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'I Kinda Like to Go Off the Track': Finding David Lynch in the Middle World of *Dune*

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Abstract For many scholars of David Lynch's work, *Dune* is considered a spectacular failure, a costly creative misstep on the way to *Blue Velvet*. While it may not be regarded as one of his signature films, *Dune* contains enough of Lynch's creative personality to warrant a critical re-examination. The purpose of this study is to place *Dune* within the context of his earlier work, namely *Eraserhead* and *The Elephant Man*, and to mine it for those tropes with which Lynch has become synonymous: enabling the grotesque, interiority and the unconscious mind, and the relationship between industry and flesh. By the director's own admission, *Dune* forced him into an aesthetic middle world, wedging him between the midnight movie and mainstream cinema. Using Thomas Leitch's theory of adaptation in both an archival and teleological reading of *Dune*, I demonstrate how Lynch asserts himself in this middle world, how he succeeds in honouring the source material while also meeting his authorial desire to reinvent it, to decouple from the archive and 'go off the track'.

Keywords *Dune, David Lynch, Frank Herbert, adaptation, science fiction, film, novel.*

INTRODUCTION

According to production notes, David Lynch's *Dune*, released in 1984, required six months of principal photography, fifty-three speaking roles, and twenty thousand extras. Lynch and his four camera crews shot interiors at Mexico City's Churubusco Studios, where sixteen sound stages encompassed over seventy sets, some of them topping out at 100 feet or higher. Exteriors were shot in the dust bowl of Las Aguilas and the 120-degree heat of the Samalayuca Desert, locations as harsh and unrelenting as the planet they were meant to approximate, Frank Herbert's fabled Arrakis, great storehouse of the spice mélange. With a budget of over $40 million and a slate of marquee talent (cast and crew included actors Kyle McClachlan, Patrick Stewart, and Max Von Sydow, as well as renowned creature designer Carlo Rambaldi, whose sandworms were seven months in preparation), David Lynch achieved what Alejandro Jodorowsky had failed to do just ten years before: he had brought Herbert's five hundred-page sci-fi epic—long thought 'impossible to properly adapt'—to the silver screen (Strick 21).

As is by now public record, *Dune* was a critical and commercial disaster. It grossed $30.9 million domestically, a seven-figure loss for the De Laurentiis family, who had worked closely with Lynch to produce the film. Reviews were overwhelmingly negative, and to re-read them now is to engage in a kind of sadistic nostalgia. Roger Ebert

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called the film an 'ugly, unstructured, pointless excursion', marred by too many 'incomplete relationships' and 'parallel courses of action'; *The Washington Post*'s Paul Attansio attacked it for being 'dull and disorderly', and for abusing 'every clunky expository device in the screenwriter's manual'; and Kirk Ellis, writing for *The Hollywood Reporter*, said that its 'ubiquitous sandworms have all the ominous presence of giant firehoses'. A community punching bag for critics, *Dune* left Lynch's devotees in a state of bewilderment, they who had so openly embraced the director's two earlier films, *Eraserhead* (1977) and *The Elephant Man* (1980). 'Admirers of Lynch', writes Chris Rodley, 'were dismayed to see the auteur literally consumed by the machinery of epic cinema and the demands of the "event picture"' (108). Perhaps the only person to come out in support of the film was Frank Herbert himself. Pronouncing it a 'visual feast', Herbert 'derived a solid and hearty enjoyment' from Lynch's adaptation of his Holy Writ, and claimed that it was 'true to the book even though most of it stayed on the cutting room floor' (Strick 21).

Near the end of principal photography, before any of the film's special effects had been added, Lynch screened a five-hour work-print of *Dune* for producers in Mexico City. To make it suitable for theatrical release, the producers lopped off almost three hours form Lynch's so-called director's cut, resulting in the version that is still widely circulated today.[1] This compromise, albeit considerable, was just one of many that Lynch had to make while shooting *Dune*. Here, he laments the restrictions placed on him by the film's modest rating: 'In some ways I knew I'd have to hold back. For one thing, the film had to be PG. You can think of some strange things to do, but as soon as they throw in a PG, a lot of them go out the window. And, you know, I kinda like to go off the track' (quoted in Rodley 114). In interviews over the years, Lynch has described his experience on *Dune* as a 'nightmare' and a 'sadness', a 'death' that forced him into a purgatorial middle world, wedged between the midnight movie and mainstream cinema, unable to do all the 'strange things' he felt the film deserved. 'I never carried anything far enough for it really to be my own', Lynch admits, and this might explain why *Dune* has been largely disregarded by scholars of his work, deemed a spectacular failure and by-passed for more Lynchian offerings, such as *Blue Velvet*, *Mulholland Drive*, and of course, *Twin Peaks* (quoted in Rodley 119).

