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*Andy and Red's Complementary Paths to Redemption*

Wrongfully convicted for murder, Andy Dufresne, one of the protagonists in “The Shawshank Redemption,” is sentenced to serve two life terms in prison for each of his alleged victims. His adamant upholding of his innocence slowly deteriorates as time progresses, and sentiments of guilt begin to accrue. Andy’s steady determination to escape the corrupt prison as evidenced by his gradual wearing away at the rock wall in his prison cell parallels the prison’s physical and mental weathering away of Andy. Rocks become an important motif in the film: the prison itself, the rock hammer, the rocks Red collects and molds chess pieces from, the large rock Andy uses to break open the pipe, and the volcanic rock covering the letter and money that Andy hides for Red at the end of the movie. Andy, himself, displays many properties of rocks. More specifically, the geologic process of weathering away of rocks, a process that takes a substantial amount of time, mirrors the steady unraveling of Andy’s character. That is, the viewer gradually sees the different layers of Andy’s personality through this figurative application of “weathering.” Red, the “institutionalized old fish” in Shawshank, serves as a foil to Andy. Unlike Andy, Red was rightfully accused of murder and has had to live with a guilty conscience for an extended period of time before coming to terms to his foolish crime. He is not filled with the intense desire to escape Shawshank, unlike Andy, who constantly clings on to hope. Whereas Andy’s progression from innocence to guilt to redemption can be best understood through the concept of weathering, Red’s progression from guilt to redemption to innocence can

be best understood through the reverse process of building up. The stark contrast between Andy and Red's personalities lead to their complementary paths to redemption, which is further reinforced by the subtle patterns of rock imagery scattered throughout the film.

From the beginning of the movie, it becomes evident that Andy is "a hard man to get to know." At his own trial, he exudes an air of frigid aloofness. Even the judge admits, "You strike me as a particularly icy and remorseless man, Mr. Dufresne. It chills my blood just to look at you." Of course, by calling him remorseless, the judge has already implied that he believes Andy to be guilty. Remorse cannot exist without the acknowledgement of wrongdoing. Andy, however, feels no remorse at this point in the film, since he did not actually murder his wife and her lover. Although Andy is innocent of the crime, his body language suggests otherwise. He remains calm despite the district attorney's harsh interrogation. Even the way in which he defends himself against the district attorney's incriminating allegations comes across as sardonic. Andy remarks, "Since I am innocent of this crime, sir, I find it decidedly *inconvenient* the gun was never found." For someone to be sarcastic and so well put together in light of the dire circumstance is atypical for an innocent man. It is more likely that someone who is wrongfully convicted of a crime would show more vulnerability in proclaiming his innocence and be more impassioned, not stoic. Nonetheless, Andy's expression of horror evoked by the judge's harsh life sentence indicates that he does lend a sense of gravity to the issue of his innocence. Andy's quiet demeanor carries over to his time in prison. He does not utter a word the first night in Shawshank, and his interaction with the inmates is quite limited the following first few years. He does talk to Red during the first filmed exercise period in the movie, but he is a man of a few words. In response to Red's question of why he committed the murder, Andy replies, "I didn't, since you ask." The fact that Andy does not further elaborate on the matter of his innocence

adds to this sense of mystery and distance he portrays. He maintains his innocence so casually and matter-of-factly. He seems as though he does not feel the need to explain himself further, an attitude that can come across as arrogant, or even abnormal. The calm way he upholds his innocence during both the trial and in his first interaction with Red supports the claim that he is “a hard man to know.” His nonchalant aura shows how he remains intact, and how he has not yet been “weathered.” Since this process of weathering has not come into full effect yet, we are unable to get an accurate reading of who Andy really is. A wall is not only constructed between Andy and those whom he interacts with, but is also constructed between him and the viewer.

