

**JAMES DICKEY'S *DELIVERANCE*:  
A VIEW THROUGH THE 'TRANSPARENT TEMPLATES' OF THE PERSONALITY THEORIES OF GEORGE KELLY AND ALFRED ADLER**

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*Editors' note:* James Dickey (1923–1997) was an American poet, novelist, and critic best known for his poetry combining themes of nature mysticism, religion, and history and for his novel *Deliverance* (1970). Dickey began writing poetry at the age of 24. After pursuing graduate studies and working for a time in advertising, he published his first book of poems, *Into the Stone*, in 1960. He was a teacher and writer-in-residence at a number of American universities and colleges, including the University of South Carolina. From 1966 to 1968 he served as poetry consultant to the Library of Congress. Dickey's poetry is noted for its lyrical portrayal of a world in conflict – predator with prey, soldier with soldier, the self with itself.

His best-known novel, *Deliverance*, published in 1970, is a harrowing account of a disastrous canoe trip four men take down a river in Georgia. The novel was included on *Time* magazine's list of the 100 best English-language novels written since 1923. A highly successful film version of the novel was produced from Dickey's own screenplay in 1972, starring Jon Voight, Burt Reynolds, and Ned Beatty.

An important function of the psychological literary critic is to identify, at least roughly, an author's implicit personality theory as it is expressed in his works. By doing this the critic can avoid hacking up or stretching the author to make him fit the Procrustean bed of an alien theory – usually a Freudian couch. If the critic then wishes to demand that the author submit himself to the contours of whatever couch (or chair) the critic has chosen for him, both the author, if he is still living, and the reader of the critical work will understand the process, and will be aware that different philosophical assumptions and values may underlie the work of the author and that of the critic.

James Dickey's *Deliverance* (Dickey 1970a) has been misunderstood and undervalued by many critics because they have failed to recognize the personality theory implicit in it and the philosophical assumptions which underlie the theory. In order to demonstrate how a psychological theory alien to the thought of the author can distort one's perceptions of a work, I shall contrast André Bleikasten's Freudian interpretation of *Deliverance* (Bleikasten, 1971) with an interpretation informed by the very different and,

I believe, in this case more congenial theories of George Kelly and Alfred Adler.

It is understandable that critics might try to interpret *Deliverance* from a Freudian viewpoint: Sex is certainly an important part of the novel, and that is usually enough to send critics of the psychoanalytic persuasion off on a hunt through 'the unconscious' of the author or his characters for a series of Oedipal complexes, phallic and/or castration symbols, primal scenes, etc. Since the raw materials for these concepts are almost always present (everyone but Adam and Eve had a human mother and father; some generally elongated cylindrical shape is bound to appear somewhere in the novel or poem, and some wound is likely to happen to some character), psychoanalytic critics are sure to find, or believe that they find, what they seek. Of course, if overt sexual references are not present, psychoanalytic critics are almost sure to perceive covert symbolic sexual references and begin to talk of *repressed* sexual material. It seems clear to me, however, that James Dickey's implicit personality theory as expressed in *Deliverance* is not congruent with Freudian psychoanalytic theory but rather with the group of theories de-

scribed as consistency theories<sup>1</sup>, and specifically with the theory of *George Kelly* (Kelly, 1955). Now, if one considers not just the novel but Dickey's poetry as well, another type of theory which emerges very clearly, I believe, is fulfillment theory, perhaps most closely paralleled in psychological literature by the theory of *Alfred Adler*.<sup>2</sup>

The theories of Kelly and Adler, although classified in different categories because of their differing emphases on the goals of human behavior and the means to those goals, are not incompatible with each other; but both Kelly and Adler are highly incompatible with Freud. The reason for the consonance of Kelly with Adler lies in their mutual acceptance of certain philosophical assumptions which underlie their theories, but which are very different from the philosophical assumptions which underlie Freudian psychoanalytic theory. For instance, let us consider only a few of the philosophical building blocks in the foundations of the theories: Kelly and Adler tend toward philosophical idealism, while Freud tends toward materialism; Adler and Kelly make the assumption (to different degrees) that final cause is the type of causality most important to understanding human behavior, and therefore tend toward a belief in free will, while Freud assumes that biological determinism is most important, and that free will is an illusion; Kelly and Adler incline to vitalism, while Freud inclines to mechanism; Kelly and Adler are holistic in their thought; Freud is dualistic.

James Dickey accepts to some degree the philosophical assumptions that Kelly and Adler accept and rejects those which Freud accepts. That he has not identified and separated out the 'Kellyian' from the 'Adlerian' hypotheses derived from the theories based on these assumptions is not surprising. There is no reason why we should expect James Dickey or any other

poet or novelist to be a systematic philosopher or psychologist. Dickey himself has spoken to this point:

*You shouldn't expect a consistent philosophical attitude from a poet. Some such may emerge from his work, but I think it's a serious mistake on the poet's part to try to make his work coherent as far as a rational structure is concerned. Because really a poet like myself is writing about experiences and ideas based on them. Any kind of self-consistency would be fine if it simply happens, but I don't think the poet should seek it out. I would agree with Emerson that a foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds ... The larger consistency that the body of a poet's work should have, should come from the totality of the poet's personality, including all its contradictions.*" (Dickey, 1970b, p. 120-121)

The fact that philosophy was one of Dickey's favorite academic subjects may have something to do with his own self-consistency; not in the sense that he has intentionally based his poetry or his novel on his academic studies, but in the sense that his training in philosophy has helped him organize his construct system in a way that has freed him from major contradictions at the level of assumptions and has left him with a relatively flexible set of constructs into which he has been able to integrate his later experiences and thought without major inconsistency.

James Dickey is concerned, as is the consistency or cognitive theorist, with the "importance of the information or emotional experience the person gets out of interacting with the external world" (Maddi, 1968, p. 110). Dickey explores in his poetry and particularly in *Deliverance* the cognitions of men and the tensions which result from cognitive discrepancies. The goal of each person according to this type of theory is consistency – not that foolish consistency which is the hobgoblin of little minds, but a consistency which allows man to avoid useless anxieties and to move forward to, as George Kelly puts it in his *Choice Corollary*, a "greater possibility for extension and definition of his [construct] system" (Kelly, 1955, p. 64). Thus, Ed in *Deliverance* moves from an undifferentiated set of constructs and stereotypes bor-

<sup>1</sup> All classifications of personality theories discussed in this article are based on the classification schema developed by Salvatore R. Maddi in Maddi (1968).

<sup>2</sup> Those unfamiliar with Adler's writings would probably find the best single source in Ansbacher & Ansbacher (1964). All references to Adler or to Ansbacher & Ansbacher in this article are to this work unless otherwise noted. Adler's theory is also discussed in Maddi (1968).

rowed from Lewis about the river, the hill country, and the people to a highly differentiated and functional set of constructs based on his own experience which allows him to deal more or less realistically with the events which take place on the river and to integrate that experience into his life in society. That he does not finally see reality is not so important as that he attempts, through his cognitive operations, to see it.

In addition, Dickey, like the fulfillment theorists, seems to see, especially in his poetry but also in *Deliverance*, the action of one basic force inherent in man which leads him on toward a goal of either actualizing himself or perfecting himself. Dickey has not, so far as I can see, made a clear distinction between the types of fulfillment theory – actualization vs. perfection – which psychologists have made. For him, actualization blends into perfection, though actualization in most cases does not seem to go quite far enough for Dickey. For the sake of clarity it is well to note here that the *actualization* version of *fulfillment* theory, perhaps best represented in the psychological literature by the theory of Carl Rogers, assumes that there is one basic force in the individual which “is the tendency to express to an ever greater degree the capabilities, potentialities or talents based on one’s genetic constitution” (Maddi, 1968, p. 65). On the other hand, the *perfection* version, typified by the theory of Alfred Adler, assumes that the one basic force inherent in the individual is “the tendency to strive for that which will make life ideal or complete, perhaps even by compensating for functional or genetic weak spots” (Maddi, 1968, p. 65). In *Deliverance*, Lewis seems to be the embodiment of actualization theory: he puts his trust in developing to the utmost his genetic potentialities. Lewis’s theory of life is expressed in his exceptional physical development. On the other hand, Ed seems to be the embodiment of perfection theory, he goes beyond mere actualization to perfection through compensation for physical imperfection. Ed’s theory of life is expressed in his intellectual power and in his will to overcome.