While *Dune* may not be considered one of Lynch's signature films, it contains enough of his creative personality to warrant a critical re-examination. The purpose of this study is not to apologize for the film's mistakes and excesses, of which there are many, but to place it within the context of his earlier work, namely *Eraserhead* and *The Elephant Man*, and to mine it for those tropes with which Lynch has become synonymous: 'foregrounding the grotesque', interiority and the unconscious mind, and the relationship between industry and flesh (Reed 13). *Dune* marks a continuation and an evolution of this last trope (a preoccupation of Lynch's since his art school days in Philadelphia), presenting characters with non-normative bodies as physical extensions of industrial apparatus, and, in the most extreme cases, the apparatus itself. Lynch's freakery, that quality that cemented his cult status after the release of *Eraserhead*, is on full display in his third feature. But—and this could be why audiences had such a hard time with *Dune*—it's bigger, wilder, less cowed, and sentimental, 'a freakishness which Lynch seems to take a perverse pleasure in' (Orgeron 32).

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Rather than approaching the film from a psychoanalytical perspective, the de facto critical lens for viewing much of Lynch's work, I will use Thomas Leitch's theory of adaptation in both an archival and teleological reading of *Dune*. Leitch, debating with fellow scholar Patrick Cattrysse in 'A Dialogue on Adaptation', explains the difference between the archival and teleological models of adaptation theory. Viewed archivally, 'adaptations are defined primarily with reference to their source texts', toward which they have 'a particular set of responsibilities', the most crucial being faithfulness to the original. This vantage, favoured by the general public when discussing cinematic versions of well-known stories and novels, offers 'a quick, readily graspable…model for talking about individual adaptations'. The teleological model, on the other hand, considers adaptations 'in terms of their ends rather than their sources'. Films based on novels, then, are regarded not as 'faithful transcriptions' but as deliberate transformations, valued for the boldness of their departures rather than the accuracy of their devotion.

In the case of *Dune*, Lynch deviates from the source material in his distorted depictions of the Guild Navigators and the Harkonnens, yet he remains true to the archive when imitating Herbert's third-person omniscient point of view, using voice-over to probe a character's innermost thoughts and feelings in an attempt to tell the secret life of the story. The character whose interiority is the most puzzling and whose journey initially attracted Lynch to the project, is fifteen-year-old protagonist Paul Atreides. As Paul undergoes a deeply personal transformation, maturing from the pampered son of Duke Leto Atreides to the desert prophet Muad'Dib, he is 'informed by the ability to see time and space as a flow of potentialities, in dreams and visions' (Schwartz 535). Herbert employs an assortment of visual analogues to dramatize this 'flow', but Lynch ignores them, crafting his own montage of 'dreams and visions' to limn the prophet's awakening. By applying Leitch's adaptation theory to Paul and these other aspects of the film, I hope to prove that the 'nasty Lynchian delights' in *Dune* are born of both the director's need to honour the source text as well as his authorial desire to reinvent it, to decouple from the archive and 'go off the track' (Rodley 109).

THE GUILD NAVIGATORS

Defined in the Terminology of the Imperium, a glossary Herbert includes at the back of his novel, the Spacing Guild holds a 'monopoly on space travel and transport' (520). Fuelled by the spice mélange, the Guild is capable of space folding, by which they span great distances in only a matter of moments. The Navigators are mass transit at the speed of light, and the Atreides clan requires their interstellar escort as it migrates from its home world of Caladan to its new fiefdom on Arrakis. Before making the trip, Paul, in conversation with his father, enquires about the elusive and legendary Guildsmen:

> 'I'm going to watch our screens and try to see a Guildsman.'
> 'You won't. Not even their agents ever see a Guildsman. The Guild's as jealous of its privacy as it is of its monopoly. Don't do anything to endanger our shipping privileges, Paul.'
> 'Do you think they hide because they've mutated and don't look…*human* anymore?'
> 'Who knows?' The Duke shrugged. 'It's a mystery we're not likely to solve'. (46)

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Nor is Herbert. Aside from this short scene, he makes scant mention of the Guild and its practices, waiting until the novel's final chapter to fulfil Paul's wish. A pair of Guildsmen appears briefly as part of the Padishah Emperor's bedraggled retinue, and Herbert describes them as 'the two fat ones dressed in grey' (475). At this stage in his development, Paul has fully ripened into the prophet Muad'Dib, and so he looks on 'the two fat ones' with a searing eye, and what he beholds is sad, ineffectual, parasitic—the reason behind Arrakis's long line of ecological suffering. And yet even with Muad'Dib's condemnation of the Navigators, the mystery of their mutation and the privacy of their space folding ritual still intrigue the reader, and from these enigmas, Lynch marks his first point of departure. Yes, the Guildsmen are parasites, but in Lynch's teleology, they are parasites who hold the keys to the universe.

