan Idaho in *Dune*, the young Paul Atreides acquires prescient capacities through consuming melange and defeats Arrakis's usurpers. Thus, Paul proves to be the legendary Kwisatz Haderach, a messianic superbeing yielded by the Bene Gesserit Sisterhood's breeding scheme. But peace does not last long. In *Dune Messiah*, Paul is injured, and his wife Chani dies while giving birth to their children, Leto II and Ghanima. That the first Idaho ghola retrieves the original Idaho's memories at the time of Chani's death is not a coincidence. Rather, it is part of a conspiracy by the Tleilaxu, manufacturers of gholas, to steal Paul's empire in exchange for a duplicate of Chani who can also remember her former persona. Paul refuses. In *Children of Dune*, Leto II obtains Paul's superpowers as well as the ability to be invisible to prescience, and he merges with Arrakis's sandtrout (the larval form of sandworms) to craft a future in which he acquires superhuman skills and the necessary longevity to ensure humankind's survival. For three and a half millennia, Leto II rules as the new Kwisatz Haderach, until he engineers his own death at the hands of Idaho-4 and Siona Atreides, a descendant of Paul, as the next step to prevent humankind's extinction. The death of Leto II generates the breakdown of his empire and the scattering of all humankind into uncharted space. Fifteen hundred years later, in *Heretics of Dune*, the Bene Gesserit have become the biggest force in the Imperium and have modified their breeding programme in scope. Now aware of Leto II's still-standing masterplan to keep a hold on humanity forever, the Bene Gesserit raise Idaho-5 as an instrument to break free from Leto II's control. To this end, the Bene Gesserit bait the Honoured Matres – a group originated from the former – into destroying Arrakis and its worms, each containing a fragment of Leto II's consciousness. The war between the Bene Gesserit and the Honoured Matres culminates

in *Chapterhouse: Dune*, where Bene Gesserit Mother Superior Odrade uses Idaho-5 to defeat the Honoured Matres.

As per Garland-Thomson's definition of the normate as hypernormal, in the series of *Dune* full normate status is only ever met by the Kwisatz Haderach, described as an aspirational male human who will have supreme prescience, that is, the ability to see in the past, present and future, and access to both male and female lines in genetic memory, that is, the combined memories of one's both male and female ancestors (*Dune*, 13-14). Furthermore, he will be invisible to prescience.[4] Compared to the Kwisatz Haderach, the Idaho gholas are not only flawed – as all those who do not fully qualify as normates arguably are – but they also exhibit altogether antinormative traits which determine a higher degree of disability. For a start, the gholas are artificially engineered and not human-born, whereas the Kwisatz Haderach is the product of no technology. By positing a male human as the definitive individual subject, Herbert relegates all things artificial to a disabled position, since they resist the dominant expectations met by the normate. Secondly, the gholas are framed as disabled through comparison: not only are they deprived of prescience and access to genetic memory, the Kwisatz Haderach's prerogative, but they also display further memory loss symptoms[5] that the readership will most likely understand as disabling. Lastly, whereas the Kwisatz Haderach can hide from prescience – most humans also acquire this skill by the time of *Heretics of Dune* – the gholas are among the very few who lack prescience-cloaking genes and can thus be always tracked.

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[4] In *Children of Dune*, the term Kwisatz Haderach becomes synonymous with Leto II, who is invisible to prescience (*Messiah*, 273).

[5] The word "ghola" recalls the Old Aramaic "gwlm, gwlmʾ" (goʊləm), which translates to "unformed, imperfect blob" and, consequently, "golem". According to the Talmudic tractate Sanhedrin, Adam is called "golem," meaning "body without a soul". Sanhedrin 38b reads: "R. Johanan b. Hanina said: The day consisted of twelve hours. In the first hour, his [Adam's] dust was gathered; in the second it was kneaded into a shapeless mass [golem]; in the third, his limbs were formed; in the fourth, a soul was infused into him" (qtd. in Krause 114). For the first twelve hours of his life, Adam is called a golem because he is a body without a soul. Similarly, Idaho is a body who cannot remember his former identit(ies).

