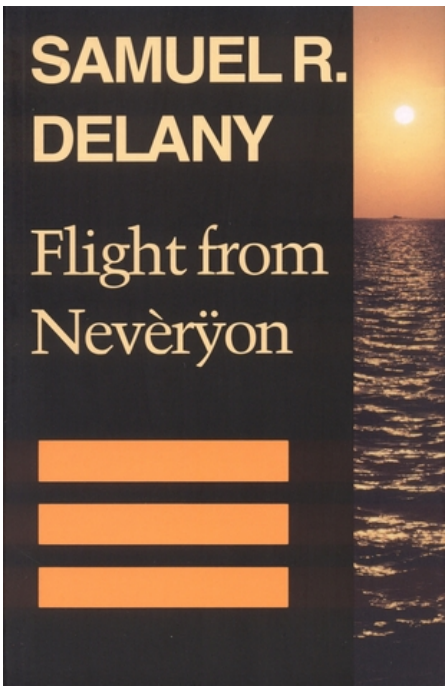

Flight from Nevèrÿon

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In his four-volume series *Return to Nevèrÿon*, Hugo and Nebula award-winner Samuel R. Delany appropriated the conceits of sword-and-sorcery fantasy to explore his characteristic themes of language, power, gender, and the nature of civilization. Wesleyan University Press has reissued the long-unavailable *Nevèrÿon* volumes in trade paperback.

The eleven stories, novellas, and novels in *Return to Nevèrÿon*'s four volumes chronicle a long-ago land on civilization's brink, perhaps in Asia or Africa, or even on the Mediterranean. Taken slave in childhood, Gorgik gains his freedom, leads a slave revolt, and becomes a minister of state, finally abolishing slavery. Ironically, however, he is sexually aroused by the iron slave collars of servitude. Does this contaminate his mission - or intensify it? Presumably elaborated from an ancient text of unknown geographical origin, the stories are sunk in translators' and commentators' introductions and appendices, forming a richly comic frame.

Flight from Nevèrÿon Details

Date	:	Published April 25th 1994 by Wesleyan University Press (first published May 1985)
ISBN	:	9780819562777
Author	:	Samuel R. Delany
Format	:	Paperback 376 pages
Genre	:	Fantasy, Fiction, Science Fiction, Science Fiction Fantasy, Glbt, Queer

From Reader Review Flight from Nevèrÿon for online ebook

Tim says

I read the first three volumes over the week. I don't think I'll be going on to the fourth just yet, but I may come back to it. There are going to be spoilers in this review.

Delany writes philosophical novels. Or perhaps he pastiches philosophical novels. Plato's dialogues lie behind several sections and almost the whole of volume 2 can be read as a cheerful response to Sade's 'Justine' Voltaire, Dostoevsky, and Anton Wilson drift in and out of the text. The author tackles psychology - mostly Freudian - economics (he's almost certainly wrong about the evolution from barter to money, which he seems to see as very important in the first volume, but which happily doesn't get much in the way of the rest of the series), literary theory and much, much more. Some of this rides with the story, but there are long passages which the reader may find pretentious, boring or mundane, depending on how much patience she has for academic quibbling.

Delany's lead character is the leader of a slave revolt - and comes across as a Staggerlee as in Nick Cave's version of the tale. It is a little mysterious as to why he acts as he does; in several places throughout the books it is suggested that slavery is, in any case, pretty much a thing of the past. And indeed, this rather peculiar hero never seems to do very much, slipping clandestinely from place to place, and holding meetings which finish in mayhem, as those he has - perhaps - betrayed discourage would-be followers and attempt to assassinate him. When he does move into action, he is as much concerned to realize his Hegelo-Sadian sexual fantasies as to make much difference to the wider world around him. Delany spends pages and pages on his fornications, particularly with his successive lieutenants, but relatively little on his political and military campaigns. And once Delaney has wound him up in the first book, he is pretty much left to tick his way through the following two as a background figure that gradually takes less and less space.

Delany is very much interested in gender questions, and several of the leading characters are women, particularly in the second volume. At one point, the heroine, a happier Justine, who is prone to embracing her opportunities rather than running away from them, finds herself caught up in a four-way drama of passion, setting up a rather interesting set of characters who then just disappear from view, to leave space for a rather pointless fellow who takes on the heroine's role as victim.

The third volume is perhaps the most intriguing and successful of the three, and its final section, which winds back and forth from the fantasy world to New York at the beginning of the AIDS epidemic, is, for the most part, wonderfully done.

