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RITES OF REVERSAL: DOUBLE CONSCIOUSNESS IN DELANY'S *DHALGREN*

MARY KAY BRAY*

One of the pleasures of reading *Dhalgren* comes from the fact that, as Delany says in his dedication, it is a "book about many things." This 1975 novel, Delany's masterwork to date, captures its readers' imaginations on so many levels that any one area might well be the subject of nearly limitless discussion. One approach which has not received much attention, however, is that which views Delany's blackness as a context for his works. Delany has never made an issue of race, nor has he written at any length specifically about racial issues except to the extent that his main characters tend to be outsiders, alienated in some way from their cultural frameworks. Still, he reminds readers that knowledge of a work's contexts *is* important. In his essay "Of Sex, Objects, Signs, Systems, Sales, S-F and Other Things," he discusses the necessity of an understanding of the then-recent discovery of the Earth's roundness to a reading of Shakespeare's *Tempest*: "a contemporary play-goer who did not 'believe' in the roundness of the earth, nor in the existence of out-lying tropical islands, and had no feeling for the new distinctions between fantasy/magic/reality/science that were being etched . . . would . . . be totally at sea." In the same essay he reminds readers of his own contexts: "I am black, I have spent time in a mental hospital, and much of my adult life has been passed on society's margins. My attraction to . . . [these contexts] as subject matter . . . is not so much the desire to write autobiography, but the far more parochial desire to set matters straight . . . ."[1] Delany's blackness has, in fact, received some discussion. Both Emerson Littlefield, in his discussion of Delany's use of a new, black mythology, and Jane B. Weedman, in her book on Delany, see the writer's blackness as an essential frame of reference.[2]

Since Delany does not make race a sole focus in his works, in what sense is his being not just an American science-fiction writer but a black science-fiction writer a context important to *Dhalgren*? Here Weedman sheds some light. She points to *Dhalgren*'s epigraph, "'You have confused the true and the real,'" as pertinent to the conflict suggested in the novel between the "prevailing idealism of the American dream and black American reality . . . ." This conflict comes from what she calls Delany's "double consciousness," which she defines as a "psychological dichotomy which results when an individual lives in a culture, such as the black community, yet must be aware for his survival of the workings and expectations of a dominate [sic] culture . . . ."[3] Although Weedman does not refer to it, her concept of double consciousness echoes the classical formulation of the term, from W. E. B. Du Bois' *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903):

> . . . the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world,—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others . . . . One ever feels his twoness . . . .[4]

Delany himself attributes to his works his awareness, as a black, of two cultural worlds—"I had a chance to compare different cultures in a way that still influences what I do and what I write."[5] It is this cultural double consciousness which is manifest in *Dhalgren*.

In particular, this double awareness manifests itself in *Dhalgren* not as a specific presentation of black experience—characters and events in the novel represent a variety of races and experiences—but as irony. *Dhalgren*'s readers are brought to an ironic cultural double perception of "'the true and the real'" akin to the "twoness" felt by Du Bois as, repeatedly, archetypes of American thought assumed to be "true" undergo ironic reversals in the "real" experience wrought by the novel. Delany provides a key to his use of irony in discussing how to break away from what he calls "old" ways of perceiving:

> If you have a gut response to a story, you are not responding to something new; you . . . are really responding to . . . a story you were told when you were six or seven, which has been so overlaid, you don't recognize what it really is. But your subconscious recognizes it. If you're going to work with those old things, I think you do better to work with them with a sense of irony . . . . You also have to know what those old stories are and what they mean in order to actually say something new . . . .[6]

It is through just this "sense of irony" that *Dhalgren* creates its "new," double perception of American experience.