Viewed through fulfillment theory, the epigraph to *Deliverance* from Georges Bataille makes great good sense (at least, taken as it is, out of context), although more than one critic

has failed to see why Dickey chose it.<sup>3</sup> The epigraph reads, “*Il existe à la base de la vie humaine / un principe d’insuffisance.*” This recognition of a “principle of inadequacy” seems very close to Pierre Janet’s idea that a *sentiment d’incomplétude* underlies the neuroses, and almost paraphrases a line from the writings of Alfred Adler, “to be a human being means to possess a feeling of inferiority which constantly presses toward its own conquest” (p. 116).

Throughout Dickey’s poetry and in his novel, we see his characters conquering their real or imagined inadequacies and inferiorities. For example, in ‘The Performance’<sup>4</sup>, a young American flier, whose greatest amusement has been in trying to master gymnastic tricks, is captured and beheaded by the Japanese during World War II. Just before he dies, he accomplishes what he has never been able to do: a perfect handstand. Dickey tells us in an interview, “He was a tall fellow, and because his center of gravity was high it was hard for him to do handstands. I can remember him falling over on his head and back and getting up and trying again” (Dickey, 1970b, p. 93). Now, in Dickey’s imagination, the flier goes to his death having overcome, in a symbolic act of self-perfection, a genetic handicap, “having done / All things in this life that he could.” Then we see the invalid mother in ‘Buckdancer’s Choice,’ suffering from angina, but, through her whistling – a most difficult act for an angina patient – “Proclaiming what choices there are / For ill women and for all slaves / Of death.” She *will* live and make choices and to some extent overcome her inadequacy until the very last breath, and, thus, will inspire her poet son. In the poem ‘Mangham,’ we see a high school teacher who, suddenly afflicted by a stroke while teaching his indifferent students, delays death by an act of will, it seems, so that he can finish his lecture on the Law of Cosines. Dickey says of Mangham, “He was dying; he was paralyzed on one side, but because he was a teacher of trigonometry he was going out with

<sup>3</sup> see, e.g., Charles Thomas Samuels, “What hath Dickey delivered?” in *New Republic*, 162 (April 18, 1970), p. 24.

<sup>4</sup> All of Dickey’s poems discussed in this article are included in Dickey (1968).

his boots on" (Dickey, 1970b, p. 152). And finally, we see Ed in *Deliverance* who does the impossible in climbing the cliff on top of which he believes a murderer lies in ambush. He seems defeated at one point very near the end of his climb; he knows that he could easily fall to his death, "I was up against a surface as smooth as monument stone, and I still believe that for a space of time I was held in the air by pure will, fighting an immense rock." The will wins out: "Then it seemed to spring a crack under one finger of my right hand; I thought surely I had split the stone myself" (pp. 171-72). Actualization or perfection? To Dickey it often seems a matter of degree, but the force within the person, directed toward a goal created by the person, accomplishes what seems to be impossible.

## II

Now let us consider in what way Freudian theory differs from the above briefly described personality theories with which Dickey's thought seems to be congruent, and discover why a Freudian reading of *Deliverance* such as M. Bleikasten's is unlikely to reveal the subtleties of the novel. Freudian theory can be classified as a conflict theory. In this type of theory it is assumed that there is not just one basic force at work in the individual (which may, but need not, lead to a conflict with forces in society) but that the person is continually and inevitably in the grip of a conflict between two great opposing forces, so that "Life ... is necessarily a compromise, which at best involves a dynamic balance of the two forces, and at worst involves a foredoomed attempt to deny the existence of one of them" (Maddi, 1968, p. 19). Freud's theory is a conflict theory of the psychosocial type; that is, one of the two opposing forces, consisting mostly of the biological instinctual drives, resides in the individual; the other counterforce resides in society. From this conflict between the weak individual and the powerful society, which is inevitable for every individual, arises the rationale for postulating the ego defenses and the repressed unconscious. The individual must try to satisfy his instincts; society must prohibit, or at least limit, the expression of these instincts

and their satisfactions. The *modus vivendi* of every person then, according to Freud, is "to maximize instinctual gratification, while minimizing punishment and guilt" (Maddi, 1968, p. 20).

Unfortunately, M. Bleikasten does not deal with *Deliverance* in a systematic theoretical way, although even such a systematic approach would necessarily reveal in itself the limitations of conflict theory for dealing with this particular novel. Rather M. Bleikasten's interpretation of the novel is only casually informed by psychoanalytic theory and is expressed in clichés derived from the psychoanalytic vocabulary of Freud with frequent borrowings from Jung. He seems to use the psychoanalytic formulae to confirm his own vague preconception that the novel is not really very good. This critic's failure to approach *Deliverance* from a clearly argued theoretical position while using the theory's catch phrases is obviously not the fault of Freud or Jung nor of their theories, but is indicative of the kind of misuse that is often made of Freudian and Jungian thought and theories, and points up the need for the critic to recognize the author's implicit theory (and his own) instead of superimposing a theory upon the author and his work. Unfortunately, not all critics who use Freudian language and concepts have been so sensitive as Freud who saw in Jensen's *Gradiva* a work which stated in implicit personality theory very like the systematic theory which he himself was developing. Freud's beautifully written exposition of the congruence of Jensen's and his own thought in *Delusion and Dream* (Freud, 1917) is a classic in psychoanalytic interpretation of literature which illuminates both the artistic work and the theory.

M. Bleikasten early in his paper retells the story of *Deliverance*. At this point there are no obvious Freudian overtones to his discussion, but one wonders how much his perceptions are colored by his later expressed preoccupation with Oedipal complexes, castration, symbols, and the like. M. Bleikasten is reasonably accurate about early details of the plot when he states that four men organize a canoe trip down the Cahulawasee River with Lewis Medlock as their leader and with Bobby Trippe, Drew Ballinger, and the narrator Ed Gentry as followers. He is

right when he says that on the second day Bobby and Ed are surprised by two rednecks who tie Ed to a tree and sexually assault Bobby at gun point, and he is right that Lewis rescues Bobby and Ed by killing one of the aggressors with bow and arrow. Whether Lewis saved them from “une mort certaine” as M. Bleikasten asserts is not quite clear. And from this point on in recounting the plot – and, we can only assume, in his perceptions of other elements of the novel dependent on the understanding of the plot – M. Bleikasten’s narration of the events becomes inaccurate. Just as he does not see that there may be some doubt about whether or not the rednecks meant to kill Ed and Bobby, he does not see, as Ed does and as the careful reader must, that there is some doubt about whether or not Drew is later shot by the surviving redneck. He simply takes at face value Lewis’s assertion that Drew was shot and even confuses the details, saying that “Au cours de la dramatique descente d’un rapide, ou les deux canoés chavirent et leurs occupants manquent de se noyer, il profite de la confusion pour abattre Drew” (p. 116). Actually, as Dickey wrote it, whatever it is that happens to Drew happens just after the men have come into “a short stretch between rapids” (p. 149), and before the men get to the rapids where they spill. Even worse, M. Bleikasten does not understand that the man Ed finally shoots from ambush may not be Drew’s assassin; may not be the redneck who escaped from the clearing after Lewis killed his companion. He looks at the plot simplistically and sees the novel as a particularly violent adventure story with a few psychoanalytic embellishments. But Dickey has taken great care to introduce doubt about whether or not Drew is killed from ambush and whether the man Ed kills later is the ambusher or an innocent hunter who happens along at an unfortunate moment. The recognition of these ambiguities is essential to an adequate understanding of the novel.

