

Journal of Literary Studies

ISSN: 0256-4718 (Print) 1753-5387 (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/rjls20

Samuel Delany writes difference: Desire and style in *Stars in my Pocket like Grains of Sand*

Deirdre Byrne

To cite this article: Deirdre Byrne (1999) Samuel Delany writes difference: Desire and style in *Stars in my Pocket like Grains of Sand* , Journal of Literary Studies, 15:1-2, 160-175, DOI: 10.1080/02564719908530223

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/02564719908530223

Published online: 22 Oct 2010.

Submit your article to this journal

Article views: 79

View related articles

Full Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at
https://www.tandfonline.com/action/journalInformation?journalCode=rjls20

Samuel Delany Writes Difference: Desire and Style in *Stars in my Pocket like Grains of Sand*

Deirdre Byrne

Summary

This article explores the intersection of transgressive sexual desire, literary convention and the boundaries of style in the Epilogue to Samuel Delany's science fiction masterpiece, *Stars in my Pocket like Grains of Sand* (1986). My argument has three parts. First, I discuss themes of gender and transgression in Delany's autobiography, *The Motion of Light in Water* (1988). Second, I examine Delany's subversion of the codes of Romantic poetry in the Epilogue of *Stars in my Pocket like Grains of Sand*. Finally, I explore markers of gender and power in Marq Dyeth's speech in the Epilogue, where Delany uses his viewpoint character to plead eloquently that erotic desire should be valorised over public interests. I conclude that Delany radically undermines the possibility of closure in terms of gender, literary tradition and desire.

Opsomming

In hierdie artikel ondersoek ek die raakpunt van oortredende seksualiteit, literêre konvensies en stylbeperkings in die Epiloog van Samuel Delany se wetenskapfiksie meesterstuk, *Stars in my Pocket like Grains of Sand* (1986). My betoog het drie dele. Eerstens bespreek ek die temas van gender en oortreding in Delany se outobiografie, *The Motion of Light in Water* (1988). In die tweede plek verken ek Delany se omverwerping van Romantiese poësiekodes in die Epiloog van *Stars in my Pocket like Grains of Sand*. Ten slotte ondersoek ek tekens van gender en mag in Marq Dyeth se toespraak in die Epiloog, waar Delany sy standpuntkarakter gebruik om te pleit dat erotiese begeerte voorkeur moet geniet bo die openbare belang. Ter afsluiting beweer ek dat Delany die moontlikheid van ontknoping in terme van gender, literêre tradisie en begeerte radikaal ondergrawe.

Delany's writing has intertextual connections with genres as diverse as popular science fiction and Romantic poetry. His own sexual history and position, as a gay man who married, is a dramatic and complex example of gender blending, which is portrayed in his autobiography, *The Motion of Light in Water* (1988). In his life, as well as in his fictional and critical writing, Delany emphasises the

necessary relationship between language, power and gender, insisting that gender identities are constructed in and through language and are intricately bound up with power. This article explores these themes and concerns as they are manifested in Delany's autobiography, *The Motion of Light in Water* (1988) and in the Epilogue of *Stars in my Pocket like Grains of Sand* (1988).

In my view, Delany's many-layered representation of gendered subjectivity has affinities with Kristeva's account of the subject's insertion into the symbolic order. Kristeva holds that the acquisition of language conjoins with the onset of the Oedipus complex to ensure the subject's induction into the codes of the social-symbolic contract. She writes:

> This is the crux of the matter: both the completion of the Oedipus complex and its reactivation in puberty are needed for the *Aufhebung* of the semiotic in the symbolic to give rise to a signifying *practice* that has a socio-historical function (and is not just a self-analytical discourse, a substitute for the analyst's couch). At the same time, however, this completion of the Oedipal stage and the genitality it gives rise to should not repress the semiotic, for such a repression is what sets up a meta-language and the "pure signifier".
>
> (Kristeva 1986: 104)

Kristeva believes that language acquisition involves the child's forsaking union with the mother, who, because her body is the site of the child's desire, "occupies the place of alterity" (1986: 101). The symbolic order, into which the child is inserted upon learning language, denies the pulsions of desire that characterise what Kristeva calls "the semiotic" (1986: 98). Language thus becomes the means by which a gendered position is constructed and enacted, while inscribing a split between conscious conformity to social codes and bodily desire. Kristeva writes:

> Sexual difference - which is at once biological, physiological and relative to reproduction - is translated by and translates a difference in the relationship of subjects to the symbolic contract which *is* the social contract: a difference, then, in the relationship to power, language and meaning.
>
> (Kristeva 1986: 196)