The novel contains ample clues to the fact that its focus is distinctly American. First, its setting is exclusively American. No other Delany novel has been set solely in the United States, and no other main character of his has remained in the same place from start to finish. Further, *Dhalgren*'s particular setting, Bellona, seems to be located right at the center of the country. It is equally far from the east and west coasts and from the country's northern and southern borders.[7] We are never told more definitely where Bellona is, for the city seems to function primarily as a symbolic center of American consciousness and behavior. That Bellona is

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presented as "internal landscape" (p. 490), a "city of inner discordances and retinal distortions" (p. 16)—in fact, as a city *within* a mind—combines *Dhalgren*'s focus on American experience with a particular emphasis on American perception. Another telling indication of such a focus in *Dhalgren* is the character of Kid himself. Here is a main character who is significantly half-Native American and half-white—a kind of personified doubleness—and who lives out patterns familiar in American literary and historical experience. He is brought up in a small, upstate New York town where he is exposed to sex and death, those American preoccupations noted by Leslie Fiedler in *Love and Death in the American Novel.* His youthful travels in foreign lands are a kind of search through various "frontiers"; yet when he enters Bellona he is still an innocent, an innocent on an overt quest for identity. Viewed from this perspective, Kid is an American dreamer who winds up at a symbolic center of American dreams. Only in *Dhalgren*, such dreams do not have archetypally American results.

By means of its ironies, *Dhalgren* brings readers to a simultaneous awareness both of traditional American myths and preoccupations and of their failure to be viable, at least for some. Among the myths and preoccupations reversed or undercut during Kid's stay in Bellona are ones which have characterized American letters. In particular, ironies in *Dhalgren* emanate from the pattern of quest and initiation suggested above, from a variety of plays upon the concept of American individualism, and from a thirst for moral absolutes set against an intensely relative background.

That *Dhalgren* contains a theme of quest and initiation is nothing new to American writing. Even a partial list of American works concerned with this theme, such as *Huckleberry Finn*, *Billy Budd*, *The Red Badge of Courage*, *The Great Gatsby*, *Go Down, Moses*, and more recently *Catch-22*, reads like a roll call of American masterpieces. All of these works contain an innocent main character who undergoes a basically linear series of experiences which lead him to a mature realization that frees him to act rather than be acted upon. Although one critic argues otherwise,[8] the quest pattern is as clearly apparent in *Dhalgren* as in any of these mainstream works. In Delany's rendering, however, the resolutions of the hero's journey are ironic.

Kid, when he arrives at Bellona amnesic and nameless, is more extreme an innocent than most other American literary figures of his type. Once in Bellona he undergoes a series of different experiences which parallel those in traditional tales of quest and initiation. Bellona contains four different types of social order, and Kid receives some sort of initiation into them all: a woodland "utopia," middle-class civilized life, Calkins' world of wealth and power, and the scorpions' lawless street society. During this time Kid also experiences the realities of becoming an artist and of being loved, and he apparently "finds himself" when he settles in as leader of the scorpions.

Numerous other incidents and images related to Kid's quest symbolize forms of initiation. *Dhalgren* opens with Kid's being sent by a mysterious female "guide" into a cave where he finds and drapes himself with the chain of prisms, mirrors, and lenses which he sees in the light of knight-errantry, an archetypal reminder of quest and initiation—"Three gifts, he thought: armor, weapon, title (like the prisms, lenses, mirrors on the chain itself)" (p. 20). Too, a pattern of sexual encounters begins just before Kid enters Bellona and continues thereafter, with significant sexual activity taking place at the outset of each new stage of Kid's participation in Bellonan life. Patterned in this way, sex in *Dhalgren* becomes a kind of rite of passage which precedes each new form of experience. Other initiatory incidents have to do with blood and bathing. Twice Kid must wash himself clean of blood—first when the scorpions beat him and again after he has retrieved Bobby Richards' body from the elevator shaft. Such incidents are almost stock symbols of baptism into new life, symbols of purification and rebirth. Indeed, all of Kid's baths, preceded by baptisms in blood or not, are described in such thorough detail that they assume ritual proportions. One begins to see Kid as a *perpetual* initiate, and it is precisely in this circular cycle that one begins to see Delany's rendering of the traditional pattern as ironic. Quest and initiation do not have the results that they have in the "old stories."

