

UDK: 821.111(73).09
Izvorni znanstveni članak
Primljeno: 15. 4. 2016.

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FOUCAULT'S HETEROTOPIA IN DELANY'S NEVÈRYON CYCLE

Abstract

This article analyzes the four books of Samuel R. Delany's *Nevèryon cycle*: *Tales of Nevèryon* (1979), *Nevèryona, or: The Tale of Signs and Cities* (1983), *Flight from Nevèryon* (1985) and *Return to Nevèryon* (1987). Michel Foucault's concepts of heterotopia, genealogy, biopolitics and reverse discourse are used to show how a sign of slavery in the novels, the slave collar, is used to create a heterotopia in which dominant discourse is reversed. This thesis starts by taking Foucault's concepts heterotopia and biopolitics to show how they relate to discourse and illustrate that certain notions we see as inherent are anything but. It continues by putting them in context with Delany and his work in order to demonstrate their correlation to discourse and how these concepts are involved in shaping discourse itself. We outline the dominant sexual discourse of our time better to understand Delany's need for subverting such discourse and the revolutionary stance he takes in his work by reversing it in a Foucauldian manner. Reading their work together shows that the key step in creating a heterotopia in fiction is not so much distancing oneself from universal thought, but rather, embracing a universal multiplication of discourses, which must be done with caution so as not to fall into the trap of binary oppositions.

Key words: Samuel Delany, *Nevèryon cycle*, Michel Foucault, heterotopia, slavery

1. Introducing heterotopias and Delany

There is a scarcity of sustained academic writing on Samuel Delany in Croatia, and especially of his works informed by the writings of Michel Foucault. There has been important work done on the relationship between gender and utopia in science fiction by Ana Maskalan at the Institute for Social Research in Zagreb (Maskalan 2006; Maskalan 2009) and work on Foucault and power by Rade Kalanj (Kalanj 1993) and Foucault and biopolitics by Marijan Krivak (Krivak 2008). However, only Darko Suvin has provided a key direct connection linking both Delany and Foucault. In a short comment in *Defined by a Hollow*, Suvin simply states that regarding

heterotopia, »The best theoretical example is of course Foucault, and the best fictional one his disciple Samuel Delany's *Triton*...« (Suvin 2010: 129). One of the aims of this paper is to flesh out Suvin's connection by showing how the creation of a *heterotopic* space in Delany's fiction can lead to a change in discourse.

Some of Foucault's key concepts such as *heterotopia*, *genealogy*, and *biopolitics* are used to examine the issues of power, race, S&M and slavery in Delany's Nevèrjón cycle: *Tales of Nevèrjón* (1979), *Nevèrjóna, or: The Tale of Signs and Cities* (1983), *Flight from Nevèrjón* (1985) and *Return to Nevèrjón* (1987). The reason this cycle is used rather than *Triton* is because the scope of the books offers a wider-ranging vision of what a heterotopia might entail. The *slave collar* has been chosen as the key trope which allows one to read into Delany's text with more insight. The various meanings of *the slave collar* in the four books highlight the arbitrariness of meaning and the importance of keeping that faculty of language in mind when constructing discourse. Saying that Delany's work can change or steer the way we think and talk of sex is, if not naïve, then at least too high a demand on a single writer that has already taken his place as a writer of queer and racially marked characters in a genre that was up until very recently relatively closed to representations of characters that do not fit into the hetero normative standard. In *Mother Jones*, Michael Goodwin talks of the sexual revolution in science fiction and states that »Samuel Delany has been the cutting edge of the SF revolution for more than ten years. He works within the tradition SF iconography (spaceships, and cyborgs) but his characters come straight from Desolation Row« (Goodwin 1976: 62). His work can be perceived as a challenging example of the way the issues of the day (the portrayal of African Americans in fiction, homosexuals in fiction) are treated in literature. And Delany consciously sets out to create a space for alternate ways of being, and he consciously takes Foucault's concept of *heterotopias* as a guide. In fact, the reason for Suvin's comment above is that Delany uses Foucault's concept in the subtitle of his 1976 novel *Trouble on Triton: An Ambiguous Heterotopia*, written in response to Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Dispossessed: An Ambiguous Utopia* (1974) (cf. Delany 1999: 321–2). Thus we can take Delany's creation of a space for alternative identities to be, at least in part, a conscious dialogue with Foucault, which deserves attention.

As the title of Delany's *Triton* suggests, for Foucault the concept of *heterotopia* is connected to his vision of utopia. As Foucault argues:

First there are the utopias. Utopias are sites with no real place. They are sites that have a general relation of direct or inverted analogy with the real space of Society. They present society itself in a perfected form, or else society turned upside down, but in any case these utopias are fundamentally unreal spaces. ... Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality. Because these places are absolutely different from all the sites that they reflect and speak about, I shall call them, by way of contrast to utopias, heterotopias (Foucault 1984: 3–4).

