John L. Grigsby

Asimov's *Foundation* Trilogy and Herbert's *Dune* Trilogy: A Vision Reversed

Anyone at all interested in SF is probably familiar with Isaac Asimov's *Foundation* trilogy and Frank Herbert's *Dune* trilogy. Their popularity is attested to in several convincing ways. First, each series has sold millions of copies, and many other SF fans read the two when they were serialized in *Astounding Stories* and *Analog: Science Fact and Fiction* in the 1940s and 1960s, respectively. Second, both trilogies (or parts of them) have been recognized as among the best of all SF by both fans and writers: Herbert's *Dune* won the Hugo award of the World Science Fiction Convention and tied for the Nebula award of the Science Fiction Writers of America in 1966, and Asimov's *Foundation* trilogy was awarded a special Hugo as best all-time series in that same year. At that point, of course, *Dune Messiah* and *Children of Dune* had not been completed, so Herbert's trilogy was not competition for Asimov's. Third, both series have been included on most lists of the important works of SF, including those by Mark Rose[1] and James Gunn,[2] and have been praised by many critics.[3]

Despite the rather elaborate praise for the two trilogies by many critics, though, others have been less impressed. Sam Moskowitz, for example, doesn't particularly like *Dune*.

> The incorporation of the atmosphere of earth's medieval, political and moral climate make the plot development almost traditional by modern standards. Furthermore, the prominent use of psi phenomenon adds a note of conformity, which combined with the political climate, robs the effort of realism and transforms it into little more than a well-done adventurous romance.[4]

Asimov's trilogy receives similar treatment by Brian Aldiss and Damon Knight. Aldiss bemoans the lack of organic unity caused, he says, by the serialization, and objects to what he sees as too much conservative faith in technology in the series.[5] Knight attacks the *Foundation* trilogy for being too directly based on the Roman empire, saying thus it isn't speculative fiction "any more than the well-known Western with ray-guns instead of six-shooters,"[6] and he objects to sequels in general for their progressive diminution of the speculative element.

These issues touch on the subject of this investigation: the nature of the relationship between the *Foundation* and *Dune* trilogies. Robert Scholes and Eric Rabkin note two points of similarity between them, hinting that Herbert adapted techniques and ideas from Asimov for his own use. They suggest that Herbert derived the idea for his quotation beginnings for chapters in the *Dune* series from a similar strategy used by Asimov. They also believe that the restoration of civilization idea, or theme, in *Dune* is based on Asimov's series, an adaptation they say Herbert wasn't alone in making from Asimov's influential trilogy.[7] However, Scholes and Rabkin fail to offer an in-depth comparison. They simply curtail further inquiry with the general statement that the *Foundation* series is "a more sober affair than *Dune*, less adventurous, less swashbuckling, and in some ways less effective as fiction."[8] Such a vague dismissal does not adequately delineate the interrelatedness of the two series.

Yet several external (non-textual) clues hint to the interconnectedness of the two series, as do numerous internal (textual) ones. The fact that Asimov's trilogy, though written in the 1940s and published as separate volumes in the early 1950s was awarded its Hugo in 1966 (the same year *Dune* was published and won the awards) seems significant as a perception of their interrelatedness. Moreover, the Asimov-to-Herbert influence relationship becomes obvious when one examines some relevant essays written by the two authors. Asimov stated in the 1960s his opinion of the new "wave" of SF writing (a "wave" which *Dune* is a product of). He objected:

> There is a growing tendency to delete the science from science fiction ... and I want to fight it. There are science fiction writers who think that science is a Bad Thing and that science fiction is a wonderful field in which to make this plain. This is part of a much more general attitude that Society is a Bad Thing and must be destroyed before a new and better system can be evolved. This may strike young-sters today as a daring and novel notion, but when great-grandfather was a boy they called it Nihilism. I'm afraid I'm too square to be a Nihilist.[9]

With this comment on the contemporary writers who have little faith in science (Asimov doesn't name Herbert, Vonnegut, etc., but he is referring to them), Asimov begins the attacks which result in a Herbert response in "Men on Other Planets."[10] Here Herbert praises Asimov's non-fiction, but although he concedes *Foundation* is an SF classic, he attacks the series as too firmly rooted in the B.F. Skinner-type behaviorist psychology. His opinion of such psychologists appears in more detail in "Science Fiction and A World in Crisis,"[11] where he says:

> The so-called mental sciences have been seeking political power for many years. This was to be expected as a natural outcome of their power posture. They assumed the position of all-health dealing with all-sickness. Such non-symmetrical relationships inevitably produce shattering crises.[12]

Thus Herbert criticizes Asimov for placing his psychologists in *Foundation* in just such a position of power and then positing a healthy future. That, to Herbert's personal vision, is an invitation to chaos because of the loss of personal freedom, identity, and initiative, and because of the imposition of external, frequently misdirected control. The problem, Herbert elaborates — and the problem applies to Asimov's trilogy — is that

> the holders of power in this world have not awakened to the realization that there is no single model of a society, a species, or an individual. There are a variety of models to meet a variety of needs. They meet different expectations and have different goals. The aim of that force which impels us to live may be to produce as many different models as possible.[13]

Asimov's society, led by hidden psychologists who control and guide human destiny, is thus a violation of the breadth and depth of human activity and existence to Herbert, and he practically confesses his plans to reverse Asimov's *Foundation* vision of the future: Asimov, in common with all the rest of us, operates within a surround of assumptions, any one (or combination) of which could serve as the jumping-off point for an entirely new series of stories.[14] Herbert even directly recommends to other writers the reversal of such assumptions as an important, basic method he uses for discovering ideas for SF stories.

> If you want a gold mine of science fiction material, pull the assumptions out of the current best-seller list. Turn those assumptions over, look at them from every angle you can imagine. Tear them apart. Put them back together. Put your new construc-tion on another planet (or on this planet changed) and place believable human beings into the conflict thus created.[15]

As detailed examination of the two series will clearly illustrate, Herbert did not resist the urge to perform just such a reversal of Asimov's overall *Foundation* vision in his own trilogy while utilizing many of Asimov's specific ideas and techniques.

The restoration of civilization theme of both trilogies has been noticed, but Scholes and Rabkin missed an opportunity to point out the similarities in the way the previous civilizations fall in each story. In *Foundation*, the over-proliferation of technology, political elitism, and the federal bureaucracy result in gradual stagnation and the loss of the inventiveness which had created the Empire and made it strong. The only real difference in *Dune* is that the Butlerian Jihad (the war resulting from the overdevelopment and overuse of technology) occurred long before the novel opens; however, the political infighting and power-grabbing characteristic of the *Foundation* Empire certainly exist in *Dune*. Such a struggle precipitates the move of the Atreides family from Caladan to the desert world of Arrakis to establish an effective government there. The move to a primitive world from the center of a decaying civilization is central to *Foundation* as well; the Encyclopediasts, led by Seldon, transplant themselves to Terminus to create their encyclopedia and also a new, and better, civilization. So, though some specific motives and contexts vary, the movement in both novels from a decaying central civilization to an outlying, primitive planet for regeneration is identical. Herbert uses Asimov's future universe as his source for more than just the idea of civilization restoration. The way the restoration occurs (in terms of movement) and the similarities between the declining Empires are too great to be coincidental.

Within these large similarities of movement and design, there are also numerous specific similarities of action, setting, and character, all of which point to Herbert's adaptation of ideas from Asimov. One plot action of great significance in both trilogies is the establishment of a religious system on primitive planets which helps pave the way for the eventual ascendence of the new Empire. In *Foundation*, missionaries are sent from Terminus to the nearby primitive planets to create the "religion of science"[16] which establishes

> the Prophet Hari Seldon and how he appointed the Foundation to carry on his commandments that there might some day be a return of the Earthly Paradise: and how anyone who disobeys his commandments will be destroyed for eternity.[17]

A similar religious crusade is carried out in *Dune* by the *Missionaria Protectiva*, which establishes the Muad'Dib messianic legend among the Fremen on Arrakis. This paves the way for the new civilization under the leadership of Paul Atreides. Like Seldon, Paul is seen as a Prophet who will lead the Fremen to power and a civilized existence, just as those who join with Terminus in *Foundation* are taught they are destined to lead their galaxy as the center of civilization and power. So, again, the almost identical use of religion in the two trilogies shows that Herbert is using Asimov as a primary source for a major aspect of *Dune*.

