

The Importance of Hope and Community

James Colvin

I am going to analyse the concepts of the prison films and their conventions and expectations. The typical crime film in which the protagonist or antagonist is sent to prison and they begin to plan an escape. These films usually follow the man sent in to the prison in which they make comrades and plan an escape. However some films don't have to be set in a prison, as it was shown in the 2010 film 'The Way Back' directed by Peter Weir. I will be looking at the director and writer Frank Darabont who made the films 'The Green Mile', 'Shawshank Redemption' and 'The Mist' as all of these films deal with the concept of imprisonment and freedom. Looking at the ideas of hope and community within these films and how that would affect the story and the characters, the idea of hope for the imprisoned soul seeing how they overcome their issues with help from the supporting characters.

Hope is a common theme, or idea, within most films for example hoping that the protagonist will get the girl and overcome the bad guy. The idea that the film's character is in a losing battle, they hope to win or conquer their problems. Other films have hope in the form of they hope for a happy ending as in the afterlife or having a happy life, in the case of these films it's the hope that keeps them going when they are in prison and are in need of something to keep them going and surviving in the small community of inmates. The community aspect is how a group of people live when they are forced to live together, all the different personalities clashing or complimenting each other. Everyone is looking for a sense of belonging and that in a way creates a community when they find a place where they belong. Community is an important theme as throughout history leaders have stated "my people" which is an easier way of saying my community but the message remains the same. It is thought that some people commit crimes because they feel as if they don't belong to a community outside of their family, so they act out and end up in prison and others prefer the community in prison and would do anything to stay there, like the character 'Brooks' from 'Shawshank Redemption' (Darabont, F. 1994). People seek a community because they are afraid or they don't get on with other people, as they have very little in common with them a good community allows you to be "happy to find others like themselves" and because of this they "find a sense of security" (Vanier, J. 1989). Finding the right community that you belong to allows you to be yourself and be confident, there is a community out there for everyone.

The first film I want to discuss is 'Shawshank Redemption' which is the earliest of my examples that was created by Frank Darabont. As this film was based on the short story by Stephen King, there were some areas of the book that had to be transferred into the film, however because it was a short story there was room for new ideas and events that could either be created or expanded upon from the original story. The plot focuses on a man who was wrongly convicted and sent to prison for murder, during the film the character becomes friendly with the staff of the prison and gets special privileges for doing their taxes and other finance problems for them. The main character, Andy Dufresne, discovers proof that he is innocent but has the proof taken from him so he commits himself to escape the prison.

The film is about hope and freedom. The hope that gets you through tough times and looking forward. We can explore the optimism within the film listening to the narrator talk about Andy and how his view of him changes throughout the film. You could look at this film as a way of seeing life, how you bide your time and wait for an opportunity to come along, everyone in the film is suffering in prison, having your freedom taken away. People can look at this film and relate to the characters but the title of the film is about the character 'Red' and his journey of redemption, "life is a prison, we are Red, Andy is our redeemer" (Ebert, R. 1999) what is being said here is that in some cases we are trapped inside our lives being told what to do and when to do it but that we should be trying to

set ourselves free, do what we want to do. We can be saved, that interpreted literally or metaphorically from our day to day lives. We could be feeling emotional or down like life is not fair but we might find someone who we admire that could influence us to feel better and set ourselves free and that an opportunity will come if we just wait for it.

Hope is something we all have, we all need to keep us going. It is used every day "I hope that..." which comforts us and we know that we hope for the best outcome of a situation, it keeps us optimistic and hopeful. Whereas our lives are darker and bleak with occasional glimmers of hope sprinkled around, "we live in an excruciating blend of hope and despair." (Dittes, J. 1996) In context of the film Andy lives in Shawshank prison living off the hope that one day he will be free and he will have justice for his wife's murder that he was sentenced for although he did not do it. Andy lives in despair by being hounded by the sisters and working for the prison by doing the staffs taxes. In life we live in despair and some people turn to religion for hope others choose to hope for a better day, trying to imagine that tomorrow will be better than today. Although in both cases it tomorrow never comes, the religious people might find peace within themselves and be content with their lives but the reality of life will always be there.

The second film I am talking is 'The Green Mile' (Darabont, F. 1999) was written and directed again by Frank Darabont. The film follows a group of prison guards that are watching the inmates that have been sentenced to death. Again like 'Shawshank Redemption' it takes a slower approach at the life of the inmates getting to know them with little action sprinkled around the film. The film addresses the Southern American states and their beliefs about race where a black man is blamed for murdering a child. This film takes a more relaxed approach that it lets the audience into the lives of the guards and inmates showing how they can become friends. Rather than in 'Shawshank Redemption' this is not a tale about a physical escape but more of friendship showing the interactions of the characters and a moral choice about executing a man sentenced to death for a crime he didn't commit but everyone is expecting him to die for it.

