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## Man's Battle in John Boorman's Movie "Deliverance"

John Boorman's epic movie *Deliverance* has long been portrayed as the ultimate 'macho' movie; a rite of passage that separates the 'men from the boys', glorifying strength and physical prowess over ethics and decency. However uncompromising this conception may be, *Deliverance* is an evocative insight into the psyche of man, and his struggle against nature and the elements, conflict with individuality, and suppressed battles. Boorman, creating a deeper meaning for the more attentive viewer, deliberately places underlying notions of this in the mise-en-scene of the film for interpretation and analysis.

The film follows a linear narrative along the 40 miles of the Cahulawassee River and was shot in Panavision, using a letterbox (widescreen) format with an anamorphic lens. This narrowing of the frame conveys a claustrophobic feeling to the viewer, and allows for greater detail and a wider view, taking in the characters and the natural landscape - an imposing and omnipresent theme in the film. The sound of crickets and birds, unseen to the characters, is heard in the background throughout the whole of the film, and creates an almost haunting atmosphere. When Lewis hits the car horn, this sound is silenced for a second, and then resumes.

This silencing of natural sound is reminiscent of the sound of the alarm heard during the credits, when the excavation and blasting occurs. The sound of the alarm and the following explosion echoes around the mountains, breaking the silence and spreading across the panoramic view. This alludes to the impending destruction that will occur to the area, when it will be flooded and turned into a man-made lake, and represents the intrusion of urbanised society into the pristine wilderness.

The first few minutes of the film is a long take that cuts when Bobby talks to the hillbilly fuelling the cars. This long shot encompasses all the characters, effectively grouping them together. Junk and rusting cars are scattered across the yard. The old dilapidated shack seems to be deserted; however, the squeaking of a door opening can be heard. Dogs bark faintly in the background, almost giving the impression of a suburban neighbourhood. The green canoe strapped to the car, and the clothes that Ed, Bobby, and Drew are wearing seem to be new.

This supports the fact that they are inexperienced outdoorsman, and probably have purchased them specifically for the weekend. The personalities of the four main characters are all made apparent in this scene. A following shot of Bobby talking about 'his car' portrays his comical reaction and bigoted disdain for the hillbillies, their way of life, and the condition of the place they live. It shows his arrogance and condescending attitude, typical of 'city folk'. He is an overweight and ignorant middle-class businessman, and depicts what men in our society are

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afraid of becoming. He is the first to see the hillbilly coming out of the house, and does not talk to him, instead turning away and calling for Louis.

Also, when one of the nearby townsfolk approaches Bobby and Ed, asking, "Who's pickin' a banjo here?" they are stony faced and rudely do not reply until the man walks off. This lack of dialogue portrays the uneasiness between the two very distinct groups. It is apparent later in the movie that Bobby cannot survive in nature without help from others, or from civilisation. Liberal minded and soft-spoken Drew is the character with whom the audience can relate. He attempts to have a decent interaction with the people by establishing a common interest: music. It is this peaceful, rational gesture that embodies the virtues common to most members of society.

Nevertheless, it is this virtue that eventually leads to his demise; establishing the fact that rational thought and morals have no place in this situation, and that the primitive laws of nature ultimately prevail. His death in a later scene depicts this; his mangled body wrapped around the rocks, his arm dislocated and twisted around his head, his finger pointing to the river. Lewis is the leader of the group - strong, virile, and perceptive. He controls the other characters, as his experience, prowess, and strength are far more evident than theirs. Lewis' cigar seems firmly stuck in his mouth, even when approaching the petrol pump, showing his disposition towards risk taking and hazards.

Lewis takes off his jacket when he is speaking to the old man, exposing his tanned, muscular arms. This action is deliberate - an almost primal 'showing off' of his body, trying to establish his superiority by showing his physique. The jacket, on closer inspection, has a badge that reveals him to be a co-captain of a sky-diving group, which reinforces Lewis' position as a daredevil 'macho man'. The old man does not look at him, instead trying to look past him and see what is happening off screen. The focus then changes to the banjo boy and Drew 'exchanging blows' in their 'duel', cutting between the two of them as they pluck their strings.

A long shot showing all the other characters can be seen. The old man with Lewis has his hand outstretched, waiting for his money for the petrol. Lewis ignores him purposefully for several seconds, then hands him the money, which is quickly snatched from his grip. The independence, strength, and power of Lewis embodies the attributes that men would like to have. These types of men are embodied in the character of Ed.

He is the central character, and seems to mediate between the two polarities of the group; typical suburbanites Bobby and Drew, and the outdoorsy adventurer Lewis. Ed calmly watches the action between Drew and the banjo-playing hillbilly, thoughtfully smoking his pipe. His mild-mannered behaviour and curiosity prior to the weekend's horrific events are visible in this scene and, by the end of movie, have significantly changed, to the point where he resembles someone more like Lewis. Whether or not this is for the better is another story. These characterisations

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form a cross section of modern society and form the central question of *Deliverance*: if society collapsed, who would survive?

The cinematography uses crosscutting techniques, and alternates between two main lines of action: the banjo boy and Drew 'duelling', and the other characters and their reactions to the situation. Bobby starts clapping mockingly, and continues until the end of the song. A shot/reverse shot between Drew and the banjo boy gives the feeling of a rousing challenge between the two. The music is diegetic, synchronous, and remains heard when crosscutting between characters. This juxtaposed use of the sound in conjunction with image is important, as it gives a feeling of cohesion, and almost harmony between the characters, both 'hillbillies' and the 'city folk'; the whistling from one of the hillbillies, 'jig dancing' from another, a old woman observing from a window, and clapping along from Bobby, emphasising this.

This spontaneous musical duet is the only positive interaction between the men and the locals. Even Ed, mostly quiet until then, briefly speaks to one of them. However, it foreshadows the events to follow. Drew is outplayed and outclassed by what Bobby referred to as a 'pitiful genetic freak', and admits defeat. This shows that the characters are in fact 'out of their element' and 'out of their depth' in this strange and alien world. The uneasiness between the men and the inhabitants in this scene tells of the bigger problem that is to come. The title of the song is "Duelling Banjos", and is normally played with two banjos. It is played in the scene with a guitar and a banjo: the guitar representing the 'city folk' and the banjo symbolising the 'backward hicks'- a clash between cultures. From this scene on, the banjo music plays a more sinister role, and is played non-diegetically to reinforce the state of mind the characters are in, and to foreshadow the events to come.

John Boorman's masterful direction in this film has created a complex and thoughtful exploration into human consciousness. The famous banjo scene sequence is constructed to create a sinister prophecy of the events that are to follow. The personalities of each character are clearly defined within the first few minutes of the film, and comparisons are immediately drawn between the seemingly stereotyped characters and how the viewer might relate to them.

The apprehensive nature of some of the characters towards the surreal environment and vastly different 'hillbillies' immediately positions the two groups in conflict with one other. The music is significant, marking the only chance the men to have any real interaction with the local inhabitants. The images and sounds convey an ominous foreboding of the events that these men will encounter on their weekend, and clearly depicts the situation in which they find themselves and the danger that they will face.

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