Like the missionaries, the traders in each story also play a similar role. They are independent and powerful, and at the same time highly organized, a force to be reckoned with in both series. Granted, Asimov's traders aren't addicted to melange as Herbert's are, but otherwise they are almost inter-changeable. They convey missionaries, spread the new technology, and eventu-ally, in both novels, aspire to the central position of power. One of Asimov's traders becomes the leader of Terminus, in fact, and one of Herbert's almost succeeds in replacing Paul Atreides as Emperor in *Dune Messiah*. Thus, the organized traders, or Guildsmen, are so similar as to reinforce the conclusion that Herbert is continuing to use Asimov as a source in this area, also.

A final major point of similarity between the two series is the use of advanced psychology. Although the future psychology is not used identically, it is likely (given the other similarities) that Herbert is again using Asimov as source and changing and adapting specifics for his own use. In *Foundation*, the psychohistorians have refined future prediction into an exact science and an academic discipline. Along with this mathematical-like predictive ability, though, the psychohistorians also develop the ability to communicate without words and to alter and control the minds of others. In *Dune*, prescience, or future prediction, and mental manipulation appear less as learned skills and more as personal, inherited abilities (although the Bene Cesserit of *Dune* and the psychohistorians of *Foundation* are similar, as both scheme to control history by selective breeding and special, secret training). Nevertheless, both psychohistory and prescience function in essentially the same way, enabling characters to see future probabilities and thus giving them an advantage over others in preparing for, or altering, those probabilities. The value and fate of those who engage in future prediction and thus prolonged planning and organizing is different in the two series. Yet the difference, while it seems to override specific similarities like radioactive body shields, arranged marriages for political power, and leaders who espouse prophetic sayings with amazing regularity, is a key variation: it points to Herbert's parodying and reversing of Asimov's assumptions in the final outcome of the *Dune* series.

At the end of *Children of Dune*, Paul Atreides' son, Leto II, acts like the psychologists in *Foundation* and decides to assume sole responsibility for the future direction of mankind. Through a strange mutation, he gains great strength of mind and body and establishes himself as leader of the Empire. The normal expectation is that Paul Atreides' son takes the best course of action for all concerned. His longevity gives him ample time to plan for and place mankind on his so-called "Golden Path"[18] which will create an ordered, planned existence for mankind like Seldon's psychologist-controlled plan. However, this greatest representative of the prescient, of the psychohistorical, becomes a domineering monster in Herbert's ironic reversal of Asimov's ordered universe. Herbert's point is that one ordered, carefully controlled universe which limits human action and arbitrarily molds human nature is not really any different from any other. This is evident in Paul Atreides' experience as Emperor. In *Dune*, he takes control of the Empire "to prevent the jihad,"[19] but the control itself, and the necessity for maintaining it, ironically takes control of him. In *Dune Messiah*, 12 years later, he explains in a moment of remorse that he has "killed sixty-one billion, sterilized ninety planets, completely demoralized five hundred others,"[20] and says that "we'll be a hundred generations recovering from Muad'Dib's Jihad."[21] This experience with control and the "absolute power that corrupts absolutely" leads him to desert his realm and wander into the desert at the end of *Dune Messiah*. He afterwards appears in *Children of Dune* as the Preacher, a mysterious opponent of his own Empire who spreads the message that the Empire must be destroyed because

> men must want to do things out of their own innermost drives. People, not
> commercial organizations or chains of command, are what make great civilizations
> work. Every civilization depends upon the quality of the individuals it produces. If
> you over-organize humans, over-legalize them, suppress their urge to greatness—
> they cannot work and their civilization collapses.[22]