Interestingly, Palumbo, the only critic who has openly discussed the narrative role of Idaho's storyline, has viewed it as a positive and unproblematic tale. In two of his articles, Palumbo celebrates Idaho-4 and Idaho-5 as monomythic heroes (with bildungsroman overtones) who serve as literary examples of "Everyman reborn" ("Monomyth," 435, 437; "Plots," 74). Arguably, the reason for Palumbo's positive reading of the gholas lies in the optimistic trajectory of their subplot. Through the restoration of their memories, the gholas repeatedly move from initial disability and social exile to rediscovered normative humanity and acquired social power. In *Dune Messiah*, Idaho is returned to life as a ghola named Hayt (Idaho-2) who cannot remember his previous life (77). This memory impediment also affects Idaho's subsequent reincarnations. Idaho-4 is also oblivious to his past. Even when he recovers his original persona, he still lacks the memories of his past ghola lives. As a result, Idaho-4's identity is never complete, and this upsets him: "'*How many of me have there been?*' The Duncans always wanted to know this." (*God Emperor*, 27). The gholas' mnemonical flaw is associated with easier manipulation. Pre-awakening Idaho-2 is genetically conditioned to kill his former master, Paul. The same is true for Idaho-5, originally programmed to conquer the Bene Gesserit. By contrast, the recovery of the gholas' memories is linked with them reaching a higher level of normalcy. It seems that, by overcoming their memory impairment, the gholas can eventually establish their sociocultural value through the larger freedom of action that results from their social acceptance. Post-awakening Idaho-2 willingly sacrifices himself to save the Imperium from destruction. Idaho-4 manages to assassinate his tyrant and ruler. Finally, the retrieval of Idaho-5's full identity signifies a radical change in the way he perceives the Bene Gesserit are using him. Aware of the limitations that the sisterhood have imposed upon him, not least the command to stay put on a ship that cannot be seen by prescient trackers (no-ship), Idaho-5 resolves to escape from the known universe and thus asserts his independence from those who marginalized him.

Contrary to this reading – which follows the order of the narrative material – I argue that the novels of *Dune* rely upon negative assumptions about disability. A disability-informed reading of *Dune* that accounts for "the fictional disabled subject, their interrelations within the narrative and the context of disability in the fictional world" (Moody 32) reveals four negative discourses about disability in the characterisation of the Idaho gholas. The first of these is that the quality of life for disabled people is lower than that for nondisabled people. In all of Idaho's reincarnations, the pre-awakening ghola is discriminated against on the grounds of both his memory impairment and his antinormative artificial origins. In *Dune Messiah*, Idaho-2 is considered neither a proper human nor capable of human emotions. When he warns Paul's sister of the danger of her powers, she replies: "Don't bandy words with me, you… you *thing*!" (131), referring to both the ghola's non-human origins and his ostensibly mechanical eyes (82). In the same book, Paul urges Idaho-2 to do "a human thing" because "Duncan's in there" (269). The idea is that Idaho-2 is not human presently and is somehow defective because of it. Similarly, in *Heretics of Dune* Bene Gesserit Reverend Mother Schwangyu refers to Idaho-5 as a "what":

> *What* you will train, Teg thought. Not *who*. This ghola-child would never be a *who* for Schwangyu or any of the others who opposed Taraza. Perhaps the ghola would not be a *who* to anyone until restored to his original self, firmly seated in that original Duncan Idaho identity. (78)

Dichotomic language is used both by the characters and the narrator. During a conversation about Idaho-2's true nature, the narrator considers: "For a brief moment, the ghola had been an intense, vital human being. […] He [Paul] had wanted her to see the *man* in the ghola flesh" (*Messiah*, 175-76). Conversely, when Idaho-2 retrieves his original memories, his name is changed from Hayt to Idaho. The name change can be understood as a device that helps restore the ghola's humanity. This much is clear from the fact that Idaho-2 is called Hayt – which sounds the same as "hate" – only once more to highlight another's distrust

towards him. In *Children of Dune*, one of the characters remarks: "Better to think of him by his ghola name, Hayt. Far better." (126-27).

The second assumption is the view that disability derives from a physical condition rather than from societal limitations. *Dune* is built on the premise that memory is physically stored in the genes; gholas, who are cultivated from someone's original cells, should remember the past of all their previous selves whose cells were used to grow them. By contrast, their disability consists precisely in their inability to do so. Furthermore, Idaho-5's genes are responsible for his inability to hide from prescience (*Heretics*, 214). Towards the end of *God Emperor of Dune*, we learn that the progeny of Idaho-4 and Siona cannot be found by prescient trackers because of Siona's prescience-cloaking genes (415). This ensures that humanity can never be completely destroyed. By contrast, Idaho-5 lacks this skill. He does not have the blood of Siona in his veins and is not shielded from prescience.

