



A Sense of Wonder: Samuel R. Delany, Race, Identity, and Difference

Jeffrey Allen Tucker

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Samuel R. Delany is one of today's most interesting writers. African-American and gay, Delany crosses boundaries—generic (science fiction, memoir, theory, pornography) and academic (literary studies, cultural studies, African-American studies, gay and lesbian studies). Critics both black and white have read Delany as a writer who downplays his racial identity in order to aspire to universal values. In contrast, *A Sense of Wonder* shows how Delany's works participate in African-American cultural traditions.

The book begins with an analysis of Delany's *Dhalgren*, using the novel's links to black cultural traditions as the key to unlocking its puzzling content. Jeffrey Allen Tucker's reading of the four-volume *Return to Nevèrÿon* series places Delany's explorations of semiotics in dialogue with Frederick Douglass's 1845 *Narrative and social histories on slavery in America*. From there, Tucker moves to Delany's groundbreaking autobiography, *The Motion of Light in Water*, his experimental novella *Atlantis: Model, 1925*, and to his pornographic novel, *The Mad Man*. Tucker's aim is to advance a reading of identity that acknowledges its multiplicity and permeability without emptying it of socio-political efficacy and meaning.

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