M. Bleikasten begins his overtly Freudian interpretation somewhat later in his essay when he describes Lewis as Ed’s ego-ideal: “Il représente, en termes freudiens, l’idéal du moi auquel Ed cherche à se conformer” (p. 123). But Ed says clearly that he and Lewis are different from each other, and it is clear that, although he admires and sometimes follows Lewis, he never

really “identifies” with him, and in fact rarely loses a chance to point out the differences between Lewis and himself. Of course, M. Bleikasten, thinking in the rigidities set by his use of Freudian terminology, must see Lewis’s broken leg as a symbolic castration which occasions the transfer of paternal power to the son. Then, too, he must find a repressed homosexual desire between Ed and Lewis, although Dickey makes it as clear as he can – without protesting too much – that there is no reason to suspect any conscious or unconscious homosexual attraction between the two men. For instance, although Ed has known Lewis for years he has never seen him naked before the swim in the river, and when he touches Lewis after his thigh is broken he says, “his penis stirred with pain” (p. 156). Ed, frankly aware of the physical phenomenon, has no illusion that his touch was causing it.

It is, in fact, the very “innocence” of the men in regard to homosexual relationships that makes the attack and the rape so devastating to them. M. Bleikasten’s error lies not in conceiving the idea of homosexuality in his own mind in relation to the dramatic situation but in his endowing the characters with a seemingly concrete characteristic called latent homosexuality. As a critic, I cannot allow myself to be caught in the trap of “proving” that Ed and Lewis are not latently homosexual lovers. I need only recognize that it is M. Bleikasten, not Dickey, who has postulated this and can simply say that the construct is irrelevant in regard to the two characters in question at this point. However, I agree that, given our society and the concepts we share regarding sexual relationships, any reader, Freudian or not, will think of the possibility of homosexuality – I believe that Dickey means the reader to think of it – but he can do so without insisting that Ed and Lewis have a latent or repressed homosexual relationship. The test of the value of a general notion of homosexuality – of holding a vague idea of homosexuality in the mind – is to ask: If the reader thinks of homosexuality without insisting that Ed and Lewis are latent or repressed homosexuals, what does the idea in the reader’s mind do in the reader’s perception of the novel? Obviously, it foreshadows. It causes the reader to fear, to suspect, to predict that the homosexual rape will take place before the characters fear,

suspect, or predict that it will. The reader will derive satisfaction from the validation of his intuitive anticipation of events.

But it is at the point where he discusses Ed's finding the body of the hillbilly he has mortally wounded that M. Bleikasten errs most seriously. He reprints the scene:

*I took the knife in my fist. What? Anything. This, also is not going to be seen. It is not ever going to be known; you can do what you want to; nothing is too terrible. I can cut off the genitals he was going to use on me. Or I can cut off his head, looking straight into his open eyes. Or I can eat him. I can do anything I have a wish to do ...*

Then he adds:

*Castration, décapitation, cannibalisme: les pulsions destructrices qui toute censure levée, font soudain irruption dans la conscience d'Ed nous renvoient toutes à l'univers pervers et cruel des fantasmes infantiles. L'ordre de leur succession n'est pas indifférent: des hantises oedipiennes l'on passe très rapidement à l'oralité sadique: la régression atteint son terme et le désir d'identification se manifeste ici sous la forme la plus archaïque, come désir d'incorporation (p. 125).*

But what about the eyes? Where do they fit into the chain of psycho-sexual development and/or regression? They do not of course, and so M. Bleikasten simply ignores them. Actually, the most important part of this scene begins exactly where M. Bleikasten leaves off his quotation:

*I can do anything I have a wish to do, and I waited carefully for some wish to come; I would do what it said.*

*It did not come, but the ultimate horror circled me and played over the knife (p. 206).*

Dickey, through Ed, is rejecting in this passage the idea that such overpowering sexually oriented cannibalistic, sadistic drives exist. Ed has heard of them, of course. He waits to see if they will "surface," but his recognition of them is purely intellectual, speculative; nothing happens

except his recognition of the awfulness of his deed. Thus Dickey, through Ed, denies the idea of repressed drives welling up from the 'id' to overpower the 'ego,'" just as he later rejects the psychoanalytically hypothesized ego defense of the repression of the memory of traumatic events when Ed comments on the version of the story he tells the police:

*The version was strong; I had made it and tried it out against the world, and it held. It had become so strong in my mind that I had trouble getting back through it to the truth. But when I did, the truth was there ... (p. 274).*

No repression, then; no uncontrollable sexual urges, and no regressions find their place in Dickey's novel. Aggressions against others, whether on the part of the mountain men or the suburbanites are undertaken coldly and rationally for the purpose of asserting superiority or for assuring survival. And only from a severely distorted viewpoint can one see the "permutation d'identités" which is so often so much a part of 'Freudian' interpretations, and which M. Bleikasten sees in *Deliverance* when for him Ed becomes Lewis, then *becomes* the man he kills.

M. Bleikasten cites Ed's aiming at Bobby and Lewis with the dead man's rifle "comme si l'ame de la victime s'était aussitôt reincarné dans son assassin" (p. 126). But there is a very good reason why Ed feels like killing Bobby: On the previous evening, just before he climbs the cliff, Ed has told Bobby quite clearly that if Bobby fails to follow his detailed instructions about how to get himself and Lewis safely away, he will kill him. He does this to impress on Bobby the necessity for carrying out his instructions; he later uses the same threat to shock Bobby into action when Ed sights Drew's body and must have Bobby's help in moving it. Now, after all Ed's superhuman effort, he finds that the incompetent, bumbling Bobby has disobeyed him; the fury he feels is not because of some permutation of identity but because of Bobby's failure to do what he was told, thus risking his own and Lewis's lives, and perhaps negating all of Ed's plans. As it is, the two men in the canoe owe their lives to Ed, or so he has chosen to believe, and his craziness is Ed's dramatization of his God-like

perception of himself. His momentary dementia (actually an expression of intellectual pride) in his "Do it, the dead man said. Do it, *he's* right there" (p. 208), is not so much permutation of identity as it is 'as if' thinking. Ed decides very quickly not to shoot, but had he decided to do so, he is aware – and so is the reader – that he, not the dead man, would have made the decision.

M. Bleikasten throughout his essay is obsessed with the idea of permutation of identity and the identification of one character with another. As another 'proof' of the symbolical filial relationship between Ed and Lewis which amounts to Ed's identification with Lewis, he cites Lewis's wound (symbolic castration) which occasions the transfer of power from the father (Lewis) to the son (Ed), and then points to Ed's answer to the sheriff's question, "You damned fucking ape, ... Who on earth was your father, boy?" Ed replies, "Tarzan" (p. 271). And because Ed has referred to Lewis, too, in the course of the novel as Tarzan it seems to M. Bleikasten that Lewis's symbolic fatherhood is affirmed by Ed himself. But from the cognitive point of view another interpretation is possible: It is important to note that the sheriff's epithet for Ed was earlier used by one of the redneck assailants when he taunts Ed who is tied to the tree, saying, "You ever had your balls cut off, *you fuckin' ape*" (italics mine)" (p. 120). Ed has earlier described himself as having a great deal of body hair, "soft gray, like monkey fur" (p. 39), and the other redneck has said, "Good God Amighty ... He's like a goddamned monkey. You ever see anything like that?" (p. 119). It seems very likely that the construct to which the sheriff's question seems to refer in Ed's mind – and which echoes the redneck's ironic persnickiness and Ed's doubts about himself – is *humanity* vs. *animality*. Ed's answer, "Tarzan," then, can be seen as an insistence on his part that he wishes to be seen neither as an animalistic victim nor as a bestial killer but as a human being – as Tarzan as opposed to the apes. His answer at that moment need have no direct relationship to Lewis who also happens to be rather a special human being in Ed's eyes.