In the film's opening scene, the Navigators are dispatched to the planet Kaitain to warn the Emperor of the imminent clash between House Atreides and House Harkonnen, and the concomitant rise of Paul Muad'Dib. Just as their ship touches down, an alarm sounds in the Emperor's court, and the gentry—all flowing gowns and epaulets—scatter in fear, giving the impression that something ghastly is approaching, a sight unfit for aristocratic eyes. The Emperor is left to face the Navigators alone, and his royal dress and stately decorum contrast sharply with the guise and attitude of the party-crashers. Lynch's Guildsmen wear heavy black latex trench coats that have the texture and drape of lead aprons, the industrial garb of workers in a foundry. The foremost Navigator, who, it seems, would rather be space folding than reporting to the Emperor, has a tube running from his left nostril to a port on the side of his hairless head. The site of the port oozes a thick orange jelly, likely the by-product of some internal chemical reduction of the spice mélange. He communicates in grunts and whispers, and needs a transducer to render his words intelligible, but what he has to say is inconsequential, as he is merely the handler for the Guild's true ambassador: Edric, the Third Stage Navigator.

Edric does not appear in Herbert's *Dune*, but he does belong to the source material's extended archive. The author first introduces him in *Dune Messiah*, the second book in the series:

> Edric swam in a container of gas only a few paces away…The Guildsman was an elongated figure, vaguely humanoid with finned feet and hugely fanned membranous hands—a fish in a strange sea. His tank's vents emitted a pale orange cloud rich with the smell of the geriatric spice, mélange. (12)

While shooting *Dune*, Lynch began work on the screenplay for *Dune Messiah*, and though he never completed it, he made room in his film for one of the book's stranger and more memorable characters (Rodley). The Guild's *ne plus ultra*, Edric is the outcome of four thousand years of transmogrification by space folding, and passed through Lynch's filter screen he looks like a foetal sperm whale, 'a giant mutant peanut floating in a mobile fish tank' (Snyder). The container, flanked on either side by the ominous, black-clad Navigators, knocks and hisses with the sound of machinery, the turning and stuttering of hidden gears. Amid the noise, we also hear the rise and fall of Edric's breathing, which recalls the laboured wheeze of John Merrick in *The Elephant Man*, and the helpless, mucoid chirping of the chicken baby in *Eraserhead*. Yet here the grotesque spectacle

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is not a sideshow exhibit in some London back alley, or a doomed child languishing in a dark, airless bedroom. He is the main attraction, a commanding trauma in the gilded halls of the Emperor's castle.

Nevertheless, Edric is still very much on display, still very much a *thing* to be looked at, as Lynch's camera repeatedly points out. More than once during the exchange between Edric and the Emperor, Lynch focuses on a particular aspect of the Steersman's visage (his smoking labia, his rolling, cetaceous eye), as if to underscore its weirdness. This is an example of what David Church calls 'classical exploitation cinema', in which 'non-normative bodies [are] framed in medium shots or close-ups…resulting in awkward cuts to the intended spectacle' (6). Lynch's emphasizing of Edric's deformity has no immediate diegetic value, and the oral and ocular close-ups become all the more awkward when juxtaposed with the Emperor's tanned and well-groomed face. Church tells us that 'physically normative characters are almost always present' in classical exploitation cinema, often to magnify the freakishness of their non-normative counterparts (10). Edric's ugly interruption nauseates the Emperor, and since viewers have no other proxy in this scene but the Emperor, they too are nauseated, and this distracts them from what the 'giant mutant peanut' actually has to say. But Lynch doesn't much seem to care, nor should he. The character of Edric, though an 'intended spectacle', satisfies Lynch's desire to 'go off the track', to assert himself by 'foregrounding the grotesque' in both form and action, the latter demonstrated in the arcane ritual of space folding.

Herbert never explicitly describes space folding in his novel; it is an abstraction that the reader must accept. Lynch, who said that one of his goals with *Dune* was to 'complete things more than the book did', reifies the process during the Atreides's move to Arrakis (Strick 21). The Third Stage Navigator, released from his tank into the void of space, fires a streak of bright yellow light from his mouth, producing the two planets between which the family must traffic. Then, hoarsely howling, he swims through a sea of cosmic fireworks, surrounded by rings of wobbly white light, stars swirling in eddies above him. Track and driver, metaphor and message, Edric collapses the void and shrinks the interplanetary distance, ferrying the Atreides to their new home. By harnessing the power of the spice, a substance with which he has become one, this 'fish' of a man is able to perform the galaxy's most essential service, 'membranous hands' and all.