Heterotopias are thus created in conjunction with utopias, although outside of them. They are counter-sites which allow for inversions of representations to take place. A *non-heterotopic* space found in Foucault's study of 17th-century society will be helpful in developing this idea:

Sexuality was carefully confined; it moved into the home. The conjugal family took custody of it and absorbed it into the serious function of reproduction. On the subject of sex, silence became the rule. The legitimate and procreative couple laid down the law (Foucault 1990: 3).

Foucault thus describes non-heterotopic space as confined, housed, in custody, a function of reproduction, full of silence, a place of the law, a model and a norm; on the other hand he describes heterotopic space as no real space, inversion, upside down, unreal, counter and contested. *The slave collar* in Delany's work functions as a signifier of heterotopic space, and at least one of its bearers insists on wearing it even when he has broken the shackles of slavery. However, in order to understand how this trope functions, a further development of non-heterotopic space, under the term *biopolitics*, is necessary.

1.1. *Biopolitics*

Foucault states that in the 17th century sexuality was to be 'exercised' in the home of the married couple, meaning that the people reproduced 17th-century norms themselves, from below, rather than having them explicitly imposed from above. This is what Foucault terms *biopolitics*, meaning the way in which biological existence reflects political existence. In other words, biopolitics is the mechanism for the creation of *non*-heterotopic space. Foucault defines the mechanism of biopolitics thus:

...it had to have methods of power capable of optimizing forces, aptitudes, and life in general without at the same time making them more difficult to govern. If the development of the great instruments of the state, as *institutions* of power, ensured the maintenance of production relations, the rudiments of anatomo- and bio-politics, created in the eighteenth century as *techniques* of power present at every level of the social body and utilized by very diverse institutions (the family and the army, schools and the police, individual medicine and the administration of collective bodies), operated in the sphere of economic processes... (Foucault 1990: 141; 144).

Thus, biopolitics means the establishment of a consciously developed (often medical) discourse on sex embedded in the *collective consciousness*. Gary Gutting, in *Michel Foucault's Archeology of Scientific Reason*, informs us that the creation of such a collective consciousness was, according to Foucault, the result of a shift in the way medicine was perceived (where the medical body replaces the clergy, with power over bodies as the clergy had over the soul) (Gutting 1989: 116).

This concept of a *medicine of normality* stands in direct contrast to heterotopic spaces that represent an 'other' to the collective consciousness. In an interview James O'Higgins conducted with Foucault the latter develops this idea of *collective consciousness*, which can have an effect similar to belonging to a secret society in that it marks an awareness of being a member of a social group, »this aspect of collective consciousness changes over time and varies from place to place. It has, for instance, on different occasions taken the form of being a member of a particular social group. This is an undeniable fact that dates back to ancient times« (Foucault 1990: 288).

In the example above of the family policing the rules of sexuality themselves, we can say in a shorthanded manner that a non-heterotopic space was determined by biopolitics through the collective consciousness of the time.

However, the task Foucault performed is not just limited to developing the terminology used in the past, but is important because it helps one understand how discourse functions today. This is a very important thing to remember because, as Delany notes in his *Queer Thoughts and the Politics of the Paraliterary*, the abstract categories which make up the collective conscience are a discourse that we participate in whether we are aware of it or not:

Abstract entities are a discourse. The person or a small dog we catch out of the corner of our eye when we know no person or dog is there becomes, when we fully look at it an overcoat hanging from a hook on the inside of the open closet door ... To become aware that some, if not all, of these mistaken perceptions relate to, if they are not controlled by, preexisting discourse (Delany 1999a: 27).

We may feel that the discourse has changed, but first it is important to understand how the discourse that we think is inherent to our being came to be, to trace its steps through history in an attempt of a better understanding of the dangers we face when applying it today.

Although this task is an impossible one, it is one which both Foucault and Delany attempt, and it is a key feature in the creation of heterotopic space. However, they attempt this task in different ways: as Foucault is mainly concerned with the connection between power and knowledge, Delany replaces power with desire. As Delany says: »Foucault gave us an analysis of power/knowledge. Desire/knowledge is just as important to understand – and, possibly and provisionally, in the current climate, even more so« (Delany 1999b: 139). Delany, in his *Queer Thoughts and the Politics of the Paraliterary* says that discourse is »what tells us what is central and what is peripheral ... it tells us what to pay attention to and what to ignore. It tells us what sort of attention to pay« (Delany 1990a: 11).

1.2. Genealogy as a way of understanding discourse

If we are to complicate this reading, it is important to mention the key issues Foucault formulates in his *History of Sexuality, Volume I*, keeping in mind the ways they relate to power. Foucault says, »The object in short, is to define the regime of power-knowledge-pleasure that sustains the discourse on human sexuality in our part of the world...to discover who does the speaking, the position and viewpoints from which they speak, the institutions which prompt people to speak about it and which store and distribute the things that are said« (Foucault 1990: 11). Thus, in the creation of a discourse on sex it is important to mention what Foucault calls *genealogy* in order to understand the discourse(s) we have before us today.

Thus the terms *genealogy* and *discourse* are two intricately related notions: discourses are not something that is intrinsic to human nature. That is why it is important for an individual to deconstruct the thoughts one may believe are intrinsic to who we are. And it is *genealogy* that reconstructs such thoughts and is that which aims at explaining how is it that such notions came to be as fixed as they are in order to

enable a change of the norm. What will be of concern for us it to develop a *genealogy* of sexual discourse in a selection of Delany's novels in order to understand how important it is to establish heterotopias, even if they are within spaces of fiction.

