

PADDLE FASTER I HEAR TECHNO MUSIC: MAPPING THE PREHOMOSEXUAL AND
THE POSTHOMOSEXUAL IN THE SOUTHS OF JAMES DICKEY AND SAMUEL R.

DELANY

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis argues that James Dickey's *Deliverance*, and Samuel R. Delany's *Through the Valley of the Nest of Spiders* are works of speculative Southern fiction by reading them through David Halperin's "How to do the History of Male Homosexuality" and his notion of prehomosexual discourses. It begins by using Clayton Bigsby as a model to show the fundamental work of speculative fiction to unravel real, historical ideologies. To describe this work, I read the skit with Scott Romine's *The Real South* and Slavoj Žižek's *The Sublime Object of Ideology*.

From there I turn to *Deliverance*, a novel that has been sorely overlooked by Southern literature scholars, due to the film adaptation taking a more prominent place in American pop culture. My analysis of *Deliverance* attempts to push back against that tendency by reading the novel through Herbert Marcuse's *Eros and Civilization* in order to demonstrate that the novel is concerned with characters who travel to the Deep South to escape from modernity, only to be met by a violent resurgence of prehomosexual discourses.

I then pair *Deliverance* with *Through the Valley* by arguing that the latter reconfigures the prehomosexual into what I call the posthomosexual by presenting a queer space in rural Georgia which retains the differentiating language of the prehomosexual. This posthomosexual space employs that language to generate unbridled, and problematic, utopian pleasure. I also discuss how labor is presented as another avenue towards pleasure by reading the text through Marcuse's notion of labor without toil. I then conclude this section by complicating Delany's utopian anxieties by analyzing the incestual relationships and racial language in the novel and discussing the difference between a subject who comes down to a utopia versus a subject who is born into it.

DEDICATION

For my parents, grandparents, and the rest of my family who supported me steadfastly, and for all my friends in Alabama—namely Angeline and Ciara— and back home who kept me laughing through 2020. I love y'all.

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CLAYTON BIGSBY: THE SPECULATIVE MODEL

In the first episode of *Chappelle's Show*, Dave Chappelle gives us one of his most poignant skits: a spoof documentary focusing on a fictitious Black Klansman, Clayton Bigsby. Bigsby is presented as an ardent white supremacist, having published six books, and serving as a prominent voice in, what his white friend and confidant, Jasper, refers to as “the cause” of White Supremacy (Chappelle). According to Bambi Haggins’ reading of the skit and the DVD commentary of the episode, the idea was inspired by Chappelle’s grandfather, who, like Bigsby, despite being aware of his race, “was put in the position to ‘pass’ to avoid trouble during school” (Haggins 222). The sketch has also had somewhat of a resurgence in social media in the wake of the murder of George Floyd. In August 2020, the protest group Say Their Names Alabama demanded the removal of Confederate symbols from the Marshall County courthouse, and were met by Daniel Sims, a Black member of a chapter of the Sons of Confederate Veterans (Lester). Sims claimed that, “[The] monument ain’t killing a soul. It’s ain’t talking bad to nobody. It ain’t even racist” (Lester). Not long after, tweets appeared comparing Sims to Clayton Bigsby, with one tweet in particular playing Bigsby’s dialog over Sims in a local news broadcast (Kurp). The Bigsby skit exists at a center point that is shared among many texts about the South—a dark, contentious history behind it, and a farcical future ahead of it in which the text takes on a new light.

A superficial reading of the Clayton Bigsby skit might merely consider it a lambasting of white supremacist rhetoric—one in which the absurdity of such politics are unsubtly displayed

through Bigsby's speeches to white supremacists. While such a reading is acceptable, I believe reading the Clayton Bigsby skit as a work of speculative fiction provides us ample space to generate new meaning. I do not mean speculative in the sense of science fiction, but as a text that is predicated on the simple question—what if? It is unlikely that a Black, White supremacist could exist in the “real” world, a term we will come back to, with the same amount popularity Clayton Bigsby is shown to enjoy. Dave Chappelle brings Clayton Bigsby to life in a sense as a speculative figure, and it stands to reason that he exists to not only defy the sociopolitical structures that would prevent a “real” Clayton Bigsby, but to expose and exploit those structures fundamental, ideological contradictions—which we will call “fault lines.”

To define these fault lines, let us turn first turn to Slavoj Zizek's critique of antisemitism in *The Sublime Object of Ideology*: “The proper answer to anti-Semitism is therefore not ‘Jews are really not like that’ but ‘the anti-Semitic idea of Jew has nothing to do with Jews; the ideological figure of a Jew is a way to stitch up the inconsistency of our own ideological system” (49). I highlight this passage for several reasons. If one is to read Clayton Bigsby as a critique of ideology, one needs to look no further than the interviewer's first encounter with Clayton Bigsby, as he sits on his front porch with his white wife. The journalist begins his interview by asking what Bigsby's “overall message” of his books are, to which Clayton replies, “Sir my message is simple. N—s¹, Jews, homosexuals, Mexicans, Arabs...stink and I hate them” (Chappelle). In response, the journalist, almost adopting Bigsby's language himself, stating, “I noticed you referred to n—African Americans. What exactly is your problem?” Clayton launches

¹ Used in place of the euphemism “The N-word” for concision and style.

into a tirade in which he claims, in the words of the journalist, African Americans are, “Good-for-nothing tricksters” and “Crack-smoking swindlers,” among other things (Chappelle).

Of course, such caricatures of Black people could be countered, but the journalist, either out of a sense of journalistic duty to report the truth, or simply not having a sufficient counter at hand, does not respond to Clayton’s claim. It would be absurd to expect the audience to counter Clayton Bigsby directly. After all, this is a comedy skit with all the rhetorical properties that such a text entail. Using Zizek’s reasoning, Bigsby’s deeply racist assertions present Black people, as the “ideological figure” which stitch up an ideology system based on “pathological, paranoid construction[s]” (49).

Such a tirade, if we are to subscribe to Zizek’s argument, exists not to be countered but to beg the question: what are the ideological inconsistencies that such a tirade is attempting to cover up? These inconsistencies are what I refer to as fault lines—moments where these constructions undo themselves. Clayton Bigsby is speculative in that he exists in a fictionalized South—one that is based on real, racist structures and ideologies, but is nevertheless divorced from them.

As Bigsby makes his arguments, he and the journalist walk to the edge of his remote property, located somewhere in the Deep South. The journalist asks Bigsby a pointed question:

Journalist: You’ve never left this property have you, Mr. Bigsby?

Bigsby: No sir, not in many years.

Journalist: What if I were to tell you that you are an African American?

Bigsby: Listen, I’m gonna make this clear. I am in no way, shape, or form, involved in any n—dom, you understand?! (Chappelle)

Thus we are presented, both verbally and spatially, with the limits of Clayton Bigsby’s racist ideology. In *Laughing Mad*, Bambi Haggins astutely notes that Bigsby’s property is “...the bubble wherein his “whiteness” is secure” (223). The important implication is that, far from

being a pervasive ideology, Bigsby's ideology is set up on a binary that divides "n—dom" from whiteness, both physically on his property, and ideologically within the confines of the text. While it is relatively secure on his property, it is nevertheless a free-floating binary, existing independently of the realities presented in the skit. As such, Bigsby's ideology is fragile, and its stitching can be unraveled with relative ease. The genius of the skit is that this process of unravelling occurs within the skit, and not necessarily by the audience watching it.

Earlier in the skit, before Bigsby lays out the binary of his ideology, the journalist interviews Bridgett Wexler, the headmistress for the Wexler Home for the Blind, who explains that, "[Clayton] was the only n— we'd ever had around here, so we figured we'd make it easier on [him] by just telling him and all the other blind kids that he was white" (Chappelle). While this resolution seems to be implausible in the historical Jim Crow South, it is the first point in which the racist ideology presented unravels itself. It is possible that the audience would expect Wexler to reject Clayton on the grounds of the color of his skin. However, by calling Clayton a blind, white student, Wexler implicitly undermines the ideological figure of Black people in Bigsby's racist ideology. While I do not wish to paint the indoctrination of Bigsby as an act of mercy, it does expose a faultline within the ideology: despite the binary between Black and white being presented, by Bigsby, as immutable and solid, it is porous enough for a Black child to be taught that he is white. In other words, these seemingly fixed categories in the reality of the skit are free floating. To put it in more liberal, humanistic terms, despite the implicit violent, irrational racism presented by the whites in this fictional community, there is compassion and humanity. Wexler, despite being an agent of Jim Crow policies, recognizes the fact that Clayton is a child with a disability who deserves an education.

Chappelle, however, does not let us hold onto that notion for long, nor should we try to. As Bigsby leaves his home in preparation to give a speech at a White Nationalist meeting, the journalist asks his handler and friend, Jasper, why he doesn't tell Clayton that he is, in fact, Black, to which he responds, "Listen man, he's too important to the movement. If I tell him he's Black, he'd probably kill himself. Just so there'd be one less n— around. His commitment is that deep" (Chappelle). Whereas Wexler's motives could be marked up to some skewed sense of compassion for a child, Jasper presents Bigsby's blindness as a matter of pragmatic necessity to "the cause." Moreover, his speculation that Bigsby would kill himself in the service of that cause further supports the notion that Clayton's position exists to serve the "pathological, paranoid construction" and that Wexler's compassion has only served to put him in this tangled position in which all the ideological contradictions are laid bare. Both utterances from Jasper and Wexler are fault lines in that they are spots in which the ideology presented have the potential to undo themselves. These fault lines can only exist in a speculative space—one that is informed by history, but is fundamentally ahistorical, thereby allowing absurd possibilities to be considered.

The skit reaches its climax as Bigsby takes to the stage to deliver another racist tirade against minorities in America, the government, and the media. Eventually a person in the crowd demands that Bigsby show them his face, and he obliges. Naturally, upon seeing a Black white supremacist, the crowd is horrified. hilariously, the man who asks to see Bigsby's face loses his head in a gory implosion. The gore, beyond its gruesome physical humor, perhaps reemphasizes that we are in a space that is divorced from our own reality, along with punctuating the ultimate irreconcilability between the "real" of Bigsby's Blackness and the deceptive figure raised by Wexler and Jasper—or so it would seem. The skit ends with the journalist telling us that Clayton has come to terms with his Blackness but has divorced his blind, white wife of nineteen years,

because she is a “n— lover” (Chappelle). Thus, the absurdity of the Black white supremacist lives on regardless of any “real” truth that Clayton Bigsby comes to terms within the speculative space he inhabits.

In evaluating the famous Clayton Bigsby skit, I wish to emphasize the potential for a fictitious depiction of the South to facilitate critique of real ideology. Of course, there are “real” historical absurdities and ideological contradictions to be unearthed in the historical and contemporary South, however, these absurdities and contradictions have never caused a man’s head to implode in a spectacularly violent fashion. Considering Bigsby skit as a speculative narrative allows us to look for underlying narrative structures in order to better define what I call “Speculative Souths.” In the case of the Bigsby skit, it should be noted that the narrative is presented as a journalistic piece—one in which a journalist, presumably not from the South, “comes down” to probe at the dark underside of a nebulously defined region. We will define the “coming down South” in greater detail later, but first it is necessary to better define the term “real.” For that I turn to Scott Romine and his book, *The Real South*. In his introduction to *The Real South*, Scott Romine attempts to define what the “real” South is in late capitalism:

Mapping the South is always a situated venture and always implicitly narrative: a way of mobilizing space in efforts of immense variety and scope, ranging from...the red state mythology of contemporary American politics to more localized efforts to generate more intimate and compelling microSouths...the South is increasingly sustained as a virtual, commodified, built, themed, invented or otherwise artificial territoriality... (9)

If this is the nature of the “real” South as it stands—a nebulously defined region, divorced from “real” geography, comprised of an endless amount of competing, defining narratives—then it seems that Clayton Bigsby is a superfluous invention. After all, how can we appreciate the absurdity of the blind, Black white supremacist when the South is full of falsehoods, like Civil War reenactments and “plantation tourism” (Romine 2). Beyond the cartoonish absurdity of

imploding White supremacists' heads, there is a potentiality in fictitious narratives that take place in the South, by virtue of their speculative nature, to break down the ideological constructions that constitute the "real" South, and perhaps push past it. In these narratives, we are given a privileged view into the minds of characters who undergo the journey of "going down South." The speculative nature of this journey allows us to consider how the South, fictional as it may be, confounds the expectations of outsiders trekking down to the South, and perhaps, shows how the impasse of the late South, as Romine calls it, with its "set of anxious, transient, even artificial intersections, sutures, or common surfaces" might be overcome (2).