M. Bleikasten's final judgment of the novel is, "*Deliverance* hésite un moment entre la traditionnelle apologie de l'heroisme viril et sa denon-

ciation, mais la fascination de la violence finit par évacuer toute conscience critique ... Dickey a joué la carte du succès. Il a gagné. Mais l'on ne gagne à ce jeu-la sans tricher. *Deliverance* est un roman habile. Trop habile pour être honnête" (pp. 128-29).

If M. Bleikasten's acceptance of Freudian clichés has not totally blinded him, it surely has not helped him to go beyond a simplistic reading of the novel. His preoccupation with his own critic-created Oedipal complexes, psychosexual regressions, and permutations of personality have contributed to his failure to understand the ambiguities of the novel and their significance, which can, perhaps, be understood more easily through the perspective of a different theoretical approach.

### III

I have already discussed Dickey's congruence with the personality theory of Alfred Adler. An implicit theory very like Adler's permeates his poetry and underlies the novel. Throughout *Deliverance*, there is the expression of that one basic force in man which strives, as the Adlerians put it, "from a felt minus situation towards a plus situation, from a feeling of inferiority towards superiority, perfection and totality" (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1964, p. 1). There is also an Adlerian emphasis on a self-centered goal rather than on drive, and the insistence that the individual can never be considered apart from his social situation. Still, in *Deliverance*, cognition is more important than in any of Dickey's poetry, and, since Adler does not deal with cognition in minute detail, we must turn to another theorist for a systematic parallel to Dickey's thought. Whether Dickey has ever read George Kelly's work or not, I do not know, but his implicitly expressed thought about cognition and human behavior in *Deliverance* parallels George Kelly's theory as clearly as Jensen's thought in *Gradiva* parallels Freud's theory.

A very brief sketch of Kelly's theory of personality will enable us to approach *Deliverance* from the cognitive point of view, since we can develop both Kelly's theories and Dickey's ideas as we discuss the novel. In this brief space, I

cannot of course do justice to the complexity and sophistication of Kelly's theory and would urge the reader to turn to Kelly's own works for a fuller understanding.

For George Kelly, all men – not just doctors, biologists, physicists, etc. – are scientists in the sense that each man has a primary desire to predict and control. In order to do this he employs, as does the recognized scientist, a mental process in which he observes, forms theories, derives hypotheses, tests these hypotheses, and accepts or rejects them, and then, perhaps, modifies his theory. It is important to realize that, for Kelly, thought cannot be separated from emotion and perception as it is in some theories. Therefore, when I speak of thought or thinking from the Kellyian point of view, the reader must understand that I am talking about the complex operation which includes feeling and perceiving. Each person bases his thinking on one or more series of constructs which for him represents reality. These constructs are dichotomous, although sometimes one 'end' of the construct may be 'buried.' Words used to express these dichotomous constructs differ from person to person, and, as Kelly points out, a word used to express a construct for one person may imply something quite different to another person. Furthermore, the opposite end of a construct for any given person is not necessarily its dictionary antonym. Through these dichotomous constructs man *represents* reality: "Man looks at his world through transparent patterns or templates which he creates and then attempts to fit over the realities of which the world is composed" (pp. 6-9).

To the extent that his constructs match reality, and to the extent that the individual is able to alter them when events prove them inadequate or inaccurate, the individual is able to predict and to some extent to control. When he finds his predictions are not validated, or that he has no constructs which will allow him to represent reality and predict events, he begins to feel anxiety. In his relationships with other people, an individual may find that his constructs do not match theirs, or are not ordered as theirs are. To the extent that he can understand (or "subsume" to use Kelly's vocabulary) the constructs and the order of constructs of another, he will be able to predict that other's actions. This is what Ed does,

or thinks he does, when he chooses the exact spot on the cliff to which the hypothesized murderous hillbilly will come to ambush the men in the canoe below.

At the beginning of *Deliverance*,<sup>2</sup> the narrator-protagonist Ed recognizes that he has no constructs relevant to the river or to the territory and society which he, Drew, and Bobby are to enter along with Lewis, their heroic outdoorsman leader. Ed and the others must depend on Lewis's correct construing of reality. When Lewis looks at the map – itself a representation of reality – and says that the "water should be good" (p. 14), Ed can only say, "I didn't have much idea what good meant in the way of river water, but for it to seem good to Lewis it would have to meet some very definite standards." Ed can predict the quality of the experience to come only to the extent that he can subsume Lewis's construct system, and then only to the extent that Lewis's construct system approximates reality in regard to the river and the area they are to explore.

But, although he is unknowledgeable about the river down which Lewis intends to lead them, Ed is not a naive thinker. Indeed he is so subtle a thinker that he (and of course Dickey) grasps intuitively and uses one of the most difficult points of cognitive theory: the idea that Kelly describes as the "minimum context of three things out of which a construct can be formed, and a minimum of two relationships, one of likeness and one of difference which must be implied" (p. 119). Through his ability to operate within the threefold context, Ed, at this point at least, is able to avoid conceptual distortion: Ed says in contrasting himself and Lewis to Drew and Bobby, "But Lewis and I were different from the other two, and were different from each other" (p. 19). There is here certainly no 'permutation d'identités'. Ed realizes very clearly his individuality, and, as we shall see, his discrimination of his own personality from that of Lewis and the others increases throughout the novel. A good deal of nonsense about permutation of personality, doubles, etc. could be avoided if critics were more aware of Kelly's concept of the threefold minimum context for construct formation and the minimum of two relationships which must be implied. This is a point in logic

too often overlooked by psychological and critical theorists alike.

Ed's confidence in Lewis as a source of accurate constructs is qualified. He knows that Lewis tries to perfect himself, at least physically, but he also knows that Lewis is reckless. He is aware that Lewis is prone to accidents, "or what would appear to others to be an accident" (p. 19), and he knows that a year or two before, Lewis broke his ankle while on a similar trip. Therefore, Ed vaguely fears trouble from a knowledge of Lewis's past (Kelly's *Construction Corollary*: "A person anticipates events by construing their replications" [1955, p. 59]), and, at the same time, he is unable to predict particular events because he himself has no constructs relevant to the river, the territory, or the people they may encounter.

Ed directly states his inability to predict the outcome of the trip and his resultant feelings of anxiety when his wife asks him, "Do you know where you're going?" Ed replies, "Not exactly. Lewis does. Somewhere up in the north east part of the state, where he's been fishing. If everything goes off O.K., we ought to be back late Sunday." Ed's wife then, sensing his doubt, says, "Why shouldn't it go off O.K.?" and Ed answers, "It will, but you can't *predict* (italics mine)" (p. 43). In spite of his attempts to reassure Martha that there is no real danger, his inability to predict and his resultant anxiety are clear. When the time comes to leave the house Ed's anxiety is even greater. "I was tempted – I must say I was – to back out, get sick, make some sort of excuse. I listened for the phone to ring – so that I could get out of the car, make a believable excuse to Lewis and take of my costume" (pp. 45-46). The use of the word *costume* of course reeks something of one construct Ed has relevant to the situation.