The aim is, in short, to approach the question Foucault poses: »what is given to us as universal, necessary, obligatory, what place is occupied by whatever is singular, contingent, and the product of arbitrary constraints?« (Foucault 1984: 45). To be able to answer this question it is important to introduce yet another of Foucault's concepts: *archeology*. Archeology is his historical method that he talks of in *The Archeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*: »Archeology tries not to define the thoughts, representations, images, and themes, preoccupations that are concealed or revealed in discourses; but those discourses themselves, those discourses as practices obeying certain rules« (Foucault 1972: 138). Archeology and genealogy are, as Una Crowley says, »two halves of a complimentary approach, alternating and supporting each other« (Crowley 2009: 4). The reason that both are important here is because Delany is painting a picture of a 'utopic heterotopia', meaning that he attempts to represent the way in which norms both have been constructed and a way they can be challenged on a universal scale. In other words, Delany creates heterotopias in which he very effectively points to the problems of a society that concentrates on maintaining just one norm while also foregrounding 'kink' as an alternative way of living.

Foucault notes a change in the exercise of power in the 17th and 18th century France which is important to note because it shows the move from the sovereign ruling over individuals to the individuals' following a norm without the direct involvement of the law, in other words, the birth of biopolitics. This notion is important for our discussion because it shows how once that a norm and a discourse are established, there is no more need for structured and official penalizing of its disruption.

The 18th century saw the 'policing' of sex. The reason behind this is, as Foucault notes, the emergence of 'population' meaning that the government no longer dealt simply with an individual but with a population. This resulted in an analysis of the sexual behavior of the nation and the effects of that very behavior because if one took time for pleasure they took time *away* from work and productivity; it was important to »expel from reality the forms of sexuality that were not amenable to the strict economy of reproduction« (Foucault 1990: 36). Thus sex became biopolitics. In accordance with this, all and any sexual behaviors that were seen as straying from this path were legally sanctioned. This led to an investigation of those seen as being deviant and here we have, for the first time, a multiplication of sexual discourses that arose from finding the answers to questions of why the perverse act the way they do and what way is there to change it and prevent it as a means of finding a better discourse on sex; this, in a strange way, also creates a language of subcultures and counter-places, in other words, of heterotopias. For sex, in its permissible form, moved into the family sphere and from within it came the seeking out of the perverseness of the individual (the masturbating child, the hysterical mother); it became the conveyor of law and the means of deployment of sexuality so that »the law would be secure, even within the new mechanics of power« (Foucault 1990: 109).

To be clear, in Foucault's reading not everyone had the privilege of owning a sexual body, it did not matter to the bourgeois class whether there were deviants among the population as a whole, they only saw the need to maintain the purity of their own

families and class, and in this way such a construction mirrors the manner in which Delany's slaves will be able to have the space to create their own heterotopia. But again, as the need for a healthy and able working class and for the purity of the family line (as degeneracy was thought of being passed down and of having the ability to infect the entire society) arose, society as a whole was also awarded a sexual body. In conclusion, what happened was that gradually and by different means, the entire society was given a sexual body that is they were given a body now dealt with on a social rather than on an individual level. As Edwardo Mendieta notes in his essay »To Make and to Let Live – Foucault on Racism«, Foucault distinguishes two forms of power, one is the juridical form and the other is a disciplinary form. The latter:

...exerts force by normalizing and creating the conditions of surveillance that lead to the subjects' docility. It is a form of power that is diffused and does not act on individuals, but determines a horizon of action. It does not discipline, but normalizes. It does not operate on juridical rules, on rights, but on norms and standards that refer to a social technology (Mendieta 2002: 2).

In other words, today there are not as many laws that sanction certain sexual performances; now there are more norms that are to be followed in a given society and it is the society that is tasked with 'sanctioning' the individual and those norms are a direct byproduct of the discourse that has been taking shape since the seventeenth century, as delineated above. Now that we have begun to have an understanding on what the norm is and how it came to be the norm, we can introduce Delany and his efforts to point to the dangers of an uninformed following and blind acceptance of a given discourse and his attempts at inverting it.

2. *The Nevèryon cycle*

Nevèryon is a place of travel, change and exchange; it is a land of different personalities that are part of a story of diversity, bigotry, power and control.

Gorgik is the only character that appears as an active participant in all the books of the cycle. Gorgik was born a free boy, however, after a change in the aristocratic dynasties he was enslaved and his parents were murdered. He was a slave in the obsidian mines in the Faltha Mountains from whence he was freed by the Vizerine Myrgot. Once again a free man, he decides to put an end to slavery in his land and embarks on a journey that stretches through the four books. This journey is marked by contemplations on power and the various forms it takes, along with musings on language, gender and sexuality. The slaves in the books are represented through the character of Gorgik, and as mentioned before, there are norms that apply to the aristocracy but not to the slaves. Gorgik fights slavery while at the same time establishing a new form of heterotopia that is to be based on giving new meaning to the collar that represents slavery.