I argue that Delany's style demonstrates Kristeva's point that "[t]hese two modalities [the semiotic and the symbolic] are inseparable within the *signifying process* that constitutes language, and the dialectic between them determines the type of discourse (narrative, metalanguage, theory, poetry, etc.) involved" (1986: 92). In his representation of desire, Delany transgresses the boundary between the articulation of drives (the semiotic) and "public" speech (the

symbolic). In so doing, he enacts the different relationship to "power, language and meaning" which Kristeva identifies as constitutive of sexual difference. In this respect, *Stars in my Pocket like Grains of Sand* (1988) gestures provisionally towards a future where the mechanisms that generate and regulate desire and gender could be, if not transcended, shown to be contingent and, therefore, subject to re-visioning.

1 *The Motion of Light in Water*

I would like to begin my investigation of gender, language, desire and literary convention with an examination of these concerns as they are represented in Delany's autobiography, *The Motion of Light in Water* (1988).[1] While recognising the difficulties of adducing the author's biographical details as a way of "explaining" a literary work, I undertake an investigation of *The Motion of Light in Water* because, as Sara Mills explains,

> [i]t is because of this difficulty in discussing the extratextual that this type of traditional stylistics is so gender-blind: because the critic cannot, within this framework, discuss factors outside the text - what I have been referring to in a broad sense as context .... Within such a model [traditional stylistics], it is difficult to make statements about gender and textuality, since gender is seen to be a factor which lies outside the text - part of its context - and therefore outside the concerns of reader/critic ....
>
> (Mills 1995: 30)

Since "gender and textuality" are exactly what I want to examine here, I believe that an investigation of Delany's autobiography can shed light on the central tropes relating to desire, utterance and identity in his fiction.

A significant proportion of *The Motion of Light in Water* is devoted to describing Delany's marriage to American poet Marilyn Hacker. While marriage may be the norm for most middle-class Americans, it was an act that knowingly transgressed the boundaries of desire for Delany, a gay (dyslexic) black man. By marrying Marilyn, Delany moved his marginal gender position in American society closer to the centre. But if one challenges the erotic hierarchy where heterosexuality is unquestionably central, as queer theorists often do, Delany's marriage moves him from marginal to a homosexual "centre" of desire. Mary Klages writes:

> Gay/lesbian studies, as a political form of academics, also challenges the notion of normative sexuality .... Queer theory concerns itself with any and all forms of

> sexuality that are "queer" in this sense - and then, by extension, with the normative behaviours and identities which define what is "queer" (by being their binary opposites).
>
> (Klages 1997)

Delaney's actions can be seen as a form of subversion, reversing conventional notions of acceptable sexual expression and challenging the very idea of centrality and marginality. He recounts how the marriage, initially configured as the union of two intellectuals and aspirant writers, quickly decays:

> There were hours, certainly, most of which had to do with intellectual pleasures, when Marilyn and I truly enjoyed each other ....
>
> Still, taken as a whole, the relation drifted from one aspect to another of low-key nightmare - even more so for her, I suspect, than for me. One particular facet of the torture was that as soon as we'd actually married, Marilyn, who through her adolescence had been extremely prolific, found herself less and less able to write.
>
> (Delaney 1988: 68)

Delany goes on to explain that the success of the marriage depends on Marilyn's continued ability to write lyric poetry: "both of us felt, though we did not often talk about it, a fear that if Marilyn stopped writing completely, there would be nothing to hold us together" (Delany 1988: 68). Examining this intricate utterance in detail yields insight into Delany's view of his own unusual heterosexual relationship. First, he avers that "both of us felt" how important Marilyn's continued poetic output is. Strangely, though, they "did not often talk about it". This raises the question of how Delany could have known what Marilyn felt if she did not discuss her feelings with him. Is Delany speaking for his wife? And most importantly, why should it be so important that Marilyn continue to write? By writing lyric poetry she asserts her subjectivity in a public form of language. As Kristeva notes, lyric poetry combines the attributes of the semiotic (giving voice to the unconscious pulsions of desire) with the Symbolic (Kristeva 1986: 101). It appears that in this relationship where desire (the semiotic) is marginal, language and competent utterance (the social-symbolic contract) have become crucial.