He fails, though, because his lesson is only taught through words, and his Empire is continued by his son, Leto II, the monster-king, who will convince the people of the evils of control through himself as negative example. All the propaganda

about the future benefit of man through control that Hari Seldon espouses in the *Foundation* series (primarily that the period of barbarism can be reduced from 30 thousand years to 1,000) degenerates to the *real* motive force in *Children of Dune*: the desire of one person or a group to control others and force their values and life-styles upon them. This is a parodying of *Foundation*, where psychohistorians control minds, blot out memories, and erase thoughts to keep the "normal" humans from developing in the "wrong" way or from discovering that the psychohistorians exist, and where the unbelievable assumption is that such demeaning acts are the best course for mankind, since they avoid a longer period of a very vague barbarism. Herbert reverses this situation in his ending, perceiving the planned universe and the controllers from the point of view of those who lack power and are simply led by force of one kind or another. He sees ultimate horror, horror which leads to revolt sooner or later, or a return to a sort of necessary barbarism. Herbert endorses that revolt, even has his monster-controller endorse it, because Leto II is actually, secretly trying to teach mankind a lesson. As the monster-king's sister points out:

> He'll lead humans through the cult of death into the free air of exuberant life! He speaks of death because that's necessary. . . . It's a tension by which the living know they're alive. When his Empire falls. . . . when it |revolt| comes, humans will have renewed their memory of what it's like to be alive. The memory will persist as long as there's a single human living. We'll go through the crucible once more. . . . and we'll come out of it. We always rise from our own ashes. Always.[23]

That dynamic, ever redefining paradox of death and life, freedom and control, civilization and barbarism is the way Herbert sees the world, and it is the complexity of such a world that causes him to parody Asimov. Any reductionism which places the fate of the universe in the hands of a few manipulative, egomaniacal psychologists ignores the effect of that control on the people in general and is too limited to go unchallenged. The ending of *Children of Dune* directly responds to the call. Humans may make mistakes and even become a little barbaric in Herbert's world, but at least they retain their knowledge of freedom and their creative energy — their ability to respond spontaneously and completely to a complex universe in all the multitude of ways such a universe calls for. As Herbert said in "Science Fiction and A World in Crisis," they will retain the ability to create as many different models or societies as possible and necessary. It is indeed hard to believe in the possibility that any small group of psychologists can make all the correct choices for everyone without creating the same kind of unconscious, subservient mentality created, to a large degree, by the dynasties in Earth's past. Herbert feels that all men must have the freedom to be creative and contribute to civilization in any way they can or want to if society is to avoid stagnation, a far greater danger than barbarism in the present age. Herbert's choice, in writing this ending, is clearly superior to Asimov's and is an important philosophical comment on the future, the present, and even the past.

It becomes clear, then, that both series are interrelated and similar, but also very opposite in their conclusions because of Herbert's ironic reversal of Asimov's assumptions. Both are also successful in their own special ways, though Asimov leans a bit too much on detective devices to interest his reader, and Herbert depends a bit too much on fantastic adventures for the same purpose. Though perhaps less speculative than unconnected novels, these two series also enable Asimov and Herbert to completely avoid overt moralizing, since they have the space in which to embody all their ideas and show them being worked out to their logical conclusions. Herbert's trilogy is more philosophically perceptive than Asimov's, but then Asimov must receive credit for a

more probable future universe in terms of plot, character, and setting (though perhaps it is too similar to the present, given its Roman Empire basis and too-extensive fear of barbarism). Some of Herbert's characters (like face dancers, gholas, etc.) verge on the fantastic, but Asimov avoids such venturing into fantasy. But then, Asimov is the scientist and Herbert is the literary romanticist-philosopher, so the strengths and weaknesses fit logically with the authors' backgrounds. No one can deny, however, despite the limitations of the works, that the *Foundation* and *Dune* trilogies have been widely read and highly influential, and the close relationship between the two which is delineated here, when added to their generally recognized artistic merits, should guarantee both series an important place in the historical development of SF.

NOTES

1. Mark Rose, ed., *Science Fiction: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ:1976), pp. 168-69.

2. James Gunn, ed., *The Road to Science Fiction: From Gilgamesh to Wells* (NY, 1977), pp. 397, 400.

3. The critical praise includes Robert Scholes and Eric Rabkin's calling the *Foundation* trilogy a "grand conception, interestingly executed" (*Science Fiction: History, Science, Vision* [NY, 1977], p. 59), and Donald A. Wollheim's contending that Asimov's trilogy is "the pivot of modern science fiction" (*The Universe Makers: Science Fiction Today* [NY, 1971], p. 37) and that SF before Asimov was primarily unrealistic and alien-dominated and that Asimov ushered in the age of realistic, human-centered writing which still predominates today. With the *Foundation* trilogy, Wollheim says, "the shape of galactic things to come was brought into the idea-structure of science fiction writing" (p. 36); "the rise, reign, and fall of a galactic empire is now taken for granted in many millennia-spanning novels to come after" (p. 41). Scholes and Rabkin echo similar sentiments when they note that the *Foundation* trilogy "improved the intellectual tone of popular science fiction considerably" (p. 62).