Even the pattern of the various names Kid receives, culminating in his partial recovery of his supposedly real name, sheds ironic light on his quest. Kid goes through three forms of the name originally given him by Tak—"The Kid," "Kidd," and "Kid." All of them, of course, connote innocence. The first two also suggest that he is an outsider, still on a search, who does not fit into his surrondings (as neither Billy the Kid nor Captain Kidd fit theirs). The last, however, the name that comes to him through Denny when he finds a home with the scorpions, does not suggest a mature, realized identity, but only youthfulness, newness, and, again, innocence. As implied through the Daphne-figure who starts him on his quest and then turns into a tree, he retains his original state rather than growing from experience. Further, he achieves his goal of finding his identity only partially and ambiguously. His name may be Dhalgren or it may be Michael Henry something—another doubleness embedded in the novel—, and each uncertain possibility comes to him set in an ironically conventional context. It is after undergoing still another sexual rite of initiation in the gangbang of Risa that Kid half remembers the name Dhalgren (p. 753). And again, it is when Kid enters a Dionysian dance in the park—a dance which, as image, suggests a mandala, an Eastern symbol of wholeness—that he has his incomplete recollection of being Michael Henry (p. 855). These contradictory revelations are confusing rather than enlightening, and, in a further heightening of their irony, may not even matter: ". . . one becomes more and more suspicious . . . that the position of the characters will have so changed by the book's end that the answers to the initial questions will have become trivial" (pp. 831-32).

Such ironic trivialization of Kid's initial concerns is intensified when he is contrasted to his literary predecessors—Huck Finn, Ike McCaslin, Nick Carraway, et al.—, who begin their quests more or less unconsciously but end their rites of passage in full control, as conscious, self-directing individuals. Kid, however, begins his quest through Bellona with the conscious goal of finding out who he is and ends his experiences drifting with the tide of events, not consciously an identified individual and not consciously choosing his actions. He leaves the city not because he wants to go but because a catastrophe strikes and its momentum carries him to Bellona's edge. Even the structure of the final chapter

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"Anathēmata," a non-linear palimpsest of chaos, reflects the directionlessness of his life.

In fact, the structuring of the initiation theme in *Dhalgren* as a whole is ironic. From first to last Kid repeats his journey of initiation so that *Dhalgren*'s thematic sequence becomes a circular one—it moves from innocence to initiation to innocence to initiation to innocence in an endless chain much like the closed loop with which Kid girds himself in the book's opening pages, the chain which, when broken, signifies nothing. Kid's non-linear journey becomes an ironic parody of the literary archetype; readers are brought to a double awareness both of the traditional pattern in American thought and of its failure to function in the actual American experience which Bellona embodies.

Another concept idealized in American consciousness and treated with irony in *Dhalgren* is that of romantic individualism. Delany plays with several familiar American variations on this theme, from the rugged individualism associated with the frontier experience through the notion of the self-made man who lives out the dream of success to the idea of the outlaw as hero. Again, readers are both given the traditional assumptions and simultaneously reminded that they do not work.

The mythical American frontier, for instance, is a place of beginnings, a place where the individual, free from the customs and restrictions of society and set in a context of infinite possibilites, is able to shape a meaningful existence for himself, to "grow up" by means of his own individual choices. Certainly *Dhalgren* contains ample reminders of this traditional mold. Bellona offers in its park a landscape which can be viewed as a type of frontier, a landscape which, though John and Milly try to civilize it, remains wild in many ways. It is a basically unstable setting, difficult to navigate because its paths seem to take a limitless number of directions (p. 354). While Kid is in the park, he is first exposed to all of the possibilities from among which he can choose the course of his life. Here is the setting in which he first meets Lanya, first acquires the spiral notebook that is to be his means of becoming a poet, and first sees or hears of the different Bellonan social orders. *Dhalgren* even provides an appropriate symbolism for the stone lions which guard the park. These lions may "pick up their paws, apocopate, and go to town" (p. 806). Lions, phonetically apocopated, are lies, and one cannot help thinking of that aspect of the frontier myth which sees society negatively, as the realm of the artificial, and the frontier positively, as the realm of the natural. Indeed, Kid responds to society's artificialities in the stock manner. Ultimately he rejects both the middle-class, reality-denying "labyrinth" of the Richards' Labrys apartments—significantly fronted by a "young, dead tree" (p. 138)—and the jaded, highly sophisticated upper-class civilization to which he is exposed through Roger Calkins' minions.