Further evidence of the perception of the (posthuman) body as the central repository of disability comes from *Dune*'s historical contextualisation. The time when *Dune* was published was also when the social model of disability was developed. In contrast with the medical model, which focused on disability as a functional limitation of the body that needs to be fixed to comply with normative values, the social model embraced the idea that disability is created by systemic barriers and social exclusion (Shakespeare 198-99). *Dune* reflects the developing tensions between the medical and social models but eventually privileges the former. Schwangyu's reference to Idaho-5 as a "what" and the narrator's following remark that "[t]his ghola-child would never be a *who* for Schwangyu or any of the others who opposed Taraza" indicate both that personhood is assigned according to each person's perspective rather than intrinsically, and that there is evidently some narrative awareness about how inclusion/exclusion is based on what the members of the society value as the norm. However, the narrator concludes that "[p]erhaps the ghola would not be a *who* to

anyone until restored to his original self", thus continuing to construct disability (and the ensuing social exclusion) as being primarily based on genetic qualities.

Thirdly, the supercrip trope, that is, the representation of a disabled person who gains attention for everyday accomplishments that appear exceptional in the context of disability (Schalk 79), features prominently. In particular, the gholas' storyline follows the superpowered supercrip narrative, a typology of supercrip representations in which superpowers overcompensate for a perceived disability or erase it altogether (Schalk 81-82). For example, in *Chapterhouse: Dune*, Idaho-5 develops prescient abilities as a result of his full awakening. The text reads: "He was back *there*, stretched between *then* and *now* the way serial ghola lives linked this incarnation to his original birth. […] New power in the vision!" (187). Through this exceptional perception, Idaho-5 is the only one who can see the Tachyon net that will be much of the focus of the *Dune* sequels.

Nevertheless, it is contentious that the supercrip narrative resolves in a positive outcome. For one, as Susan Wendell notices, the superpowered supercrip narrative "may reduce the 'otherness' of a few disabled people, but because it creates an ideal which most disabled people cannot meet, it *increases* the 'otherness' of the majority of disabled people" (251). Unlike the regular supercrip narrative, superpowered supercrip stories report of outstanding cases of disability in which disabled people exceed their impediment through newly found abilities, to the point where their disabled status may be called into question. Likewise, the Idaho gholas start out as disabled and acquire skills which both compensate for their shortcomings and raise them above human standards. The superpowered supercrip narrative implies a progressive change, and therefore that the disabled individual "must change in order to be accepted and valued" (Harnett 22, qtd. in Cheyne 143). The gholas move from a state of disability to a state of fierce able-bodiedness and only by developing superhuman powers can they be recognized as human.

Ultimately, the Idaho gholas reinforce the idea that disabled people lack freedom of choice and control over their own life. Pre-awakening gholas depend on others to recover their lost identity, and the awakening process is always initiated by someone other than the gholas themselves. In *Dune Messiah*, Idaho-2 is awakened by Paul. In *God Emperor of Dune*, the Tleilaxu people awaken Idaho-4 before reaching Dune. Finally, in *Heretics of Dune*, the Bene Gesserit oversee the awakening of Idaho-5. On a deeper level, the gholas lack agency in their repeated re-creation. Idaho-4 condemns Leto II for bringing the gholas back to life without asking for their permission. In *God Emperor of Dune*, Idaho-4 argues: "You've committed a crime against us, Leto, against all of us — the gholas you resurrect without ever asking us if that's what we want." (269).

Post-awakening gholas are characterized quite differently. As mended creatures, no longer disabled, they are entitled to the power that nondisabled status carries with it (Garland-Thomson, *Extraordinary*, 8). In *Children of Dune*, Idaho-2 defies the plans that Paul's sister has for him and murders her lover. In *God Emperor of Dune*, Idaho-4 assassinates Leto II.[6] In *Chapterhouse: Dune*, Idaho-5 chooses to flee the known universe. Most significantly, the gholas' move from dependence to independence, from lack of control over their life to full control over others' lives, reaches its climax towards the end of the series. In a curious reversal of roles, Idaho-5, who had been trained by supreme commander Miles Teg, is called upon to educate the new clone of Teg, as well as to reactivate his dormant memories (*Chapterhouse*, 134). Idaho-5 goes from occupying an abject position to training those who are relegated to disabled status.