While this project is, in a way, an extension of Romine's, it is different in that we are not trying to define the "real." That is the difference between Romine's microSouth, and my concept of a speculative South. While both are undoubtedly built upon a material and cultural history, the former is a study of fragmented, cultural artifacts, while the latter merely deals with narratives about the South. My object of study is contemporary, fictional narratives either about or set in a fictionalized South in which characters attempt to "go down" South to break away from the pathologies of modernity. Just as Romine suggests, this project is also concerned with the points in which these narratives present "intersections and surfaces" such as Brigette Wexler and Jasper's reasonings in the Clayton Bigsby skit. If the project of Southern cultural studies is to map out a fractured "real," this project works to take step beyond that to consider the potentialities in fictive southern spaces. This thesis considers one potentiality in particular—the capacity for male-on-male sexuality to both disfigure and liberate by examining the speculative Southern spaces of James Dickey's *Deliverance* and Samuel R. Delany's *Through the Valley of the Nest of Spiders* through the lenses David Halperin's "How to do the History of Male Homosexuality" and Herbert Marcuse's *Eros and Civilization*. While *Deliverance* is primarily a

novel about white men in a predominately white space, *Through the Valley* will complicate our discussion by presenting a speculative space that is both queer and predominately Black. I argue that *Deliverance* presents a Southern space that is expected to be a utopia by the novel's main characters, Ed and Lewis, and dashes those expectations, offering instead a prehomosexual "theme park" which offers them no deliverance. *Through the Valley* follows the same basic narrative structure as *Deliverance*, but partially makes good on the former novel's promise—presenting a posthomosexual, Southern utopia, which is complicated by its use of racially differentiating language as a means for sexual gratification, and its depictions of incest.

DELIVERANCE: REVIVING THE PREHOMOSEXUAL

To better discuss these potentialities, I turn to James Dickey's *Deliverance*. In many ways, the Bigsby Skit echoes *Deliverance* in terms of narrative structure, with people coming down to the South to figure out how and why people live there. Moreover, the Bigsby skit is just now obtaining the layers of historical accretion that *Deliverance* has had for decades. The novel itself is often overlooked in favor of the film, which seems to have a dubious legacy at best. Ed's harrowing journey through the foothills of Georgia has been reduced to the line, "Paddle faster, I hear banjo music" that one may find on a bumper sticker, or that one hears as quip from their friends as they kayak on some lonesome stretch of river somewhere in Appalachia. It is difficult to hear the first, plucky chords of "Dueling Banjos" and not have a mental image, however fuzzy, of some hillbilly flashing a toothy smile on a riverbank. There is no reason to lament this; these bumper stickers, quips and chords, are perhaps more "real" than the film or even the novel. Romine's definition of the "real" South claims that it is "an archive of improvisations grounded in space and time, a register of imagined relations to artificial territorialities, themed spaces, virtual terrains, built environments, localities, and 'the global'—imaginable precisely because of the breakdown of coded territorialities" (17). As such, these fragmented legacies of the film *Deliverance*—bumper stickers and all—enact this "archive of improvisations."

While the film is something that can be turned on and off, the bumper stickers, the jokes, the music, and the imagined hillbillies cannot. Once someone enters a Wal-Mart and sees the pithy phrase pressed on a t-shirt, once they sits down in a canoe on the river, the "register of imagined relations" is conjured up in the mind, marked by a vague feeling of amusement, and

perhaps fear, whether they have ever seen the film or not. That is the “real” of *Deliverance*—the immediate associations of images and sound, born from a conflagration of jokes and commodities without need of a film, let alone a novel. As such, the film itself is apocryphal in the fragmented archive of Southern culture—the cultural associations transcend its materiality. If the film has been relegated to the cultural backburner, where does that leave the novel? At face value, it would be easy to consider it a progenitor of a progenitor, a bit of trivia that one may bring up in small conversation: “Did you know that *Deliverance* was based on a novel?” To which someone may reply “Really? I’ll have to check that out” only to put a used copy of the book on their Amazon wish list and never think of it again.

If the legacy of *Deliverance* is so immediate in the mind and readily available for purchase, then it should be safe to say that it has far outpaced both the novel and film. The scholarship surrounding the novel compounds matters further. Much of the criticism surrounding *Deliverance* is psychoanalytic in nature. While the novel might lend itself to such readings, such methods are, respectfully, as dated as the leisure suits that were popular around the time of the novel’s publication.

To brush away those layers of accretion, we may consider the novel as an archetypical work of Southern fiction, which presents a fictionalized space in which some sort of “deliverance” ought to occur. I use “ought” for a very specific reason, as the novel ends on an ambiguous note in which Ed, having survived his ordeal, tells Drew’s wife, Martha, that her husband died on their fateful trek, and that “it’s the river’s fault” (Dickey 271). Martha sees through this and throws it back at him; “All right, Ed,” she says “Nobody can do anything. Nobody can ever do anything. It’s all so useless. Everything is useless. It always has been” (272).

While Martha is correct in believing that Drew's death serves no great purpose, and the trek down the fictional Cahulawassee River is a foolhardy endeavor, taken up by men in the throes of some deep, internal crisis, I believe that Ed's casting of blame on the river warrants further analysis. It is a confounding space, to which Ed and his friends "come down" to discover something about themselves—only to be met with sexual violence and murder. I believe Romine affords us such a space for analysis, as he claims his object of study are "microSouths" (9). Whereas Romine is interested in microSouths and their ability to "sustain" the artificial territoriality of the "real" south, we are concerned fictive speculative Souths, in this case *Deliverance*, and their attractiveness to outsiders as a space that offers some sort of "deliverance" from the world beyond it.

In calling *Deliverance* an archetypal text, I do not wish to merely uncover what can tentatively be called universalities. Laying out the latent, ancient symbolism in the image of a river, and comparing the novel to the countless tales of men travelling down bodies of water is beyond the scope of this paper. Our task is to frame Ed's "going down" to the rural areas of the South as an archetypal story so that we may track that process in other stories as well—namely Samuel Delany's novel *Through the Valley of the Nest of Spiders*, which, like *Deliverance* features a character who "goes down" to a rural Southern area to seek his own deliverance, and is met with male-on-male sexuality—although to a different end. To lay a groundwork to discuss the potential in this sexuality, I turn to David M. Halperin's *How to do the History of Male Homosexuality*.

In this "genealogical" analysis of the history of male homosexuality, Halperin maps out "transhistorical continuities"² which he considers to be the progenitors of what he calls our

² "Effeminacy, Active/Passive Sodomy, Male Friendship/Love and Passivity/Inversion (Halperin 92).

“modern concept of homosexuality” (90). Thus, he begins his analysis of these four “prehomosexual discourses, practices, categories, patterns [and] models” (89). I argue that these “prehomosexual practices” exist in *Deliverance*, and are there to enact the “confoundment” that Ed’s journey entails—from the obvious, the rape and emasculation of Bobby, to the not so obvious, Ed’s contemplation of the “kind of love, painful and terrifying” that he and his freshly-killed assailant might have made (Dickey 180). However, Halperin’s essay concludes with an “end of history” of sorts in which all the trappings of Prehomosexuality, its hierarchical, transactive, or otherwise, give rise to modern homosexuality, which can be defined by its likeness to:

...heterosexual romantic love, the notion of homosexuality implies that it is possible for sexual partners to bond with one another not on the basis of their difference but on the basis of their sameness, their identity of desire and orientation and “sexuality.”

Homosexual relations cease to be compulsorily structured by a polarization of identities and roles (active/passive, insertive/receptive, masculine/feminine, or man/boy). (112)

In claiming that these problematic discourses have all but “ceased” in modern homosexuality, it seems pointless to go beyond that. However, Halperin also claims that “[prehomosexuality’s] histories as well as the history of their interrelations have been obscured *but not superseded* by the recent emergence of the discourses of (homo)sexuality (91). As such, it is entirely possible to map the moments in which the tendencies of prehomosexuality “pop up” even in the world of contemporary homosexuality, with all its egalitarian trappings.

Criticism of *Deliverance* is united by the supposition that the novel does, in fact, offer some sort of “deliverance”—usually presented as some sort of lesson that Ed and the rest of the survivors have learned from their time on the river. In his essay “James Dickey’s ‘Deliverance’: The Ritual of Art,” Henry Lindborg defines this deliverance, as “an organic fusion with nature and with the mind of another man” (89). Lindborg ultimately concludes that “The novel itself is a means to discovery” which he defines through a reading of Ed’s final thoughts on the river,

affirming that he finds a way for the river to serve him in his day-to-day life—his archery, his work as a graphical artist, and a collage-maker. (Lindborg 90; Dickey 275-76). R.E. Foust directly pushes against Lindborg’s reading, claiming that the novel is “a tactile immersion in the nature resulting in an equivalence between subject and object, Self and Other. Rather than the transcendence of nature, consciousness reveals its equality with it” (200). He also asserts that Ed experiences this equalization “through violence” and that “...He will learn the appropriate uses of force: when to eat, when to react, and when to be still” (Foust 205).

Daniel Guillory takes up this project of deliverance-as-lesson and adds a mythical twist by claiming that the river is a “god-in-the-object, an agent of metamorphosis...” which facilitates Ed’s change from a man under the weight of his “occupational drudge” to a “free man endowed with authentic and aesthetic motivation” (58). Keen Butterworth pushes this notion of deliverance-as-lesson to its conclusion, going to far as to paint Ed, Lewis, Drew, and Bobby as constituent members of the psyche, and concludes that “Dickey’s psychology is more modern, more complex, for the instinctual self rises from within when called upon to meet the challenge of survival” (77). While all these readings are important, they run the risk of boxing in *Deliverance* as some sort of hillbilly bildungsroman and serve as the impetus for the current popular memory surrounding both the novel and film. Linda Ruth Williams, in her reading of the film, pushes directly against this, claiming that Ed’s encounters on the river “do not add up to a redeemed, sovereign sexual identity which sits on only one side of the great divide” (Williams). This divide between modernity and the untamed wilderness, is broken by what she calls a “sense of sexual infection which crosses the divide between inhabitants and invaders, rural monsters and urban exploiters” (Williams). As we are partially reading *Deliverance* through Scott Romine’s notion of microSouths, this claim is particularly important. The river should not be read as a

primordial, premodern space, even though that is what Ed and Lewis expect it to be. Such a reading would perpetuate the current idealization of the film and novel, rather than generating a new reading.

It is not surprising that such monolithic readings of *Deliverance* render the mountain men as being a part of nature, rather than people living it. Michael K. Glenday pushes directly against reading the river as a primordial, creative source, asserting that the novel is a “surprising vindication of urban civilization and not a revelation of its exhaustion...” (Glenday 150). Anil Narine goes even further in collapsing the difference between civilization and the river by focusing on the mountain men, as presented in the film, as “Caucasian Americans living, secluded, within the United States” who are not “outcasts of modernity living in isolation from its influence. Rather, they are bound up in its machinery but receive few of its benefits...” (451). Narine’s work is vital to our project as it allows for a break down in the divide between the urban and the rural in both *Deliverance* and *Through the Valley*—a distinction which is prominent in both texts.

Like Narine, Don Kunz also pushes back against the creative impulse in *Deliverance* by claiming that Ed abandons his life and, more specifically, his wife for a “super-masculine” companionship with Lewis—a concept that is important to our reading, and one that we will return to later (293). That said, Kunz concludes that the wilderness, as presented in *Deliverance*, “is not a paradise to be regained without women but a hell of their own making in which they must by default suffer the roles of women” (301). Kunz begins to touch on potentiality for the river to be a space of confusion, one in which there is an “inversion” in which these hyper-masculine men “discover not so much how to be men as how it feels to be women abused by the kind of men they have dreamed of being” (300). Although I find the notion of “inversion,”

useful, this paper will divorce it from an inversion of gender roles, and, for a lack of better terms, “queer” Ed and company’s journey. We will let the male-on-male homosociality, rape, and murder stand on its own, rather than turning them into didactical gender representations.

Although I do not agree with many earlier readings of *Deliverance*, I do not wish to throw out the early criticism of the novel, as it provide us with a means for discussing the compulsion in literature about the South to have characters to penetrate it—to “go down” South. Keen Butterworth attempts to pin the novel down in archetypal terms in his essay “The Savage Mind: James Dickey’s *Deliverance*” claiming that the novel presents a story of “Descent and Return—as old at least as *The Gilgamesh*...” (71). While this may be true, such a reading goes beyond the scope of this project. If possible, I wish to divorce the term “archetypal” from its psychoanalytic connotations, along with its perceived literary pedigree. Instead, we will view *Deliverance* as an archetypal text within the confines of Southern literature in terms of structure. *Deliverance* is archetypal in that its narrative structure—a group of modern subjects penetrating the Deep South to find “something”—is distinct enough as a form to be tracked. The content, however, is anything but. But we are not interested in mapping out the anatomy of the subconscious mind onto *Deliverance*, nor are we interested in Ed’s journey as a means of self-discovery, creative rebirth, or as a bildungsroman of sorts. Instead, I wish to work from Scott Romine’s notion that the South is a “virtual, commodified, built, themed, invented, or otherwise artificial territoriality” as a more helpful guide into understanding the novel and its deeper themes.(9). This “artificiality” is perhaps best demonstrated in Romine’s analysis of an episode of *Three-Day Weekend* in which a couple takes a three-day tour of Franklin Tennessee—visiting an assortment of restaurants, a factory-turned-lofts, and horseback riding ranch (18). Romine

concludes that this episode “appears as a totally incoherent narrative” in which one of the visitors “performs a narrative work” in concluding that Franklin is “an authentic southern place” (18).

It is possible to read *Deliverance* in such a way as well. Much like the couple who wish to escape life in Orlando, Ed and Lewis are seeking a deliverance from their modern condition. After all, it is Lewis who claims that there is “something important in those hills” which he equates with “[the] songs...that collectors have never put on tape” (Dickey 40). As such, it is not so much the river that Lewis and Ed seek, but rather some vague notion of authenticity that is missing in their own lives, and which they believe can be found along the river. Lewis’, and to a lesser extent, Ed’s expectations of what the river and its inhabitants will give them is the “artificiality.” It is Ed who performs the narrative work of creating some sort of meaningful story out of his traumatic experience.