The barrier constructed between Andy and the viewer is non-existent between Red and the viewer. There is no sense of mystery surrounding Red, since he is the reliable, yet limited narrator. He is a respectable character from the start, regardless of the chilling fact that he is a convicted felon. Red’s tenure in prison as “the man who can get [the inmates] anything” has consequences that are two-fold. On the one hand, this tenure makes him a respectable and wise figure in both the eyes of the inmates and the viewer. On the other hand, it constructs him as this “institutionalized” figure so accustomed to the routine of prison life. In Red, we do not see the enigmatic nature of Andy, but rather a stable and predictable character confined by sentiments of guilt. Red’s institutionalized nature shows how his personality is in dire need of strengthening and “building up,” a process which is facilitated through Andy’s influence over the course of their growing friendship. The first time we see Red is in the Shawshank hearings room, when he is being interviewed for parole by seven austere men. In response to one of the man’s question of whether Red felt as though he had been rehabilitated, Red responds, “Yes, sir. Absolutely. I’ve learned my lesson. I can honestly say I’m a changed man. I’m no longer a danger to society. That’s the God’s honest truth. No doubt about it.” Through his seemingly rehearsed responses

and body language, in which he tries hard to maintain good posture, it becomes obvious that Red is trying to please authority. Red is wide-eyed and nervous, and, in a sense, becomes infantilized in this scene. He does not seem to understand the implications of his actions and is merely reciting what he feels the panel expects him to state. Although it appears as if Red is speaking with conviction, it is really just an act to please authority. At this stage, Red tries unsuccessfully to adopt ideas of redemption by saying he is “a changed man,” but in reality, his guilty conscience prevents him from doing so. In effect, he remains “guilty” through the panel’s decision to reject his parole opportunity.

As the process of weathering begins to take place, Andy’s notions of innocence become slightly weakened. A few years have passed at this point in time, and Andy has suffered considerably. From the constant beatings by Bogs and his crew and the encounter with the brutal Hadley, which nearly results in Andy being pushed off the prison rooftop, to the two weeks of solitary confinement he faces, Andy is gradually being broken down. He copes with the violence and corruption in Shawshank by providing financial services to Hadley and the warden Norton and by developing a stronger bond with Red, thus marking an important transition from his status as the “new fish” to a more respectable inmate. It is ironic that he copes with the corruption by aiding in it through the assistance he provides the warden via the money laundering operation. After Red and Andy have transitioned from acquaintances to friends, Red asks Andy, for the second time, why he committed the murder. Andy jokingly responds, “I’m innocent, remember? Just like everybody else here.” Andy’s remark is not sarcastic and cold as it was in the courtroom, but rather warm and lighthearted, signifying the growing camaraderie between Red and himself. By talking about his innocence in a more lighthearted fashion, Andy loses the sense of gravity he once placed on the matter. This is not to say that he believes that innocence and

guilt are completely inconsequential, but rather shows how he feels that firmly maintaining his innocence will do nothing to change his situation. Andy's openness and comfort with Red, as indicated by his playful demeanor and the fact that he reciprocates the question of innocence back to Red, suggests that a significant portion of time has passed from their first encounter. Andy's experiences in prison have not completely broken him down at this point, but have only slightly challenged his notions of innocence. He still maintains his innocence to some degree, but is less serious about the matter as a result of its futility in freeing him.

Red's stance on his own sense of guilt becomes clearer through his interaction with Andy. Red's progression to redemption is one in which he is gradually coming to terms with his feelings of guilt for wrongdoing. During the second encounter in which Red brings up the question of Andy's innocence, Andy asks Red what he has been convicted of. Once Red emphasizes the likeness of their situation by saying that he has been accused of murder, Andy asks Red whether he is innocent. In response to this question, Red remorsefully responds, "[I am] the only guilty man in Shawshank." Red's following response says a lot about his character development at this point. Unlike other convicts who feign innocence, Red honestly admits that he is guilty. This admission of guilt is the first step in which Red transitions to the beginning stages of coming to terms to his guilt. The tone of melancholy indicates Red's regret for the murder and the immutability of the situation. This pessimistic tone carries over to his second parole hearing, in which he is asked the identical question of whether or not he has been rehabilitated. The content of Red's response is identical to the content of his response during the first hearing. However, his body language is entirely different. Red makes no effort to impress the men on the panel or to truly convince them of the fact that he is rehabilitated. He does not make eye contact and is merely reciting words robotically. That Red hardly puts any effort to get

approved for parole shows how he is so overwhelmed with feelings of guilt that he, himself, believes that he is undeserving of freedom. He does not believe the words he is saying, as indicated by his lack of enthusiasm and eye contact, and feels remorse for the crime he committed. The fact that he does not try to prove himself to the panel marks Red's building up in personality.