In *The Motion of Light in Water* Delany recounts that he began writing *The Jewels of Aptor* in 1961, shortly after Marilyn's miscarriage (1988: xvi). By contrast, Marilyn had already begun to experience difficulties with utterance, dating from the marriage:

> In personal conversations, when caught up in the grip of excitement or anxiety, [Marilyn] often developed a slight and persistent stutter.[2] Indeed, it had come

> about just at the point we'd first decided to go off and get married ....
>
> At the kitchen table, Marilyn turned and smiled. "Oh, hi!" she said. "Hello. You got here!" both the o's and the h's catching faintly on her tongue to make the small stutter that was the only voice she could now speak to me with.
>
> (Delany 1988: 150)

This passage describes how Marilyn's status as a speaking subject has been compromised. Kristeva defines her concept of the "speaking subject" in terms of negations, as follows:

> the subject of the semiotic metalanguage must, however briefly, call himself in question, must emerge from the protective shell of the transcendental ego within a logical system, and so restore his connection with that negativity - drive-governed, but also social, political and historical - which rends and renews the social code.
>
> (Kristeva 1986: 33)

The speaking subject is, then, one who acknowledges his or her inscription in history, and is also connected to the drives that constitute the semiotic. In her poetry, Marilyn addresses her own historical situation; she also gives voice to the semiotic, which, in Kristeva's view of poetic language, is shown to be "the precondition of the symbolic [and] ... that which also destroys the symbolic" (1986: 103). Marilyn's difficulties with utterance echo the ambiguous split between the semiotic and the symbolic in Kristeva's account of poetic language. She stutters "in the grip of excitement or anxiety", that is, when emotion comes to the fore, as well it might while living with a gay husband whose writing projects were so prodigious.[3] Delany adds another context for this interaction: following his repeated infidelities, Marilyn had taken a lover of her own, a move that "gave me a sense of relief - and Marilyn some pleasure" (1988: 149). This, again, articulates concerns rooted in what Kristeva calls "the semiotic *chora*: a non-expressive totality formed by the drives and their stases" (1986: 93). The interplay of Marilyn's and Delany's desire is likewise rooted in "drives" and, like the *chora*, disrupts the symbolic for Marilyn, for whom, as a woman, "the social contract ... is based on an essentially sacrificial relationship of separation and articulation of differences" (Kristeva 1986: 199).

It is possible to demonise Delany as a patriarchal husband whose control of the symbolic and linguistic domination of Marilyn reduced her to silence. But this would oversimplify the subtleties of the representation of subjectivity in *The Motion of Light in Water* (1988). Delany gives Marilyn's poetry considerable prominence in the text, quoting her poems at length, as though deferring to her artistic ability to characterise the mood and atmosphere of their life together in

language. He does not, however, make more than a passing mention of the private dimensions of their marriage. Although autobiography is traditionally the most private and confessional genre - that is, the mode most suited to articulation of "feminine" experience[4] - Delany shies away from giving voice to this side of his narrative. He diminishes "feminine" content (such as his private relationship with Marilyn) in favour of "masculine" concerns, such as their employment and publishing ventures. Delany's insistence on a nonlinear "polyphonic" (Kristeva 1986: 47)[5] narrative - where several modes, including theoretical speculation, quotations from Marilyn's poetry, aphorism and conventional reporting blend - extends the conventions of autobiography in the same way as he transgresses and extends other genre boundaries in his fiction.

2 *Stars in my Pocket like Grains of Sand*: Romanticism and Gender Transgression

The themes of gender, desire and articulation feature prominently in *Stars in my Pocket like Grains of Sand*. In this novel, a gay black male writer (Delany) uses a form of gender sleight-of-hand to write as a woman: that is, in the persona of Marq Dyeth, Velmian Industrial Diplomat, a subject whose very name evokes absence. "General Information" explains the meaning of the term "woman" as follows:

> "she" is the pronoun for all sentient individuals of whatever species who have achieved the legal status of "woman". The ancient, dimorphic form "he", once used exclusively for the genderal indication of males (cf. the archaic form *man*, pl. *men*), for more than a hundred-twenty years now, has been reserved for the general sexual object of "she", during the period of excitation, regardless of the gender of the woman speaking or the gender of the woman being referred to.
>
> (Delany 1986: 103)