What, then, is the “authentic” experience that these men encounter beyond the narrative that Ed crafts? This may seem an untenable question to ask, as it runs the risk of falling back into the same trap as previous scholarship. Because we are dealing with a speculative South, we are granted some leeway. Unlike the real individuals Romine’s example, we are privileged to the inner workings of Lewis and Ed’s desires. The narrativizing is already underway at the beginning of the novel—Lewis expects to find authenticity, among other things, in the “songs” in the hills. The key object of study is the point of rupture where these expectations are dashed and aiming to better explain the “authentic” thing that is encountered and the process that is undertaken.

Kunz is correct in asserting that there is a sort of inversion that takes place once these men are on the river, but it is not necessarily one of gender roles, nor is it a prescriptive measure to teach the men what it is like to be women. Similarly, Glenday and Narine are correct to frame

the river as an extension of modernity, rather than some primordial space, and that mountain men as modern subjects. In a sense *Deliverance* is a microSouth in reverse. The narrative work is already done for us; Lewis, and Ed, and by extension, the readers as well, know why they are going out there. Because of this, we are afforded the space to push out from Romine and claim that there is a “thing” that rises to greet the men.

Even though the centerpiece of *Deliverance* is a graphic scene of male-on-male rape, little attention has been paid to it in and of itself. It is typically reduced to one small step in the arduous, hillbilly bildungsroman. I wish to push back on that and discuss that episode in greater detail. To center our discussion on that episode, we must utilize Halperin’s model of Prehomosexuality. Halperin is concerned with historicizing the modern notion of homosexuality, not as an historical discourse in and of itself, but an amalgamation of four distinct historical discourses: effeminacy, pederasty, friendship/male love and passivity/inversion” (92). Halperin also argues that these separate histories are “obscured *but not superseded* by the recent emergence of the discourses of (homo)sexuality” and that “what ‘homosexuality’ signifies today is an effect of this cumulative process of historical overlay and accretion” (91).

Narine argues that Ed and company represent “a different form of faith in modernity and its comforts” and yet they, just like the couple in Romine’s reading of “Three-Day Weekend,” are compelled to flee from it. However, it is important to remember that all these men live in Atlanta—a “real” microSouth. The authentic South that they encounter is not one of traditional Southern history. They do not find Civil War bullet holes in the walls of plantation homes in Franklin Tennessee (Romine 18). Instead, by virtue of the scenes of male rape, gender inversion, and homosociality, these men have a direct encounter that Halperin describes. The task is

therefore to determine the significance of the rupture point between the expectations of the journey and the reality.

From the very beginning, Ed, Lewis, Drew, and Bobby conflate the South that they seek with a sense of wildness that is under siege by modernity. As the four men plan their trip, Lewis imparts in them a sense of urgency, claiming, “The dam at Ainty has already been started, and when it’s finished next spring the river will back up fast. This whole valley will be under water. But right now it’s wild. And I *mean* wild; it looks like something up in Alaska. We really ought to go up there before the real estate people get hold of it and make it over into one of their heavens” (Dickey 3-4). At first glance, Lewis’ urgency might seem to already undermine any attempt to paint the river as a microSouth, with all its convoluted authenticities, as it creates a certain tension between the world in which they inhabit, and a “wild” Southern space at risk of being flooded. Most critics tend to take this tension at face value. Kunz for example claims that the novel “delivers [the] protagonists to a wilderness for violent initiation principally in order to liberate them from the captivating power of their conventional masculine fantasy” (290). Most follow this formula of the river as a delivering force. Narine, however, is an exception. He reads the dam as the materialization of a “modern, technocratic ideology of progress” (451-52). Rather than letting that stand as is, Narine collapses the tension in claiming that the mountain men too are modern subjects as well.

But before we can pick up that argument, it is necessary to fully define what exactly is meant by the phrase “modern subject.” For that, we must turn to Ed’s thoughts on his friends, and on his own life. As Lewis plans out the trip down the river, Ed shares his thoughts on Lewis:

I liked Lewis; I could feel myself getting caught up again in his capricious and tenacious enthusiasms that had already taken me bow hunting and varmint-calling with him, and down into a small, miserably cold cave where there was one dead, crystalline frog. Lewis was the only man I knew who could do with his life exactly what he wanted to do. (5)

At this point in the novel Ed paints Lewis—in his own mind—as a paragon of freedom, and, perhaps more importantly, as one who can impart this freedom by facilitating journeys into the “wild.” Dickey doesn’t leave this image of Lewis uncomplicated in Ed’s mind, however. Later on, Ed’s thoughts turn back to Lewis, this time in a more critical way; “...Lewis and I were different, and were different from each other. I had nothing like his drive, or his obsessions. Lewis wanted to be immortal. He had everything that life could give, and he couldn’t make it work...he might be able to find what it was he wanted, the thing that must be there, and that must be subject to the will” (9).

It may be tempting to read Lewis’ obsessions as-is; that the river is, in fact, a “raw and wild” representation of “life untouched by the civilizing hand of man, or even by the tempering forces of Nature itself” and that it must be civilized. (Butterworth 71-2). However, such a reading would ignore the fact that the river is, as Narine reminds us, a space occupied by subjects who are just as much at the mercy of modernity as Lewis. The river is more of a theme park than a primordial space—one in which these men can excitedly attempt to seek deliverance from their modern conditions, while being able to return home after.

Ed is the key into mapping out the definitions of modern conditions and subjects. After the men plan out their journey, Ed begins to tell us about his career as a “graphics consultant and director” at his own studio which is “full of gray affable men who tried it in New York and come back South to live and die” (Dickey 13). Ed claims that his employees, some of which he calls “boys just out of art school” would occasionally have good ideas, but mostly spend their time coming up with “trying-for-it” absurdities (Dickey 13). Moreover, he admits that he and his partner hire people who considered themselves to be “real” artists, “willing to do what they openly considered hackwork in order to do their own work in the evenings and on weekends and

holidays” noting that they were “the saddest of all” (Dickey 14). Ed, who, despite calling his employees his “captives,” is a man who is self-aware enough to call himself a “mechanic of the graphic arts” and who works in a gray, stagnant space which profits off a “lack of graphic sophistication” (Dickey 14; 26). In so many words, Ed’s modern condition is one of stagnancy that lacks any “real” creative output.

However, there is a moment during a photoshoot for an ad for “Kitt’n Britches” which ruptures the stagnancy that plagues Ed. “I stepped over to touch [the model],” he says:

She turned and looked into my face at close range, and the gold-glowing mote fastened on me; it was more gold than any real gold could possibly be; it was alive and it saw me...Her hands were folded across her breasts in a way that managed to give the effect of casualness, and Max was not quite sure of how to hand her the cat. She took it with one hand and in doing so, protecting herself with the other she simply took her left breast in her hand and the sight of that went through me, a deep and complex male thrill, as if something had touched me in the prostate. (22)

R.E. Foust claims that the “most obvious feature” in this scene is the “primacy of touch” and that “It is this tactility that bestows value upon the moment, leaving it in Ed’s memory as an experience promising ‘deliverance’” (206). Although I agree with Foust’s reading of the moment, it is important to remember that Ed, as a modern subject, is a “mechanic.” It is not surprising that, before the moment of touch, he is fixated on a fleck in her eye and the gold beyond any “real” gold. Just as Lewis unfurls the map of the Cahulawassee and claims that there is a “wild” beyond it, so too does Ed see—or perhaps longs—for something beyond that which is in front of him (Dickey 4). As previously mentioned, Guillory calls the river a “god-in-the-object, an agent of metamorphosis; to pass through its force-field is to be changed in ways that are fundamental and inexplicable” (57). As such we can read this encounter almost entirely in the same way—by virtue of the “male thrill” that it stirs within him. That said, it is important to remember that it is the fleck in the model’s eye that transfixes him, and the *sight* of the model touching her breast which touches him.

The most interesting aspect of this passage is the fact that Ed centers the sensation on his prostate. This sensation foreshadows the rape episode and its aftermath. Ed is penetrated in his thoughts in this scene, just as Bobby will be physically penetrated. Pamela Barnett frames Ed's journey as one in which he must vanquish both his modern ennui and his own perceived femininity (145-6). While this is true, I would like to use Halperin to explain this passage. In his discussion of the prehomosexual historical discourses, Halperin attempts to distinguish the categories of effeminates and passives:

Effeminates are men who succumb to a tendency that all normal men have and that all normal men have to guard against or suppress in themselves, whereas passives are men who are so unequal to the struggle that they can be seen to suffer from a specific constitutional defect, namely a lack of the masculine capacity to withstand the appeal of pleasure (especially pleasure deemed exceptionally disgraceful or degrading) as well as a tendency to adopt a specifically feminine attitude or surrender in relations with other men. (103)

While this passage specifically refers to the prehomosexual relationships between men, and although we are still within the trappings of civilization at this point in the novel, I believe it is possible to view Ed's passive description of the sensation as a "constitutional defect." Even though he is the one who initially touches the model, the sensational feedback is rendered in such a way that he is penetrated by it—perhaps alluded to by the "complexity" of the feeling—which is ultimately, along with the stagnancy in his life as a "mechanic of the graphic arts," what he seeks deliverance from.

Before we continue with Ed, let us turn to his counterpart, Lewis. Even though Ed views Lewis as a man with no small degree of freedom, he is just as keen to go on this trip as well. As the two men trek out towards the river, Ed notes a line of demarcation along the highway:

The change was not gradual; you could have stopped the car and got out at the exact point where suburbia ended and the red-neck South began... We hummed along, borne with the inverted canoe on a long tide of patent medicines and religious billboards. From such a trip you would think that the South did nothing but dose itself and sing gospel

songs...you would think that the bowels of the southerner were forever clamped shut..." (Dickey 38)

For Ed, the South from which he seeks deliverance, is coded in the symbols of advertisements, which present a false sense of Southernness. Moreover, the clear distinction that he makes between his South and the "red-neck South" is a clean break. While it may be tempting to take Ed at his word, the dichotomy he creates is a false one. Narine's position that both the "mountain people" and the "Suburban Atlantans, are both "bound up in [modernity's] machinery" serves to highlight that the demarcation that Ed perceives is just as false as the perceived Southernness portrayed in the advertisements (451).

False as the demarcation may be, Lewis is also keen to take up a similar position. As they get further up into the mountains, the men begin to speculate on the nature of their inhabitants. Ed, to his credit, takes a skeptical line against Lewis' fawning over the mountain people: "If those people in the hills, the ones with all the folk songs and dulcimers, came out of the hills and led us all toward a new heaven and a new earth, it would not make a particle of difference to me. I am a get-through-the day man" (Dickey 41). Lewis responds by differentiating the river from Ed's office:

...You've had all that office furniture in front of you...You've been sitting in a chair that won't move. You've been steady. But when that river is under you, all that is going to change. There's nothing you do as vice-president of Emerson-Gentry that's going to make any difference at all when the water starts to foam up. (Dickey 41)

Lewis' focus shifts from the people back to the river. At this point, Lewis still considers it the "wild" thing that will end up removing all titles and "things" of modernity. The river as a "wild" space is a force that, in Lewis' mind, strips human subjects of titles and trappings of modernity and places it in a position to grapple with nature. Lewis admits as much by saying "...the whole thing is going to be reduced to the human body, once and for all. I want to be ready" (Dickey 42).

It is this readiness that is central to Lewis' own anxieties about modernity. Ed asks what he means by "the whole thing" to which he replies, "The human race thing. I think the machines are going to fail, the political systems are going to fail, and a few men are going to take to the hills and start over" (Dickey 42). We should not be afraid to read this anxiety with a certain sense of irony. After all, the distinction between the mundane suburban South and the mythic, musical South is only a matter of perception in the minds of Ed and Lewis. Moreover, as Narine reminds us, the rural areas of the South in the novel are already under threat from the machinery of modernity through the impending damming of the river. The fact that these men have loaded their vehicle up with a canoe, camping equipment and other associated paraphernalia, and are taking time out of their normal routines to go there only serve to reinforce that irony. Despite Ed's ennui and Lewis' anxieties, the men both stop for a "big meal with grits and eggs and lots of butter and biscuits and preserves" along the way to the river (Dickey 38). Even if the anxieties and ennui are authentic for these men, it is still mediated through the modern ritual of going on vacation—even if the trip goes horribly wrong.