Cécile C. says

Ouch... Ok, so let's start with the most important things. Delany is a very, very clever author. He's a keen observer of the world and he definitely can write. He can even write enjoyable books when he wants to. When he wants to make you think, though, you may come out of the book with a slight headache.

This is the third book in the Neveryon series, so I assume (as the author has) that if you are brave enough to carry on, you already expect to read about prehistorical barbarians exchanging very thoughful points of view about capitalism and psychoanalysis, not to mention the power of names and signs and of course, modular

calculus (whatever that is). You also know that after the novel proper is finished, you will come across an appendix about some mysterious Mesopotamian texts recently unearthed in the desert and containing mentions to names, places and events strangely similar to those in the book (you may also have already been puzzled by this unheard-of discovery, looked it up on the net and found out it was all Delany's invention), discussed by very renowned (and completely inexistent) archaeologists, putting the novel in an entirely new light. So now you are comfortably expecting to have understood what Delany was up to, and probably feeling a lot more confident and relaxed as you open the book.

Well, you won't be for very long. The first part, it's true, is pretty much what you must have got used to by now. The most surprising point in the second part is the way it is told, but otherwise, it's ok. And then, not halfway through the book, you reach the third part.

Have you ever read an SF novel where the point of view shifts every paragraph or so, never telling you exactly where it is picking up? All right, and one which alternates paragraph about a fantasy world and paragraphs about New York in the eighties, in full AIDS panic ? And that adds to the lot numerous comments about the art of writing, meanings, SF, disease, freudianism...? What is more, in its shifting between the colourful, if plague-ridden, world of Neveryon, and the atmosphere of profound despair of the gay community in New York before the discovery of the HIV virus, the story is deeply unsettling. You never feel you are wasting your time. It is fascinating, deeply intellectual and heart-rending at the same time.

Julene says

I took this book out from the library to read "Appendix A: The Tale of Plagues and Carnivals, or Some Informal Remarks toward Modern Calculus, Part Five." This is part diary, part of a breakdown of the series of books that make up author Samuel R. Delany's Flight From Neveryon, the last in a series titled Neveryon, where there is a deadly epidemic that mimics HIV/AIDS, which hit big cities in the early 1980s.

This Appendix is numbered into sections. Near the beginning, in section 2.2 Delaney starts by quoting Susan Sontag from her book Illness as Metaphor, "Diseases should not become social metaphors." She was addressing cancer and wrote her book in the late 1970s, before the AIDS epidemic was known. Delaney then writes, "When dieseases generate such metaphors, the host of misconceptions and downright superstitions that come from taking them literally (misconceptions that, indeed, often determine the metaphors themselves in a system of reciprocal stabiliation) make it impossibe, both psychologically and socially—both in terms of how you feel and how others, with their feelings, treat you—to "have the disease" in a "healthy" manner." In Section 3 he writes, "Perhaps the job is to find a better metaphor and elaborate it well enough to help stabilize those thoughts, images, or patterns that, in the long run, are useful—useful to those with the disease, to those who care for them, or even to those who only know about them. (Needless to say, what is useful in the long run is not, necessarily, in the short.) What is most useful in the long run is what destabilizes short-run strategies, the quick glyphs, the cliches, the easy responses history has sedimented." (This is the whole of Section 3.)

He weaves in and out of the story that must be from Neveryon, stopping to ask what an orthodox Freudian would say in a few sections. Later in Section 8 he introduces us to Joey a street hustler in NYC who he sees in his neighborhood and who he occasionally gives money to. Joey asks for help because a murderer is killing people who sleep on the streets. In Section 8.2 he has breakfast with a friend who works at a hospital and talks of how many AIDS cases are coming in daily. He assures her he is curtailing his sex outside his main relationship. (Samuel Delaney is a gay man who was also married and had an agreement with his wife.)

Section 8.21 he talks about the one person so far (1984) that he knows of with AIDS, Hibiscus who worked as an actor, he died two years later. What begins to emerge between the science fiction/fantasy story is Samuel's personal history with the disease, his grappling with it's effects as he watches people disappear. Also he begins to pick up anecdotal evidence, of say the number of cases of infection who use needles. And at one point he has a flu with fever where he questions if he has AIDS and sees a doctor to be told he does not.