Admittedly, there is comedy in watching Edric paddle his way across the heavens, but there is nobility in it as well, an awe and a reverence. For Lynch, Edric exists on two levels: first as an object of grotesquery, in whose flesh his camera revels; and second as a powerhouse of sacred industry, a mutant god. If the other Navigators are factory workers, as has been suggested, then Edric is the factory itself, capable of manufacturing beltways in the sky with only his mouth. The responsibility of space folding belongs to him, and that responsibility, grave as it is, confers upon Edric a status which few other characters in the film enjoy. He is the freak's apotheosis, John Merrick and the chicken baby floating among the stars. As part of Lynch's telos, where the non-normative body can be enabled and ennobled, Edric and the Navigators amount to much more than Herbert's 'two fat ones dressed in grey', proving that 'the stuff in [Lynch's] films that so many critics dismissed as camp, [the director] took seriously' (Johnson 8).

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THE HARKONNENS

Observing the utmost frugality in reference to the Guild, Herbert is not as minimal when describing the villains of his novel, the Harkonnens. Their Hun of a leader, the Baron Vladimir Harkonnen, is, in the author's words, 'grossly and immensely fat', so big that he can no longer walk and must be borne through the air 'by portable suspensors harnessed to his flesh' (21). He has the face and hands of a baby, and his short, stubby fingers are given to 'compulsive touchings…compulsive wandering' (180). Obese and infantile, the Baron is also a pederast and a sex-trafficker. After he almost dies by poisoning at the hands of Duke Leto, he tells his guardsman to 'bring me that young fellow we bought on Gamont, the one with the lovely eyes. Drug him well. I don't feel like wrestling' (186). The Baron's nephews, Rabban and Feyd-Rautha, glorified guardsmen themselves, mostly go about doing their uncle's bidding, confirming Duke Leto's claim that the Harkonnens are little more than 'dung heaps with village provost minds' (101).

In the Terminology of the Imperium, Herbert defines their 'village', Giedi Prime, as a 'median-viable planet with a low active-photosynthesis range', but beyond that he says very little about its interior or exterior locales, reserving the bulk of his setting description for Arrakis (519). With so few details in the archive, Lynch had to reimagine Giedi Prime for his adaptation, and tapping into his love of 'giant machinery' and 'big stuff', he conceived of it as an oil planet, which, not surprisingly, became his 'personal favourite' to stage and shoot (quoted in Rodley 110, 118). Translated by Lynch, Giedi Prime is one big gothic factory, a world of beams and girders, tubes and pipes, echoey metal stairs, and humming crimson fluorescence—and beneath it all a swamp of bubbling black oil, 'an anonymous and tremendous plenitude that rumbles on' continuously (Courtright 172). The very first image we see of Giedi Prime is the silhouette of a massive oil derrick, the planet's literal and figurative heart. Behind it looms the statue of what looks to be the side of a man's face, most of which is in darkness save for the double chin and gaping, upturned mouth. Black smoke billows from the aperture, suggesting that the statue serves more than just a decorative purpose, its mouth a kind of release valve, its breath the refinery's exhaust. Derrick and statue, oil and man, and industry and flesh—these things are one and the same on Lynch's Giedi Prime, and they have their nexus in the pustular body of the Baron Vladimir Harkonnen.

Lynch retains from Herbert the Baron's rotundity and paedophilia, and adds to these his own teleological touches. When the Baron (played by Kenneth McMillan) first appears on screen, he is reclining in a chair while a doctor uses a hydraulic syringe to remove pus from the cyst-like bumps purpling his sweaty face. Though smaller and less diffuse, these bumps can be likened to John Merrick's epithelial tumours. Lynch tells Chris Rodley that the 'papillomatous growths on John Merrick's body…were like slow explosions [coming] out through the skin', and they materialized for him the idea that 'human beings are like little factories', full of 'chemicals and fluids' and subject to 'changes and timings' (103). Lynch revisits this idea in his presentation of the Baron, but instead of casting the explosions in a negative light, as a source of pain and ultimately death, he chooses to celebrate and even eroticize them.

The Baron's doctor, who promises him that his 'disease will be lovingly cared for for all eternity', delights in draining his blisters, and says, without irony, 'Your skin is love to me'. Thus pampered, the Baron hot-air-balloons to the ceiling, hovers beneath an

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industrial showerhead, and spreads his arms ecstatically as it douses him with reddish-black oil. Rabban and Feyd-Rautha watch with horny glee, noting that the Baron seems to be invigorated by the unholy drenching. Then, using the oil as a murderous aphrodisiac, the Baron descends upon a quivering page and mauls him to death, at which time Lynch cuts to the Atreides family dressed in their finest regalia, strutting three abreast between rows of uniformed guards, looking as normative as ever. This set against the Baron's slick, almost intestinal face, streaked with a motley of blood and oil, a crazed eruption of libidinous freakery.