I do not wish to make light of Lewis' anxieties about—or perhaps his wishes for—societal collapse. This conflation of anxiety and desire is the impetus of the whole novel, and the heart of its characters' actions. After Lewis explains his fixation on the rural South as a source of renewal and authenticity, Ed begins to internally criticize him:

I looked at him. He lived in the suburbs, like the rest of us. He had money, a good-looking wife and three children. I could not really believe that he came in from placating his tenants every evening and gave himself solemnly to the business of survival, insofar as it involved his body... Did he have long dreams of atomic holocaust in which he had to raise himself and his family out of the debris of less strong folk and head toward the same blue hills we were approaching? (Dickey 42)

Ed's reading of Lewis is not too far off from our own. He is aware of the contradictions in

Lewis' anxieties and his fantasies. Just as the lines of demarcation between the suburbs and the

rural are blurred and marked by modernity, so too is Lewis' psyche; he blurs the mental lines—between being a modern, suburban man, and a survivor of an impending apocalypse. Lewis admits as much when he claims that he built an air-raid shelter stocked with canned food, record players, and, oddly enough, recorders so that he can create a “family recorder group” (Dickey 42). However, at the end of this labor he admits that he realizes that “...survival was not in the rivets and the metal, and not in the double sealed doors...It was in me. It came down to the man, and what he could do. The body is the one thing you can't fake; it's just got to be there” (Dickey 42). If Ed's modern trappings are his desk and chair, these modern means of survival are Lewis'. They are the things that, despite any practicality that they might have, fail to give him that elusive sense of comfort that he craves. Therefore, it should not be surprising that he sees the people living in the hills in an almost mythic light—as people who live by their “authentic” bodies as the only real means of survival. Contrary to Guillory's assertion that the river is the “god-in-the-object,” it is the rural people who occupy a space in Lewis' mind as gods-in-the-subject. In ignoring those rural people's own positions in modernity, Lewis sets himself up for the catastrophe of the trek down the river by making one too many presumptions.

Such a position conflicts with Butterworth's psychoanalytic reading of *Deliverance*. According to Butterworth, Lewis “can be seen as the ego: he is concerned with his own survival as an individual, not with the survival of society; he values his relative independence from the economic institutions of society” (75). While I agree insofar that Lewis is concerned with honing his own body to facilitate some survival, I take issue with the fact that it is rendered in such an individualistic way. Lewis is fixated on the way in which people live in the hills; he is fixated on the music that they create. Moreover, Ed is sharp enough to recognize that, at the end of the day, Lewis is still a suburban man with a family who, at the very least, has factored their survival into

his own plans. Lewis is not so much seeking an ascetic, body-affirming experience as he is searching for a way of life that he can ape to escape from his modern condition.

Lewis' desires are more utopian than apocalyptic—less Freudian and more Marcusean. For Marcuse, the fundamental struggle between the pleasure principle and the reality principle plays out in the mind, and eventually becomes the foundation of repressive civilization on the grounds of the “constraint on the gratification of instinctual needs...the suppression of pleasure” (Marcuse 12; 61).³ In the chapter “Phantasy and Utopia” Marcuse asserts that “[phantasy] aims at an ‘erotic reality’ where the life instincts would come to rest in fulfillment without repression”(146).⁴ Marcuse associates such a way of being with an “unconquered future” or utopia which the “basic human needs” which he claims are “sexual as well as social” and include food, housing, clothing, and leisure without “toil—that is, without the rule of alienated labor over the human existence” (152).

I claim that this is what Lewis falsely sees in the mountain people with their unrecorded songs and their “different” way of “taking life” (Dickey 40). For him, the world in the hills is one that is not predicated on a disjoint between modernity and toil. Ed’s position as a “mechanic” of the graphic arts, which, at the very least, belies a certain lack of creativity and freedom, is perhaps the greatest signal that both men are mired in the struggle between their modern lives and a perceived, utopian world beyond that. It is not by chance that for Lewis such a world in which the body (perhaps read as “pleasure” in the Marcusean formulation) is supreme over all

³ This is an oversimplification of Marcuse’s tracking of the suppression of the pleasure principle by the reality principle, through a close reading of Freud, from the individual to civilization, and from the prehistorical to the postmodern. On page 12, Marcuse clearly lays out the “value systems” of both principles in binaries: pleasure/restraint, joy/toil absence of repression/security etc. He also gives us a “[sketch] of a historical sequence from the beginning of organic life...through the formative stage of the “two primary instincts” on page 137 (136).

⁴ Marcuse claims that Freud “recognized this role” and associates it with a “subhistorical past of the “genus” prior to civilization (146-7). However, Marcuse claims that “phantasy could refer to the unconquered future of mankind rather than to its (badly) conquered past” and notes that “all this seemed to Freud at best a nice utopia” (147).

other considerations is predicated on an atomic holocaust. After mapping out, briefly, what such a utopian society would look like, Marcuse asks a poignant question:

Does it follow that civilization would explode and revert to prehistoric savagery, that the individuals would die as a result of the exhaustion of the available means of gratification and of their own energy, that the absence of want and repression would drain all energy which could promote material and intellectual production on a higher level and larger scale? Freud answers in the affirmative...free libidinal relations are essentially antagonistic to work relations...that only the absence of full gratification sustains the societal organization of work (154).

To square this argument up with Lewis' fantasy of an atomic holocaust, we must read it backwards so to speak. Such a catastrophe should not be read as the result of the pleasure principal taking its position as a driving force for a utopia per se, rather as an affirmation of Freud's position as defined by Marcuse. Returning to Zizek and his reading of antisemitism, Lewis' fantasy of a catastrophe is a "pathological, paranoid construction" that stitches up an ideology which reaffirms the societal organizations of modernity in the novel. Since there is no apocalypse in the novel, there can be no full deliverance for Lewis in which he becomes the progenitor of a new, body-centered society. Instead, all of Lewis' contradictions that Ed points out in his incredulous reading of his ideas about the hills and its inhabitants, will ultimately be reaffirmed in the end. If there is no true deliverance in the novel, we must now define exactly what happens to Ed, Lewis, Drew, and Bobby on the river.

I previously called the space of the river a "theme park" of sorts as an attempt to read *Deliverance* through Romine's notion of a microSouth. Perhaps "haunted house" would be a better descriptor of the space in which the ghoulish figures of the mountain men haunt Ed and his friends. Even that runs the risk of being too playful with these scenes. The "authentic" thing that these men encounter in the rural South is not the dulcimer music, nor is it a rebirth of creativity gained from surviving a trauma; rather, it is a resurfacing of prehomosexual discourses, both from the mountain men, and from within themselves.

The first discourse discussed by Halperin that I wish to map out is his notion of “male friendship and love” (Halperin 99). While Ed’s views on Lewis are best described as being skeptical before the trip, by the time they are on the river, his descriptions of Lewis take on a fawning tone. For example, Ed goes for a short swim in the river, and comes up beside Lewis who is “waist deep with the water crumpling and flopping at his belly” (102). From there, Ed goes on to describe Lewis’ body in detail:

Everything he had done for himself for years paid off as he stood there in his tracks in the water. I could tell by the way he glanced at me; the payoff was in my eyes. I had never seen such a male body in my life...I knew I could not even begin to conceive how many sit-ups and leg raises—and how much dieting—had gone into bringing them into view. (Dickey 103)

It is worth noting that this recognition is mediated between the two men looking at each other. Lewis’ arduous work is socially enacted by being viewed. This passage, at the very least, signifies that we are in a space where such socially enacted pleasure is no longer mitigated by a modern skepticism. It may be tempting to read such affection as homoerotic, but Halperin resists such temptations in his readings of poems that center on “male friendship and love”: “It is difficult for us moderns, with our heavily psychologistic model of the human personality, of conscious and unconscious desire, and our heightened sensual masculinity, to avoid reading into such passionate expressions of male love a suggestion of ‘homoeroticism’...if not...‘latent homosexuality’...formulations that often act as a cover for our own perplexity about how to interpret the evidence before us” (101). Indeed, Glenday reads the encounters between Ed and Lewis as having a “homoerotic element” in which “[Lewis’] dedication to physical culture is awesomely regarded by [Ed]... (152-53). In order to avoid using the psychologistic model onto this scene, is possible to interpret Ed’s reading of Lewis’ body as a signifier that we have entered the “theme park”—a space, which as Halperin writes, is a “...venue in which to express, without social reproach, sentiments of passionate and mutual love for one another” (101).

Ed's gazing at Lewis is reformatted as touch in the post-rape portion of the novel, after Lewis takes a spill out of his canoe and fractures a bone in his thigh. In order to assess the damage, Ed tells Bobby, "Let's take his pants down" which echoes the language of their assailants—a fact that Ed is keenly aware of as he immediately exclaims "Goddamn phraseology" after giving the command (Dickey 148). As Ed works to assess Lewis' injury, he describes what he finds in sensual terms, rather than medical ones. "His bare legs" he tells us, "were luminous, and the right leg of his drawers was lifted up to the groin. I could tell by its outline that his thigh was broken; I reached down and felt of it very softly. Against the back of my hand his penis stirred with pain..." (Dickey 149). Ed is still fixated on Lewis' body, particularly his "luminous" thighs, and we are once again presented with a touch which stirs the most intimate parts of the male anatomy. Ed's prostate was stirred by the model's touch, so too is Lewis' penis stirred, albeit painfully, by Ed's touch.

At the risk of tripping over my own arguments, I wish to turn back to Foust's reading of touch within the novel, as he is also concerned with the transformative power of touch. Through his reading of a previous scene in which Ed reaches out to touch the claw of an owl perched on his tent, he claims:

[Ed's] first response is to put out his hand, not to *see* but to touch the natural force that seeks to prey upon his intimacy, the privacy of the tent's personal space. The distinction is between knowing and experiencing, and between romantic and existential responses. Nature holds Ed in a violent and intimate embrace that does not quite shatter his conventional mental defense but that prefigures the homosexual rape and the murders that will, finally, "deliver" him from his complacent urban mind set. Throughout the passage Ed sees little or nothing, but he *feels* hypersensitively and by dawn he is able to touch nature, timidly but consistently, at will. (207)

While we have effectively collapsed the distinction between the natural world and modernity, Foust's assertion allows us to understand the illusive "thing" that Ed is seeking out in his journey. While Ed's admiration for Lewis is initially tempered by a sense of skepticism and

reservation, once they enter this prehomosexual space, it is freed from that temperance through a mutually enacted sort of admiration, which ultimately results in this moment of tender, homosocial touch. That it is to say, Ed is not reaching out to touch nature at will, but another man, to facilitate some sort of needed homosociality. Kunz touches on this need, claiming that Ed “temporarily abandons [his wife] for the super masculine companionship of Lewis and the promise of a revitalizing trip down the river” because “Martha and women in general represent normalcy to Ed, and it is only his dissatisfaction with the boring, routine, imprisoning existence which he and other middle-aged...men have made of the civilized world that makes him consider normalcy a fault” (293). Kunz’s reading of Martha, although problematic in its reduction of women, lays out Ed’s needs eloquently. After all, if women do represent normalcy for Ed, the only cure for the ennui set on by this normalcy is fellowship with Lewis. That said it is not the river that provides this revitalization, but Lewis’ body, which is experienced through sight, and, more importantly, through touch.

Leaving this need and actualization on such a positive note would require us to ignore its more problematic implications. Ed’s touch not only has the power to tend to Lewis and facilitate homosociality, it also has the power to disfigure and kill as well. Later, Ed scales a cliff to kill one of the rifle-toting mountain men who aims to kill the men during their escape. Before Ed scouts out the hilltop, he ponders about his victim:

I had thought so long and hard about him that to this day I still believe I felt, in the moonlight, our minds fuse...If Lewis had not shot his companion, he and I would have made a kind of love, painful and terrifying to me, in some dreadful way pleasurable to him, but we would have been together in the flesh, there on the floor of the woods, and it was strange to think of it. (Dickey 180)

It is strange that Ed calls his potential rape a “kind of love” in which he and his assailant would have become “one” despite the pain and terror of the assault. On one hand, we can view this passage, at least in part, as a perversion of the “touch” that Ed facilitates with Lewis—one in

which two men come together in the flesh. The strangeness of the act is something worth exploring further. This strangeness is not in the act of “being together” in the flesh, but the sort of “mark” that such an act places on men. To better explain this “mark” we must turn to Bobby’s rape, as witnessed by Ed.

Whereas the relationship between Ed and Lewis neatly fits into Halperin’s notion of homosociality, Bobby resists such strict categorization. In his discussion of pederasty and sodomy, Halperin claims that such discourses are, historically, “sex as hierarchy, not mutuality” which “implies difference, not identity” and that the receptive partner’s “reward must...be measured out in other currencies than pleasure, such as praise, assistance, gifts or money...” (97). Bobby’s rape is a transaction in which he receives some sort of reward for it. We should read the rape itself for the heinous violation that it is. As we are not privileged to Bobby’s thoughts on his violation, we must rely on Ed’s testimony of the rape. The mountain man orders Bobby to remove his “panties,” and Ed notes that “Bobby took off his shorts like a boy undressing for the first time in a gym, and stood there plump and pink, his hairless thighs shaking, his legs close together” (Dickey 113). While Bobby is a fully grown man, in Ed’s eyes he is now the “junior partner” in Halperin’s model. It is his gaze that this hierarchical difference between the mountain man with his gun and a boy in gym is facilitated.