The first book in the series, *Tales of Nevèryon* introduces the readers to the land about to be travelled, first through the eyes of Gorgik, born a free boy, enslaved and then. In the process of becoming a successful merchant, he purchases Small Sarg, a barbarian prince who later becomes his fellow crusader in the fight against slavery and those who condone it. Readers are then introduced to Old Venn, a wise and accomplished old woman who acts as an educator to the children of a small seaside

town. Through the stories she tells the children, the readers learn of the various roles women assume in Nevèrjon and of the differences between them and the women of barbaric tribes. Noreema is one of her students and through her interpretation of the old woman's stories the author offers commentary on society, monetary politics, and the different ways sexuality is perceived in different places.

The second book, *Nevèrjona or the Tale of Signs and Cities* centers on Pryn, an extraordinary young girl travelling the land. As we learn through her character, Gorgik's campaign has spread as she encounters both his supporters and his enemies. Her travels offer an insight into the struggles of peasants and the attempts of the nobility to end Gorgik's campaign to free the slaves.

In the third book, *Flight from Nevèrjon*, various minor characters try to use Gorgik's notoriety and fame to their own ends by impersonating him. Gorgik feels the effect of this turn of events. Through a story he tells to a young man he encounters he defends his sexual leanings and portrays all the difficulties and ambiguities those feelings pose to him. The succeeding tale revolves around a young smuggler and his lifelong friendship with a mummer. The mummer recounts the smuggler's story and the story of their friendship to an intellectual and a patron of the arts, implying there is a connection between the intellectual and the smuggler who fell into madness and crime, connected by sexual desire. The tale that follows shifts between the fictional world Delany created and New York City of the 1980s. A plague rampages through the capitol of Nevèrjon, Kolhari, as HIV/AIDS does through the USA. The shift is used to parallel the handling of the situation by the inhabitants of both New York and Kolhari.

The final book in the series, *Return to Nevèrjon*, finds Gorgik successful in his attempt to end slavery. However, their troubles do not end there as now another difficulty poses itself, that of integrating the former slaves into society. The book ends by going back in time and re-introducing Gorgik, as was done at the beginning of the series.

2.1. Introducing the collar

Delany and Foucault share similar interests in the themes they explore, one of which is *power*, the way it is perceived and how it can be used. Others are *sexuality* and *desire*, and when these notions come together they form a discourse on S&M.

What Delany does in his series can be connected to Foucault's first volume of *History of Sexuality*. Much as how Foucault explores the way certain themes like sexuality in children became interesting to doctors, artists and the public itself, Delany develops the symbol of *the collar*, exploring the history and the various meanings it has for different classes of people. Delany does this as a means of developing a fictitious history of the creation of discourse on S&M, where S&M is just a part of a larger metaphor of heterotopia. In Delany's *Queer Thoughts and the Politics of the Paraliterary*, he informs his readers that certain objects influence the evolution of discourse, as was the case with the invention of the lead paint tube which allowed artists to travel and move from their studios in order to create their work, resulting in the birth of Impressionism. Taking into account what Delany says of Foucault's contribution to discourse – »Foucault warns us from the idea of founding subjects, originating experiences, universal mediation and the tyranny of the signifier« (Delany 1990a: 23), we see a connection between the ideas of the two authors. While Foucault talks of genealogy, Delany goes one step further and shows us that he is not

only avoiding »the tyranny of the signifier« but changing it altogether through the concept of the slave collar.

The collar is introduced in the first book of the series, *The Tales of Nevèrÿon*, as a sign of ownership: »When he saw the iron collar around the boy's neck, Gorgik stopped walking, thinking, breathing. There was a thud, thud, thud in his chest... the next thing Gorgik saw were the scars...They were from a flogging. In provincial villages, he knew, whipping was used to punish criminals. And, of course, slaves« (Delany 1979: 32). These scars on the bodies of slaves throughout the book assume at least two different meanings. If one is free and bears scars from a flogging, he/she is considered a criminal and is less likely to fit in. If a person wears a collar and bears scars, it is considered normal as one is considered not to have agency over their own body.

We learn of a different use for the collar as Gorgik buys the small barbarian prince (Sarg) who is quite perplexed at his owner's wish to have sex with him because, as he states, »You're a man. That is what boys do, away from the village huts, off in the forest. You become a man, you take a woman and you do it in a house with her. You don't do it with boys in the woods anymore« (Delany 1979: 153). This instant in the book calls to mind Foucault speaking of the simple-minded peasant that propositioned young girls which, until the secularization of sex, no one seemed to mind, »At the border of a field, he had obtained a few caresses from a little girl, just as he had done before and seen done by village urchins« (Foucault 1990: 31), which is what happens in Nevèrÿon at this point of the story. At this time, Sarg is still within the time and space frame where secular observations on the collar and on sex in general do not enter his field of thought. His sexual practices are still within the boundaries of what he learned while he was with his tribe and they do not have overtones of social importance.