Dhalgren's presentation, then, of the individualism emerging from the frontier experience might appear to be the conventional one. The groundwork for Kid's experiences in Bellona is laid in a setting of infinite possibilities from which he seems to gain much of value. Yet Kid turns out to be one individual upon whom the frontier experience has no real effect. He breaks with Lanya and life in the park in what is at best only a semi-conscious state, a five-day blackout from which he can recall only one day's worth of events. Shortly thereafter he abandons his poetry as well—"'I don't think I'm gonna write any more poems'" (p. 397). During this time he takes up with the scorpions, but since his decision to do so comes after he has done so (p. 410), he cannot be said to have purposefully chosen his new life. Even the idea that his experience has made Kid a better person than he once was, evidenced in his ability to judge and reject the artificialities of society, is undercut by his alliance with the scorpions, who are, literally, nothing more than a gang of marauders. Far from fulfilling the mythical pattern of conscious choice based upon individual maturity gained through the frontier experience, Kid's behavior amounts to directionlessness and desertion. In fact, his early desertions of Lanya and his poetry, although he returns to both for a time, only serve to prefigure what, in one possible reading of *Dhalgren*'s "ending," is his ultimate desertion of his whole experience in Bellona.

Concomitant with this ironic undercutting of the American ideal of frontier individualism is Delany's further reversal of the romantic archetype in his rendition of the self-made man living out the American dream of success. This view of material prosperity and renown, possible for the self-reliant individual who through skill, ingenuity, and hard work finally makes his fortune, is the other side of the myth of the frontier. If on one hand the implied rewards of life in the new land are moral and emotional, on the other hand they are most certainly concrete and socially advantageous. Delany's metafictional remarks on science fiction, which come to us through Tak, also pertain rather directly to the uniquely American success myth which emphasizes self-reliant action directed purposefully toward a goal: "'First: A single man can change the course of a whole world . . . . Second: The only measure of intelligence or genius is its linear and practical application . . . . Three: The Universe is an essentially hospitable place . . .'" (p. 415).

Kid "'follows all the conventions'" (p. 415). He goes to work for the Richards out of a sense that he needs to get a job and make money. Having contracted to deliver his services for a fair price, he persists in his efforts even when his employers and conditions of employment become increasingly bizarre. When Arthur Richards makes only partial payment for the work he has done, Kid feels cheated. Likewise, Kid fits the conventional mold in his desire for fame as a reward for his being a poet. He wants all the accoutrements of success: "His eyes dropped in a well of *Time* magazine covers ('Poet Refuses Pulitzer Prize'), the audience's faces as he stood on Minor Latham's stage where he had consented to give a rare reading. He hauled himself back before the fantasies' intensity hit pain" (p. 190). To this extent, Kid is a typically American dreamer who applies his skill in search of financial and social rewards.

Unfortunately, in *Dhalgren* all this "'linear and practical application'" of Kid's "'genius'" does not have the expected outcomes. The money he gets from Arthur Richards, despite his anger at being cheated, finally doesn't matter. He gives it back. In fact, money in general is valueless in Bellona except when it is used to play elaborate games, as when Lanya tries out prostitution or Kid experiments with mugging. Too, when fame comes for his book of poems, Kid is no longer even sure that he wrote *Brass Orchids* and, ironically, cannot recall the meaning that it once had for him (p. 702).

