



# An Analysis of the Writing Skill of the *Shawshank Redemption* from the Perspective of Personal Heroism

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**Abstract.** *The Shawshank Redemption* is a novel written by the American author Stephen. This movie tells the story of Andy, who escaped from prison based on his own ingenuity and gained freedom. Individual heroism advocates freedom, which includes freedom of thought, freedom of belief and freedom of speech, and demands the establishment of a multicultural system. And it emphasizes the role of the individual in social and historical activities, which is reflected in the exercise of individual abilities. In Shawshank prison, Andy relies on his own wisdom to invite his cellmates to drink, and by virtue of his ability to make false accounts for the warden, he is treated better and sets up a library, relying on his own strength to transform the prison little by little, and then after learning that the warden intends to trap him in Shawshank prison, Andy begins to plan his escape and regains his freedom on a stormy night. Personal heroism can explain Andy's words and actions very well. At present, domestic and foreign studies on *The Shawshank Redemption* mainly focus on individual heroism, American dream, institutionalization of capitalism, and spiritual redemption, etc.

This thesis takes *The Shawshank Redemption* as a text, combines the theory of individual heroism with the writing techniques of symbolism, irony and Gothic conflict to focus on the speech and behavior of the main character Andy, pointing out the embodiment of individual heroism in Andy's body, and at the same time calling on people to adhere to good humanity, maintain a positive attitude in the face of adversity, and be brave to fight.

**Keywords:** Personal Heroism; Irony; Symbolism; Gothic Conflict; Self-salvation

## 1 Introduction

The *Shawshank Redemption*, directed by Frank Delabonte, is a classic film that deeply dissects human nature and tells about redemption and hope. The film tells the story of Andy, a promising young banker who was wrongly convicted of shooting his wife and her lover to prison. After he was imprisoned, he kept quiet, plotted and managed to save himself step by step for the camp and successfully escaped from prison to regain his freedom. The special scenes of the prison make the human character more profound

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and comprehensive, and also let the social justice corruption at a glance, but also through the characters show the personal heroism concept and the desire for hope, self-redemption, and finally regain freedom with wisdom, bravery and superhuman perseverance.

### 1.1 An Introduction to the Author and Text

Stephen King was born in 1947 to a poor family in Maine, USA. He studied English literature at a state university. After graduation, he started writing because of his meager salary, and rose to fame in the mid-1970s when he was hailed by the New York Times as "the master of modern horror fiction". Since the 80s and 90s, his novels have always been on the top of the best-seller lists in the United States, and have remained there for a long time. He is the most widely read and most famous American novelist in the world today. In 1979, at the age of 32, he became the world's leading billionaire author. Today, he earns more than ten million dollars in royalties for each of his works.

Published in 1982, *Different Seasons* is a collection of middle-grade stories written by American author Stephen King. This novel is different from most of his horror novels, it is less thriller and imagination space, but the years, growth, redemption and other themes involved in this work seems heavy and serious and even criticized the darkness of American society at that time. And *The Shawshank Redemption* is the first of this middle-grade novel. The story of Andy, a banker who is wrongly convicted of shooting his wife and her lover and is imprisoned, but who does not move and plans to save himself and finally succeeds in escaping from prison and regaining his freedom. The main story is about a banker Andy, who was wrongly convicted of shooting his wife and her lover after being imprisoned. He suffered a lot of torture and abuse in prison, but he did not despair, then step by step. He planed to save themselves and finally successfully escaped from prison, regaining freedom. There is no doubt that the novel was a great success. When it was made into a movie, it became a classic. Her success is inseparable from the author's multiple narrative techniques and narrative skills [1].

### 1.2 An Introduction to the theory of personal heroism

Individual heroism is the spirit of an individual who, in a given situation, is not willing to show weakness, fight and make sacrifices for the greater good of the nation. F. Hersey believes that the main culture of America is the worship of heroes. Individual heroism is undoubtedly the traditional character of the American people and is an integral part of American culture.

" American heroism is at the heart of American culture and American culture, and it is the original need of the American people for freedom." When Western European immigrants came to North America, they were unfamiliar with their surroundings, distrustful and insecure, so their bravery and courage became the spiritual backbone of the American people [2]. The American pioneers were oppressed by the privileges and rigid hierarchy of the British aristocracy, which prompted them to pursue equality and freedom, and heroism-led victories gradually became mainstream. The American

pioneers, under the privilege and rigid class oppression of the British aristocracy, gradually worried about their own survival and humanism, and therefore advocated self-reliance, constant self-transcendence, and the belief that everyone could create greater welfare for society in order to obtain spiritual solace. As individual heroism continued to develop in the United States, its economic power also continued to grow. At the same time, the United States pursued power politics in order to establish the image of the "lone hero", thus allowing individual heroism to flourish and gradually penetrate into all fields.

The most representative characters in early American popular fiction, represented by cowboys, detectives and science novels, are full of heroic colors in their character, and their character is often "free from the constraints of law and society, to achieve their goals by overcoming violence with violence", which is also a symbol of the American pursuit of freedom and transcendence of self. This is also a sign of the American national consciousness of freedom and transcendence. The spread of these popular novels also had a great impact on the world, as well as on the shaping of heroic characters in various countries. However, this work did not have much impact on the world at large because it required reading and understanding, unlike the movies [3].

In short, individual heroism has been widely used in art creation, bringing together national cultures and national spirits in a way that still has far-reaching effects.