Lynch moves still farther away from the source material (and closer to his own 'authorial expressivity') in a later scene set on Giedi Prime (Alsop 51). At its start, the short scene involves the Baron and his sorrel-haired attendant having a bit of fun. Acting as if he's operating an amusement ride, the attendant uses a buzzing black box to send the Baron into a raucous orbit around a stall of hissing steam. The baron laughs and hollers, feeling the pull of the machine deep in his ventricose belly. But the merriment ceases when Feyd-Rautha (a twenty-nine-year-old Sting) emerges from the stall wearing nothing but a black leather cod piece. The attendant stops the carousel and the Baron, stirred by his younger nephew's comely physique, gapes incestuously as Feyd lifts his arms above his head and stretches to the full length of his carnality, mocking the boilers and rivets surrounding him on all sides.

Watching Feyd pose in this provocative manner, the viewer senses a shift in the power dynamic of Lynch's industry/flesh binary. Whereas Edric and the Baron represent a coalescence of the opposites, Feyd symbolizes an ascension of the flesh, the statue taking ideal physical form and stepping out from behind the derrick. Feyd is neither the casualty of industry's cosmetic side effects, like Edric, nor dependent on it for sustenance and movement, like the Baron. He is the Adonis in the abattoir, what John Merrick wished he could've been on that London train platform, hounded by screaming whistles and plumes of white smoke. For Merrick, and for Henry Spencer of *Eraserhead*, industry is loud and intrusive and dangerous; for Feyd, it is merely background. Of all the 'dung heaps' on Giedi Prime, he is the most beautiful, and Lynch takes care to recognize this.

But if not for leaving the archive Lynch may never have found Feyd-Rautha amid the steam, nor would he have found the Baron in all of his pornographic ugliness. Paul Attansio, in his otherwise scathing review of *Dune*, concedes that the Baron 'brings out the best in Lynch's imagination'; by exaggerating his moral and physical disfigurement, the director makes 'evil palpable'. What Lynch does with the Baron and his clan, what he appends to them in the transfer, feels like reinvention rather than adaptation, transmuting rather than transmitting. If one were to ever question whether David Lynch directed *Dune*, one need only look at the Harkonnens. Less moody and less cerebral than anyone else in the film, they constitute a movie in and of themselves, occupying, alongside the Guild Navigators, their own outlandish milieu.

THE SECRET LIFE OF THE STORY

Hyperbole, clearly Lynch's strong suit, does not carry the same aesthetic weight for Herbert. 'Part of [his book's] narrative appeal', says Robert L. Mack, 'is its…delicate political climate constructed through the subtlest of communicative interaction' (41). In order to maintain this 'climate', and to rationalize for the reader its ever-changing

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winds, Herbert uses a third-person omniscient narrator to frequently share the italicized thoughts of his principal characters. As they jockey for power, both domestic and cosmic, he 'weaves the narrative voice with externalised and internalised speech to effectively add a kind of linguistic mortar' to their decisions and actions (Parkerson 410). In some cases, what the characters say to themselves is more important than what they say to each other, as it discloses a truth that spoken dialogue must artfully conceal.

For example, in the novel's first chapter, the Reverend Mother Gaius Helen Mohiam, a member of the Bene Gesserit sisterhood, pays a visit to Paul Atreides and his mother, Lady Jessica.[2] The purpose of her trip to Caladan is to administer the test of the gom jabbar, which will measure Paul's pain tolerance and possibly determine whether he is the Kwisatz Haderach, or chosen one. After Paul successfully completes the test, Herbert's 'internalized speech' reveals Lady Jessica's relief ('My son lives'), the Reverend Mother's curiosity ('Could he be the one?'), and Paul's satisfaction per the severity of the test ('They told the truth'.), none of which can be vocalized because the contentious relationship between the room's two women (Lady Jessica, also a Bene Gesserit, is the disgraced former pupil of the Reverend Mother) prevents it (Herbert 10–11). In another example, Paul's teacher Dr. Yueh is talking with his student about the terrain on Arrakis and remarks to himself, '*How the boy has filled out these past few months. Such a waste! Oh, such a sad waste*' (38). Yueh—whose convoluted scheme to avenge the Harkonnens' ill treatment of his wife involves betraying Duke Leto and imperilling House Atreides—struggles to quiet his conscience, and the narrator closely monitors this fight, reporting on Yueh's motives as well as his misgivings. Thus, readers gain access to the character's private heart, wherein so much tension is contained and released.