Reading this scene through Ed’s eyes strengthens the theme park reading in that it relegates the rape scene to a spectacle in a themed space within a speculative South. Moreover, it is this episode of observed sodomy that facilitates the reprisal of other prehomosexual discourses, namely effeminacy and inversion. Kunz touches upon inversion in *Deliverance*, claiming that “...the experience of Bobby, Lewis and Ed in the woods constitutes a second kind of inversion of the wilderness escape formula. Dickey emphasizes that these men discover not so

much how to be men as how it feels to be women abused by the kind of men they have dreamed of being” (Kunz 300). While Kunz is correct to indicate that there is a repositioning of Ed and Lewis as men, they are not relegated to the position of women. For Bobby in particular, his repositioning is more along the lines of Halperin’s model of the male passive or invert, which is defined as “...subordinate males whose willingness to submit themselves to sexual penetration by men proceeds not from some nonsexual motive but from their own erotic desires and/or from their assumption of a feminine gender identity” (102). Once again, we run the risk of trivializing and rendering Bobby’s rape as a scene of consensual pleasure. However, we are still dealing with the rape as mediated through Ed’s understanding of it. After the rape, Lewis’ rescues both men, and murders the assailant with a bow and arrow, and Ed begins to place blame on Bobby for being raped:

Bobby got off the log and stood with us, all facing Lewis over the corpse. I moved away from Bobby’s red face. None of this was his fault, but he felt tainted to me. I remembered how he had looked over the log, how willing to let anything be done to him, and how high his voice was when he screamed. (Dickey 128)

Regardless of what Bobby makes of his trauma, it is Ed who interjects a willingness into a scene where there is undoubtedly none. As such, we are not witnessing a traumatic scene of rape, as much as we are watching a man read and assign value to a constructed scene. In Romine’s words, he is “performing the narrative work” of that particular moment—Bobby was willing to be raped, and, more importantly, he is “tainted” by the event. Bobby can therefore be read as being inverted post-rape, not to the position of a woman, as Kunz argues, but as an invert—one who operates in a “visibly different mode of appearance and dress, his feminine style of self presentation” (Halperin 104). For Halperin, “inversion manifests itself outwardly” and that mode of operation hold trues for *Deliverance* as well, at least in Ed’s mediation of reality. This “taint” on Bobby carries through the rest of the novel, with Ed calling him, in his own mind, an

“incompetent asshole” and a “soft city country-club man” (Dickey 201). Barnett claims that this perceived inversion is a defense for Ed, due to the fact that “[conceding] his utter passivity would be to admit the possibility of male lack itself” and that “most brutal among Ed’s defenses is his repeated reduction of Bobby to ‘ass,’ the orifice that has become feminized through the rape...Ed marks his distance from Bobby—and aligns himself with the rapists—by using the same diction [as the rapists]” (151). While we may view Bobby as a victim, that is not the case for Ed, who can only see him as a reminder of his own fragility and ennui, and as a willing partner in an “authentic” display of prehomosexuality. Ed’s reading of Bobby is so powerful that it carries through to the end of the novel. Ed admits, after running into Bobby, that the two men can only “[nod] to each other in public places,” and that “[Bobby] would always look like dead weight and screaming, and that was no good to me” (Dickey 276). For Ed the “taint” of inversion, as brought on by sodomy, is one that cannot be scrubbed clean, and it ultimately renders a man “no good.”

At the end of the novel, Ed begins to process the river itself after its eventual damming, while resting at Lake Cahula, another man-made lake. “The river and everything I remembered about it,” he says,

became a possession to me, a personal, private possession, as nothing else in my life ever had. Now it ran nowhere but in my head, but there it ran as though immortally. I could feel it—I can feel it—on different places of my body. It pleases me in some curious way that the river does not exist, and that I have it. (Dickey 275)

While his language focuses on the river itself, and not the people living there, we should not be so quick to let Ed have this moment. We should, however, be apt to read this through Romine—the “river” as Ed’s possession is nothing more than a strung-along series of traumas and encounters that he can look back on as a way to provide some sort of personal meaning. In a sense, Ed is in the position of the couple on *Three Day Weekend* looking back on their time in

Franklin Tennessee as an “authentic” experience. However, that does not mean that we should *Deliverance* as Butterworth does, by claiming that Ed has tapped into some “instinctual self” that meets the challenge of survival (77). On the contrary, modernity is more or less affirmed at the end, as Ed notes that “people are getting interested in” developing land around the newly formed Lake Cahula (278).

What does remain is the traumatic social interactions that Ed encounters along the river—Lewis’ penis stirring against his hand, and his constant signifying of Bobby as a sexual invert, rather than a rape victim. This is what I mean by the term “theme park.” Rather than the South being associated with unbridled nature, or mountain songs, it is rendered as a series of prehomosexual encounters that he is ultimately able to return home from, with his sense of self ultimately intact. While I am aware that mapping out Halperin’s “History” onto *Deliverance* might be as problematic as rendering Ed, Bobby, Lewis, and Drew as constituent elements of the psyche, I believe it is necessary to create a richer understanding of a novel, beyond the psychoanalytic fixation. Reading *Deliverance* through the notion of prehomosexuality not only allows us to “queer” the desires of Ed and Lewis, but it also allows us to read other Southern spaces as having a tentative “authentic” queer element in them as well. If *Deliverance* is indeed a novel in which these sorts of primordial, tainting discourses can pop up, if only for a moment, how might we track them moving forward? If modern homosexuality, as Halperin defines it, is the result a “cumulative process of historical overlay and accretion” of these prehomosexual discourses, and if we have reached a modern homosexuality, which is grounded in two partners achieving an “Exclusive, lifelong, companionate, romantic and mutual homosexual love...” then we must be willing to consider, through a reading of speculative fiction, what one “posthomosexual” might look like, and how it reconfigures those prehomosexual discourses in

new ways (Halperin 91, 112). Going from a predominately white space to a predominately queer and Black space will necessarily change the way in which we consider the prehomosexual in the text. As previously mentioned, the novel presents racially differentiating language for the sexual gratification for both the Black and white characters. While it may be problematic to claim such language constitutes a prehomosexual discourse, it nevertheless manifests itself in the novel's graphic depictions of sex. I believe it is necessary to make this pairing, not to advocate its use in a posthomosexual praxis, but because we are afforded such a chance by the speculative nature of the novel.

THROUGH THE VALLEY: A SPECULATIVE POSTHOMOSEXUAL SPACE

Published in 2012, *Through the Valley of the Nest of Spiders*, is on the cutting edge of Samuel Delany's oeuvre. The novel tracks the lives of Eric Jeffers and his partner, Morgan "Shit" Haskell in a predominately Black, queer space in rural coastal Georgia, affectionately called "The Dump," along with the nearby town of Diamond Harbor, from 2007 into a speculative future. Unlike *Deliverance*, and to a lesser extent the Clayton Bigsby skit, there is a definite point when the text stops speculating on a "real" South, and turns its attention, chronologically, to a speculative future, complete with drastic social and technological changes. In the limited body of criticism surrounding *Through the Valley*, there is a tendency to read the text as a utopian novel. Timothy Griffiths claims that "[the novel] must be understood with the concept of utopianism as both frame and content, attentiveness and aloofness, critique and acceptance, and speculation and reality" (306). As the novel is—more or less— a string of extremely pornographic vignettes set in the backdrop of a coastal Georgia community as it moves through a speculative future, it is possible to read it as such. The frame is The Dump itself, and the string of sexual encounters between Eric, Shit, and the other inhabitants are, in the words of Griffiths actions that "penetrate the body of the place itself, thus constantly revising through spatializing and revisionary tactics what is labeled as utopia" (305). *Through the Valley* is utopian insofar that it represents a patronized, fictive community in which there is an extreme degree of sexual freedom.

Our pairing of *Deliverance* with *Through the Valley* gives us clearance to read the latter merely as a work of queer, utopian science fiction. After all, just because Lewis never finds the

“dulcimer music” in the hills, does not mean such music does not exist at all. Nor does it mean that there cannot be a fictitious, Southern space in which a deliverance may be achieved. While we will engage with the subject of utopia in *Through the Valley*, and Delany criticism at large, I would like to couch such ideas in a different terminology—namely the “posthomosexual” idea as I briefly touched on earlier. If Halperin is correct in his assertion that the discourse of modern homosexuality is a “cumulative process of historical overlay and accretion” that is now marked by an egalitarian notion “bond[ing] on...the basis of...sameness” which ultimately allows for relations that function as “principles of social organization in their own right and give rise to freestanding social intuitions” then we are perhaps dealing with, what I previously called an “end of history” (Halperin 89; 112-13).⁵

While Halperin does not proclaim that modern Homosexuality is the teleological end of the prehomosexual discourses, it can be read in such a way:

The systems of difference that were internal to the structure of the [prehomosexual] discourses find themselves externalized and reconstituted at the border between homosexuality and heterosexuality, categories that now represent in and of themselves new strategies of social differentiation and regulation. (114).

As such, homosexuality is a stable, static category by Halperin’s reckoning. What was—at the time—true for Fukuyama, is now true for Halperin’s historiographic project. While it is viable to read the prehomosexual discourses as markers of external “borders” between the homosexual and heterosexual, as we have seen in Ed’s idealization of Bobby post-rape, and by the action of crossing borders for their rafting trip, I believe there is more to it. What Ed and Lewis encountered was not modern homosexuality, but a temporary revival of prehomosexuality. As such, the “end of history” moment for homosexuality is perhaps not as stable as Halperin seems

⁵ This is a reference to Francis Fukuyama’s essay “The End of History?": “What we may be witnessing is not just the end of the Cold War, or the passing of a particular period of postwar history, but the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind’s ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government.” (4)

to imply if such non-egalitarian modes of sexuality can crop up from time-to-time. As we are dealing with speculative texts however, we are privileged to get past this blockage and see one model of the posthomosexual in the speculative South of *Through the Valley* through its reconfiguration of the prehomosexual discourses.

As the novel is relatively new, we will draw from the large body of criticism surrounding Delany's other novels along with his memoirs. Delany's negotiation of utopian ideals is at the forefront of much of the scholarship, and is complicated by his own, often quoted, dismissal of the concept: "I mean utopia pre-supposes a pretty static, unchanging, and rather tyrannical world. You know: 'I know the best way to live, and I'm going to tell you how to do it, and if you dare do anything else...'" (On "Triton" 302). At the risk of taking Delany at his word, we will, for the most part, work from this assumption that utopia represents a "static, unchanging, and rather tyrannical world." I believe it is safe to do so, as we are pushing away from Halperin's static category of modern homosexuality, and we have seen the dangerous effects of presupposing such a world might exist through our reading of *Deliverance*. That is not to say that utopian readings of Delany's works are without merit. While Griffiths is primarily concerned with reading *Through the Valley* through a utopian frame, he also is quick to claim that the novel resists the "static" world problem through his assertion that Delany:

...approaches utopia from the bottom, using revision critique and action from the base—primarily through sexual action—to suggest an alternative form to the alternative that is queer utopia. In doing so, *Spiders* shifts the grounds of utopia so much that it no longer looks like utopia, raising the question of whether it still is and whether utopian representation and political formations are doomed to alteration by necessity. (306)

This is perhaps a "fix" to Delany's fundamental critique of utopian fiction, or, at the very least a way for us to circumvent such critique. While we were and still are concerned by fictive, Southern spaces, we are primarily concerned with the actions that take place within them—the

touch of the mountain men in *Deliverance*, and the scenes of unrestricted sexuality within *Through the Valley*.

Cameron Ellis also touches on the tension between space and action as utopian in their essay “Chōra/Chōros: Samuel R. Delany and the masculine semiotic in *Through the Valley of the Nest of Spiders*. Ellis claims that *Through the Valley* “is witness to a multiplicity of non-endurable masculinities,” and demonstrates this non-endurability by arguing that Eric, the novel’s primary actor, has an identity that is:

...shaped by his life in Diamond Harbor, specifically through his relationship with Shit. But Eric’s is not a case of assuming an identity passively simply by virtue of being in a place (chōra); Eric’s identity is shaped because he comes to Diamond Harbor with a parpticaurly open disposition that reacts conflicts favourably with those around him co-producing the experience of Diamond Harbor as well as his identity within it...” (451; 452)

For both critics, utopia and identity within utopia are not static positions that an individual may merely occupy, but something that is “co-produced,” in this instance, through sexual encounters. More than just a means to circumvent Delany’s anxieties, such readings allow us to consider the constructive aspects of male-on-male touch in a productive way, as opposed to its disfiguring and difference-marking aspects as seen in *Deliverance*. From that position it is also possible, I hope, to read speculative Southern spaces as more than a temporary, carnivalesque reemergence of the past, but as a space in which a future may be modeled.

Before we can consider the ramifications of such readings, it is necessary to consider the larger body of Delany criticism outside of *Through the Valley*, as many of the figures and themes presented in his previous novels are reconfigured in the former. As I have briefly mentioned before, in terms that I am not entirely comfortable with, I referred to *Through the Valley* as a novel concerned with “extreme sexual freedom.” Guy Davidson is also concerned with the limits

of sexual freedom in his reading of Delany's novel *The Mad Men*, particularly as they pertain to the proclivities of the homeless men in New York City within the novel:

In capitalist New York, the homeless represent, then, both ultimate freedom and the profoundest abjection; and these two characteristics of homelessness are yoked in the novel's association of its homeless men with 'dirty,' unsanctioned forms of sexual expression comprising, most notably, verbal abuse (including the use of racial epithets), intergenerational sex, piss-drinking, shit-eating—a set of practices that it makes sense here to call *undomesticated*. (16)⁶

As we will soon see, such acts are the glue that holds, *Through the Valley*, a “highly modal, episodic, and gestural...” novel, together (Griffiths 308). However, the difference between *The Mad Man* and *Through the Valley* is that such acts are no longer the sole domain of homeless actors. Instead, these acts—after the first few chapters—become grounded both as the acts that bind Eric and Shit, along with the entire community at The Dump together. We will further explore the implications of grounding these acts in a fabricated, fixed space, and what happens to Delany's project as it transfers from a “radically democratic vision of the cosmopolitan city” to a small, predominately queer and Black community in the rural South—that is to say, from the “undomesticated” to the domesticated (Davidson 15).