This pervasive linguistic "novum" (Suvin 1979: 4), introduced into the intergalactic society created in *Stars in my Pocket like Grains of Sand*, constitutes a radical interrogation and destabilisation of conventional gender construction. In Delany's imaginary - and radically heterogeneous - society, the linguistic category of "woman", not "man", is the privileged term in the "ancient, dimorphic" gender binary. Pronouns are always feminine, unless when designating desire. This is an exact reversal of the state of affairs in contemporary language use, where "woman" is generally constructed in language as the object of male desire. Sara Mills, for example, analyses the phrases used in fiction to describe women and men, and concludes that women are described in terms of

body parts that are sexually attractive to men, such as "legs, skin, breasts and hair" (Mills 1995: 160-62). Delany's reconfiguring of pronoun usage draws attention to several features of gender and power systems. First, sexual difference is, as Kristeva notes, allied to a different relationship to power that obtains for different genders. Second, the choice of pronoun is not arbitrary, as some linguists would have it,[6] but articulates an agenda that is concerned with meaning and power.

By resituating the unit of language that is most often cited as a site of sexism - the pronoun[7] - Delany makes explicit the power-relations between gender-positions. He shows his affinity with French feminists such as Kristeva when he reveals these to be constructed in and through language, and not inherent or natural. He calls for an abandonment of a system of reference that is outdated because it articulates gender inequalities that have outlived their usefulness. Finally, his practice of insisting on the imbrication of desire and language recalls George Steiner's essay on "Eros and Idiom" (1978), which concludes:

> Because it lies at the heart of consciousness, sexual experience offers both a denial and a challenge to the genius of language. It is through that genius that men [sic] have, at least until now, principally defined their humanity.
>
> (Steiner 1978: 136)

The overarching trope of the Epilogue of *Stars in my Pocket like Grains of Sand* is dawn. Subverting the traditional poetic associations of dawn with origins and presence, Delany associates morning with absence. Marq Dyeth's first "aubadinal" thought is that his "perfect erotic object" (Delany 1986: 263) is absent: "I don't remember when ... I first realized that I had no memory of the morning after his departure" (Delany 1986: 437). In a universe where "he" is used only to point to the object of "her" passion, the pronoun "his" signals both Marq's lost lover and the rupture of his desire. Delany's association of dawn with absence and forgetting is symptomatic of the text's tendency to transgress and subvert teleological and logocentric systems of signification. At the macrocosmic level of narrative development, these trends coalesce, as I shall show, in the ill-fated affair between Marq Dyeth and Rat Korga.

Romantic poetry often positions the poet as master and interpreter of natural phenomena.[8] As the poet/speaker gazes on nature, he is moved to philosophical and psychological insight. When Delany rewrites the same situation in the Epilogue to *Stars in my Pocket like Grains of Sand*, the gaze, which constitutes the vehicle for the relation between subject and object, perceiver and perceived, is shown to be culturally contingent. The earliest dawn Marq recalls is an occasion where, wandering on an unfamiliar planet, he finds himself "gazing at an alien gazing at an alien gaze" (Delany 1986: 439). This expression of

extreme cultural relativity has the effect of undoing any illusion of transcendental subjectivity and resituating the subject within a network of culturally contingent contexts. In this framework, neither the human nor the nonhuman is privileged, but both are depicted as shaping the other's perception and representation of both self and Other.

Significantly, Marq's encounter with the unnamed alien ends when one of his "parents" - "I don't know whether it was Hatti or Sel'v who called" (Delany 1986: 440) - protectively calls him back to the familiar, warning that he might be in danger on a strange planet. This re-enacts a well-known family scenario, with an older parent showing concern for a child, who in this case is "perhaps ten" (Delany 1986: 438). It also reinforces the centrality of the family in the development of subjectivity as expressed in language, which Kristeva describes as follows:

> Formal linguistic relations are thus connected to an "externality" in the psychosomatic realm, which is ultimately reduced to a fragmented substance [*substance morcelée*] (the body divided into erogenous zones) and articulated by the developing ego's connections to the three points of the family triangle.
>
> (Kristeva 1986: 91)

In Delany's representation of "the family triangle", however, Marq's family becomes *unheimlich*, as Marq explains to Rat Korga that "there is no egg-and-sperm relation between any of our parents and any of this generation of children, not between any of my sisters - human or evelm - and each other" (Delany 1986: 274-275). In consequence, Marq's "parents" Hatti and Sel'v come from different species (Delany 1986: 256). In re-writing the traditional family, Delany divests kinship of physical reproductive links, but retains its propensity to regulate the child's behaviour. In the case of ten-year-old Marq, the cross-cultural family ironically terminates his investigation into cultural difference in the name of his safety.