Section 9.7 is his recounting of being at the Port of Authority at 4:30 am, he is catching a bus to Philadelphia for a conference. It is a vivid recounting, not a pleasant place to be, but intriguing to read as a native New Yorker. Section 11.3 documents April 23rd, 1984 where it is announced on the news that there has been an AIDS breakthrough; Dr. Robert Gallo isolated a virus (HTLV-3) as possibly the causative agent of AIDS. In Section 11.4 he writes, "By now I'm willing to admit that perhaps narrative fiction, in neither its literary nor its paraliterary mode, can propose the radically successful metaphor. At best, what both modes can do is break up, analyse, and dialogize the conservative, suggesting (not stating) where still another retains the possibiltiy of vivid, radical development. But responding to the suggestion is, of course, the job of the radical reader. (The "radical metaphor" is, after all, only an interpretation of preextant words.) Creators, whatever their polictics, only provide raw material—documents, if you will. In terms of AIDS itself, there are all sorts of social practicalities one can endorse: better reserarch, better information, support groups for people with AIDS, support groups for those around them."

He ends Appendix A in Section 13, walking along Riverside Park and meeting a man who has a fire going in the bushes. The line I love is, "Muggers? They're too scared to wander in this part of the city after sundown." and, "But the cops are almost as scared of this section of the park as the muggers." If you want to know what happens in this exchange, I leave it to you to read this essay.

Justin says

http://librarianaut.com/2013/04/14/bo...

M. says

EDIT: wrote post on the Tale of Plagues and Carnivals....over here.....
http://www.montevidayo.com/?p=1906

"The Tale of Plagues and Carnivals" which takes up the bulk of this, the third book in the Neveryon series, is worth reading on its own as a response to and document of the AIDS crisis in early 1980s NYC. It's also worth reading for what it does to unravel its own fictiveness and expose (explicitly, where all else has been implicit) the seeping of the present into Delany's construction of the fantasy world of Neveryon.

The tale is fragmented, moving between Delany's documentation of the rising numbers of AIDS cases and the frustratingly slow search for their cause, and the plague he is simultaneously writing into his fictional world (and Delany comments frequently about how each narrative comments upon the other). And of course it's all fiction or at least all constructed (plot spoiler!) - yes, it's a dazzling literary performance but that is somewhat beside the point. The sense of urgency with which he writes is stunning - the narrative is consistently disrupted and disrupting; it acknowledges the impossibility of representation, and the attendant

helplessness of the writer responding to and attempting to address crisis.

When I worked with Chip at Temple, we talked a lot about experimental novels of crisis (because I was/am working on one) - this tale, a novel in itself (the book contains two other shorter tales preceding this one), is an example of such a work. In his interview on experimental writing in Para*doxa, included in his volume of essays About Writing, he writes of the difference between the novel of crisis (e.g., Trumbo's Johnny Got His Gun) and the experimental novel of crisis (he uses Joanna Russ's The Female Man as his prime example) and why he chose the experimental mode to respond to the AIDS situation in 1983:

"Because of the topicality and the urgency of my own undertaking, I felt it was worth the risk to hoist up on my own shaky shoulder the burden of the experimental, when I decided to take on AIDS, life, and death in a novel started in '83 and finished in June '84.

"That judgment of the crisis was NOT: I must reach as many people as possible. Rather, it was: The people I reach, I must reach as INTENSELY as possible. ...To write that book, I said: Even if I don't use it all, I've got to have the full range of the contemporary aesthetic armamentarium from which to choose...I've got things to say that are too important and that will not fit within the structures of narrative fiction as it is usually handed to us."

These strategies are of their time and so seem a bit standard from today's vantage point - the meta and pastiche especially - but unlike a lot of pomo (I think) the novel reads like necessary, urgent and effective communication.

KAIROS!

The other tales in here are also meticulously and impressively designed.

Chuck Childers says

Okay, while Neveryona, the 2nd book in this series, is one of my favorite novels ever, this book, Flight from Neveryon, is... not. I'm fairly sure part of this collection of stories that juggles sign, symbol, reality, the written shadow of reality, and AIDs in 80s New York, is that Samuel Delany like to f**k with his readers. Flight may be one of those books that one can get more out of depending on how much work one puts into it, but I'm not sure I want to work that hard. Again, Delany may just be f**king with us. Still I enjoyed the experience if not the actual reading.

Being the third book in the series, other books should be read first for any (let's just call it) "clarity." Also, the book has some fairly graphic gay sex scenes with BDSM elements, not particularly arousing, but detailed. So, Flight isn't for everyone. Forewarned, forearmed, etc.