In pseudo-Freudian terms, one might call Ed's frame of mind ambivalence, i.e., he both wants to go and wants to stay. But Freud used the term ambivalence, which he borrowed from Bleuler, to refer to a person's antithetical feelings (affection and hostility) toward other persons, not towards events or phenomena. However, in general parlance ambivalence has come to mean some kind of unresolvable internal conflict. But it is important to understand Adler's

and Kelly's views of what they too, for the lack of a better word, might at times call ambivalence. For Adlerians, there is really no such thing as an immobilizing intrapersonal conflict; there are not two conflicting drives operating simultaneously within the person, nor are there two simultaneous goals; rather there is only one goal at the moment and that is to delay. The person achieves the delay by appearing to be unable to make a decision. For Kelly, in regard to ambivalence there is his *Choice Corollary*: "A person chooses for himself that alternative in a dichotomized construct through which he anticipates the greater possibility for extension and definition of his system" (p. 64). Ed in his 'ambivalence' is clarifying the alternatives for himself and finally decides to go on the trip, even though he has doubts and fears, because he hopes to grow. He seeks deliverance from the confinement of his present construct system. Dickey's parallel to Kelly's choice corollary is implicit in Ed's saying to Lewis, just after suggesting that they might be better off not to go on the trip, "I'm looking forward to getting on the river. I'm so tanked up with your river-mystique that I'm sure I'll go through some fantastic change as soon as I dig the paddle in the first time" (p. 61). There is some sarcasm in his remark perhaps, but still the dichotomies are clear; normalcy (represented by his wife Martha) vs. deliverance (represented by the gold mote in the model's eye); getting-through-the day vs. some fantastic change.

At first there is a seeming reluctance in Ed to broaden his construct system to include the territory and the society which they are entering. This kind of reluctance is not uncommon in the psychotherapeutic relationship, and for the moment, we may parallel Ed's relationship with Lewis to a client's relationship with his therapist, since Ed seeks out Lewis as a client often seeks out a therapist, because of a desire to broaden his horizons and perhaps to change his behavior. Psychoanalytically oriented therapists might call this reluctance resistance and might see in it a defense to prevent unconscious repressed matter from becoming conscious, but when Kelly uses the word *resistance* he does not see it as a defense (ego defenses have no place in his theory), but rather means that a client is in some way

indicating to the therapist "the lack of congenial common structure for dealing with the therapist and his interpretations" (p. 1050). Ed in fact, as Kelly says of the "resisting" client, is "demonstrating the fact that his construct system does not subsume what the therapist (Lewis) thinks it should" (p. 1104). Ironically, it is Ed (the client) and not Lewis who is finally able to subsume the other's construct system. It is Ed who is finally able to "understand another better than he is understood" and who "understands the other at a higher level of generality" (Kelly, p. 96). By the end of the novel, it is Ed who is the authority figure, not Lewis. At this earlier point, Lewis accuses Ed of not wanting to know about the hills, and when Ed answers, "I don't mind going down a few rapids with you, and drinking a little whiskey by a campfire. But I don't give a fiddler's fuck about those hills" (p. 50), Ed is demonstrating one of the clear differences between Lewis and himself, and furthermore he is telling Lewis that he does not share his construct system and does not see how it is relevant to them. But when Ed sees the relevance, and when he necessarily comes to share Lewis's concern for survival, he rapidly develops a construct system which deals with the hills and the people. Even now, he is drawn on by his interest in Lewis to try to subsume Lewis's construct system while letting him know that he does not share his values.

This part of the novel in which Ed and Lewis talk while driving to meet the other two men at Oree has seemed to some critics slow and uninteresting<sup>5</sup> but it is absolutely essential in allowing the reader to understand the cognitive patterns of Ed and Lewis and the importance of those cognitive patterns to the novel. The reader should note that, in spite of seeming reluctance, it is Ed who draws out Lewis; who tries to understand his constructs and their ordering, although at first glance it is Lewis who appears to be the leader, the teacher, or even the therapist.

When the four men arrive at Oree, there are several scenes in which the major point is the ability or inability of one person to subsume the construct system of another. Significantly, it is

Bobby who first shows his insensitivity when he says impertinently to the old man at the filling station, "Man, I like the way you wear that hat." The old man replies: "You don't *know* nothin' (italics mine)" (p. 66). Ed notices that the man turns from Bobby with such finality that he is forced to "glance at Bobby to see if he had disappeared as a result" (p. 67). It is clear that *knowing* is important, and that Bobby does not have the knack; i.e., he can't or won't subsume.

It is Drew in this section of the novel who is able to communicate with the hill people. He does it both verbally and nonverbally through music. But Drew is passive, and he does not so much subsume the constructs of the hill people as allow them to subsume his. It is the albino boy who anticipates Drew's playing in their impromptu duet so that "it sounded *as* though Drew were adding another kind of sound to every note he played." Lonnie, the albino idiot, Ed says, "played so softly and so rightly that it sounded like Drew's own fingering" (p. 69). The bond formed by the nonverbal communication of music allows Drew to be understood and in turn to elicit and understand verbal communication. For a brief time Drew becomes a sort of emissary between the men from the suburbs and the men from the hills; it is Drew, not Lewis, who gets directions, advice, and who learns the names of men who might be willing to drive their cars to Ainty for them. But Drew's construct system, under conditions of threat, is not permeable enough to allow him to deal with the terrible subsequent events, and he dies having failed to understand how it can be that his constructs concerning law and order vs. crime and anarchy are not shared by his companions and are not relevant to the situation in which the men find themselves.

Lewis, although he has some knowledge of the ways of the country, acts, when the men come to Oree, as if he had none because of his arrogant need to assert his superiority. Ed is very uneasy when Lewis bargains with Griner about driving the cars to Ainty. He is aware that Lewis has insulted the man by turning a question back to him. "Lewis himself had told me that the worst thing you can do is to throw something back at these mountain people." Arid when Lewis goes further in his tactless bargaining Ed says

<sup>5</sup> See, e.g., Daniel B. Marin, "James Dickey's *Deliverance*: Darkness Visible," *South Carolina Review*, 3, No. 1 (1970), pp. 56-57.

to himself, "Good God ... Why is he like this?" (p. 74). Ed is afraid that Lewis will arouse the anger of these people, and he resents Lewis's getting him into the situation. Ed is aware of the need to subsume others' constructs and work with them. His understanding of the situation is paralleled in Kelly's *Sociality Corollary*: "To the extent that one person construes the construction processes of another, he may play a role in a social process involving the other person" (p. 95). Ed instinctively tries to avoid confrontation, while Lewis tries to force the mountain people to conform to his predictions of them in regard to their inferiority and his superiority. If we wish to speak in Adlerian terms, we might say that Lewis is deficient in social interest; that he fails to understand the social context, and that he strives for self-enhancement through a dangerous competition rather than through cooperation.

Ed's fears and his predictions of trouble are validated the next day when he and Bobby are made captive by the two rednecks who come upon them on the river bank. Bobby has learned nothing from his interchange with the old man about his hat, and when one of the rednecks seems surprised that the men say they are going to Ainty, Bobby throws back at him, "Sure. This river just runs one way, capn'n. Haven't you heard?" Ed says, "I could have killed him" (p. 116). Whether Ed's diplomacy might have averted the confrontation between the two pairs of men is not certain, but it seems clear that there is, in true Adlerian fashion, a contest for superiority. Although Kelly does not deal directly in terms of superiority-inferiority, his definition of hostility should here be noted. For Kelly, hostility is not simply an attempt to do harm to another person, rather it is a means to an end. "Hostility is the continued effort to extort validation evidence in favor of a type of social prediction which has already proved itself a failure" (Kelly, 1955, p. 510). Both Lewis and Bobby attempt to extort validation of their inadequate construct systems from the hill people who in turn do the same thing to them. Drew, too, evidences hostility as Kelly defines it, against Lewis over the question of disposing of the murdered hillbilly's body; that is, Drew attempts to extort from Lewis and from the others validation of his constructs in relation to law and order which are

clearly beyond their range of convenience in the situation in which the men find themselves. Only Ed manages to question his own constructs and his interpretation of evidence without resorting to the extortion of validation evidence (at least until he comes up against the sheriff and Deputy Queen, and then he knows what he is doing and why he is doing it and he is successful), and it is Ed who survives the experience on the river with the least injury to his body and to his construct system.