This is Sarg's first encounter with the collar, so for him the notion of it being a mark of ownership is relatively new, while its use for sexual purposes is something he is only discovering. The collar is beginning to create a heterotopia, by engaging in play-slavery. By means of this play new identities are formed, those of master and slave. Yet these identities must come full circle in order for the heterotopia to be established. When the collar is worn as a mark of property, the identity of the person who wears it is that of a slave. Its meaning is already socially established and recognized. When worn during a sex act, another new identity is formed, one that is flexible and, more importantly (and rarely), one which can be abandoned. However, when Gorgik, a former slave, wears the collar both in public and during sex, it circles back to having an identity that must be socially defined; thus the collar's meaning is once again revisited. This can be seen in the following quotation. In response to the little barbarian's question on whether he was going to take the collar off Gorgik indicates:

“No,” Gorgik said. “You keep it on.” Looking up at the barbarian, he snorted again. “You see ... if one of us does not wear it, I will not be able to ... do anything.” At the barbarian's puzzled look, Gorgik raised one bushy eyebrow and gave a small nod. “And right now, I do not feel like wearing it ... at least tonight. Some other night I will take it off you and put it on myself. Then we will do it that way” (Delany 1979: 154).

In this passage the collar turns from an object that represents ownership to an

object that represents desire. What we have here is a personal *genealogy*, the path of signification that the collar has for Gorgik. In an interview conducted by B. Gallagher and A. Wilson, Foucault addresses the nature of S&M as a sexual practice and the way it establishes a dialogue with politics and power. The following statement is of importance for the entire thesis and can also intensify the reading of Delany's books:

One can say that S&M is the eroticization of power, the eroticization of strategic relations. What strikes me in regard with S&M is how it differs from social power. What characterizes power is the fact that it is a strategic relation which has been stabilized through institutions. So the mobility in power relations is limited ... On this point, the S&M game is very interesting because it is a strategic relation, but it is always fluid (Foucault 1984: 169).

What Foucault is aiming at here is a reconfiguration of the uses of desire. The eroticization of power means the stabilization of desire through institutions. This is dangerous because the structure of desire is to be never-ending. Desire perpetuates desire, this is why desire is not about the object obtained (which can never fulfill desire) but rather about the process of desiring. This biopolitical reading of desire follows certain strands of Jacques Lacan, as summarized here by Bruce Fink: »It is Lacan's theory of the object as *cause* of desire, not as something which could somehow *satisfy* desire that allows us to understand certain of Lacan's innovations in analytic technique« (Fink 1997: xiii). The fluidity that Foucault indicates in the quote above arises from the presence of desire in a heterotopia, rather than its being eroticized by social power.

Apart from the very personal and fluid meaning it has for Gorgik, the collar also gains a secular meaning. Giving the collar new meaning is what Gorgik, as a representative of the 'other', tries to do. In this sense he practices fluidity. Unfortunately, for some in the novels the collar merely represents a fun fetish and not much more. A mere secularization of the collar when it comes to its use in sex is counterproductive for Gorgik's goals because he is fighting a system from within, using its own 'artillery' by choosing on his own what role to play, a strategy which today is becoming known as *acceleration* (Srnicek and Williams 2013). When the collar becomes a mere fetish in Nevèryon, everyone is again 'stuck' in the institutionalization. The person that seeks someone wearing a collar on the Bridge of Lost Desire is in position of setting the terms which takes away the fluidity of S&M.

After years of struggling and guerilla fighting against the slaveholding system, Gorgik finally reaches the position of Minister and realizes his goal of abolishing slavery in all of Nevèryon. *Flight from Nevèryon*, the third book, finds him considered a legend. The collar he wears in public until all slaves are free becomes associated not only with his struggle but also with his fetish. From his very first encounter with the collar he was fascinated by it, perhaps the strangeness of it coupled with his enslavement that happened not long after were the reasons it became a fetish at all. Gorgik is a public person and his use of the collar is no secret. The act of always wearing it in public and the knowledge that he uses it during sex make his fetish heterotopic because he wants the freedom to wear the collar as he pleases. The mobility of the power relation is what excites him: the collar is merely a sign that represents that mobility in S&M and its fixed property in institutions. In the interview mentioned above, Gallagher and Wilson also talk to Foucault about resistance and how it is not

merely an act of saying no. Foucault's answer to this is that in S&M:

There are roles, but everybody well knows that those roles can be reversed. Sometimes the scene begins with the master and slave, and at the end the slave has become the master. Or, even when the roles are stabilized, you know very well that it is always a game. Either the rules are transgressed, or there is an agreement ... But I wouldn't say it is a reproduction, inside the erotic relationship, of the structures of power. It is an acting-out of power structures by a strategic game that is able to give sexual pleasure or bodily pleasure (Foucault 1984: 169).