While prison life is gradually building up Red, prison life begins to weather away Andy's rocky "innocent" exterior, exposing traces of his guilt, but this is further complicated by Andy's desire to free himself by proving his innocence. When Red compliments him on his ingeniousness involving the money laundering operation, Andy comments, "It's funny. On the outside, I was an honest man. Straight as an arrow. I had to come to prison to be a crook." Over the course of his life in prison, Andy's firm maintenance of his innocence has now disintegrated into an admission of guilt. This line is interesting since it represents the dynamism of Andy's feelings of innocence and guilt. Although it seems as though he has completely accepted these feelings of guilt, Andy still maintains the fact that he once *was* innocent. He was genuine in maintaining his innocence before, but now things have changed. His statement provides insight regarding the irony of how prison has made him a criminal, when its intended purpose is to rehabilitate criminals. Andy, to some degree, has allowed the prison to "weather" him by cooperating with, rather than fighting against, its corruption. That Andy's notions of innocence become even weaker is also supported by his response to new inmate Tommy's question of why he has been incarcerated. Andy, having been asked this question for the third and final time in the movie, responds humorously, "Everyone's innocent in here. Don't you know that?" The laughter that ensues indicates how this matter of innocence has essentially become a joke. The fact that Andy has adopted Red's line not only shows how he has become a respectable figure

akin to Red, but also how his attitude has changed over time. It is only when Tommy tells Red a story that confirms Andy's innocence that Andy desperately clings to this bit of hope. At this moment, Andy completely embraces his prior notions of innocence, trying to convince the warden of the validity of this liberating new piece of evidence, but the warden is not impressed. When Andy, after much frustration, mentions the illegal money laundering business and calls the warden "obtuse," the warden sends him away to solitary confinement for a month. The warden gives Hadley permission to kill Tommy, the only witness who can provide the piece of evidence to liberate Andy, leaving the question of Andy's fate unresolved.

The untimely coupling of Tommy's death and Andy's month long duration in the "hole" marks the final stage of weathering, which foreshadows Andy's overwhelming sense of guilt and his rejection of innocence. Although Andy mentions earlier in the film that no one can ever take hope away from him, his defeated expression suggests that barely any hope remains for him. The next conversation Andy has with Red following his month in solitary confinement is pivotal in understanding his current state of mind. He confesses to Red, "My wife used to say I'm a hard man to know. Like a closed book...I loved her. But I guess I couldn't show it enough. I killed her, Red. I didn't pull the trigger. But I drove her away. That's why she died. Because of me, the way I am." Andy's final admission of guilt corresponds with this final stage of weathering. The once aloof, put together banker is now a vulnerable, broken-down inmate. The tumultuous experience of prison life has eaten away at his conscience. It would be too simplistic to say that Andy does not like who he has become, because in retrospect, he also does not like who he once was. He struggles with accepting his identity. He is no longer a "closed book" to the viewer, now that his inner turmoil is on display. He goes on to tell Red, "I didn't shoot my wife and I didn't shoot her lover, and whatever mistakes I made I've paid for and then some." Andy's sense of

guilt remains strong, but he adopts an attitude which reflects that these actions were in the past and cannot be changed. He has reached a final stage of remorse, feelings which were absent (according to the judge) in the beginning of the movie.