James Dickey's description of the behavior of the two mountaineers and their treatment of Ed and Bobby is much more congruent with Adlerian striving for superiority and Kellyian extortion of the validation of obsolete construct systems than with Freudian biological drive theory. There is no evidence to suggest that the two rednecks come ravaging from the forest in the clutches of an irresistible sexual frenzy; their actual rape of Bobby and intended rape of Ed are characterized by calm, cool calculation. They are not driven, it seems, by forces in the 'id'; rather they have a goal: the subjection and humiliation of these two suburbanite interlopers. The diction of the rape scene clearly implies Ed's perception of this, "The white-haired man *worked steadily* (italics mine), on Bobby ..." There is nothing frenetic about the rednecks; the one who watches exhibits no sexual excitement; instead, Ed says that the man with the gun "looked on with an odd mixture of approval and sympathy" (p. 122). Ed, even in this stressful situation, observes and understands, or believes that he understands, the thoughts and emotions of this man. The rest of the scene up to the point of Lewis's killing the rapist is darkly comic. So far are these mountain men from being driven by blind sexual force that the one to whom Ed's humiliation falls is clearly repulsed by Ed's physical appearance. He notes that Ed is fat and very hairy – hairy as a dog – and apparently wonders how to approach sexually such a revolting specimen. He turns with what seems to be an ironic fastidiousness to his companion and says with puzzlement, "What the hail ..." to which the other with pure practicality answers, "Ain't no hair in his mouth" (p. 123).

Dickey's reasons for introducing homosexual rape have been questioned. Some readers believe he introduces it as an indication that men in our

society have begun to realize that they, too, can be sexual victims and that homosexual rape has begun to be something that the average man must fear. But that seems to go without saying. "Homosexual Rapist Assaults 17 Males in Memphis Area," declares the *New York Times* of November 5, 1972; it is not difficult to find other similar news items. But Dickey's reason for using homosexual rape in *Deliverance* has something to do, I believe, not only with its general shock value and the fears of men, but with the fact that it can reasonably be seen to lie entirely outside the constructs the city men consider relevant to the wilderness. Ed has feared broken legs, snakes, the river, but it had never even occurred to him or Bobby or Drew that they might encounter, out in the woods, a sexual crime against the person – a crime of the city, which if it were to take place there, and if the victim were a woman, would probably excite no more comment than the traditional, "If rape is inevitable you might as well relax and enjoy it." If ever men have discovered the fallacy of that formula outside of personal experience it is in *Deliverance*. The power of the rape and of the consequent murders lies in their total unexpectedness in the minds of the characters and in the failure of the characters to have adequate constructs to deal with the circumstances when they occur.

We have seen throughout the earlier part of the novel Ed's willingness to understand others' thoughts and to subsume their construct systems, and his belief that he does so accurately. We have, in short, seen his cognitive operations. We know that both physically and mentally<sup>6</sup> Ed can subsume constructs and can empathize with both friends and enemies. He wants to see what others see; he wants to experience, to understand, and to adapt. He learns in many ways. For instance, he gets the idea of how to handle a canoe from "movies and pictures of Indians on calendars" (p. 82), but he also understands Drew's physical movements in the canoe. Just as the albino boy anticipated Drew's guitar playing, Ed anticipates Drew's paddling: "He dug in, and I swept with him" (p. 83). Later he says, "Drew made half the

right move and I made the other half" (p. 86). Even with Bobby's uncoordinated and awkward bulk in the canoe, Ed can subsume, predict, and control: "We went on, taking long slow swings at the water. I had fitted my stroke to Bobby's the best I could, I moved when he moved, and I got to the point where I could put my paddle in the water and lift it out at the same time he did" (pp. 113-14). But it is not until after Drew has fallen from the canoe, shot perhaps from the top of the cliff by the one redneck who escaped from the clearing, and after Lewis has broken his leg, that Ed comes to the greatest test of his powers of subsuming the construct system of another and of his ability to predict and control.

All the time that Ed is subsuming the theoretical murderer's construction system, or thinking "with the other men's mind" (p. 205), as Ed puts it, the reader or critic must follow him and subsume Ed's system. But if the reader is to understand the novel, he must also try to subsume the author's construct system. The reader can simply accept Ed's assumption about Drew's death and the theory he bases on it, but if the reader does no more than this, he will very likely see, as M. Bleikasten does, only an adventure novel. If the reader or critic considers other alternatives, as I believe Dickey intends him to, he will see a very different kind of novel.

The first thing the reader might do is consider whether or not Ed's construct system represents reality and whether or not Dickey wants us to believe that Ed has considered all of the evidence and all of the alternatives. The reader can do this at his leisure while recognizing that if he were at the foot of a cliff facing the possibility that a murderer is waiting in ambush above him, he too might not see all possible alternatives. The primary question that arises is: if the man who escaped from the clearing when his partner was killed is up above waiting in ambush, and if he did shoot Drew, where did he get the rifle? The only weapon the two men had when they accosted Ed and Bobby was a shotgun which Ed grabbed from the surviving man when he ran from the clearing and which was buried with his murdered companion's body. The reader can imagine it possible that he had a weapon hidden in the forest, but that seems extremely unlikely. Nevertheless, the author leaves us with that pos-

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<sup>6</sup> The mind-body dichotomy has no place in the theories of Adler and Kelly, nor, I believe, in that of Dickey, but it is difficult to avoid seeming to express that duality in our language.

sibility and with a doubt which cannot be resolved from evidence given either to the characters in the novel or to the reader. We can see why Dickey chose the first person point of view for his novel. There is important information which the narrator-protagonist Ed cannot have, the question of where the redneck could have procured the rifle, for instance, is one that should occur to him but does not. An omniscient author narrator might reasonably be expected to comment on such a circumstance, but as it is, the reader sees the problem through Ed's mind and also sees Ed's failure to take all aspects of the problem into consideration when building his theory; he also sees Dickey's refusal to give the reader a pat answer.

The problems of obtaining adequate information and of perceiving reality are acute throughout the latter half of the novel. The reader cannot be satisfied with what the characters know, or think they know. He must maintain a skeptical attitude. For instance, it is Lewis who first suggests – in fact insists – that Drew was shot. Ed's answer is, "I'm not sure" (p. 155). He never is sure. Ed says, "There was a long raw place under the hair just over his left ear, and the head there seemed oddly pushed in, dented. But there was no brain matter showing, nothing blown away." Ed asks Bobby if it is a gunshot wound. Bobby replies, "Ed, you know I wouldn't know. But it sure doesn't look like it to me." He thinks the wound might have been made by a rock after Drew fell out of the canoe. But Ed wants to know, and the only 'authority' present is Lewis. Lewis, lying in the canoe, suffering from his broken leg, rouses to look at the wound and says that Drew was shot – grazed. "Maybe," says Bobby. "Maybe, is it," answers Ed. "It'll have to be" (pp. 222-24). But the reader should remember that Lewis has a strong interest in convincing the others that Drew was shot: It was Lewis who shot the first hillbilly in the back, then talked the others into concealing the body. Lewis has justified himself by saying that there is no doubt that the two rednecks would have killed Bobby and Ed after sexually assaulting them. The only evidence we have to the contrary is the fact that they had not yet killed Bobby after raping him. We may suspect, but cannot prove, that they would have preferred

to allow their victims to live, sure that no city man would subject himself to the humiliation of admitting that he had been subdued and forced to submit to obscene acts. When the lean man fastens Ed to the tree with his own bolt, Ed says, "It occurred to me that they must have done this before; it was not a technique they would have thought of for the occasion" (p. 119). It seems unlikely that the two attackers, however, could have killed many men, although they may have assaulted many. Even in the hills people would be reported missing; inquiries would be made. It is more likely that the two men would revel in the sense of superiority gained by humiliating their victims into silence. Lewis very likely killed when he need not have done so. Even had the mountaineers intended to murder Bobby and Ed, Lewis and Drew could have remained hidden in the forest and could have called to the mountain men, saying that they were covering them and ordering them to drop their shotgun. There would have been little risk at the moment when the men were handing the gun from one to the other. But Lewis preferred to kill. His first words when viewing the man he shot are, "Well now, how about this? Just ... how about this?" (p. 126), as if very pleased with himself. But moments later he significantly fails to look at Ed when he says, "I figured it was the only thing to do." Ed verbally agrees, but thinks to himself, "I wasn't all that sure" (p. 127). Lewis is certainly aware of Drew's opposition to hiding the body, and he knows Ed too well not to be aware of his reservations about the necessity for killing the man. Therefore, anything that Lewis can do to lessen his companions' cognitive dissonance about their involvement in the death and burial of the hillbilly is to his advantage. He may be right in saying that Drew was shot from ambush by the surviving member of the two rapists, but, right or wrong, it is definitely to his advantage to convince Bobby and Ed that he was justified in killing, and that the killing of the other redneck – which one of Lewis's companions will now have to undertake, thus also becoming a murderer – will be the only way to stop the vendetta against the men from the city. Lewis succeeds in convincing Ed that they had better act as if Drew were shot and as if the other three are in danger of being shot, but the doubt never entirely leaves