So what happens with S&M is the creation of both pleasure and identity. Wilson and Gallagher summarize that: »to resist is not simply a negation but a creative process; to create and recreate, to change the situation« (1984: 168). If Gorgik had simply taken the collar off altogether after becoming a free man, his resistance to the system would merely be represented through his scars, which would show that he did in fact rebel at one point. By wearing it as a free man he forces a new meaning upon it. Even if S&M does not reproduce power structures but merely acts them out, the very creation of freely moving between the two identities of slave and master is a freedom not previously possessed. Furthermore, by wearing the collar even when he is not engaged in a sexual act he flows between these roles, imposing on society a challenge to create a new 'category' for him, one which is unstable. He becomes a *heterotopic* character. He cannot change the relations of power and the power of discourse within the institution but he can change them within a practice that mimics this institution. *He* himself speaks of the times he fantasized of running away from the mines and how in his mind »the very sign of my servitude, the iron at my neck, would be taken by all I met as a symbol of transcendent freedom« (Delany 1987: 34). This would be so because he would represent a member of a heterotopic society within a world in which, without an owner, the collar has no meaning. He would be out of place and out of signification for those around him, thus allowing the collar to obtain a new meaning.

2.2. Reverse discourse

Gorgik explains the multiple meanings that the collar may have to two women traveling together. They are Raven and Noreema, who live in a world where barbarians, who have white skin and fair hair, are slaves to those of darker skin, such as Gorgik, who are their owners. It is true that he bought Small Sarg and that in that moment he participated in the institution he is fighting against, as Jeffrey Allen Tucker says of the novel, »wanting freedom for oneself does not necessarily prevent one from taking it away from others« (Tucker 2004: 113). A sexual relationship between a slave and his/her master is not considered an uncommon one, while a relationship in which the pair declares themselves as lovers and free people who are able to use a socially powerful sign as a means of achieving sexual pleasure is all but normal. While one might say that sexuality should not be defined at all, sexuality has already entered the realm of language and thus the land of discourse; so if one intends to talk of it he/she is left with no other choice but to use the words others have coined and put to use so that is out of one's hands. What can be done is what Delany is doing, using the words, notions and ideas we recognize and associate to a particular context and put

them in a new one; this is what Foucault terms *reverse discourse*: »to speak in its own behalf ... There is not on the one side, a discourse of power, and opposite it, another discourse that runs counter it. Discourses are tactical elements or blocks operating in the field of force relations ... they can circulate without changing their form from one strategy to another« (Foucault 1990: 101-102).

In order to enact reverse discourse Gorgik takes the slave collar that is socially associated with slavery, degradation and ownership and dons it willingly in order to experience those same feelings in a sexual and mutually consensual context. Within the story, Gorgik wearing the collar as a free man is, as Tucker says of the novel, »shifting the site of the collar's operation from a strictly social context to a political context ... In other words, changing the meaning of the collar is almost as radical as abolishing slavery« (Tucker 2004: 138). This can be seen in a conversation he and Sarg have with Noreema and Raven:

Gorgik, sitting with one arm over one knee said: "We are both free men. For the boy the collar is symbolic of our mutual affection, our mutual affection, our mutual protection. For myself it is sexual, a necessary part in the pattern that allows both action and orgasm to manifest themselves within the single circle of desire. For neither of us is its meaning social, save that it shocks, offends or deceives." ... "As one word uttered in three different situations may mean three entirely different things, so the collar worn in three different situations may mean three different things. They are not the same: sex, affection and society," said Gorgik. "Sex and society relate like an object and its image in a reflecting glass. One reverses the other are you familiar with the phenomenon, for these *are* primitive times and mirrors are rare." (Delany 1979: 238-239).

The process of Gorgik doing this resembles the way people use, or rather do not use, the word 'nigger'. It is a derogatory term used to reference African-Americans and it is considered to be politically incorrect and rightfully so. It is not uncommon, however, to hear the word used by African-Americans as a kind of a title, much in the same way an obese person decides to call themselves fat in order to 'own' the word and in that way to strip the word of its power in case anyone else may decide to use it as an adjective added to their name or designated pronoun. Tucker says: »consider how epithets such as 'nigger' and 'queer' have recently been rearticulated by some segments of African American and gay communities, respectively as signs of community and purposeful transgression« (Tucker 2004: 138). Thinking again of Foucault and *reverse discourse*, it is clear that Gorgik is aware he is not 'outside' of power or discourse.

2.3. Biopolitics in reverse

The dialogic relationship of the work of Delany and Foucault emerges again when we think of Raven and Noreema's reaction to a form of sexual behavior unknown to them. They rationalize, take apart the protagonists of the act, and try to determine what their relationship *should* be: »we demand that sex speak the truth (but, since it is the secret and is oblivious to its own nature, we reserve for ourselves the function of telling the truth of its truth, revealed and deciphered at last)« (Foucault 1990: 71). The pair wants to fix the relationship between the men within known and normative

discursive practices. On the other hand, Gorgik's words mirror Foucault's when he says that sex and society are like an object and its image in a reflecting glass. Only in this society the rules are strict and one cannot generate new identities through it, but S&M offers the opportunity to change discourse through the very creation of new norms of behavior.