In a later dawn, Marq watches the rise of Aurigae, "the largest known object in the galaxy" (Delany 1986: 440) - heralded by all the conventional fanfare of flashing lights and dramatic, if taped, music. This experience in outer space resembles conventional depictions of terrestrial sunrise only tangentially. Marq's co-perceiver is a nonhuman being, who "has twelve different faculties that you would call senses. But the ones you humans call sight, taste, and smell are not among them" (Delany 1986: 445). As he attempts to explain his experience of the dawn to her, Marq wonders "at the vagaries of translation" (Delany 1986: 445): in other words, whether sensory experience can be translated across cultures. He finally comes up with a synaesthetic description of an analogy to the sight of the dawn, based on an idiosyncratic account of limit-experiences of

taste and scent. Delany's evocation of a variety of senses here as vehicles for apprehending the environment strongly recalls Romantic poetry's exploitation and valorisation of sensory intensity in poems such as Keats's "On Melancholy" (Allison et al. 1970: 662-663).

As though to underline the point that the gaze, which conveys both desire and objectification, is not a given faculty, Marq muses after the unknown woman's departure: "That she and I had both found something matitutinal to contemplate, for whatever our vastly different reasons, in that huge fire, seemed the most stupendous of cosmic accidents and was, finally, where all real wonder lay" (Delany 1986: 446). The apprehension of nature is not, as in Romantic poetry, a vehicle for psychological wisdom. Rather, Marq asserts that the insights gained during his stay on a particular planet (the name and number of which he has forgotten) are less important than "that morning departure .... The rest is only its synopsized results" (Delany 1986: 450). As Delany rewrites the Romantic trope of musing on nature, the idiosyncratic connotations of departure that cluster around dawn in Marq's (re)construction challenge the primacy of psychological profundity so cherished by Romantic writers. It is the power of dawn to destabilise the individual, taking him or her to a radically different context, rather than its potential for philosophical closure, that is important to Delany.

Delany's fiction reveals that the perception of nature is a culturally produced phenomenon, which is largely incommunicable when attempts are made to "translate" it across cultures. This articulates a radically conditionalist position, where the phenomenal world is seen as "intertwined" (Kruger 1995: 34). When Kruger goes on to explain: "that a person comes into existence in a *web* of human social relationships, and never leaves it" (1995: 35, my italics), he is unconsciously echoing the universe of *Stars in my Pocket like Grains of Sand*, where an organisation known as the Web oversees relationships between divergent cultural groups. In a theoretical vein, Delany encapsulates his view of the interdependence of event, language and desire in *Silent Interviews* as follows:

> Desire ...
> Language ...
> What happens ...
>
> The point is that, because the inadequacy of any one to any other produces the field in which the third constitutes itself and registers, none of the three is a ground that can stabilize either of the other two. To negotiate their interrelations we must hold onto the fact that none is ultimately a privileged register or term.
> (Delany 1994: 60)

As this passage reveals, Delany favours the Sygn philosophy, encapsulated in the "cyhnk" which "signifies ... a difference between one part of itself and another" (Delany 1986: 172). In a similar conditionalist move, the senses, which are conventionally used to apprehend natural phenomena, are revealed to be contingent on a particular bodily configuration, namely the human, which is removed from its privileged central position in an intergalactic community where there are many sentient life-forms.

Marq's account of his apprehension of the rise of Aurigae is as lyrical and synaesthetic as much Romantic poetry. The perceiver retains his position as literary translator of natural phenomena, however unstable the process of translation is seen to be. In this interaction, Marq acts as a Kristevan "speaking subject" (1986: 24-33), fully situated within his historical context, and able to exploit the resources of language for Symbolic purposes. As an Industrial Diplomat, it is Marq's function to facilitate crosscultural communication, as he does with the extra-terrestrial who has twelve senses. When he addresses her, he speaks in a public voice, using the language of the Symbolic, reinforcing the social contract and the Law of the Father.

The longest utterance in the Epilogue to *Stars in my Pocket like Grains of Sand* is Marq's conversation with the Web official, Japril, who decided to remove Rat Korga from Velm and consequently from Marq's life. Linguistically, of course, Japril is a "woman" in accordance with the convention on civilised planets. ("Her" gender is never revealed.) Like Marilyn Hacker in the presence of Samuel Delany, Japril is silenced by Marq, who allows "her" only four brief comments during his six-page soliloquy. Here he is behaving in accordance with masculine behaviour in conversation, where, according to Edelsky,

> [i]n F1s [formal situations where one speaker speaks at a time], the men held forth, took longer turns though not more of them - dominated the construction of the floor by virtue, at least, of the time they took talking.
>
> (Edelsky quoted by Swann 1992: 27)

Marq certainly "dominates the construction of the floor" in his conversation with Japril. Edelsky makes a telling distinction between F1 situations, which are formally structured, and F2 situations, which Swann calls "collaboratively developed talk" (1992: 27). Following this, one might say that Marq turns his conversation with Japril into a formal occasion by his insistence on a formal linguistic style. In so doing, he evokes his own "public" subjectivity as an industrial diplomat. The structure of Marq's discourse is marked as "masculine" by its affinities to public utterance.