This 'dramatization of inner conflict is the unique strength and wonder of the novel', writes Robert McKee. 'The novelist slips into thought and feeling with a density' for which there is no cinematic equivalent (365). Seeing that much of Herbert's story takes place inside the characters' heads, and not wanting to sacrifice that inner life at the altar of Cinema's reigning gods, Action and Dialogue, Lynch opted for the technique of voice-over narration to assimilate the novel's 'linguistic mortar'. There are several instances of voice-over in Lynch's *Dune*, but he is not responsible for all of them, as he here explains:

> Because they made me make the movie two hours and seventeen minutes long…a mound of stuff had to go. And the rest of the stuff had to go into a garbage compactor to push it together. You'd have a line instead of a scene and the line would be in voice-over…A lot of it was meant to be in the film, but like 40 percent of it was added to nail things down that they thought people wouldn't understand. It can be a beautiful thing—to hear thinking. It's a nifty thing, but when it's just for information, you smell a rat. (quoted in Rodley 116–17)

It's impossible to identify which voice-overs came from Lynch and which came from the De Laurentiises, but we can categorize them in terms of how 'nifty' they are, to use the director's phrasing. The better ones plumb the characters' interiority for the inchoate and formless, giving utterance to that which makes them human. The more verminous examples are 'slack and patronizing', typified by needless repetition and obvious hole-filling (McKee 345). Again, while it's hard to say who the rat is, I'm inclined to think

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that the film's more 'beautiful' mental moments belong to Lynch. They were likely there before the 'garbage compactor' and they managed to remain there after it had done its work, one of the surviving features of Lynch's middle world.

The voice-over narration that opens the film, delivered by the Princess Irulan, daughter of the Padishah Emperor, falls into the four-legged category. A two-and-a-half-minute-long chunk of narrative exposition, it contains background information on a number of story elements: the spice mélange, space travel, the planet Arrakis, the Fremen, and the prophet Muad'Dib. In addition to compensating for details sacrificed in the time compression, Irulan's voice-over is meant to orient viewers to the film's speculative future, but owing to the shear amount of data that the Princess has to relay, this well-intentioned courtesy turns into a somewhat tedious invitation. Each time it seems like Irulan is finished speaking, her voice starts up again, droning and dragging on with still more exposition. Lynch and the producers may have felt guilty about this 'Oh-and-one-more-thing' preamble, because we don't' hear Irulan again until the midpoint of the film, where she returns to hurry the plot forward by a full two years—a hole big enough to house one of Carlo Rambaldi's epic sandworms.

To cite one more example of *Dune*'s misapplication of voice-over, characters often repeat, in thoughts, what other characters have just said aloud. 'Tell me of your home world', asks Chani, Paul's love interest, and seconds later he mimics her request in voice-over. This is supposed to signal that the question has had a psychological effect on Paul, but it sounds and feels like a hokey redundancy, making him seem slow and dim-witted rather than attuned and introspective. The cumulative effect is one of inertia, the stalling of Seymour Chatman's all-important 'march of events' (26). Valiantly, the actors try to save these moments from complete stasis (licking their lips, blinking their eyes, descending stairways ever so slowly), but nothing seems to work—not even the camera dollying in for an extreme close-up. In such instances, the tension the voice-overs were alleged to preserve is withered away by the melodrama of so many pensive looks.

By contrast, the film's more effective uses of voice-over recreate the novel's internal conflict while personalizing the characters' objective experiences and narrating the story through private disclosure. Before the test of the gom jabbar, Lady Jessica passes through a courtyard in the rain, and Lynch airs her thoughts as she braces herself for the Reverend Mother's visit. 'No man has ever been tested with the box', she thinks, heightening the tension around the test, and then, sharing her concern about Paul's chances of survival, she entertains the worst-case scenario: 'Tonight, I may lose my son'. Unlike Irulan's voice-over, Jessica's goes beyond the superficial, connecting the unprecedented moment to the emotional response it elicits. Lynch could've stayed on the surface, only establishing the test's historical implications, but he peels back another layer and gives us—lets us *hear*—Jessica's inmost truth, the fear that lives beneath the facts. Following the test, he also lets us hear the Reverend Mother's truth, when she asks herself a pair of questions relating to Paul: 'Could he be the one?' (this directly from Herbert), and 'Will he be ours to control?' These brief yet telling vocalizations do not slacken the narrative pace, nor do they exist merely to advance the plot; they enrich the filmic experience by promoting mistrust in the Bene Gesserit and rousing interest in Paul Muad'Dib. In short, they tell the secret life of the story.