GerShun Avilez's essay “Cartographies of Desire: Mapping Queer Space in the Fiction of Samuel Delany and Darieck Scott” is unique in that it engages with “queer space” as an architectural concept in order to analyze “the engagement and redefinition of public space in Samuel Delany's *Stars in My Pocket Like Grains of Sand*” ultimately arguing that Delany's novel “[provides] effective cartographies of desire that generate ‘queer space’ within the generic parameters of the novel” (126). Avilez makes an excellent pairing with Ellis in that both authors are attempting to tie space and the action within said space as the constitutive elements of a queer space. Avilez also will give us a means to push past the immediate sexuality of Delany's

⁶ Conferred from William Haver's chapter in *Queer Theory in Education*, “Of Mad Men Who Practice Invention to the Brink of Intelligibility”

writing and to consider the implications of such fictional spaces, particularly in his claim that “such space has little to do with sex necessarily; rather through Delany’s text it becomes apparent that queer space describes a strategy that rubs against and unhinges hermeneutical frameworks that seek to define and delimit all relationships and encounters, especially but not only those with an erotic valence” (132). Unlike some of Delany’s more science fiction heavy work, *Through the Valley* is much more grounded in a sense of reality, at least for the first half of the novel. As such, there is a world beyond this queer space, and, much in the same way as *Deliverance*, its inhabitants are beset by the forces of modernity with its Marcusean restraints. As such, when we assess the space the novel presents towards the end, we will explore the implications of employing “queer space” as a strategy, along with the restrictive “hermeneutical frameworks” throughout.

To the point of a more “believable” speculative space, I turn to Tavia Nyong’o’s essay “Back to the Garden: Queer Ecology in Samuel Delany’s ‘Heavenly Breakfast.’” He claims that *Heavenly Breakfast* tracks the possibilities of a “feminist, antiracist, and proto-queer...communal egalitarianism ” but notes that “Such possibilities, however, arise through ambient poetics rather than self-conscious identity politics” and that “Delany portrays Heavenly Breakfast as a place where rules are kept informal and pragmatic, the immediate consequence of any decision being allowed to spontaneously produce a self-adjusting social order” (758). From this point, Nyong’o goes on to contrast Delany’s memoirs with his science fiction:

...Delany’s speculative fictions...require extended passages of exegesis in order to introduce the reader to a social setting in which there are, say, three genders, or technologies available to change sex, skin color, or sexual orientation. Yet while such fictional heterotopias seem to have little to do with journalistic depictions of an actual, if temporary, community, Delany’s insistent layering of fantasy and reality enable a useful juxtaposition. (758)

Through the Valley represents a strange sort of middle ground between Delany's memoir and his science fiction, one in which technological process exists as a backdrop, and does not provide a means for the changing of gender, sexual orientation, or skin color. Rather than presenting a "self-adjusting" social order, the novel does, in fact, present a community governed by an, admittedly liberal, law—as we will soon see. If anything, in this middle position, the novel is perhaps the best showcase of Delany's ability to layer "fantasy and reality" in order to create a juxtaposition that, for Nyong'o, to not only depict "alternatives to the dystopian present" but to also "investigate the closures in representation that make it difficult to imagine actually existing or historical alternatives to that present" (759). If anything, the prospect of a more grounded science fiction texts allows us to better consider alternatives than the extreme ends of Delany's other works—mired by history on one hand and predicated on unimaginable technological progress on the other. I would also like to briefly mention Alex Zamalin's chapter in *Black Utopia*, "Samuel Delany and the Ambiguity of Utopia" whose reading of *Triton*, informs our reading of *Deliverance* through Marcuse, and will no doubt have much utility in our reading of *Through the Valley*. In particular, his claim that "Triton extended...Marcuse's view...[that] unbridled pleasure would not lead to social disorder, but to new forms of cooperation" and that "...lawlessness doesn't create more crime, but create unwritten laws that come from the demands of collective life" (115). Such an eloquent assertion serves the impetus for this entire project.

Nicole McCleese's reading of sadomasochism in *Stars in My Pocket Like Grains of Sand* and *Through the Valley*, gives a means to discuss the sexual acts depicted in the novel. For McCleese, the latter novel "eroticizes historical performances in the future" (369). The primary "historical performances" she discusses in the novel are Delany's depictions of incest, and the character's use of "n—" as a "layering of taboos" which renders "same-sex" relationships as no

longer taboo (371). Most importantly, she claims that “the use of the slur radiates all the inequalities of American slavery and a long violent history of racial inequality (371). While McCleese makes these arguments to demonstrate the sexual acts as a means to make “the reader experience masochism,” we will read such instances of eroticized difference against *Deliverance* and Halperin’s notion of prehomosexuality. While not using terminology as historically loaded as “n—,” we have seen the effects of differentiation through Ed’s reading of Bobby in *Deliverance*. However, as *Through the Valley* is more utopian in its outlook, we must consider how the use of differentiating language, functions as a reprisal and reconfiguration of prehomosexual discourses, and how they operate in a fictional space in which the baseline “same-sex” relationship is no longer a taboo, or otherwise disfiguring.

Reading *Through the Valley* against *Deliverance* is a challenging task in that most of the numerous depictions of sex in the former are, with rare exceptions, consensual. That said, we are nevertheless dealing with a novel in which an individual probes deeper into the South in order to find something. The novel begins by focusing on Eric, aged 16, on his life in Atlanta—with his Black stepfather, Mike (Delany 2; 21). During his morning routine, Eric “[digs] in his nose with a forefinger, hooking out as much as possible...[pulling] it loose” and “suck[s] the yellow-green crust from his forefinger...” in act at that McCleese refers to as “mucophilia” a term that we will borrow for our purposes (Delany 7; McCleese 371). If James Dickey obfuscates the desires of his characters behind imagery (e.g. “the Golden Eye”) then Delany is his stark counterpoint, as this brief, private act is immediately explored further:

For the last two years, except in the boys’ room, Eric had been trying not to do it in school or at home where people knew him—and had mostly succeeded. But on his own, biking or walking around the city, he’d developed strategies for doing it whether strangers were looking or not (Delany 7).

In this passage, we are presented with modernity as being divided between private pleasure and a need to hide such pleasure in public spaces. That said, Eric does attempt to find an outlet for his mucophilia. Shortly after this scene, Eric goes out into the streets of Atlanta, and to a Verizon billboard off the highway, “behind which various homeless guys camped out among the saplings” and looks for “two homeless black men” whom he has taken on as sexual partners (9). The narrator then goes on, in detail, to describe the nature of Eric’s relationship with the homeless men, including the racially-charged language of one of the homeless men—Frack: “*I’m ‘bout half-hard all da time—an’ I’m pretty much jerkin’ off on it—at least half ways—all da time, too. An’ you love to watch dis mule-dicked [n—] play wid it, doncha white boy?*” (10). It would seem that such language is an indication that the homeless in *Through the Valley* are operating in the same mode described by Guy Davidson in *The Mad Men*—that they offer a “dirty” and “undomesticated” set of practices which are enacted through a series of taboo sexual practices and racial epithets (Davidson 16). However, there is a limit to this undomesticity, and the “ultimate freedom” and “profoundest abjection” that such acts entails. The narrator also reveals that there “black kid” named “Pickle” who occasionally shows up to the homeless encampment who urinates on himself whenever he gets “excited about anything” (Delany 11). This is not a reflexive action for Pickle. Much like Lewis and Ed, who enact their own homosociality by being viewed, so too does Pickle: “Often Pickle would rub his groin—already soaked after only an hour—then suck his blunt, thick fingers. When Pickle saw Eric looking, he’d say, *The salt taste’ good*” (Delany 11).

Eric, called “hopeful” by the narrator at this instance, believing this to be an opportunity to express his mucophilic tendencies, says to Pickle “*Like eatin’ your*” before demonstratively digging his finger in his nostril (12). Put off by this, Pickle frowns and asks Eric “*Why you doin’*

dat? Dat's nasty. Pee's better, ain't it?" (12). It would seem then that, even in this marginal space there are limits on what is and is not acceptable. As such, "the undomesticated" ultimate freedom seen in *The Mad Men* is not present in Atlanta, as presented in *Through the Valley*. If anything, Narine's assertion that the mountain people in Deliverance are not "outcasts of modernity" holds true in *Through the Valley* as well (Narine 451). While Pickle, along with the other homeless men that Eric has sex with, are economic outcasts, they still, to whatever small degree, uphold the Marcusian binary of pleasure and repression. While Eric is free to find some sexual gratification in this space, he is unable to break away from a small degree of repression—that is to say, he is unable to find deliverance.

In the subsequent scene, Eric returns home and strikes up a conversation with his neighbor, Bill. Eric tells Bill that, "My dad don't want me to go inside your place' cause you're gay" to which Bill replies, "Now *how* in the world....did I figure *that* one out for myself" and that "And while in no *way* am I suggesting that *you* bring up the topic up with Mike, *should* your dad mention it again, you can tell him from me—if it occurs to you—I do *not shit where I eat!*" (Delany 15). While we never learn how Eric's father concludes that Bill is gay, it does imply that homosexuality, in the context of the novel, does have a certain visibility to it. Coming from the encounters between Eric and the homeless men behind the Verizon sign, we are travelling from a space of more freedom, albeit not *total* freedom, to a space of demarcation, both in regards to Bill's visibility, and his dictum of not shitting where he eats—choice words considering the extreme sexual nature of the novel. We will see how these demarcations are broken down and exploring that implication.

Soon after that, Eric reveals that he told his mother that he is gay, after masturbating to "Those HBO shows" that his mother watches, particularly "The gay ones" when he was twelve,

but he also claims that he also “don’t even like gay guys” (Delany 17). Confused, Bill attempts to categorize Eric’s sexuality:

Bill: Hey now—you’re gay...How can you not like gay men—unless you don’t like yourself? Let me add, I always thought you were likable.

Eric: Sometimes---I don’t think I’m *really* gay.

Bill: Oh, come on. You just said you suck of half the football team—

Eric: A couple of the other line guys fuck me. I fuck Philly-Bob back. I hope he ain’t got AIDS, ‘cause he won’t use no condom. He says that’s for faggots—I don’t know what he thinks *he* is. But I don’t argue with him. Besides, I don’t love those things, either—”

(Delany 17)

Bill’s confusion makes sense if we are to read “gay” merely as the capacity for a cisgendered male to have sex with other cisgendered males. However, Eric’s reasoning is more complex, even if he is somewhat inarticulate. The fact that Philly-Bob refuses to use condoms hints at a sort of tautology that pertains to homosexuality and the AIDS epidemic. It is possible to infer that Philly, and Eric for that matter, associate AIDS with homosexuality (i.e. “faggots”) and that to wear a condom would be to enact homosexuality. Instead, the interactions between Eric and Philly can be read as something akin to Halperin’s active sodomy, which he concedes is “structure of male homosexual relations for which there is no single proper name” (92). I say “akin” for a very specific reason, as for Halperin the prehomosexual discourses, particularly in those of pederasty or, more to the point, “active sodomy” are hierarchical and transactive, one in which “the junior party’s reward must...be measured out in other currencies than pleasure, such as praise, assistance, gifts, or money” (97). It would seem then that Eric and Philly-Bob exist in a no man’s land of sorts, as Eric concedes that they penetrate each other, and that the only distinction they actively avoid is that of being a “faggot.”

Eric seems to be somewhat aware of this no man’s land as he begins to describe what he isn’t by describing his fellow “team cocksucker,” Scotty:

Scotty’s gay—the other cocksucker on the football team. He actually *likes* those HBO shows. The one I watched didn’t have no black guys on it. At all. And everybody’s

hookin' up and getting' all upset if anybody screws anybody else who ain't him. Scott sucks Hoagy—one of the black guys on our team. But he says he'd 'rather not.' Damn, I told him I'd trade Hoagy for any two of the white guys I do in a *minute!* Hoagy's a halfblack. But 'cause Scott's Puerto Rican, he hogs all the n—I think he likes the white guys better—but they make him anyway. (Delany 17-8)

It would seem then that Scott is more aligned with Halperin's criteria for modern

homosexuality—one which that emulates heterosexuality and its monogamous trappings or “getting upset if anybody screws anybody else” as Eric puts it. Eric, perhaps unknowingly, but nevertheless astutely, ties modern homosexuality to material conditions. Scotty enjoys, and perhaps emulates the social aspects of the HBO, while Eric is merely attracted to the sexuality presented in the shows. Eric also seems to be aware of racial difference as it pertains to sexuality identity as well, and as a point of fetishization, as demonstrated by his desire to trade Hoagy. Such blatant racial epithets are a blind spot for Halperin, who, admittedly notes that he is primarily concerned with European “cultural traditions” (91). While he does go through great pains to emphasize the difference implied in prehomosexuality, he nevertheless does not offer us a means to discuss racial epithets being employed as means of sexualized difference. McCleese gives us some explanation as to how such language operates in the text—creating “unease and guilt of eroticizing the slave through a racial slur” to explore queer bonds and allow the reader to experience masochism (369). The divide between the reader's unease and guilt with such casual language and Eric's desires for a freer exchange of sex should not be overlooked. While Eric's language is certainly problematic, it does hint at a sexualized operation, one in which difference is ultimately fetishized. While this does not divorce such language from its historical context for the reader, the casualness of its use serves as the impetus for the speculation that novel presents on such an operation.