Nevertheless, the content of the conversation is decidedly "female". What Marq articulates is not his public persona in a "web of human social rela-

tionships" (Kruger 1995: 35), but his private desire: that is, the "drives and their stases" which Kristeva (1986: 93) identifies as constitutive of the "*chora*", which in turn generates the semiotic and ruptures the symbolic function of language, namely the perpetuation of social codes and positions (Kristeva 1986: 98).

Marq tells Japril of his own marginalisation in a received system of erotic topography:

> even for an ordinary, human, homosexual male, my sexual map is somewhat unusual. In general youth and fine features have never been particularly attractive to me. And what in most is a genital focus, in me seems divided between hands, genitals, certain facial features, feet .... Bitten nails in humans and strong claws in evelmi [the dragon-like species who couple with humans on Marq's home-world] .... Pitted human skin and a particular dark shade of evelm claws ....
>
> (Delany 1986: 455)

This radically contradicts Annie Leclerc's assertion that "[f]or man, there is only one celebration of sexuality: intercourse" (quoted in Cameron 1990: 76). It destabilises the penis from its privileged position in psychoanalytical thinking as "*the only sexual organ which is recognized and valued*" (Irigaray, quoted in Cameron 1990: 81) and the focus of bodily desire. Marq stages his eroticism in language as far closer to the tradition of women's sexuality as defined by "non-contradiction [and] contiguity" (p. 89). Unlike the "masculinist linguistic fantasies" about bodily orifices that Gilbert and Gubar attribute to male writers (Belsey & Moore 1989: 82-84), Marq's erotic map is concerned with surfaces and, therefore, with relations of touch - another feature attributed to women's sexuality (Irigaray, quoted in Cameron 1990: 83). In his representation of Marq's sexual topography, Delany transgresses the codes of normative gender ideology, as well as its subversion in feminist theory, which too rigidly associate one kind of sexual expression and desire with each biological sex. Instead, he implicitly questions the very system where sexual identity is prescribed: which Kristeva calls "the socio-symbolic contract", which entails sacrifice for women (1986: 200).

Marq's conversation with Japril articulates and challenges the radical disempowerment of the sexual deviant. Marq's homosexuality is marginalised within heterosexist norms of sexuality; and even within the peripheral grouping of gay men, Marq's topography of desire is deviant, like that of Delany, who writes in *The Motion of Light in Water* that he has always been attracted by bitten nails (1988: 28, 87). Delany and Marq are Others in the social-sexual contract that specifies some forms of sexuality as acceptable and denigrates others. They are therefore in a position analogous to that of women, whose

sexuality is defined in negative terms by the dominant, that is, phallocentric, model of eroticism. The social requirement that they must sacrifice the object/s of their desire creates another analogy to women's position, which Kristeva identifies as being defined by "the sacrificial logic of separation" (1986: 199).

Delany subverts received sexual norms in Marq's monologue by means of the verbal energy with which he moves an extremely marginal sexual position to centre stage. Marq is speaking to a high-ranking Web official: his complaint that his lover has been removed carries the illocutionary force of a political protest against the oppression of those the system is unwilling to accommodate. He recycles the feminist slogan, "the personal is political", to argue that all "women", beings with legal status, have the right to erotic gratification and *jouissance*. He protests against the political reasons for Rat Korga's forced removal from Velm, which Japril rather feebly cites as the imminence of Cultural Fugue caused by the sensational appearance of Korga, who is the single survivor of the destroyed planet, Rhyonon. Contravening the supposed logic of "the greatest good for the greatest number" Marq argues for the primacy of the personal - individual desire - over the political. He all but drowns his opponent in a flood of rhetorical vigour.