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That secret life gains in significance whenever Lynch enters the mind of Paul Atreides. During a sparring match with his trainer, Gurney Halleck, we hear Paul talking to himself, and his thoughts are a softness amid the struggle. Yet they have pertinence and weight, proof that the interior is just as alive as the exterior, that it too has something to say. Still in the first act, confronted with the Reverend Mother and the test of the gom jabbar, Paul internally recites the litany against fear, and it steels him—body and soul—against the worst of the torture.[3] Not only do Paul's voice-overs articulate the language of his inner strength, they lessen the burden of interpretation on the viewer. Staring down a deadly hunter-seeker (a small, missile-like projectile planted by the Harkonnens), Paul explains in voice-over what the hunter-seeker is, what it can do, and how he might go about disarming it—all details the viewer needs to know, and can acquire through no other means than the eerily patient thoughts of the protagonist.

It is not by chance, then, that Lynch's meta-discourse on the phenomenology of thinking comes via Paul. 'Some thoughts have a certain sound', he muses, 'that being equivalent to a form'. What is Lynch doing in his use of thoughts if not giving them a 'certain sound?'

What is he doing with voice-over if not formalizing interiority? As often as it lays bare the sub-text in *Dune*, the activity of thought just as often adds to it, deepening the intrigue with 'linguistic mortar' both invented and faithfully adapted. Lynch is closest to Herbert when pursuing this 'beautiful thing', and, as we've seen, closest to Paul. 'Pure, unrefined spice', thinks Paul after he gets his first whiff of mélange, and with this thought (itself a minor commentary on the niftiness of raw cogitation) Lynch cuts to a white screen, suggesting that Paul's mind has been re-set and he is now ready to ascend to another level of awareness, to leave the realm of thought and enter the 'landscape of the unconscious' (Orgeron 35).

AWAKENING THE SLEEPER

Such an ascent is possible because Paul is the Kwisatz Haderach, 'a male Bene Gesserit' possessing 'mental powers' that allow him to 'bridge space and time' (Herbert 522). Near the end of Book One, as Paul is just becoming cognizant of these powers, he sits in a stilltent with his mother on their first night alone in the desert. He stares out at the 'moonshadowed rock' and sees 'with sharpened clarity every circumstance and occurrence around him…unable to stop the inflow of data or the cold precision with which each new item [is] added to his knowledge' (187). This hyper-conscious state leads to a kind of panoramic second sight, the ability to see both past and future simultaneously. When Paul and his mother join the Fremen, the indigenous people of Arrakis, he is fed a morsel of food tinged with the spice mélange, and the effect of the drug brings his already heightened awareness to a whole new level:

> He sank to the floor, sitting with his back against rock, giving himself up to it. Awareness flowed into that timeless stratum where he could view time, sensing the available paths, the winds of the future…the winds of the past…a vision that permitted him to see time-become-space…the continual solidification of that-which-is into the perpetual-was. (295)

Once mélange becomes a staple of Paul's diet, the breadth of his inner vision only expands. With increasingly foul portent, the 'available paths' multiply at a crushing rate,

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and, beset upon by his powers, Paul uses 'reason and intellect to transcend instinct' and deliver to the Fremen the fate they've long deserved (Schwartz 535).

In several key passages, Paul looks inward, envisioning scenarios, weighing alternatives—in short, reasoning. He acts only after his mind has done so, and *this* movement, this often painful ratiocination, is more telling than the character's physical progress through the novel. But Lynch, in adapting Paul's unorthodox mental journey, is not so much concerned with his 'straight-line computation' (Herbert 191). He is more interested in how Paul fits into an 'oneiric model of filmmaking', how his character can be understood through the 'language and syntax of dreams' (Alsop 58). Portrayed as a man under hypnosis, Paul becomes a typically Lynchian figure. The director's characters, notes Jeff Johnson, 'frequently surrender themselves to inexplicable forces beyond their conscious control', and Paul, guided through the film by a series of perplexing inner visions, is no different (12).