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These reversals are congruent with Tak's response to Kid's request for further explanation of the way in which he has Bellona "figured out" according to the science-fiction paradigm given above. Now the conventional model is gone:

> "I don't understand anything about it. I'm a God-damn engineer. I take a plug; I put it in one socket; and it works. I put it into another one; and it doesn't. I go into an office building and one elevator works, and only the lights on the top floor. That's impossible, by anything I know about. I go down a street: buildings are burning. I go down the same street the next day. They're still burning. Two weeks later, I go down the same street and nothing looks like it's been burned at all. Maybe time is just running backward here. Or sideways. But that's impossible too." (pp. 419-20)

Once again, *Dhalgren* sets up a pattern common to the expectations of American experience only to undermine its traditional significance.

A third means by which American romantic individualism is ironically reprised in *Dhalgren* is through the myth of the exceptional outlaw. Because American culture has been fascinated by tales of individuals who make their own laws in dramatic ways, figures like Billy the Kid (with whom Kid's first name associates him), Jesse James, Butch Cassidy, Bonnie and Clyde, and so on have become legends in American thought. American literature, too, abounds with heroic outsiders like Thoreau, Huck Finn, Tom Joad, and a great many more who break laws and defy the system in response to some "higher" code of their own. Here is rugged individualism run rampant, and it clearly holds a kind of attraction. Once again *Dhalgren* places Kid in the traditional context. He becomes leader of the scorpions, Bellona's resident "outlaws," who in their energy and restlessness, their unpredictable and violent behavior, may be seen as a force for growth and change in Bellonan life. Like other outlaws, they break the stasis that has overcome society, as illustrated in particular by their first raid on the Emboriky department store where they disrupt and permanently alter the small society of people living there (pp. 369-83). Thus Kid is not only in a situation in which he is free to become himself outside the constraints of any settled social order; apparently he can also influence the forms society takes. Further mythical overtones surround the scorpions and their activity, for much as notorious outlaws have become larger than life in American consciousness, the scorpions have literally become larger than life in Bellonan consciousness by means of the images they project for themselves with their holographic light-shields. They also, and Kid among them, adhere to an unspoken code of behavior—as an outsider discovers when he violates that code (pp. 774-78). The idea of such a code among outlaws is at least as old as the myth of the outlaw itself.

Nonetheless, the view of the American outlaw in *Dhalgren* ends up an ironic one. The scorpions appear to be lawless and free to mold their own destinies, but actually they are restricted by their own directionlessness. They have no plan of action, no goals; most of their time is spent watching "the dull sky slipping" (p. 809). Kid, as their leader, neither grows into selfhood nor visibly affects the forms of society. He realizes that although "people think of us as energetic, active, violent. At any time . . . a third of us are asleep and half have not been out of the nest for two, three, four days . . ." (p. 836). Further, as a force for change set in an already confusing and mutable context, the scorpions have no real sting. They frighten most other inhabitants of Bellona, but they are largely ineffectual. The Richards simply try to move out of their reach at the Labrys apartments, and Calkins' group, on the night the scorpions attend his big party, uses them as a source of entertainment. The American outlaw, to gain mythical stature, must do something purposeful and spectacular; the scorpions do neither. Their dull lives undercut any mythical view. In its ironic denial of the substance of the outlaw-hero myth, as in its similar denials of other aspects of American romantic individualism, *Dhalgren* creates again a double perception of American assumptions. Viewed from this double perspective, what American consciousness presumes to be true is not necessarily what really happens.