Paradoxically, in his impassioned assertion of his right to his "perfect erotic object" (Delany 1986: 263) even in the face of impending social disaster, Marq opposes the hierarchy of values and practices articulated by the Web. This is in keeping with his cultural background as a citizen of a world aligned with the Sygn, which cherishes diversity and, by implication, individuality. Marq's unusual erotic preferences and gender-position make him a marginal member of the Sygn; but his very marginality is safeguarded by the Sygn's valorisation of difference. Horton's discussion of the social functions of religion distinguishes societies based on communion from those based on manipulation. This distinction is helpful in delineating the difference between the Sygn and the (ironically designated) Web:

> Two poles of relationship can be distinguished in the sphere of interpersonal behaviour among human beings. At the one pole ... ego's action is directed entirely towards obtaining certain responses from alter which he [sic] values intrinsically and towards giving certain responses to alter whose discharge is of similar intrinsic value to him. We may call this a pure communion relationship. At the other pole ... ego values intrinsically neither his own nor alter's responses, alter being treated as a mere means of arriving at a goal which can be defined without reference to the behaviour included in the relationship. We may call this a pure manipulation relationship.
>
> (Delany 1993: 33)

Horton uses the example of "two unmarried lovers" to demonstrate the relationship of communion and the example of a "'business' relationship" to demonstrate that of manipulation (1993: 33). The "ripples" in the "Dyeth [family] stream" (Delany 1986: 163) and Marq's relationship with Rat Korga clearly exemplify a model of social contract where communion is valorised. On the other hand, Japril's actions in removing Korga from Velm and her coldness in the face of Marq's ardent protest, bespeak a society where the responses of others are not valued except insofar as they promote a predetermined social goal.

Far from actually articulating relationships based on communion, as one might expect from Horton's discussion, romantic fiction, where the plot progresses towards the teleological idyllic sexual union of a man and a woman, addresses and constitutes its reader as a woman by evoking supposedly "feminine" fantasies of union with and domination by a charismatic male protagonist (Radway 1984). Delany's version of the romance tale, *Stars in my Pocket like Grains of Sand*, retains the fantasy of perfect union. Upon hearing of the existence of Rat Korga, his "perfect erotic object - out to about seven decimal places" (Delany 1986: 225), Marq wonders about the pervasiveness of this fantasy: "Well, don't we all live with this idea anyway: Somewhere in the known universe is the perfect woman for me?" (Delany 1986: 230). Delany rewrites central questions in the romance quest by reconstituting the reader as a legally empowered woman, according to the definition of the term in General Information. It implies that women of both genders have the right to erotic gratification, however unusual.

When Rat Korga and Marq Dyeth are separated, Delany frustrates readers' expectations of a happy ending.[9] He destabilises the teleology inherent in conventional romantic narrative, with its ritualised enactment of gender positions. As I have noted earlier, this is consonant with a general trend in *Stars in my Pocket like Grains of Sand* to suspend closure by transgressing literary conventions which construct gendered subjects within fixed categories. Japril's cursory "Good morning" (Delany 1984: 460) not only negates the lyrical association of dawn with lack that gives the opening pages of the Epilogue their rhetorical force, but also summarily dismisses Marq's appeal for a more generous dispensation with regard to personal erotics (however marginal). Delany's call for new discursive means of representing desire within the web of cultural and social relationships has not, however, been ineffective.

The final sentence of the novel reads: "When I woke again, it would be day" (Delany 1984: 464). The fantasy of origin associated with dawn will give way to the inexorable circularity of the diurnal rhythm. Delany appeals to the cyclical nature of "Women's Time" (Kristeva 1986: 191) as a means to

reconfigure desire in a more humane fashion that would include the signifying system itself. In this utopian, if unrepresentable, future, women of both genders could avoid being silenced by their relations with men, as Marilyn Hacker was in her marriage to Samuel Delany. Instead, respecting the imbrication of difference, gender, desire and language, they could be in a position to assume "woman's command of language as against language's command of woman" (Gilbert & Gubar, quoted in Belsey & Moore 1989: 85).

Notes

1. It is interesting to note that *The Motion of Light in Water*, while ostensibly relating "the truth" about Delany's life between 1957 and 1965, is predicated upon another transgression of the boundary between the semiotic and the symbolic. Delany compares the two sentences "My father died of lung cancer in 1958 when I was seventeen" and "My father died of lung cancer in 1960 when I was eighteen" as paradigmatic of the two modalities. He goes on to say:

   > The first is incorrect, the second correct.
   >
   > Now a biography or a memoir that contained only the first sentence would be incorrect. But one that omitted it, or did not at least suggest its relation to the second on several informal levels, would be incomplete.
   >
   > (Delany 1988: xviii)

2. Rydra Wong, the central protagonist of *Babel-17*, is also a poet. Like Marilyn, she also stutters when under the influence of strong emotion (Delany 1966).