Eric elaborates on his desires further by positioning himself against Scott: “I don't want one guy. I want maybe nine or ten. And I want each of them to bring home another nine or ten,

and we'll all fuck: little guys, big guys, black guys, white guys, Chinese guys..." (Delany 18). Standing in stark comparison to his desires to "trade" sexual partners on the basis of race, Eric presents a mode of sexuality that, one on hand, seems to fall in line with Halperin's notion that "Homosexuality" refers to all same-sex sexual desire and behavior, whether hierarchical or mutual, gender-polarized or ungendered latent or actual, mental or physical" and on the other runs against its grain (110).

Eric certainly does not see his behavior in such a way. What he considers "gay" at this point in the text is not what he engages in, but what his counterpart Scott does. For Eric, homosexuality is more in line with what Halperin considers to be the teleological end of these desires and behaviors: "the register of sameness and mutuality" which are, ultimately, "not organized merely according to the requirements or prescriptions of large-scale social institutions" (112). However, if HBO shows serve both a constitutive element for Eric's sexuality, and a model for him to critique, then we cannot merely ignore them. The conversation continues as Eric begins to break down his definitions even further:

Eric: Scott wants to be safe and happy and monogamous. He doesn't even like the guys he sucks off on the team. But it's like there's a fuckin' rule—

Bill: Do *you*?

Eric: They're okay. Only most of 'em are straight. But that's the problem, see? Straight guys, gay guys, white guys, black guys, to me it's all the same fuckin' thing. Love me and don't let me catch you lookin' at nobody else....*I* wanna hang out with somebody who wants to go to weird places and beat off together and suck each other off and watch each other do nasty shit with other people...Hey, what's this guy—Scott's boyfriend—gonna *do* with himself? Change the curtains every week?

Bill: Probably the most important thing for Scotty will be that he pays half of the rent. Which I suppose is in the same line, actually. (19)

It would seem them that Eric is primarily seeking deliverance from a conceptualization of homosexuality that would pair it with the modern conception of heterosexuality with all its economic underpinnings—a point that Bill astutely points out. Moreover, he also pairs his desires to be in a more open relationship with a desire to be in "weird places" in which he can

express all of his sexual desires—rendered in this passage as “nasty shit.” In a sense, Eric mirrors both Ed and Lewis and their desires to escape from a modernity which has hitherto left them unsatisfied or is otherwise predicated on somebody else providing them a new model by which to live. This should not come as a surprise, after all, as Marcuse puts it: “...the sexual relations themselves have become much more closely assimilated with social relations; sexual liberty is harmonized with profitable conformity (94). Eric, in so many words, is wholly dissatisfied with the, for lack of better terms, HBO sexuality, that has enthralled his counterpart. This distinction between Eric’s desires and what he considers “gay” is a point by which we may begin to define the posthomosexual.

While I have harangued on Halperin’s “end of history” moment, he does also give us the means for moving past it, particularly through his implications that homosexuality is an “cumulative process of historical overlay and accretion” and that homosexuality does provisionally allow for hierarchy and difference to exist, by his critique of Alfred Kinsey’s model of homosexuality (91; 110). However, the posthomosexual cannot exist in modernity as we understand, due to their pairing with social relations, as Marcuse claims. After all, it would be difficult for one to be a monogamous homemaker who “changes the curtains” while exploring the depths of their own sexuality with multiple partners in the peripheral spaces of modern cities. Doing so would not only disrupt the very idea of monogamous love, but also disrupt the fundamental social conditions that make such love possible. Moreover, even the homeless cannot be the model of “ultimate freedom” as Davidson would suggest as they too exist under their own modern social conditions and have their own limits of what they will and will not do. As the conversation continues to unfold, Bill offers Eric some sage advice: “...sometime in your life—it may be in twenty minutes, or two months, or six years, or twenty-five years—you are going to

find yourself in a situation that, simply because of all the things you have done you will realize holds the possibility of happiness” (25). If we are to read Eric’s “happiness” as “unbridled pleasure” we must be cognizant of the fact that such happiness cannot exist under the social conditions presented in the novel, with their implicit laws and underlying social relations. What we call the posthomosexual in the novel is both “unbridled pleasure” which, paradoxically, exists in and is a constitutive element of a queer utopian space.

Eric’s “going down” moment comes where he, like Ed, travels from an urban space to a rural one with all its delivering potentiality. Not long after his conversation with Bill, Eric returns home to pack his things to go live with his mother in Diamond Harbor, a small town along the Georgia coast (Delany 2). Along the way, Mike and Eric stop at the “Turpens Truck Stop” whose sign claims that it is “A GEORGIA INSTITUTION SINCE 1937!” (Delany 31). The narrator also notes an assortment of car parts, knick-knacks, and most interestingly an assortment of flags: “American, Puerto Rican, Italian, Irish, Hells Angels, Mexican, Confederate, Union, Marine, Navy, one flag with the horizontal white, brown, black and tan stripes and a paw print in the upper left” (Delany 31). Such tchotchkes evoke Scott Romine’s notions of “an archive of improvisations grounded in space and time” and the “register of imagined relations to artificial territorialities” (Romine 17). One may also see an echo from *Deliverance* as Ed, travelling to his own point of departure, notes the “patent medicines and religious billboards” and snidely notes that “you would think that the South did nothing but dose itself and sing gospel songs...” (Dickey 38). If the Turpens Truck Stop is an authentic Georgia institution, then one would assume that the entire South are, perhaps, Neo-Confederate bears who ride motorcycles. Ed sees through the coded artificiality of such signs, finds them to be

inauthentic and simply leaves them on the roadside as he seeks out something more authentic. Eric, on the other hand, is more apt to enter this artificial space and reconfigure it.

Upon entering the gas station, Eric notices two men, one, “wearing beige slacks and fingering a cell phone into a yellow shirt pocket, from which stuck a handkerchief’s purple points” and another, “a head-and-a-half taller than Eric...stocky and in his late thirties...[with] dull blond hair...orange cap...[and] brazen beard” (Delany 32). Interestingly, the narrator notes that “To Eric, the handkerchief...said ‘Faggot’” (Delany 32). Eric is operating under the presumptions of a prehomosexual “visibly different mode of appearance and dress” (Delany 33). However, the narrator complicates Eric’s presumptions in short order. In a moment of indirect discourse, Eric thinks “Well, if I follow the gay one, I’ll find the right john fast” (Delany 32). Eric begins to have doubts as he tracks the man’s movements: “Eric watched the gay guy cross the lobby’s plank flooring. In an alcove, silhouetted on the right was a small man, and, on the left, a small woman. The gay guy—if he was gay—walked up and turned right” (Delany 33). The other man eventually follows him but takes a moment to look at Eric (Delany 33). Perhaps in a superficial way, the narrator is playing on Eric’s expectations, and in doing so is rendering the lines between being visibly straight and queer a little vaguer. This should come as no surprise as we have left with Eric into the rural areas where such distinctions may be played with, as they were in *Deliverance*.

Eric strikes up a conversation with the bearded man, who gives him a brief history of the TurpensTruckStop, along with his own past:

I gotta take me a wicked piss. It’s backed up so far I can taste it...See, the old head’s in the rear. The one all the guys use who been comin’ to Turpens since ‘fore they built the single room motel and peepshow stalls. Once this was the last place on the highway with dormitory-style sleepin’. Used to be down at the end, here. They closed that up twenty-five, thirty-five years ago, in seventy or eighty...It’s still the last place you can get a real

key to your room...Guys used to bring me in here when I was a kid tom-cattin' around—a puppy like you—eighteen, nineteen. (Delany 34)

There are several different ideas at play in this conversation. One of the largest things that will play out in the text, especially when it reaches the height of its speculative-ness, is the negotiation between queer agency and changes in technology. If this bearded man is the novel's own version of the mountain men of *Deliverance*, then we will explore that negotiation as a means of people on the edges of modernity surviving the damming of the river—so to speak. Another thing to consider is that the bearded man calls Eric a “puppy” which is a jab at his age, and should be read as hierarchical language, meaning that prehomosexual modes are in play.

Upon hearing all of this, Eric, asks, exasperatedly, “We can...*do* stuff in there” and the narrator notes that “...he wasn't sure where “there” was” (Delany 35). This uncertainty comes from the fact that such sexual freedom is in the process of being transferred from the homeless, who have hitherto been read in Delany as being representations of “ultimate freedom” into an economic space, with its own material history (e.g. the truck stop being replaced by a motel, the locks changing from keys to card) (Davidson 16). Such a change is the most profound speculative shift from *The Mad Men* to *Through the Valley*, in that what is “unsanctioned” for the homeless is now sanctioned in the “there” that Eric is pondering. The bearded man answers Eric's question as bluntly as possible:

Yeah we got a good reputation around here. Hey, they got a stainless steel pee trough where we can spring a leak. Or, if you can find one that still flushes, you can climb up on the rim, squat on one of them shitters—none of 'em got doors no more—and drop a *big ol'* turd...My partner's in there now. Probably that's what he's doin'...if he ain't suckin' off some n— what come in to relieve hisself whatever way he can. My partner, he's a Mex—he don't talk. Spanish or English. He signs... We been comin' down here for...well close to fifteen years. And me a lot longer. It's a nice place (Delany 35).

The niceness of the place can be attributed to the openness of it. There are no doors on the stalls, and the lines between excretion and sexual pleasure are blurred to the point that anyone who inhabits the space is doing one thing or the other. Moreover, the bearded man also claims that

“We get a lot of black fellas, Injins, plain ol’ redneck trash...like me” (Delany 35). While distinction implies that there is a mode of prehomosexuality in play, it also, paradoxically enables the openness of the place. More significant to Eric, is the fact that the bearded man “dig[s] deep in [his] nostril” and scratches around (Delany 35). For Eric, this is perhaps that this is the space of ultimate freedom that spurred his journey in the first place, and it is because of the openness, and the blurring between excretion and sex, that allows for such a signification to occur.

Eric enters the bathroom with the bearded man shortly after and is introduced to Eric’s soon-to-be partners, Dynamite and Shit, along with a handful of other men (Delany 39). The scene quickly turns into a graphic spectacle of sexual acts. However, we also see a reputation of both the differentiating language, along with signifiers to Eric that he has entered another kind of space. The narrator describes Shit as having “...close-set green eyes, a sparse beard you could see through to his face, broad bare feet, a tan mat of kinky hair and wide Negroid nose” (Delany 38). Eric realizes, through the narrator, that he is “black, though his skin was the same burned bronze as the boatman’s, as Eric’s” (Delany 38). The use of the term “Negroid” has a strangely antiquated and, perhaps even Social-Darwinist, ring to it, especially in comparison to the harsh south-Georgia dialect of the bearded man (the “boatman” in this passage). The use of such language, both by the narrator and Eric, hints at something that Griffiths eloquently describe in his mapping-out of Eric’s desire. For Griffiths, Eric “enjoys the abjection of homophobia...” and is aroused by the prospect of being socially deviant (Delany 309). However, Griffiths is also quick to make the distinction that he does not “desire...the inequity itself, but rather, for whatever reason, for its verbal performances” (Delany 309).

The reason for such desires will remain elusive unless we read it in the same way we read Ed in *Deliverance*. Just as Ed wished to be free from his ennui brought on by the material conditions of his world, so too does Eric wish to be free from the constraints that render his most “deviant” desires as “nasty” as Pickle puts it. In a way, the language employed both by Eric, the Narrator, and Jay (the “bearded man,”) does not reestablish the hierarchical, transactive nature of the prehomosexual discourses as they were, but instead reconfigures them. Indeed, if this novel begins in a place “where homosexuality...is no longer taboo” then it would not make sense to depict such relationships in a work of speculation as anything but a starting position for the reader to make some sort of sense of Eric (McCleese 371). If Avilez is correct in asserting that “queer space” in Delany’s work “describes a strategy that rubs against and unhinges hermeneutical frameworks that seek to define and delimit all relationships and encounters” then so to must the language of the people living in such queer spaces (132). The prehomosexual discourses do not reoccur in *Through the Valley* to enforce some sort of lopsided power structure, but to serve as a means to break away from the status quo (i.e. homosexuality). While Jay might refer to the men in the bathroom as “black fellas, Injins, plain ol’ redneck trash” they are nevertheless “...establishing their political solidarity, their black gay utopia, as a hyperinclusive philosophy, outside the bounds of what ‘black gay’ is taken to mean, by engaging in an interracial orgy” (Griffiths 309). What they are doing cannot rightfully be called homosexual—by the definition we are working with—and is lacking the speculative vocabulary of Delany’s more science-fiction heavy works, which require “extended passages of exegesis in order to introduce the reader to a social setting...” (Nyong’o 758). The use of the prehomosexual language is a provisional means for describing their actions without falling into the trappings of homosexual discourse (e.g. Bill insisting that Eric is merely gay). However, it is necessary to say

that such use of racist language should not be used as antiracist or queer praxis. Instead, we must always remember that this language is being employed in a speculative space in which we can see such language reconfigured. In so many words, the limits of such a project are the pages it is written on. Eric's use of differentiating language, smacks, for lack of a better term, *of* prehomosexuality while expressing a desire to expand the notion of homosexuality beyond its monogamous limit. The people occupying this space are queering the prehomosexual discourses to overcome an impasse in language. That is not to say that this impasse is overcome completely. On the contrary, there are moments in which the historicity of the sexualized, racist language rears its head.