Herbert provides a blueprint for these waking dreams in his dense, descriptive prose. The archive contains various metaphorical tenors, concrete objects that could be organized into an illustrative image system: 'a net gathering countless worlds and forces' (362); 'a river hurtling toward a chasm—the violent nexus beyond which all was fog and clouds' (388); 'a globe with avenues radiating away in all directions'; and a 'gigantic lever across the known universe' (193). Lynch, perhaps relying too heavily on his own telos, neglects Herbert's figurative language and develops an entirely new set of images, including Lady Jessica's pensive face, an open palm, water dripping into a pool of black water, Edric's mandibles, a straining eyeball, a foetus in bloody utero, and the moon fracturing like the shell of a hollow egg. Herbert's correlatives tend toward the alam-al-mithal, that 'mystical world…where all physical limitations [are] removed' and Muad'Dib can truly exist, whereas Lynch's, whether intentionally or not, tend toward psychedelia, the seriously silly montage technique of early music videos, with their doves and their candles and their gauzy, wind-blown curtains (Herbert 513). The viewer tries to divine a pattern in Lynch's random assembly, a clue to its semiotics, but it just isn't there. Though expertly framed and edited, the trippy visual poetry fails to make any immediate sense, and, in the end, renders the phenomenon of Paul's awakening even more inscrutable.

But this may be the point: what stirs the sleeper will forever be an 'incomprehensible mess', as Roger Ebert referred to Paul's dream sequences. The 'inexplicable forces' at work in Paul's mind are just that—inexplicable. As nonsensical as they seem, these forces act on Paul in profoundly affecting ways, though neither he nor the viewer is ever fully aware of their influence or what exactly they might be saying to him. His messianic becoming, his being 'reified, finally, into a national character', unfolds in the manner of a hypnagogic hallucination (Johnson 13). Paul is caught somewhere between the unconscious and the conscious, sleepfulness and waking, and if he is to fulfil his destiny and inherit the vastness of the desert, he must vacate this middle world. Such a thing happens in Lynch's *Dune*, but almost reluctantly. For all its apparent silliness and confusing symbology, Paul's mind offers Lynch one of the event picture's only sealed spaces, a respite from the orchestral battle scenes and giant sandworms, the punishing sun of Arrakis. And this is why the director so readily identified with Paul Atreides: in the character's 'terrible subjectivity' Lynch found his neighbourhood (Mack 48).

CONCLUSION

'A key feature common to David Lynch's best work', writes Richard Martin, is the 'focus on a single, bubble-like location', a 'concentrated environment' that the director can meticulously manage and control (238). Lumberton, the setting of *Blue Velvet*, is just such an environment. Critics and scholars widely agree that *Blue Velvet* ranks among Lynch's best work, while *Dune* remains an embarrassing footnote to his career. If anything, they view the film as an expensive creative misstep on the way to Lumberton, but far from canonical in and of itself. *Dune*, which 'from its inception was too large a canvas for Lynch', taught him that authorial intent diminishes greatly in the Samalayuca Desert, that personal filmmaking is not possible on a 100-foot set (Johnson 10). Lynch's third feature may have been the one to splinter his confidence in the notion of auteurism, to persuade him that his filter screen, his interpretive vision, is just one of several competing and complementary visions, and that cinema is ultimately more 'aleatory than intentional' (Alsop 60). After watching *Dune* sift through the hands of so many people, Lynch vowed to never let anything like it happen to him again. From then on, final cut would be his.

So, a laurel for Dune, the misunderstood, the overlooked, and the outlier. How easy it is to write the film off, to label it the work of Alan Smithee, but when we look at it more closely, we see that Lynch's signature is all over *Dune*. In fact, I believe that certain parts of it (the Guild Navigators, the Harkonnens) are more grotesque, more freakish, and more certifiably Lynchian than anything to be found in his other films. For they are the testimony of the midnight movie under mutation by mainstream cinema, or, just the inverse. Not five minutes into the film, Edric, Lynch's stand-in and the hero of his teleology, dominates the screen, his holding tank the size of a mid-town bus, demanding that he be reckoned with. Here is Lynch showing up to the Hollywood party in his scariest costume, speaking of the future and staring straight at us. We—and by 'we' I mean the Emperor, the viewer, the De Laurentiises—we have no choice but to take him into account. Restricted though he is to a cloud of orange gas, he does not hesitate to make himself known.

NOTES

[1] According to IMDb, there are certain cuts of Lynch's film that he has officially disowned, such as the Region 2 DVD released by Castle, and televised versions 'seen both in syndication and on most cable networks'. At Lynch's request, his name has been removed from the credits to these versions and replaced with Alan Smithee, the alias preferred by directors who no longer wish to be affiliated with a bowdlerized product. The version I am using for this study is the Universal Pictures DVD released in 2017.

[2] The Bene Gesserit are an ancient sisterhood practiced in 'the minutiae of observation' and the art of controlling 'others merely by selected tone shadings of the voice' (Herbert 532–33).

[3] 'I must not fear. Fear is the mind killer. Fear is the-little death that brings total obliteration. I will face my fear. I will permit it to pass over me and through me. And when it has gone past I will turn the inner eye to see its path. Where the fear has gone there will be nothing. Only I will remain' (Herbert 8).

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