3. Delany's first novel, *Jewels of Aptor*, was accepted for publication in 1962, when he was twenty; his second writing venture was a trilogy, of which two volumes were accepted for publication in the following year; and *The Ballad of Beta-2* was published soon afterwards (Delany 1988: 191).

4. See, for example, Jelinek (1980) and Smith (1987). In a similar vein, Chodorow (1978) predicates her research into motherhood in patriarchy on the gendered split between public and private domains, where men are constructed as subjects whose major field of action is the public arena, while women are consigned to the private or domestic realm.

5. Kristeva follows Bakhtin in contrasting "monological" and "dialogical" discourse as two modes of assertion, where monological discourse posits an unproblematic relation to truth, while dialogical discourse, including "carnivalesque and Menippean discourses as well as the polyphonic novel" where the mode is that of "destructive genesis" (Kristeva 1986: 47), which necessarily

opposes the idea of a transcendental truth or meaning.

6. Ursula Le Guin, discussing the correct pronouns to use for the androgynous inhabitants of the planet Gethen in her novel *The Left Hand of Darkness*, writes:

> I still dislike invented pronouns, but I now dislike them less than the so-called generic pronoun he/him/his, which does in fact exclude women from discourse; and which was an invention of male grammarians, for until the sixteenth century the English generic singular pronoun was they/them/their, as it still is in English and American colloquial speech.
>
> (Le Guin 1989: 15)

7. Sara Mills writes:

> The generic pronoun "he" is perhaps the most well-known example of gender-specific or sexist language, and is frequently referred to as "he-man" language.
>
> (Mills 1995: 87)

8. See, for example, Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey" (Allison et al. 1970: 523-526), Coleridge's "Kubla Khan" (Allison et al. 1970: 564-565) or Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind" (Allison et. al 1970: 620-622). Wordsworth writes in his "Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*" that "[the poet] considers man and nature as essentially adapted to each other, and the mind of man as naturally the mirror of the fairest and most interesting properties of nature" (1954: 17).

9. Delany has continued to frustrate readers' expectations by failing to write the sequel to *Stars in my Pocket like Grains of Sand*, promised on the book's back cover.

References

Allison, Alexander W. (ed.)
1970 *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.

Belsey, Catherine & Moore, Jane (eds)
1989 *The Feminist Reader: Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism*. Houndmills: Macmillan.

Cameron, Deborah (ed.)
1990 *The Feminist Critique of Language: A Reader*. London & New York: Routledge.

Chodorow, Nancy
1978 *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Delany, Samuel
1966 *Babel-17*. New York: Ace.

1986 *Stars in My Pocket Like Grains of Sand.* London: Grafton.

1988 *The Motion of Light in Water: Sex and Science Fiction Writing in the East Village, 1957-1965.* New York: Arbor.

1994 *Silent Interviews: On Language, Race, Sex, Science Fiction, and Some Comics.* New England: Wesleyan University Press.

Horton, R.

1993 *Patterns of Thought in Africa and the West: Essays in Magic, Religion and Science.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Jelinek, Estelle C.

1980 *Women's Autobiography: Essays in Criticism.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Klages, Mary

1997 Queer Theory. http://www.colorado.edu/English/ENGL2012Klages/-queertheory.html (27 August)

Kristeva, Julia

1986 *The Kristeva Reader*, edited by Toril Moi. New York: Columbia University Press.

Kruger, J.S.

1995 *Along Edges: Religion in South Africa: Bushman, Christian, Buddhist.* Pretoria: University of South Africa.

Le Guin, Ursula K.

1989 *Dancing at the Edge of the World: Thoughts on Words, Women, Places.* London: Victor Gollancz.

Mills, Sara

1995 *Feminist Stylistics.* London & New York: Routledge.

Radway, Janice

1984 *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy and Popular Literature.* Chapel Hill: University of California Press.

Smith, Sidonie

1987 *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography: Marginality and the Fictions of Self-Representation.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Steiner, George

1978 *On Difficulty and Other Essays.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Suvin, Darko

1979 *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre.* New Haven: Yale University Press.

Swann, Joan

1992 *Girls, Boys and Language.* Oxford: Blackwell.

Wordsworth, William

1954 *The Prelude: Selected Poems and Sonnets*, edited by Carlos Baker. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, Inc.