So far, I have questioned the assumption that the gholas' storyline constitutes a challenge to negative assumptions about disability, instead proposing that the series

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[6] Though Idaho-4's position in Leto II's prescient plans suggests that Idaho-4's murder attempt was expected, his new status gives him a position from which to protect those whom he truly cares about.

represents disability as a damaging state that must be overcome. Elements that support my reading include the use of dichotomic language both by the characters and the narrator when addressing pre-awakening and post-awakening gholas; the conceptualisation of disability as primarily a physical condition; the supercrip narrative as a device that is both potentially inspiring and alienating; the juxtaposition between able-bodiedness and free will. In my Introduction, I mentioned how the representation of ableist biases is not limited to the characterisation of the gholas but extends to the social mechanisms of control to which the gholas are subjected. A reading of *Dune*'s spaces of enclosure and internalized norms of behaviour with these issues in mind will now be undertaken.

Looking Outward: Disciplinary Enclosures and Internalized Ableism

Dune is set 20,000 years in the future. Like all SF narratives that imagine yet-to-come futures, *Dune* acts as an early warning system that envisions one possible future deriving from our current reality. Regarding disability, the text not only exposes the ways in which disability is constructed today, but also how we might approach conceiving it in the future. Building on models of present and past societies (Hand 24) – what Michael Foucault and Gilles Deleuze call *societies of sovereignty, disciplinary societies*, and *societies of control* – Herbert reimagines how they may be used to build a future society. Nevertheless, he also represents the ableist practices of these social models in *Dune*'s imaginary universe.

In "The Right of Death and the Power over Life," the last section in the first volume of *History of Sexuality*, Foucault discusses the transition from societies of sovereignty, whose goal was to tax and take life, to disciplinary societies, which regulated life through the control of vast spaces of enclosure. Medical institutions for confining disabled people are a primary example of the enclosed environment. Psychiatric hospitals developed in the late eighteenth century as "an instrument of segregation" with the purpose of confining severely deviant

people to protect society (Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation*, 243). In this time, another transformation took place, and the nature of power shifted from depending on overt mechanisms of discipline, to a new power relying on "continuous regulatory and corrective mechanisms" that are internalized by all citizens (Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 144).

Deleuze extends Foucault's model of the disciplinary society to consider the diffusion of disciplinary power following the Second World War, and the crisis of all spaces of enclosure that superintended the teaching of normative rules of behaviour. In "Postscript on the Societies of Control," Deleuze observes: "We are in a generalized crisis in relation to all the environments of enclosure – prison, hospital, factory, school, family" (3-4). Deleuze calls these new formations societies of control, to indicate the rise of a social control that is based upon internalized disciplinary mechanisms that do not depend on physical enclosed environments:

> The conception of a control mechanism, giving the position of any element within an open environment at any given instant […] is not necessarily one of science fiction. Félix Guattari has imagined a city where one would be able to leave one's apartment, one's street, one's neighbourhood, thanks to one's (dividual) electronic card that raises a given barrier; […] what counts is not the barrier but the computer that tracks each person's position [...] *It may be that older methods, borrowed from the former societies of sovereignty, will return to the fore, but with the necessary modifications*. (7; emphasis added)

Deleuze's final remark could be applied to the characterisation of *Dune*'s society, which melds together different aspects of all three social models. *Dune* is based on a post-technological feudal interstellar society split into planetary fiefs which are controlled by several noble houses. Firstly, the social structure of medieval European feudalism is recovered by the Imperium, and corporal punishments together with it. For instance, Leto II orders that one of the Tleilaxu ambassadors be publicly flogged fifty times (*God Emperor*, 158). In *Chapterhouse: Dune*, Mother Superior Odrade explains: "Punishments are administered only to teach a valuable lesson. What good is punishment if it only causes

pain?" (87). The link between punishment and discipline is therefore made clear. Secondly, spaces of enclosure are everywhere in *Dune*. In *Chapterhouse: Dune*, Honoured Matre Murbella observes: "We're in a special school, Duncan. Most schools are a kind of prison." (71), and then again, "This ship was not just a prison" (206). Both *Heretics of Dune* and *Chapterhouse: Dune* include several references to Bene Gesserit schools as disciplinary sites appointed to the normative training of acolytes and, via the management of their bodies, to greater social control. Thirdly, mechanisms of control typical of both disciplinary and control societies are present aboard the no-ship to which Idaho-5 is confined: "And the guards, mostly unobtrusive in the no-ship but always there as they had been on Gammu. Or their spy devices present, artfully camouflaged and blended into the decor" (*Chapterhouse*, 205).

