

Higher Media Analysis – Revision Notes

Key aspect	The Shawshank Redemption (USA, 1994, dir Frank Darabont)
Categories	
Medium	Film
Form	Mainstream A feature film with medium budget \$25m
Genre	Generic hybrid: prison genre plus elements of buddy and caper movies. <u>Prison film</u> Semantics: (typical characters, locations, props) Syntax: see narrative structure 1 below. <u>Biracial buddy film</u> Young/old male wisecrack their way through the action; biracial films have black/white crossover appeal. <u>Caper film</u> Criminal(s) plan a complex con that will set them up for life.
Purpose	Profit from screenings in cinema and on tv, video/DVD sales; entertainment which allows us the pleasure of ‘escaping’ from everyday reality through fantasies; emotional release gives a feeling of intensity which may be lacking in our lives.
Tone	Serious but wry dialogue lightens bleak subject matter. Nostalgic tone at the start (Inkspots ‘If I Didn’t Care’) establishes that this is old-fashioned ‘good story’. Story is meant to inspire (Starline: ‘Fear can hold you prisoner; hope can set you free’) Uplifting ‘happy’ ending.
Style	Classic narrative style – see technical codes below.
Language	
Technical codes	Story all-important and style unobtrusive. Clear chain of cause and effect – each scene linked to next by dialogue/voiceover and/or causal linkage. Unobtrusive editing – generally continuity editing without ES – may be due to economic reasons. Mess hall scenes in first 2/3 of film may have ten or more camera set-ups and use continuity editing but at the end they use Steadicam with maybe only 2 set-ups – due to fears of running over-budget.
Cultural codes	e.g. use in opening titles/prologue of film – Art Deco font in titles, Inkspots evoke nostalgic feeling plus establish time and place.
Anchorage	Not much action in film, so Red’s voiceover is needed to move story along and explain what Andy is feeling. Thomas Newman’s score moves from ‘cold’ synthesised music at the start (connotes the harshness of the prison) to more ‘human’ orchestral and piano music when Andy escapes.
Narrative	
Narrative structure	<u>Narrative structure 1 (Todorov)</u> Typical crime film syntax: narrative structure law-breaking, discovery, punishment, resolution cf. Todorov’s normality, disruption, return to normality. <u>Narrative structure 2 (Thompson)</u> Film historian Kristin Thompson has analysed Hollywood films from 1910s-1990s and found that they generally have a 4-part structure with major turning points providing the transitions between the parts (set-up, t pt1, complicating action, t pt 2, development, t pt 3, climax). The t pts in TSR are 1. in the rooftop scene where Andy offers to help guards & gets beers for the prisoners so becoming integrated into prison life; 2. when Andy plays Mozart to the prisoners expressing the fact that he is not-institutionalised and giving a glimpse of freedom to the prisoners; 3. when Tommy, who can prove Andy’s innocence, is killed meaning that Andy’s only way out is escape. <u>Narrative structure 3 (Campbell)</u> Joseph Campbell has suggested that underlying the myths of society there is a monomyth – the hero’s quest. A hero enters an underworld, fights the forces of evil with the aid of helpers and a wise old man. He defeats evil and returns to the everyday world with boons to bestow to his fellow. TSR follows this structure.
Narrative codes	<u>Action codes</u> : typical of prison genre e.g. routine of prison life, meal times, exercise,