During their last conversation in Shawshank prison, Red tries to comfort Andy regarding his feelings of guilt for “killing his wife.” He states, “That don’t make you a murderer. Bad husband maybe. Feel bad about it if you want, but you didn’t pull the trigger.” By reassuring Andy of his innocence by using logic, Red exhibits a rational approach to notions of innocence and guilt. This approach manifests itself later in Red’s third Shawshank parole hearing. In response to the previously asked question of whether he has been “rehabilitated”, Red steers away from this “bullshit politician’s word” and instead explains his genuine feelings of remorse: “Not a day goes by I don’t feel regret, and not because I’m in here or because you think I should. I look back on myself the way I was... That kid’s long gone, this old man is all that’s left, and I have to live with that...you just go on ahead and stamp that form there, Sonny, and stop wasting my damn time. Truth is, I don’t give a shit.” This final parole hearing shows how Red has built himself up, having transformed from an “institutionalized” inmate to a strong individual unafraid to offend authority through his candor. He has shifted completely from the submissive, ready-to please person to a self-empowered, redeemed man. Red has finally come to terms with his guilt, noting that his horrendous crime was in the past and is irreversible. His approval for parole is technical proof that he has been redeemed. *Now*, he can honestly say that he is a changed man.

The rock imagery in the film accounts for the different processes- weathering and building up- which lead to redemption. Red constantly is involved with collecting and discovering rocks. He provides Andy with the rock hammer, collects rocks for Andy’s chess piece set, and discovers the volcanic rock Andy hides for him at the end of the movie. His exposure to rocks is

always linked in some way to Andy. This collecting and building up pattern can also be applied to Red's progress over time. He "builds" his personality over the course of the three parole hearings, transitioning from a submissive to an empowered individual. A type of interdependence is sustained: Andy relies on Red to get him the rock hammer and rocks for his chess pieces, but in the end, it is Red who finds the rock that Andy hides for him by the brick wall. Finding the rock towards the end of the movie foreshadows his eventual reunion with Andy, who emphasizes the idea of hope. Equilibrium is maintained with Red collecting rocks (building up) and Andy scraping away at the rock wall in his prison cell (weathering). The process of weathering allows us to see Andy's true emotions and helps us better characterize him. Like a rock, he can never fully disintegrate. He endures much weathering, but ultimately maintains his hope.

Andy's transition from innocence to guilt is a gradual one that occurs in the context of his harsh living conditions. His long escape through the narrow, feces-infested pipes towards the end of the movie marks his final passage through corruption and guilt. The iconic scene in which he raises his arms in triumph as rain is pouring down on him symbolizes his rebirth. The water from the river and the rain wash away Andy's sins and sentiments of guilt. Not only is he a new man figuratively, in the sense that he has been redeemed, but he also is literally, in the sense that he has adopted the new identity that he created while in prison. His discomfort with his own identity is put at ease through his embrace of this new identity, a fantasy that symbolizes a fresh start, free of guilt. Andy's progression in his role as the "fresh fish" to the more experienced prisoner to the escapee corresponds with his notions of innocence to guilt to redemption, respectively. His changing responses to the repeated question of what he has been imprisoned for indicates how the passage of time has caused him to re-evaluate his position on innocence, progressively

treating it in a more light-hearted fashion. Andy's changing roles are also accompanied by a trend towards openness and character readability: a trend that is facilitated through the process of weathering.

The path to redemption is reversed for Red. He progresses from a sense of guilt to redemption only after building himself up by coming to terms with his unlawful deed. His nonchalant attitude transforms from one of misguided apathy, in which he has no desire to change or improve, to intentional apathy, in which he learns to disregard the opinion of authority. Already institutionalized, Red does not seem to care whether or not he escapes prison. The actions he takes never seem to be self-interested, but rather in the interest of others. He provides services for all the inmates including Andy, and is more concerned with pleasing people than doing something for himself. Over the course of his three parole hearings this changes, however. He is first greatly concerned with tailoring his response to what the seven men on panel want to hear, but this eagerness to please diminishes during his second hearing, and completely vanishes during his final parole hearing, as evidenced by his line, "I don't give a shit." By ridding himself of the façade of the respectable man he sought so hard to portray to the panelists, he finally finds redemption in being true to himself. Coming to terms with his feelings of guilt, therefore, was a building up process, in which he was greatly influenced by his close friend Andy.