Another major, typically American, preoccupation in *Dhalgren* is the hunger for absolutes which emerges in Kid's quest. American society has been characterized by a kind of cultural Manichaeism; things are either right or wrong, good or evil, and this concern has dominated much American fiction.[9] Ahab is metamorphosized into evil incarnate by choosing to believe that Moby-Dick is evil; Hester Prynne redeems herself through absolute expiation of sin, and even Silas Lapham, with his business morality, repudiates his fortune for the sake of moral unrightness. In Kid, *Dhalgren* too contains such absolutism. As Ahab wishes to pierce the "paste-board mask" in *Moby-Dick*, Kid wishes to "'reach up and peel off all that sky'" (p. 421). We are further reminded of Ahab's absolutism when Kid sees "pale leviathans" in the skies outside the Labrys apartments (p. 246). In fact, Kid's whole quest for identity, love, sanity, and artistry is a quest for absolute truth. Being "Kid" is identity enough for the context of Bellona; yet Kid pursues his true name. Being loved by Lanya and Denny is love enough; yet Kid is haunted by reminders of the woman who turned into a tree. Being assured by Madame Brown that he copes adequately with his surroundings is sanity enough; yet Kid continues to fear that he is crazy. Being the author of *Brass Orchids* is artistry enough; yet Kid fears that somehow his poems are not "good" poems and that good poetry cannot be written by a "bad" person (pp. 393-94). Kid's search for absolutes culminates in his interview with Calkins at the monastery. Although it is Calkins he has wanted to see, Kid keeps turning the conversation back to the mysterious Father who heads the monastery, and asks three times, "'Is the Father a good man?'" (pp. 819-22). Calkins' reply pinpoints the issue: "'You're afraid that for want of one good man the city shall be struck down?'" (p. 820).

The trouble is that the only thing absolute about Bellona is its relativity. Bellona is, as one critic puts it, a moral labyrinth, "itself the projection of the hero's moral confusion."[10] The landscape in which Kid's moral search is set is a subjective, mutable one in which any such absolutism is simply irrelevant. Kid has picked the most ironic location possible in which not to be satisfied with relative answers. Predictably, his search is futile. Kid's reaction to not receiving the answers he seeks heightens the irony related to his search for them in the first place. The difference between Kid and Ahab or Hester Prynne is that the latter characters confront the dilemmas with which they are faced and make moral decisions which determine their subsequent actions, whereas Kid simply records moral crises such as his

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interview with Calkins in his notebook and goes on drifting from one situation to another, his choices apparently not affected one way or the other. He comes to embody neither evil, like Ahab, nor redemption, like Hester Prynne; his quest for truth finally leaves him unchanged, and herein lies the irony in *Dhalgren*'s treatment of moral absolutism—traditional expectations are raised, then thwarted. Again readers are left aware both of archetypal American patterns and of their unworkability in actual practice.

In addition to these major thematic ironies, *Dhalgren* is filled with other significant ironies, such as the inversion of character stereotypes in the black man-white woman rape plot, in which George is the knowledgeable, sensitive individual and June is driven by her lusts, perhaps even to murdering her brother. By means of such inversions, readers are not allowed to come away from *Dhalgren* without an ironic double awareness of American experience, an awareness through which they are brought outside their standard perceptions, outside the "old stories" they may have assumed to be "true" to a new perception of the "real" which cohabits American life. This new perception surely contains that "twoness" of which Du Bois speaks. One might add that such double consciousness pertains equally well to other non-dominant groups in American culture: For all such groups, dominant cultural assumptions are ironically unworkable. Bellona's name, that of a minor Roman war goddess, suggests the conflict between "'the true and the real,'" but it would be a mistake to view *Dhalgren*'s presentation of this "war" in American awareness as a didactic one. Delany is not a didactic writer, and *Dhalgren* is not a didactic work. Rather, it is a holistic one.

Bellona, as a symbolic center of American consciousness, embodies in its interactions with Kid the *whole* of American experience, and for that reason, "Very few suspect the existence of this city. It is as if not only the media but the laws of perception themselves have redesigned knowledge and perception to pass it" (pp. 15-16). It takes a certain doubleness of perception to be able to see Bellona, for it is a place in which a person can become an initiate and still not learn, in which he can build a new life and still not have a home, in which he can seek a moral basis for life and then forget his moral concern in going about his life. In Bellona, these dualities accumulate, so that at times the city's streets seem to "'underpin all the capitals of the world'" while at other times the whole place seems "'a pointless and ugly mistake'" (p. 395). Through such ironies, *Dhalgren* confronts and embraces the doubleness of American life.