Ed. He weights Drew's body and sinks it in the river because they cannot take the chance that an autopsy might reveal that Drew has been shot. Ed says, "We can't explain somebody killed with a rifle." To which Bobby says, "If he was," and Ed answers, "That's right: if he was" (p. 225). Ed can never be sure; neither can the reader.

In trying to decide whether Drew was shot by the escaped redneck who is assumed to be tracking the other men, there is another bit of evidence that the reader must consider: The attack on Ed and Bobby took place on the left bank of the river. The ambusher, therefore, presumably is still on the left bank. Now, when Drew is shot (if he is), he and Ed are just approaching the upcoming rapids in the river. Ed is trying to hold Drew centered on the white water and Drew is beginning to dig in with his paddle to help the canoe shoot through the rapids. He is presumably looking straight ahead. The question is: at what angle would someone have to shoot from the left bank in order to graze Drew underneath his hair just above his left ear? The only possible position would seem to be well downstream. But the terrain at the top of the cliff is overgrown and very rough for a man walking. The man in the canoes have been taken downstream from the scene of the rape and murder by a fast current and would very likely have outdistanced a walker on the bank, even if he had had a rifle at hand and had gotten a head start on them during the time they were burying the body. But then, we cannot really be sure from the information that Dickey gives us that Drew was looking straight ahead. In light of our lack of real knowledge, we can only question whether alternative explanations need to be considered in such a situation; i.e., whether a totally unknown person might not have shot him, accidentally or on purpose, or whether a bullet fired into the gorge of the river by a hunter on the right bank might have ricocheted from the cliff on the left bank, striking Drew in the canoe; or whether Drew, tormented by their ordeal, may have died of a heart attack; or – as seems more probable in the movie than in the novel – whether he may have committed a strangely passive suicide by allowing himself to fall from the canoe. I believe that James Dickey has taken great care to arrange it so that the

reader must consider such possibilities in his efforts to subsume the construct systems of the author and those created by the author for his characters.

Ed's own thinking about the murderer he supposes to be lying in ambush on the cliff above follows the scientific theoretical pattern delineated by Kelly. He selects his postulate: The man who escaped from the clearing has a rifle and is following them to kill them and has already killed Drew. He builds his theory: The man is up on the cliff and will kill them in the morning, but they can outsmart him since he doesn't expect them to be able to climb the cliff and ambush him. He derives his hypothesis: He, Ed, can climb the cliff and can then subsume the killer's construct system well enough to ambush him at point X at time Y, just as he is drawing down to fire on the canoe. Ed's language throughout this section of the novel is fraught with the rhetoric of the scientific theoretician: "The question is ..." "We can start out with the assumption that ..." "The next thing is when ..." "We can do three things ..." And over and over again, "If ..., then ..."

There are two problems with Ed's hypothesis: (1) There is no protective laboratory setting available to Ed, so that the test of his hypothesis must take place in the real world. The consequences will probably be death to the experimenter or to the subject. Ed cannot deal with a null hypothesis as a laboratory experimenter might; he must deal with the experimental hypothesis on a one shot basis and can have no recourse to accepting or rejecting his hypothesis on the basis of statistical probability. He wants to operate at the .00 level of confidence; but the allowance for the operation of chance can never be totally eliminated. (2) He fails to see that one could make the same prediction which is finally tested (that the man with a gun will appear at point X at time Y) from a different theory: i.e., that mountain men often hunt alone early in the morning along the river and that, therefore, someone carrying a gun is quite likely to appear at point X at time Y to view the river. Of course, originally Ed intends to wait until the man is lying down, actually aiming at the canoe, so that he can center shoot him just as Lewis shot the first man. But when the moment comes, Ed can-

not wait to see whether or not the man actually tries to ambush the canoe. Once the man with the rifle is aware, or is about to become aware, of Ed's presence, Ed has no choice but to kill him, for no matter why the man has come to point X at time Y, as soon as he finds that Ed is in a tree above him, holding a bow and arrow at full draw on him, he is going to fire at Ed in self-defense without waiting to ask questions. Ironically then, Ed does kill the second man just as Lewis killed the first: He manages the center shot without really knowing whether his own victim intended to kill the city men.

Few if any critics have really questioned whether or not Ed kills the right man on the cliff; they allow their doubt to dissipate when Ed continues to act 'as if' he had killed the right man. Instead of subsuming Dickey's construct system, the reader is likely to be so enthralled with Ed's that he stops there. Of course, Ed himself doubts the identity of the man he kills when he first sees his body. The man he was stalking was toothless, but the corpse has teeth. But they are false teeth. It might be the right man; it might not be. Ed says, "If I could have seen him move I would have known one way or the other. But I didn't and I don't" (p. 206). We must remember that on the way up the cliff Ed questions a part of his theory, although not the basic postulate; "I had to admit it: I thought there was really no danger involved, at least from anything human. I didn't actually believe that the man who had shot Drew would stay around all night for another shot at us, or that he would come back in the early morning light either." But then the 'as if' mode of thinking returns: "*If it were me* (italics Dickey's)," thinks Ed (p. 179), and again picks up his theory. He cannot afford to take the chance. And he believes that he must think with the other man's mind; his hypothesis must include all the constructs of the man he is tracking and must order them in the same way. Ed says, "I had thought so long and hard about him that to this day I still believe I felt, in the moonlight, our minds fuse" (p. 185). And later, "For me to kill him under these conditions he would have to be thinking as I had thought for him, and not approximately but exactly. The minds would have to merge" (p. 191).

And of course the man, or at least *a* man, appears at almost exactly point X at time Y. But he doesn't seem to be trying to ambush anyone. He is simply standing on the cliff holding a gun at the level of his waist. Ed finally deals with the question of whether or not he has shot the right man in the only way he can: When Bobby, too, questions whether this corpse really is that of the man who escaped from the clearing after his partner was shot by Lewis, Ed admits that he is not sure. He only knows that the situation is as it is, and that the only thing they can do is sink the body in the river. Ed acts as if he believes he justifiably killed the right man, and he really seems to believe that he did. But his faith is built primarily on a subjective feeling (which after all is a part of thinking in the Kellyian theory) – the intuition that "to this day I still believe I felt, in the moonlight, our minds fuse" (p. 186). Ed believes that the minds remained fused throughout the night of the climb and the hunt, throughout the moment of killing and the search for the body. Then, he says, "His brain and mine unlocked and fell apart" (p. 205). His confidence in that intuition or faith is bolstered in Ed's mind by his past successful experience in predicting and understanding human actions. He knows that he was right in trying not to antagonize the mountain men; he knows that Bobby is as incompetent as he had thought him, and he knows that he was right in suspecting that Lewis would lead them into trouble.