Thus there is a certain duality in Delany when it comes to sexuality. In interviews he openly and without constraint talks of his fetishes and sexual preferences, but when it comes to his characters, he never uses signifiers as we know them to point to a certain preference. This is because Delany has created labels which do not exist. He knowingly challenges the human need to define sexuality. The issue is not silenced; it is merely treated in a different way. If there is no word for homosexual, then there is no derogatory term for one either. Gorgik is not secretive about his use of the collar in his sexual adventures, and Tucker notes that »as radical as Gorgik's political recontextualization of the collar is, the Liberator engages in an even more drastic shift in its meaning« (Tucker 2004: 138).

Sylvia Kelso, in her »Across Never: Postmodern Theory and Narrative Praxis in Samuel R. Delany's NEVERÿON Cycle«, notes that:

In Nevèryon, the collar willingly donned, becomes a sign of slavery 'conquered,' but also of liberated transgressive same-sex desire ... The sign of black historical oppression thus becomes a facilitator of same-sex desire. And in this softened Elsewhere Delany can 'come out' to confront and remodel – mythicize, fantasize – the central trauma of Afro-American history (Kelso 1997: 294).

If we take Kelso's claim that a willing subjugation to play-slavery equals conquering real slavery into consideration, we find what Lewis Call claims to be true: »Kink theory interprets such power exchange as a viable ethical alternative to the non-consensual power structures which permeate the modern world« (Call 2011: 132), which would make Gorgik's sexual desires a sort of an inner rebellion that he can control. In other words, he was uncharacteristically enslaved and made to be a part of machinery that takes freedom away. By acting a part in the sexual play in which one of the people involved is enslaved by their own will, he regains at least a part of his freedom. To quote Highleyman, as found in Call,

In a typical BDSM relationship, the dominant desires the desire of the submissive. The submissive's desire frequently structures negotiations and determines the shape and extent of the scene. By endorsing and emphasizing the desire of the submissive, BDSM promotes a high level of equality between the participants (qtd. in Call 2011: 133).

The emphasis here is on the consensual nature of the BDSM relationship and the dialogic nature of Kelso's and Call's texts points to the importance of *reverse discourse* Foucault also places emphasis on and Delany chooses as a method of creating *heterotopias*.

Call goes on to note that »Like almost all of Delany's books, the Nevèryon stories draw very clear lines between non-consensual socio-economic power and consensual, desired erotic power. Delany is especially careful to distinguish slavery from play-

slavery« (Call 2011: 145); however, while Delany does distinguish between the two, he also uses the concepts of play-slavery to accentuate the atrocities of actual slavery and the traps and patterns of behavior one can easily fall into if adhering to the heteronormative rules of discourse. Tucker takes a different stand on this. With Gorgik's rise to fame so rose the number of people that engaged in sexual activity using the collar openly. He says that in this way »the Empire seeks to reclaim the humanity lost during slavery through this 'perverse' sexual practice« (Tucker 2004: 140), while this hardly seems to be the case. In fact, one might argue that this is a case of regaining mastery. Continuing with our reading of Tucker, it can be seen that Gorgik attempts what we could call a *biopolitics in reverse*, although Tucker does not reference Foucault in his analysis:

McClintock interprets S/M as similarly »self-consciously *antinature*«: S/M is less about inflicting or receiving pain than it is a »theatrical organization of social risk« that operates »with the utmost artifice and levity«. What Brechtian theatre does to human social gestures, S/M does to the relation of domination inherent to slavery; it reveals such a relation as »sanctioned neither by nature, fate nor God, but by artifice and convention and thus as radically open to historical change«...then Gorgik's engagement in such behavior does not contradict his campaign against slavery; rather we will see that his sexual desires actually inform his desire to transform Nevèrjon's sociopolitical landscape (Tucker 2004: 141).

This reading of Delany is a reading uninformed by Foucault, who argues that we are never outside of power, meaning that Gorgik did not fight slavery from the outside, on the contrary, he uses old discourse, one he belongs to in order to create a new one. S&M is not a mere facilitator of his fight against slavery; it is a tool for establishing new discourse within old discourse. This type of talking, writing and examining S&M is precisely the thing that Foucault calls for as it resembles the formation of the medical discourse on sex that caused a proliferation of discourse itself. Here we can come back to Call's questions: »Even as a radically contextual sign does the slave collar ever free itself from the contamination of the history of slavery? Does a residue of slavery remain attached to the collar even after the context has shifted? Does any of that history remain untransformed?« (Call 2011: 145). The answer is *no*. As Foucault notes how the regulation of behavior and subsequently discourse evolved from being regulated by the state to being regulated by society, we find a similar thing happening with Delany. Gorgik wearing the collar as the Liberator, and Gorgik wearing it as a sexual human being, are two different things, as he himself tries to explain to many of the characters in the book, but their notions of the collar are always going to be hinged with what they already know, with what they once represented, because it was presented as a universal truth.