Operating very much in accord with MacLeish's injunction that "a poem should not mean/but be,"[11] Delany does not use this ironic mode or elicit its contingent double consciousness in his readers in order to instruct them in some message about American life. In fact, he has cautioned readers about trying to pin *Dhalgren* down to a particular meaning.[12] Rather, he gently leads his audience back to the experience he has created, and back, and back again. For however we view *Dhalgren*'s structure, whether as a circle, a Moebius strip, a series of perceptions and perspectives like those provided by Kid's optic chain,[13] or even as a subjective account of events recorded by a dyslexic epileptic,[14] the fact is that this is a structure which does not point outward to any external message but continually returns its focus to itself, to the experience it embodies. Denny's book of M. C. Escher prints is a key here, since Escher's experiments in perspective often combine inside and outside so that images flow endlessly back into themselves. It is through this sort of topology that *Dhalgren* captures that American experience which is hard to see unless one can see double. All events—both mythical and, ironically, anti-mythical—return to themselves: The reader does not journey through them to some conclusion and new beginning as is the case with much of the apocalyptic literature echoed by the disaster in Bellona; he or she simply is brought into and left with experience itself. In this sense, *Dhalgren* "exposes" rather than teaches, does not "mean," but *is*.

This nonjudgmental quality of *Dhalgren* is one of its many strengths. The novel's ironies serve to widen its readers' field of vision by bringing them into contact with the complicated reality of there being more than just archetypal possibilities in American experience. But *Dhalgren* makes no pretense of weighing that experience in terms of positive and negative, right and wrong any more than Ishmael, for instance, chooses between Ahab and Starbuck. "'I can't judge,'" Newboy says, "'because I am still in it. Frankly I will not be able to judge once out of it'" (p. 395). Even Kamp, the American astronaut who searches while in Bellona for the clear and simple truth of stars and is thwarted by the ambiguous veil of fog which shrouds the city, sees that America is "'such a big country now .... I guess it's hard for *any*one to know ...'" (p. 781). America is like Bellona, a "great maze—forever adjustable, therefore unlearnable—" (p. 426). What Delany, as a black writer, does in *Dhalgren* is to superimpose the "real" upon the "true" in such a way that readers are brought to that double consciousness concomitant with a complete view of American life. The country cannot be taught by *Dhalgren* or any other book, and it cannot be learned by readers of books, but its essence can be shaped in loops of words containing both its myths and ironic denials of those myths. The experience of America is one of the experiences created by *Dhalgren*. What the reader does with that experience is up to him or her.

NOTES

[1]An unpublished manuscript circulated by the author, pp. 9-10, 23.

[2]Emerson Littlefield, "The Mythologies of Race and Science in Samuel R. Delany's *The Einstein Intersection* and *Nova*," *Extrapolation*, 23 (1982), 235-42; Jane B. Weedman, *Samuel R. Delany* (Mercer Island, WA: Starmont House, 1982).

[3]*Samuel R. Delany*, pp. 61, 12.

[4]Rpt. in *Three Negro Classics*, ed. John Hope Franklin (New York: Avon, 1965), pp. 214-15.

[5]Interview with Samual R. Delany in Charles Platt, *Dream Makers: The Uncommon People Who Write Science Fiction* (New York: Berkley Books, 1980), p. 73.

[6]Ibid., pp. 72-73.

[7]Samuel R. Delany, *Dhalgren* (New York: Bantam, 1975), pp. 13, 816. This and subsequent in-text page references are to the 1976 9th printing of *Dhalgren*, containing the author's corrections to the original printing.

[8]See Douglas Barbour's *Worlds Out of Words: The SF Novels of Samuel R. Delany* (Frome, Somerset: Bran's Head Books, 1979), p. 92.

[9]See Richard Chase's *The American Novel and Its Tradition* (New York: Anchor Books, 1957), p. 11.

[10]George Edgar Slusser, *The Delany Intersection: Samuel R. Delany Considered as a Writer of Semi-Precious Words* (San Bernardino: Borgo Press, 1977), p. 62.

[11]In *Ars Poetica*.

[12]"Of Sex, Objects, Signs, Systems, Sales, SF and Other Things," p. 27.

[13]Barbour, pp. 108-12.

[14]Weedman, pp. 63-65.

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