Edward Rathke says

Two novellas and a novel length story.

Like the previous two books, the previous six stories, the concerns and themes persist here. Language, stories, power, and what they all mean, how they all change, how they relate, reflect, and are dependent upon so many unclear answers and influences.

The most impressive story of the series thus far is The Tales of Plagues and Carnivals, or, Some Informal Remarks towards the Modular Calculus, Part Five [yes, all of that is the title]. It is a novel treatment of the early years of the AIDS epidemic which blends fact, fiction, and everything in between. Kolhari, the city at the center of the Neveryon world, is hit by a sexual disease which seems to mostly target homosexual men and the novel deals with how the government responds to this. At the same time, contemporary New York is the subject [contemporary at that time: 1982-1984]. The novel blends these two to surprising effect while, at the same time, commenting on the nature of these narratives, undercutting points he makes, critiquing them, critiquing the critiques, and so on until the novel seems to fall in many directions with no clear answers, no proofs, no center to hold onto, which, of course, is the point.

Even within all of that, there is a supreme focus on stories, on how who a person was said to be is never really who they were, how we invent people just as they invent us, and the truth is neither of those things, who we say we are, who we are, and who people believe us to be. But all of those things add up to something new, something that is neither us nor is it not us. It is our shadow and our reflection, it is the people we wanted to be as well as the people we never wanted to be. And this very much is about the nature of truth. What it is, how it is given, what it means, the signs that accompany it, and so on.

It is an extremely impressive mirror that he points on modern life as well as his own created world, which is a reflection of modern life and concerns. And so, again, we have mirrors facing mirrors, maps about maps about mirrors, all adding up to what can scarcely be pinned down.

It is very conscious of the series as a whole, too, and here is where many of the concerns and characters throughout the series come together and interact in amazing ways.

Best of the series so far.

David Meyers says

While the first two stories in this book are two of the best in the series, the third, A Tale of Plagues and Carnivals, is by far the best of the Neveryona stories that I've read to date. In a strange, but compelling amalgamation, it combines the author's experience as a gay man in New York at the height of the AIDS crisis with a story of AIDS affecting the fantasy world that the Neveryona series takes place in, with additional tidbits and digressions on literary theories on scifi and fantasy spread throughout. It is worth reading the whole Neveryona series, just for this one story.

Konrad says

Read for the imbedded novel 'The Tale of Plagues and Carnivals,' Delany's self-referential, Po-Mo, intelligent twining of the sword & sorcery world of his imagination (Nevèrÿon) with his verisimilar rendering of the AID's epidemic in NYC, circa 1984 (often following Joey -- homeless, hustler, junkie). Toss in here & again there portions Delany's own lit. theory musing, thoughts on his approach towards historical

'real' events, & editorial comments of his own writing, even include outside, persuasive critique from (imagined) persons who have a bone to pick with Delany's novel, and you got yourself a, challenging, sure, yes, if that matters, but whole-hog-heartedly rewarding text. Read. Read. Read.

Macartney says

Review is for the series: Set in a long ago time in a forgotten kingdom, Delany explores the structures of civilization in this four novel “sword and sorcery” series comprised of eleven interlinking stories surrounding Gorgik the Slave Liberator. At times privileging academic exercise over pure storytelling, the series nevertheless captivates as much as it elucidates. To be immersed in Delany’s Nevèrÿon is to watch him attempt to name the unnameable magic and spirit that makes humans human. Even when the story creaks and shakes from the weight of Delany’s ideas, it never falls apart and, like a Rube Goldberg machine, its near destruction makes its eventual success all the more fun and awe-inducing. The second book Neveryóna, a stand-alone novel chronicling the adventures of a young girl named Prym, is the most cohesive and successful of them all. A true joy of a character resulting in a story that is a delight to read and so very delicious to think about.

John says

I came across the first book in the *Return to Neveryon* series (*Tales of Neveryon*) at random in a small bookstore in Stratford-upon-Avon in England. It looked interesting, so I bought it and read it on the flight back to the States. This novel sparked a love affair with the writings of Samuel R. Delany - both fiction and non-fiction, across multiple genres - that continues to this day.

One of the best reasons to read the series, though, are the appendices in each book in which he shows us the inspiration behind his creative process, his fascination with writing and its history, and his staggering intellect. Absolutely fascinating!