2.4. Dangers of a fixed meaning of the collar

We can conclude this paper with a reading of the character of Sarg, who is unable to see the fluidity of the meaning attached to the collar. Sarg's tribe saw servitude as death so when he gets captured he is certain of it being the end of his life. Gorgik takes the collar off of him, only to put it back on again when they make love and successively when they start fighting the slave owners. Sarg only saw one side of

the collar and attributed to it a large amount of power, but according to Foucault, power is not centered in one thing, it does not have one single representation or an institution that enforces it. »By *power* I do not mean *Power* as a group of institutions and mechanisms that insure the subservience of the citizens of a given state ... I do not mean a mode of subjugation ... Finally, I do not have in mind a general system of domination exerted by one group over another ...« (Foucault 1990: 92). Sarg saw the collar as representing the exact opposite of what Foucault says here, he sees the collar as a sign of this twisted definition of power he attributed to it, and was unable to view it differently. In order to change discourse we must disintegrate our notions of the fixed and of the unchanging reality of things. That is something Sarg is unfortunately unable to do and something he is punished for by the author with his untimely death.

In the second book of the series, *The Tale of Signs and Cities*, we learn that Gorgik abandoned Sarg precisely because of his inability to see the changing nature of signs. He tells the tale of their parting to Pryn:

Sarg claimed he felt no bodily pleasure in the collar. Under the sun he and I wore it to advance our fight against slavery, to infiltrate and obliterate it. At night? Well, he tolerated it at first. Sometimes he laughed at it. Later he began to argue against it; and it was an argument much like the one I and you have sketched out: its oppressive meaning debased love; its sexual meaning made of slavery itself an even more terrifying mystery. Finally he refused to wear it any longer. Nor did I press him to it since he allowed it to me. But as Sarg wore the collar less and less by night, I could not help but notice the change in the *way* he wore it by day, while that is true, is not so much the point as that he now *insisted* on wearing it. Several times when we were camped outside a town, he wore the collar into the local market while he bought our supplies, whereupon he would brazenly insult, or cheat, or anger someone, then at their complaint, bring them to me, his 'master', and I would have to promise to discipline my 'slave' ... he wanted to be the one to play 'slave', as he would now chide me, first jokingly, then seriously, I could not be trusted in the role. For me, you see, it was too *charged* a sign ... it was always *my* overvaluation of the collar that was to blame for any fault I found in *his* actions while he wore it (Delany 1983: 181–182).

If we are to look at Foucault for the reason Sarg acted the way he did it was because he wanted the collar to have a utopic character, for, as Foucault says, »Utopias offer consolation: although they have no real locality,« which is »disturbing because ... they make it impossible to name *this* and *that*« (Foucault 2005: 19). When we hear Small Sarg tell his version of his relationship to Gorgik, it is hard not to draw a parallel between him and the more conservative folk who are unable to discern the powerful grasp that preexisting discourse has on them from their own thoughts and opinions. For Sarg there is no genealogy, he accepts what he is told of as truth. He finds it difficult to accept Foucault's suggestion of creating instead if only saying *no*. Here he says *no* to slavery but he also says *no* to the only person fighting it. He fails to realize that, as Gorgik's fetish is to be able to say *yes* or *no* to the collar, and to have the freedom to put it on someone else, the social component lies in creating new meaning for it and putting the old behind. Sarg, in his refusal, only foregrounds the strength of Gorgik's fight for the creation of a heterotopia.

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POJAM FOUCAULTOVE HETEROTOPIJE U DELANYJEVU NEVÈRYON CIKLUSU

Sažetak

Ovaj članak bavi se analizom četiriju knjiga Samuela R. Delanyja koje pripadaju njegovu Nevèryon ciklusu, *Tales of Nevèryon* (1979), *Nevèryona, or The Tale of Signs and Cities* (1983), *Flight from Nevèryon* (1985) te *Return to Nevèryon* (1987). Koristi se pojmovima Michela Foucaulta kao što su *heterotopija*, *genealogija*, *biopolitika* te *obrnuti diskurs* kako bi se pokazalo da se simbol robovlasništva, robovska ogrlica, može iskoristiti pri stvaranju heterotopije u kojoj dominantan diskurs mijenja pravac. Ovaj esej počinje s Foucaultovim konceptima *heterotopije* i *genealogije* kako bismo uputili na njihovu povezanost s diskursom i njihovom ulogom u njegovu stvaranju te kako bismo pokazali da su određena razmišljanja koja držimo prirođenima zapravo naučena. Zatim te pojmove kontekstualno povezujemo s Delanyjem i njegovim djelima radi isticanja njihovih dodirnih točaka s diskursom te na koji način ti pojmovi sudjeluju u stvaranju diskursa. Prikazujemo dominantni seksualni diskurs našeg doba da bismo bolje razumjeli Delanyjevu težnju da ga 'svrgne' te revolucionarno stajalište koje zauzima u svojim djelima mijenjanjući mu pravac u Foucaultovu stilu. Foucaultova i Delanyjeva djela pomogla su nam zaključiti kako je bitan korak u stvaranju *heterotopije* u književnosti ne samo odbacivanje jednoznačne misli već i prihvaćanje raznolikosti diskursa. Korak koji se ne smije olako shvatiti kako ne bismo ostali omeđeni binarnim opozicijama. Ovaj rad pokušava dokazati kako je to upravo ono što Delany u svojim književnim djelima postiže.

Ključne riječi: Samuel Delany, Nevèryon ciklus, Michel Foucault, heterotopija, ropstvo