

Shawshank redemption use of symbolism



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The 1994 film, *The Shawshank Redemption*, directed by Frank Darabont, uses recurring symbols to convey the main theme of different types of Freedom. Darabont uses the bible and hammer to convey the idea of freedom and salvation by creating relations to biblical events. He uses the hole to express the idea of a loss of freedom by showing the hopes of Andy being taken away when he is sent to the hole. The hope of freedom that is felt by the inmates is conveyed to the audience through the clever use of music and symbols of music throughout the film.

Frank Darabont conveys the idea of a loss of freedom through his use of “the hole” as a motif. The hole is a place where a prisoner’s limited freedom is taken away from him. For freedom, or the opportunity of freedom, to be taken away it must be first had or able to be obtained. In *The Shawshank Redemption* there are two instances where Andy is sent to the hole, both result in his freedom being taken away from him. The first instance is where Andy plays a music record over the PA system. The music is a sign of the outside world and of freedom.

Warden Norton punishes Andy by sending him to the hole. The second instance is where Andy, convinced that Tommy has evidence that could lead to his release, tries to convince Warden Norton to help him gain a retrial. As a direct result of this conversation, the Warden sends Andy to the hole for the longest sentence ever done by an inmate. These two instances, where the possibility of freedom for Andy is so apparent, are crushed by him being sent to the solitude and bleakness of the hole, where all his previous luxuries are taken away from him along with the idea of freedom.

The director of *The Shawshank Redemption* represents the idea of freedom and redemption through the motifs of the rock hammer and the bible. The two items closely link as the rock hammer is hidden in the bible. The first time the warden meets with Andy, his parting comment is "Salvation lies within." This is true in two ways. The first is that it's Andy's inner strength and desire to right the injustice that has occurred to him, that allows him to escape and get his life back.

The second is more literal as Andy uses the bible to hide the hammer which he uses to tunnel to freedom. Another biblical reference that alludes to Andy's freedom is when after he has climbed out of the pipe of crap, he rips off his shirt and stands arms out looking to the skies. This pose symbolises Jesus's crucifixion which leads to his second coming and redemption. Likewise this is Andy's redemption. There are numerous other biblical references in the movie such as the cross stitch of a quote from the bible.

The constant use of well-known biblical references allows the ideas of freedom and redemption to play a prominent role in the film. The hope of freedom is conveyed by the director of *The Shawshank Redemption* through the repetitive use of music and symbols of music. The relation between music and hope is directly referred to by Andy after his stint in the hole stating you need music so that you don't forget hope. At the start of the movie things are looking down for Andy but after he finds hope when drinking beers on the roof, this is conveyed to the audience by the non-diegetic music.

After Red is rejected by the Parole Board for the second time, Andy gives him a harmonic, which represents hope, Andy wants Red to keep having hope that one day his application will be approved and he will be set free. Whilst Andy played the opera music, the voice over states “ and for the briefest of moments every man at Shawshank felt free,” which shows the relation between music and that hope and belief of freedom. The use of music at strategic points through the film help convey the idea of the hope of freedom that Andy has and that which he tries to give to the other prisoners.

The use of recurring symbols, by director Frank Darabont, such as music, the bible, the hammer and the hole help convey the main idea of Freedom in the film, specifically the hope of freedom, freedom and resurrection, and a loss of freedom. It's the emphasis on one major theme divided into three smaller ideas which are repeated and represented throughout most of the film that make The Shawshank Redemption arguably the greatest movie of all time.