Before the trip is over, Ed has another experience of correctly subsuming another man's thought and somatic experience which increases his trust in his belief that his mind had merged with his victim's mind and had led him to the right man. After Ed and Bobby sink the weighted body of the man Ed has killed, and just before they find Drew's body, Ed looks at Lewis who is lying on the floor of the canoe, and notices that "with his free hand, the one that had nothing to do with his face, he was bracing up under the inside of the gunwale, and I thought that perhaps this was a new system, a way to make his leg go to sleep and keep it asleep by putting pressure on it in a special manner ..." (p. 220). But he does not verbalize the thought. Later on, just as they get back to civilization, Ed asks Lewis, "Do you feel anything in your leg?" Lew-

is answers, "No, but I haven't moved it or fooled with it for a long time. I kept trying to put it to sleep, back yonder, and now I can't wake it up" (p. 235). Ed's perceptions of the other man's psyche and soma are validated. This is one more bit of evidence, and not an insignificant one, that makes him confident that in most cases he reads men correctly; that he subsumes their construct systems accurately. He can construe this incident of thinking with Lewis's mind and feeling with his body to validate his earlier conviction that he had thought with the ambusher's mind.

But Ed is not identical with his creator Dickey, no matter how many resemblances there are between them, and Dickey will not permit us the resolution of doubt he permits his character; he insists that we take into account the operation of chance which Ed has failed to recognize fully. Ed of course knows that the killer he is stalking may go to some other spot on the cliff to carry out his ambush of the canoe, but he does not consider, until after he has killed, that another man who is totally unconnected to the preceding events may come to point X at time Y. He does not consider this possibility because of the necessary limitation of his attention at this time (Kelly would say because of preemption during the cycle of circumspection-preemption-control which leads to a choice that "precipitates the person into a particular situation" (p. 115)<sup>7</sup> Through literary allusion, however, I believe that Dickey indicates to the reader that he must question the apparent operations of cause and effect or design and that he must consider whether the man who comes to point X at time Y is killed because his design to ambush the men in the canoe has been understood, or whether he comes to the river quite innocently and is killed by chance. The allusion I speak of is to Robert Frost's sonnet 'Design.' Dickey's placing Ed in the innocent-seeming tree (Ed notes that man like deer have no natural enemies in the trees) in order to kill a man who walks into the trap, parallels Frost's placing the white spider on the unexpectedly white heal-all in order to kill the white moth that flutters into the web. Ed uses the word *design* in the paragraph in which he de-

scribes the victim who comes to him, "I had never seen a more beautiful or convincing element of a design" (p. 195). Then, too, Ed is a designer by profession. And, as in Frost's poem, it is morning. But can I prove that Dickey means the reader to think of Frost's poem? Ironically, I can argue only from design that it is so: Dickey is a poet and a teacher of literature; he would be likely to use allusion; he considers 'Design' one of Frost's finest poems<sup>8</sup> and I find it inconceivable that he could have just accidentally paralleled the situation of Frost's 'Design' in his novel and could have just inadvertently used the word *design* at the critical moment. But Frost's twisting of the argument from design in the poem enters in: Is there a design: Does design govern? And if so, whose design? Frost offers us the alternatives of evil *universal* design or chaos, i. e., chance; Dickey offers us the parallel alternatives of evil *individual* design or chaos, i. e., chance. Dare I, in face of the comments on the argument from design, offer the argument that the author intended thus and such? I am left, as Ed is, with an intuition that my mind has merged with another's; in this case that my mind, for a brief time, has thought with Dickey's mind. I feel that Dickey meant the reader, at least the academic reader and the critic, to understand the allusion to 'Design' and to see that the man who walks into Ed's ambush may have done so innocently and quite by accident. But perhaps Dickey's use of the word *design* and the similarity of the situation *are* accidental; perhaps I perceive the allusion only because of the pattern or template through which I see reality, just as M. Bleikasten sees Oedipal situations and symbolic castrations through his Freudian template.

The kind of question I face here is the kind of problem the whole of Dickey's novel poses: In psychological terms the problem is cognitive – what does one know and how does he know it? And how does he organize what he knows? In philosophical terms it is epistemological – what are the origins, the nature, and the limits of human knowledge? Dickey's novel is certainly not *just* a statement of the age-old epistemological

<sup>7</sup> The interested reader should see Kelly's explanation of this cycle (pp. 514-517) which space will not permit me to explore at length here.

<sup>8</sup> See "Robert Frost", *Babel to Byzantium: Poets and Poetry Now*. New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1971, pp. 200-09.

and cognitive problems, but encompassing those problems, as it surely does, the novel is certainly more than “an emptily rhetorical horse-opera played in canoes”,<sup>9</sup> or “un roman habile. Trop habile pour être honnête,” as M. Bleikasten would have it.

If Ed's theory was wrong; if Drew was not shot by the surviving rapist; if no one was following the men to murder them, and if Ed killed an innocent man, the moral position of these suburbanites who have come into the wilderness, to see and experience the river before it is too late, is grave indeed. On the other hand, if Ed's theory was right, than what the men did is possibly, even probably, justifiable. But in any case, we are led to consider the question: how is morality possible without knowledge? And then we must consider what the criteria are for judging when we really *know* something.

Ed knows that he doesn't know, and can never know, whether his theory was right or wrong. He has to settle for survival under the circumstances. At the end of the novel, he subsumes the sheriff's construct system well enough to tell him lies, which, if they do not deceive the sheriff completely, are not ones which the sheriff wishes to take the time or trouble to dispute. But at the same time, Ed must exchange whatever chance he might have had to learn the truth for safety from suspicion. Ed must live with his uncertainty and his cognitive discomfort about what happened on the river. He seeks to lessen his cognitive distress by seeing both of the mountain men whom he and Lewis killed as repulsive, useless murderers, in fact, by seeing in the hills only a pathological society of people twisted and ill, physically, mentally, and morally, and by seeing Lewis, whose life he believes he saved, as “a human being, and a good one” (p. 283). But the reader can draw his own conclusions about the members of the mountain society and can doubt whether Ed killed the right man without sharing Ed's cognitive distress, although, if he really thinks about the novel, the reader must suffer a sense of frustration that he, too, can never *know* how Drew died or whether or not Ed killed the right man. Certainly the

reader need not see Ed as a hero, as a totally good man, nor even as an accurate representer of reality. And it in forcing us to face and accept, through our understanding of Ed, our own cognitive fallibility that *Deliverance* delivers us from the bondage of our own old construct systems and helps us confront ambiguity. In its doing so, I believe that it is one of the great novels in the English language. An author's implicit personality theory is not always so apparent in his works as is Dickey's theory in *Deliverance*. Of course, the reader may disagree with me about my perception of the author's implicit personality theory; but if he does, before he becomes too hostile (according to Kelly's definition of that term), let him examine his own implicit personality theory and the philosophical assumptions that underlie it. Let him be sure that he can identify it and that it is free of major inconsistencies. Let him be sure that he is aware that a more or less transparent template which shapes his perceptions lies between him and *Deliverance* and between him and my comments on the novel; let him be sure that his own theoretical spectacles are carefully adjusted on his nose and that they are polished clean of smudges and all unnecessary obscuring fingerprints and film.

In the last analysis, there is not overwhelming scientific proof for the validity or invalidity of any personality theory yet devised. Indeed, it is not realistic to talk of proving or disproving a theory, one can only test hypotheses derived from any given theory and say that the evidence supports or fails to support the hypotheses; the theory itself can long abide, not being either easily demolished or affirmed. I cannot logically claim that Kelly's or Adler's theory is better than Freud's; I can only claim that those theories are nearer Dickey's own implicit theory than is Freud's. If psychological critics *will* look at literature and life through personality theories – and I believe that it is profitable to do so – they and their readers should be aware of alternative theoretical positions and should realize that their own preference of theories must at present be on the basis of choosing that theory which is emotionally, cognitively, or aesthetically pleasing to them and they must accord the same right to choose to the poet and novelist and to other critics.

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<sup>9</sup> Benjamin DeMott, “The ‘More Life’ School and James Dickey”, *Saturday Review* (March 28, 1970), p. 38.

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