Herbert's *Dune* trilogy has also been praised rather extensively by the critics. David Ketterer applauds *Dune*'s consistent, detailed development (*New Worlds for Old: The Apocalyptic Imagination, Science Fiction, and American Literature* [Bloomington, IN:1974], p. 90), and Elizabeth Calkins and Barry McGhan note that "the color, action, and conceptual innovations of the story are definitely worth the reader's time" (*Teaching Tomorrow: A Handbook of Science Fiction for Teachers* [Dayton, OH:1972], p. 75). Scholes and Rabkin concur with these opinions of *Dune*'s detailed, unique construction, adding another strength of the trilogy as well. Herbert is praised for producing an entirely new mythology which "reminds us that science fiction concerns itself powerfully and continually with the examination of symbols central to our vision of the world and of ourselves" (p. 169).

4. Sam Moskowitz, *Seekers of Tomorrow* (Cleveland, 1966), p. 428.

5. Brian Aldiss, *Billion Year Spree: The True History of Science Fiction* (NY:Doubleday & Co., 1973), p. 269.

6. Damon Knight, *In Search of Wonder* (Chicago, 1956), p. 91.

7. Knight, p. 249.

8. Scholes and Rabkin, pp. 59-60.

9. Scholes and Rabkin, p. 59.

10. Isaac Asimov, quoted in Lois and Stephen Rose, *The Shattered Ring: Science Fiction and the Quest* (Richmond, VA:1970), pp. 26-7.

11. Frank Herbert, "Men on Other Planets," in *The Craft of Science Fiction*, ed. Reginald Bretnor (NY, 1976), pp. 121-34.

12. Frank Herbert, "Science Fiction and A World In Crisis," in *Science Fiction, Today and Tomorrow*, ed. Reginald Bretnor (NY, 1974), pp. 69-95.

13. Ibid., p. 76.

14. Ibid., p. 93.
15. Herbert, "Men on Other Planets," p. 129.
16. Ibid., p. 131.
17. Isaac Asimov, *The Foundation Trilogy* (NY:Avon Books, 1974), p. 90.
18. Asimov, p. 103.
19. Frank Herbert, *Children of Dune* (NY: Berkley Publishing Co, 1976), p. 396.
20. Ibid., p. 404.
21. Frank Herbert, *Dune* (NY: Charter Communications, Inc., 1965),p. 481.
22. Frank Herbert, *Dune Messiah* (NY:Berkley Publishing Co., 1969), p. 108.
23. Ibid., p. 108.
24. Herbert, *Children of Dune*, p. 306.
25. Ibid., p. 399.

RÉSUMÉ

John L. Grigsby. **La Trilogie de Fondation** *chez Asimov et la trilogie de* **Dune** *chez* **Herbert: une vision inversée.** *— Les trilogies d'Asimov et d'Herbert ont connu un succès mondial mais, si elles ont été souvent étudiées et critiquées, on a peu cherché à les confronter entre elles. L'analyse montrera qu'il y a là une lacune sérieuse de la part de la critique. L'analogie des structures générales de ces deux oeuvres suggère qu'Herbert a utilisé Asimov comme une de ses sources principales. Dans les deux cas, outre des similarités de détail, on rencontre comme thème dynamique central de l'intrigue un grand mouvement qui va d'un centre — une civilisation en décadence — à une périphérie en voie de régénérescence. On notera également la présence de personnages, psychologues ou chefs mondiaux dotés de prescience et des négociants et des guildes qui remplissent des fonctions remarquablement semblables. Ce qui est plus frappant encore que ces traits parallèles c'est cependant les implications thématiques directement contradictoires des deux trilogies. On sait qu'Herbert a explicitement condcmné la vision du monde de* Fondation *et on peut croire que son oeuvre figure ce rejet délibéré en parodiant les présupposés philosophiques d'Asimov même.* (JLG)