Within these films Darabont creates a sense of community and hope this allows the audience to connect with the characters so that we care about their journey. Within 'The Green Mile' there is a community among the guards and the men on death row, they bond over time and get to know each other as they are close to death, sort of the last connections to anyone before they die. People claim that 'The Green Mile' is too long and is no 'Shawshank'. Both films have similar messages but it has its own quality to it too.

I like the idea of being imprisoned mentally and looking at the physical imprisonment and how they overcome their issues and gain an understanding of life. The characters have to overcome new issues as well as the original issue that they have which drives the plot. Seeing how Andy deals with the sisters and how he copes with the staff of the prison allows me to have an idea of what ways characters can deal with their problems. There is always the message of hope in this film and we see when it is taken away and how Andy reacts to this news making it seem real to us. Looking at how the inmates are acting knowing they are going to die in 'The Green Mile' reflecting upon themselves and accepting their fate. The way they interact with the other inmates and guards in their own little world or community and seeing how the guards treat the criminals who are in there for murder and rape etc. They understand they are about to die and they have compassion towards them, compassion lets us get attached to people and understand them as it is a "true expression of human attachment and recognition" (Berlant, L. 2004) it's the understanding of the guards in this film that lets the community grow as they acknowledge the fact that the prisoners have been sentenced to death so there is no point being hard on them, they treat them with the respect and dignity they deserve.

'The Mist' (Darabont, F. 2007) is another adaptation from the work of Stephen King, which is a different spin on imprisonment. There is a community of survivors in a shopping centre that are hiding from a monster in the mist that has engulfed their town. Throughout the film the characters

go through emotional trauma, as they are afraid of what will happen so they decide to sacrifice a child to please God. The ending of the film shows the main protagonist shooting everyone in his car except him to save them from a terrible fate that he will experience, however after he runs out of bullets the military show up and they are saved. The idea of hope comes in this film as a will they escape and survive or not.

This film has a biblical tone as in the bible God tells Abraham to sacrifice his own son which is what happens in the film, 'David Drayton' kills his son and the other survivors and is saved. There is a question about this ending, during the film a woman picks up a bible and claims God will save them if they sacrifice the child, if they would've sacrificed the child earlier would all the people be saved? The survivors become restless when they think it's a good idea to kill a child which alienates the main character group. Then they become imprisoned as in they are trapped by a monster in the mist and the group of survivors that have a murderous intent.

Putting people together under stressful circumstances will create a sense of panic and lead to a disorganised community this leads to a lack of judgment and in times of crisis people turn to God for answers, bargaining with him in a way in an attempt to not die, in the films case, or to move on safely, "striking the best possible terms for dying as well as trying to strike a bargain that enables them to avoid death entirely" (Harvey, G. 2013). Throughout this film there is the possibility that the people won't survive and they attempt to please God, thus striking a bargain which people do in desperation for self-preservation which is an animal instinct, to ensure the safety of one's self before protecting others, a selfish act but it is a natural one within the animal kingdom. In a sense it takes into consideration the survival of the fittest mentality by sacrificing the weak and protecting yourself however you can.

Throughout this report I have touched upon the idea of being imprisoned, mentally and physically, hope and community. Being imprisoned forces you to be with other people and that puts you into a community, if you are there long enough you feel like nothing when you leave the community, in 'Shawshank Redemption' the character 'Red' played by Morgan Freeman addresses the character 'Brooks' and comment on him leaving the prison stating that outside of their community he is nothing which can be true for all communities but shown as an extreme example. This illustrates how important community is, the idea of hope keeps people from focusing on the bad side of life, like death, and lets the character have an optimistic view of the world when everything is bleak, "without it, the human being would be static; he would cease to be" (Pieper, J. 2003). In a sense hope gives us meaning, something to look forward to, a goal to aim for and achieve. Similar to a community in the sense that it gives us purpose and a feeling of belonging.

I chose these films because I wanted to analyse the state of imprisonment and what effects that has on hope and the community within. These films all have a sense of imprisonment, a time to look at one's self and your beliefs. I like the idea of self-reflection in isolation but the focus of this is the hope and community in bleak times such as prison, facing death or impending doom and how others react in the same way within the community. Looking at the reason for hope and the necessity of it for us to grow and thrive in the world, it provides us with a reason and meaning we see it as a way to go on with our lives and to improve upon ourselves. Hope and community can get you through some dark times and brings you back to reality

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