	<p>work, violence, parole hearings, escape.</p> <p><u>Enigmatic codes</u>: e.g. major enigmas: will Andy be proved innocent? Will Red get parole?</p> <p><u>Semic codes</u>: e.g. the connotations of the prison ('one part prison, two parts castle of Frankenstein', 'Gothic quality that draws the eyes skyward') – connotations of religion + horror</p> <p><u>Referential codes</u>: e.g. the use of film star posters to indicate the passage of some 20 years (Rita Hayworth, Marilyn Monroe, Raquel Welch)</p> <p><u>Symbolic codes</u>: binary oppositions (justice v. injustice, good v. evil, freedom v. oppression, appearance v. reality) typical of prison film.</p>
Representation	
Selection	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. This a world in which women are absent (the feminine man 'Fat Ass' is the first 'fresh fish' to freak out – he is 'feminised' by having fulsome breasts). 2. Red is black (Morgan Freeman) – as well as being an Oscar-winning actor he increases crossover appeal. 3. Set in prison. 4. TSR focuses on individuals, mainly Andy.
Portrayal	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The portrayal of masculinity can be expressed in binary oppositions (male v. female, hard v. soft, unemotional v. emotional). 2. Race is not portrayed as an issue in Shawshank. Was it felt that this would be too disturbing an issue to have in a feelgood movie? Red is inferior to Andy (criminal and uneducated v. innocent and educated). 3. Prison brutal and dehumanising. Typical of Hollywood narrative – one individual escapes. 4. Andy is an outstanding individual whose intelligence and hard work leads to his escape.
Ideological discourses	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Masculinity is an expression of discourse of machismo. 2. Lack of racial conflict expresses ideology of US as 'melting pot'. Representation of Andy and Red express discourse of white racial superiority. 3. Expresses individualist ideology of USA – individual solutions to institutional and social problems. 4. Expresses individualist ideology of the USA – anyone with talent and hard work can succeed i.e. make lotsof money.
Audience	
Target audience	<p>Seems to be aimed at older film-goers e.g. 40+ who don't like action blockbusters – use of 1940s-1960s music and movie stars backs this up.</p> <p>However the film got an MPAA R rating (restricted, adult accompaniment for 17 or under) because it implied male rape rather than showing it.</p> <p>Biracial pairing implies black/white targeting.</p>
Mode of address	<p><u>Indirect address</u> used in scenes where events unfold in front of us.</p> <p><u>Direct address</u> used where Red gives the voiceover.</p> <p><u>General mode of address</u> in that it seems addressed at a wide audience (although it may not appeal to females).</p> <p><u>Unified mode of address</u> in that it creates a single viewpoint for the audience i.e. the plot is so clear that everyone would construct the same story from it.</p>
Preferred reading	<p>Darabont has said that he believes you make your own luck by determination and effort – you must believe in yourself no matter how bleak things seem. This is why he liked Stephen King's original novella.</p> <p>Andy: 'Get busy living or get busy dying.'</p> <p>Video cover: 'Fear can hold you prisoner; hope can set you free.'</p> <p>By believing you can advance you can make it happen and be redeemed.</p>
Differential decoding	<p>Many people responded to the movie as it was encoded and have found it inspiring (it is currently number 2 in the IMDB greatest movie list). It seems to engage with the 'structure of feeling' of many people who feel trapped in oppressive situations – TSR gives the fantasy of escaping from an oppressive reality to the sun with lots of money.</p> <p>Black critics criticise Freeman's casting as being typical of Hollywood.</p>

	Film-goers whose taste is for art movies with more experimental style and plotting find TSR dull.
Institution	
Internal context	<p>Produce by Castle Rock Entertainment – mini-major who make films to be picked up for distribution by majors. The script would appeal to CRE as it has a ‘mythic journey’ story which appeals to studio executives.</p> <p>CRE believe in the right of artistic integrity and gave Darabont right of final cut but ‘persuaded’ him that his first cut was denying the audience the pleasure of Andy and Red being re-united (the original had an unresolved ending where Red was seen on bus to Mexico wondering if he would see his friend again). Darabont’s first film so he was teamed with leading cinematographer Roger Deakins who came up with economic solutions to shooting when the film was about to go over-budget e.g. mess hall scenes. Test screening led to cutting of some redundant scenes.</p> <p>Film cost \$25m and gained \$18m on fist release. Re-released when gained seven Oscar nominations – took \$10m domestically. Phenomenal success on video/DVD and when screened on network tv.</p>
External context	Gained R rather than NC-17 rating in USA which meant that teenage audience could see it. NC-17 rating would have been given if scenes of violence or rape had been explicit and this would have reduced potential audience (e.g. exclude teens and put off 40+).