Yet precisely because *Dune*'s society draws so heavily on our past and present social models, it also represents their ableist mechanisms, such as the containment of people with disabilities. This is the case of the Bene Gesserit Keep on Gammu in *Heretics of Dune* and the no-ship in *Chapterhouse: Dune*, two educational and carceral spaces that are conventionally used to *literally* contain Idaho-5's disabled body. Whilst the Bene Gesserit system of raising Idaho gholas on Gammu presents the appearance of good quality of life for those it raises – e.g., Idaho-5 is well-versed in history, philosophy, and military training – it remains a disciplinary environment that works by favouring those who control it. Ultimately, the Bene Gesserit only need Idaho-5 for their breeding programme: "We will breed them [Idaho-5 and Sheeana], of course" (*Heretics*, 343).

On Gammu, Idaho-5 is doubly removed from society. He lives on a planet that is surrounded by an encapsulating perimeter of monitors and no-ships that mask its existence from prescient trackers (*Heretics*, 28). Moreover, to mark Idaho-5's difference from anyone

else living on Gammu, he is locked up in a fortress that he can never leave.[7] Dichotomies emphasising the carceral nature of the Keep as opposed to the outside world abound. Chapters 3 and 10 in *Heretics of Dune* introduce us to Gammu by juxtaposing the planet's tranquil setting to the feeling of ever-constant apprehension typical of the Keep, as in the following sentence, "He [Idaho-5] saw other children occasionally beyond the walls, walking along the perimeter road, laughing and calling. […] Other children did not have a Reverend Mother Schwangyu to order every smallest aspect of their lives" (37). Idaho-5 does not share the children's freedom of movement. Rather, the narrator often discusses the many places where Idaho-5 is not permitted (*Heretics*, 28). Idaho-5's only attempt to escape from the Keep is met with the punishment of an entire guard unit who did not fulfil their duties carefully (*Heretics*, 30). Since then, even in those rare occasions when Idaho-5 disobeys Schwangyu's orders, he never leaves the Keep. The "Forbidden Window" is a good example of the containing function of the Keep, and it works as a liminal space in which Idaho-5 exists both as an autonomous individual who looks beyond the Keep's pillboxes and as a disabled subject who dares not leave the Keep's grounds:

> This Forbidden Window was forbidden because it pierced an outer wall of the Keep and could be opened. It was often open, as now, for ventilation. […] Standing well back in the shadows of the upper hallway, Duncan focused on rolling slopes of forest climbing to rocky pinnacles. He found the forest magnetic. […] How good it would be to lose himself there, to be only his own person without worrying that another person dwelled within him. A stranger there. (*Heretics*, 98-99)

After the enemy attack on Gammu and Idaho-5's move to Chapter House, the mechanisms of his confinement are reproduced. On Chapter House, another planet surrounded by orbiting monitors, Idaho-5 is confined to a grounded no-ship, and he cannot

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[7] Returning to the etymology of "ghola," another interesting parallel can be made with the Old Aramaic "gwlh, gwltʔ" (gullā, gulləṯā), which translates to "cloak, hood". In this sense, "ghola" could either indicate an empty vessel or convey the idea of someone or something that is being hidden away, the same as Idaho is concealed from society.

leave his quarters. Despite the appearance of greater freedom offered by the no-ship – "[t]his was his cave, the former supercargo suite: large rooms with slightly curved walls—bedroom, library-workroom, sitting room, a green-tiled bath with dry and wet cleansing systems" (*Chapterhouse*, 74) – Idaho-5 is still a prisoner of the Bene Gesserit. On the one hand, the text reads:

> Some things in the no-ship contributed to an illusion of freedom, chiefly its size and complexity. The ship was large, how large he could not determine but he had access to many floors and to corridors that ran for more than a thousand paces. (*Chapterhouse*, 206)

On the other, the chapter goes on: "Sitting at the console, he [Idaho-5] experienced mixed feelings. […] No matter the size and richness of his prison, it still was a prison" (*Chapterhouse*, 208). The physical settings that Herbert deploys in *Dune* are all heavily guarded: The Keep is surrounded by pillboxes and spy devices are present everywhere on the no-ship. Yet, as in the case of the "Forbidden Window," Idaho-5 often manages to elude them. This raises questions about why Idaho-5 never leaves these sites permanently, and it highlights the extent to which his understanding of himself and his social value have been manipulated by the upbringing he received.