Much later in the novel Eric and Shit have sex on top of a cliff in the middle of a hurricane, with Eric performing as the top. During the sex, Shit begins to play to Eric's desires, shouting: "Fuck this n—white boy!" (Delany 355). Upon climax, the narrator notes that "Eric's orgasm...was the strongest feeling he'd ever had, till then, in his life. (Being white had never turned him on before, and it scared him that it did so much now)" (Delany 355). Despite the concerted efforts by Eric and the other men of Diamond Harbor to push past homosexuality through differentiating language, the language seems to push back at times. In this climatic scene, the lines between sexual freedom through reconfiguration and the shadowy history of the reconfigured language becomes blurred. Rather than leaving the fetishization of race unproblematized, Delany presents a moment in which freedom can give way to racial hierarchy. This hierarchy operates not on the "verbal performances" of inequity, but the inequities themselves. While in the truck stop, Eric is enamored by the multiracial orgy. Here, he achieves orgasm from a one-on-one sexual act, and as a result is enamored by his own whiteness which is given contrast by his Black partner. As a result, this whiteness becomes his object of pleasure,

rather than public, interracial sexual acts. The fear of the moment is perhaps the most salient aspect of the scene, as it attests to the fact that some sort of utopia has been achieved, but it is one that can be lost if the reconfiguration is not enacted by a multiracial group. The difference between a theme park and a utopia is the difference between a one-on-one sex act and a multiracial orgy.

There are also other, less tentative, means by which the utopia is enacted in the novel as well, particularly through its depictions of labor. Comparing *Through the Valley* with *Deliverance*, the novel's plot ends with Eric's arrival at Diamond Harbor, and his partnering with Shit and Dynamite insofar that Eric has found his deliverance. From there, Shit and Eric take on a range of careers, the most notable being garbagemen, and managers of a pornographic theatre.

Eric's career as a garbageman begins during the sex scene at Turpens Truck Stop when Dynamite tells Eric, "Jay MacAmon over there says you might be around for awhile—you interested in a job?" (Delany 45). He then tells Eric that the job will involve "haulin' garbage with me and Shit" in Diamond Harbor (Delany 45). While Eric hesitates at first, Shit digs into his nostril once again, and, upon seeing that, Eric takes the job (Delany 45-6). Labor in this space does not operate to make a living, nor does it serve as the impetus for a break from modernity. Instead, labor serves a potential avenue for pleasure, both sexual, as indicated by Eric's hesitancy dissipating after seeing Shit dig into his nostril, and in a more general sense.

The "general" sense of pleasure is slightly harder to define, than the sexual. However, Jay MacAmon gives us a definition to map out the dynamic between labor and pleasure:

You do as many nice things as you can, [Eric], for as many people as you can. Feed 'em. Give 'em a place to sleep. Hug 'em and keem 'em warm—'cause it's gonna keep you warm too and make you feel better if you're down. You do good things for people for the same reason you beat off—it makes *you* feel good. (Delany 169)

It is tempting to read such a maxim as the ultimate revival of the prehomosexual notion of sodomy with its transactive nature, even if it is merely based on pleasure alone. However, the proximity of sexual pleasure to a seemingly menial job hints at a reconfiguration, rather than a mere revival. This reconfiguration is best understood through Marcuse, who theorizes about a hypothetical state in which there is a “non-oppressive distribution of scarcity” and a “rational organization of a fully developed industrial society” in which “...basic human needs...sexual as well as social: food, housing, clothing, leisure...“are satisfied”...*without toil*—that is, without the rule of alienated labor over the human existence” (151-52).

Toil is the key term in the passage. Whereas Ed’s job as an artist can be described as toil due to its mechanical nature, and its ability to spur him to seek pleasure in the deep South, Eric’s job, is free from toil insofar that it offers him pleasure, transactive as it may be. Eric admits as much in a conversation with his mother, Barbra, who has some trepidation about her sons’ career:

...I wanna be a person who does things to make other people feel better—have an easier time—like get their fuckin’ garbage out of the way and off to the Bottom...I have a lot more fun workin’ with Dynamite and Morgan...It’s just a different *kind of* fun—that’s all...Every time I finish collecting the day’s garbage, I feel like I won—like everyone around here has won because of me and...Morgan and Dynamite. I like workin’ the route. I like to do it, ‘cause it’s useful. (203)

By framing his job in such collective terms, it would be hard to read his work as anything but utopian. While it does not exist in a Marcusean post-capitalist state, it does seem to divorce the toil from work due to its proximity to sexual pleasure, and, more importantly, its capacity, from Eric’s perspective, to allow “everyone” to win. Instead, rather than presenting an entire world divorced from modernity, Delany reconfigures the transactive prehomosexual discourses along with alienated labor and allows them to exist as the provisional grounds for a utopia of sorts. In the words of Ellis, “[the novel] shows the potential for radically alternative modes of living that

dwell within those places that the dominant system of capital ignores and discards” (457). In a larger sense, the posthomosexual in this novel is more than a space, and more than free sexual activity—it is nothing less than an entire economy based on pleasure rather than toil.

I would like to conclude our discussion of *Through the Valley* by discussing a fly in the utopian ointment—Shit Haskell, who necessarily complicates Delany’s utopian vision. A few days after the encounter at Turpens, Eric joins Jay and Mex at their place of work, the Gilead Boat Dock (94). Inquiring about the community, Eric asks Jay who Shit’s father is (96). Jay tells Eric that Dynamite is Shit’s father, and then tells him that “...you ain’t supposed to talk about that. Though God knows most people around here do...If anybody asks, you go on sayin’ you think Dynamite’s his uncle” (Delany 96). Jay also reveals that Shit was, more or less raised by Dynamite, Jay, and Mex: “Dynamite—well, Dynamite and me, with a *whole* lotta help from Mex...did more raisin’ of that little bastard than [his mother] ever did” (Delany 97). While Eric wastes no time in relishing this new information: “But you mean Shit and his...*uncle* really...really fuck around together in a public john? That’s...so *awesome!* I mean, with his own father—” (Delany 99). We must make some distinctions here—incest and child abuse are by no means queer, nor do they represent the unbridled freedom for Shit. Nevertheless, his life necessarily complicates our discussion of such topics.

As the previously mentioned hurricane passes, Eric asks Shit. “Did Dynamite ever fuck you?” to which Shit replies: “Yeah—a few times, back when I was a kid. But that was ‘cause I asked him to...He said that didn’t think a father fuckin’ his own son was all that good of a’ idea. He said that was child abuse” (Delany 356). Shit also concedes that some of the other gay men living in Diamond harbor do not approve of his relationship either “These n— around here may be gay, but the truth is, they don’t hardly approve of *nothin’!*” (Delany 357). This disapproval by

the “gay” inhabitants is another indicator that the relationships depicted in the novel cannot properly be called gay, but instead must be called posthomosexual. While it retains sexual contact between males, it nevertheless goes beyond the limits of non-hierarchical homosexuality.

The critics who breach this sensitive subject in the text tend to read it as a means for Delany to challenge the reader. In his review of the novel, Hedley Bontano claims that Delany challenges the reader:

...not to concede that such behavior isn't of necessity undesirable or harmful, or to change our views on the subject—but to imagine reacting to the real human outcomes of such behavior in uncommon ways that do not continue to victimize those we label as victims, and that offers full opportunity for humanity to all regardless of how we feel about their circumstances of origin. (Bontano)

Griffiths pushes Bontano's point further, claiming “The most concise way to put [Bontano's review] is that there is clearly a difference between engaging in a utopian impulse out of an intention to control and prescribe and engaging in a utopian impulse to understand other humans more fully” (314). McCleese continues with the reader-focused interpretation of the relationship by claiming “Delany's use of the father/son incest...recontextualize ideas of what taboos still challenge the reader” (Delany 370). We may concede such things to these authors—it would seem very much that Delany is, in many ways, pushing *beyond* the taboo of homosexuality as we understand it. We may also concede that the purpose of such a strong push is, in fact, to gain a deeper understanding of human beings without feeding our own aversion to such acts.

It is still necessary to read Dynamite and Shit's relationship as it is written on the page. In many ways, Shit is the antithesis to Eric. While Eric comes down to Diamond Harbor and does, in fact, find his deliverance, Shit has no choice but to participate in this posthomosexual utopia. As such he is the most speculative aspect of *Through the Valley*. Bontano is spot on to considering the “real human outcomes” of such a space. If the men of Diamond Harbor create this space of unbridled freedom through their sexual encounters, then they are, in turn, free to

create a subject born into such a space. The real human outcome for Shit is that he is molded by the posthomosexual, while Eric merely has the choice to inhabit it or not. Reading *Shit* in such a way allows us to reconsider Delany's anxieties on utopia in a different light. Diamond Harbor is not a "...static, unchanging...tyrannical world" for Eric as it is the endpoint for his life-long yearning for freedom (On "Triton" 302). Eric has found what Lewis sought in *Deliverance*—the music up in the hills. Shit, however, is very much at the whims of an unchanging world, one in which sex and differentiating language has been a constant in his life from birth, and one that ultimately places him at the whims of prehomosexual hierarchy.

I will concede though that Shit is perhaps not a victim, if anything, because of the speculative nature of the novel. He does have a rich, full life with Eric, all the way into the late 21st century. At the end of the novel, Shit is on his deathbed at a nearby hospital, and, in the ultimate refutation of the world beyond Diamond Harbor, has a humorous encounter with a reverend, Brother Lucas, as he makes his rounds with the "older patients" (Delany 791). Lucas asks Shit about the "things" he has done in his lifetime, to which Shit responds, that he should ask Eric about that because Eric "...can read and write—he reads all that philosophy stuff, and busts his ass helpin' people....He's a special person" (Delany 791). Lucas asks if he and Shit were married, to which Shit replies "Naw—we di'n't never bother to get married" (Delany 792). Lucas asks is if they didn't get married because their partnership did not "involve intimacy", to which Shit finally responds:

You mean did we fuck? Goddamn I don't even remember sometimes. But we did just about every nasty thing two fellas could do—with each other and everyone else. And I mean real nasty too...Wait a minute! What the hell am I talkin' about? Course we fucked! We fucked like damned rabbits! Each other and everything else what come by. (Delany 792)

The conversation trails off, and Shit offers to masturbate in front of Brother Lucas as he quietly leaves the room (793). Shit dies in his sleep not long after—unperturbed by his problematic

upbringing, and resistant towards the specter of religious confession at the end of his life (Delany 793). In many ways, Shit is to Eric, what the dead mountain man is to Ed in *Deliverance*. Shit, with all his capacity to make readers terribly uncomfortable, is, as Griffiths claims, “the novel’s abject ideology...” (314). He is the speculative element in the novel which lays bare the most extreme possibilities of freedom in many paradoxical ways. While he has both has a partnership with Eric, he is not bound to him monogamously. While he is the subject of abuse, he nevertheless, finds freedom and happiness in this speculative space. His relationship with Eric represents unbridled freedom, and the lingering tyranny of prehomosexuality. Despite these paradoxes, Shit is the music in the hills that Lewis seeks—he represents the primacy of the body and embodies a problematic freedom.

CONCLUSION

I would like to conclude our reading with some disclaimers, and some of my own speculations. In exploring *Through the Valley's* posthomosexual, I do not wish to imply that it is the *only* posthomosexual, nor do I wish to imply that the only future beyond modern homosexuality is one in which unbridled sexual activity and race-fetishization are the only expressions of posthomosexuality. While Delany deftly explores the limits of the latter expression, it is particularly problematic if one attempts to use it as some sort of praxis in the real world. I believe it is necessary to keep such fetishization relegated to the speculative to prevent any reconfiguration from turning into a reestablishment of old ideological regimes.

If I might theorize about the best way to achieve a posthomosexual, I believe that there is some truth to Marcuse's theory. If it is old hat to merely suggest the abolishment of alienated labor, perhaps it is necessary to depict spaces in which labor is queer. Alternative forms of labor might offer avenues for pleasure and might be divorced from toil as much as possible. In a more general sense, I have taken great pains to avoid defining what "posthomosexual" means for speculative literature in the sincere hope that more people pick this term up and run it in a thousand different directions.

I have also said very little about the South outright in the back half of this paper. The question of why the South is such a fertile ground for exploring the limits of male homosexuality and homosociality is as an elusive for me. If the "real" South is much more artificial than marketing firms would like us to believe, then we have an almost limitless amount of agency to explore what it *might* be. Nevertheless, the South has a complex and horrifically dark history.

Despite how that history is recodified for markets, it remains at the heart of all literature about the South. In that respect, there is perhaps something noble to the project of building out of the ashes of history, even at the risk of giving rise to monstrous mountain men. There is something about the damming of rivers and the billboarding of swaths rural of land that compels people to head for the hills for a vacation, or for deliverance. There is something almost noble and romantic about a colony of queer men fashioning, a complicated, sexual utopia in the heart of Georgia—unremittingly dark as it may be at times. If the old, famous maxim of Southern literature is true, and the past truly isn't dead, then perhaps it is the task, particularly for queer writers, and writers of color, to simply push past it—to speculate on Souths that *might* be.

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