One of the main dramatic tensions in *Chapterhouse: Dune* is whether Idaho-5 will accept Odrade's offer to leave the no-ship and risk exposing the entire planet to prescient trackers because of his genetic defect. Even in this life-changing situation, what is presented to the reader as Idaho-5's freedom of choice conceals the truth that his choice is fundamentally limited. Consider the following exchange between Odrade and Idaho-5:

> "I am removing your guards. Only Scytale remains a prisoner."
> "You mean I…" He pointed vaguely to his right indicating the outside.
> "Your decision. I do not wash my hands of you; I merely set you free. You will not feel the cruelty of this until you reflect on it."
> "Do you mean I can leave the ship?"
> "If you choose."
> "But if the hunters are using Guild Navigators…"

> "As they most certainly are."
> "Damn you!"
> "An Atreides gift to you, Duncan."
> "Gift!"
> "You see? Complete trust in your conscience."
> "Would I betray you by… you would put all of the Sisterhood on my conscience!"
> "I put nothing on your conscience! That's your own possession to do with as you will." (333)

Any freedom of choice in this context clashes with Idaho-5's internalized understanding that by leaving the no-ship he will "put all of the Sisterhood on [his] conscience" and will alienate himself even more. Odrade goes on: *"You see it, Duncan. Freedom puts you on your own. You no longer can look to exterior forces, to rules laid down by others. Were you ready for this?"* (*Chapterhouse*, 333). Idaho-5 lacks the agency to escape from the no-ship because of the norms he has internalized over his many lives. His final choice not to leave the no-ship can be understood as a manifestation of submission to the normative social order in which he lives. By this time in the story, Idaho-5 has regained control of his past identities and has therefore become aware of the many ways in which his past selves have been controlled. Simultaneously, he feels all the Idaho gholas' cumulative internalized feelings of inferiority more strongly. To borrow from what Will Kanyusik remarks about the protagonists of Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*, the main narrative tension in *Chapterhouse: Dune* is generated by Idaho-5's "awareness on some level of the irreconcilability of the internalized disciplinary mechanisms characteristic of a society of control that structure [his] behaviours and [his] understanding of [himself]" (444). By refusing Odrade's proposal, Idaho-5 accepts to keep identifying with the ableist structures that have marginalized him so far and made him an individual primarily defined by his disability.

In this regard, the ending of *Chapterhouse: Dune* is also telling. The novel ends with Idaho-5's choice to run away from Chapter House. Whilst the contrast between Idaho-5's confinement and his escape plan encourages the reader to celebrate this move as a liberating

event, Idaho-5 flies away on the no-ship that he was imprisoned on. By doing so, Idaho-5 not only fails to get rid of the physical space that had constrained him, but he also carries it away with him. By fleeing in the no-ship Idaho-5 contributes to reinforcing his position as disabled. In the final moments of *Chapterhouse: Dune*, he asserts: "'We're an unidentifiable ship in an unidentifiable universe,' Idaho said. 'Isn't that what we wanted?'" (460). But the question is formulated ambiguously. The feeling is that Idaho-5 would rather have been a visible creature in a known universe. By claiming that he is doubly unidentifiable, Idaho-5 reproduces, even in this moment, the same structures that had contained him on both Gammu and Chapter House. Although Idaho-5's escape apparently suggests that he eventually rebels against the society that marginalized him, the ending of Herbert's series covertly shows the long-lasting effects of a system that operates to contain the disabled status of artificial creatures to preserve the privileges of non-gholas.

Conclusion

The characterisation of Idaho as a disabled character who overcomes his imperfections encourages the reader to understand his trajectory as an optimistic tale. Nevertheless, a disability-informed reading of *Dune* illustrates how the many strategies of containment employed by Herbert limit the risk of disruption posed by a socially inclusive representation of disability in *Dune*. To borrow from Cheyne's study of disability in "The Ship Who Sang," rather than being a work that challenges conventional assumptions about ability and disability, and about human and posthuman bodies, *Dune* "is a tale that shores up the supremacy of 'the normal' in all its forms, a narrative that flirts with the radical potentials of posthuman embodiment but ultimately safely contains them." (151).

My focus on the series of *Dune* is intended to be taken as a case study of the widespread but problematic workings of disability in SF narratives. Disability is a key

concern of the genre of SF and has recently occasioned some insightful comment from Ria Cheyne, Netty Mattar, and Kathryn Allan. Nevertheless, the growing number of critical studies of representations of disability in SF texts has also exposed another recurrent trait, namely, that the genre of SF is as obsessed with disability as it is with the tendency to represent ableist practices. These prevent establishing a positive presence of people with disabilities in imagined future scenarios. My hope is that future literary analyses of SF texts will draw from disability studies to critically interrogate the genre's representation of imagined future disability. In particular, analyses thus informed should put in question the received view that SF representations of disability are intrinsically positive and socially inclusive.

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