## 2 An Analysis of Personal Hero Images in Terms of Irony

The most basic feature of irony is that it signifies a philosophical reflection and a human attitude through two paradoxical opposites. As a modern art law, it already had a serious critical spirit core in the ancient Greek period. It was not until the late 18th and early 19th centuries that Romanticism broadened the rhetorical meaning of irony and provided a thoughtful innovation for the whole literary creation. The irony of the novel is mainly through both the language of the characters and the storyline, making it fully reveal the character of Andy, and the theme of the novel[4].

### 2.1 Analyzing Andy's Heroic Image in Terms of Language

Language irony is the opposite of what is said, i.e. words that contradict the literal meaning or express the true intention, thereby achieving a satirical effect.

Andy, Reed and twelve others, in an accident, were sent to the repair shop to repair the roof. Andy laid a layer of tar on the roof, and knowing of Warden Harley's woes about inheriting his property, he took the liberty of offering to help him.

Asked what his intentions were, he replied, "If it's fair, I'll just ask for three beers for each of my colleagues". Another guard laughed and said, "Colleagues? You're a cowboy, a coworker". He ignored the taunt and continued, "I want to work outside, and if I have beer, I'll feel like a normal person, that's what I want", and the guard obliged. Redemption is a practical way to help them get out of danger or overcome a situation. Not only did Andy get three beers, but he also got the prisoners' long-awaited freedom. Andy calls the inmates "colleagues" and lets the "colleagues" enjoy the same leisurely

pace of repairing their own roofs as ordinary people, and rightly directs the inmates' voices, which is a way to save and rescue others. Andy is a social being whose words, actions and thoughts fit his identity. Shawshank's corrupt justice system and endless lust and greed have robbed Andy of his most fundamental desires, but fortunately, he is always on the right path [5]. Huang Min. On the influence of character on individual destiny from the movie *The Shawshank Redemption*. *Taste · Classic*,2022(15):1-4.

Andy was the first time he appeared as a hero to everyone, and he radiated the light of saving the world and making everyone feel free. Andy's road to freedom was not a smooth one, and he traded his music for two weeks in jail. In the words of Reed: "I never understood what the music sang, and I didn't want to understand, at this point no words are better than words. They sing the unspeakable beauty, so beautiful that it breaks your heart ....." The music, which had not been heard for a long time, had pierced deeply into the hearts of the prisoners, awakening their desire for freedom and giving them relief in this beautiful melody.

Andy's escape left a lasting impression on his comrades in prison and became the subject of much talk. Reed said: "I must admit some birds can't be shut up, their feathers are so bright .....", "When he flies away, for getting rid of the sin, you will be happy for him. But you still have to live in this place, tedious, boring .....". Andy's heroism awakened Reed's desire for freedom, and it was only after Andy's successful escape that Reed underwent such a psychological change.

## 2.2 Analyzing Andy's Heroic Image in Terms of Behavior

Personal heroism holds that a hero must possess one or more outstanding traits and that such traits are often personified in the process of being portrayed. The hero of *The Shawshank Redemption*, Andy, is endowed with the ability to redeem humanity. I will then analyze the irony of the novel's behavioral aspects in order to portray Andy as a personal hero.

Andy found that the people in the prison had no spiritual food, so he built a library, played music, and woke up the imprisoned people over and over again. Reed and Tommy were the two people closest to Andy. Reed was imprisoned for the murder and was released on bail three times in Shawshank, but he expressed remorse for all of the examiner's questioning, but failed to pass. It was because of Andy's presence that Reed truly realized his guilt. Had it not been for Andy, he would have likely hung himself after being granted parole, just like Boo. Tommy was touched in the same way. Tommy was an uneducated, idle thief, but he inadvertently told Andy about his wife's death. After Andy has no hope of reversing the case, he concentrates on teaching Tommy and gets his high school diploma. But because Andy was put in jail, he became the death of the prison guards. In any case, Andy brought a glimmer of hope and freedom to Shawshank's prison. In prison, the course of life is to time for the scale, and all the passion will be helpless to put their hands in front of the despair, at the mercy of God. Only a clear mind can see the absurdity of life, otherwise, people can only be in the face of aggression and helplessness, anger and rage when suppressed, rotten in distress, and even loneliness and despair in normal circumstances. Andy has saved the spirit of Shawshank. In such a reformed man, whose behavior is even worse than that of the

reformed man, the warden stifles everyone's thirst for freedom. Andy brings his heroism to the forefront, giving hope to everyone in Shawshank. With his actions and ingenuity, he shows all the imprisoned people that their hearts are not trapped by high walls. Andy has achieved great success in his social interactions, and with his heroic gun, he has opened a door to freedom and beauty in Shawshank prison.

### 3 Analysis of Andy's Heroic Image in Terms of Symbolism

Beer, music and libraries are everyday things in our lives, a way to spend time and entertainment. But in the novel, the special environment of Shawshank Prison gives these three things a special meaning - dignity and freedom.

The word "beer" appears very frequently in the novel. In particular, in 1950, the inmates drink warm beer as a group the day before they finish renovating the roof, thinking it is the best drink they have ever had in their lives. This is how the novel describes it in detail, "We sat and and drank it and felt the sun on our shoulders, and not even the expression of half-amusement, half-contempt on Hadley's face—as if he were watching apes drink beer instead of men—could spoil it. It lasted twenty minutes, that beer-break, and for those twenty minutes we felt like free men [4]. In a word, what Andy gets is not only the comfort of three beers each, but more importantly, the long-awaited feeling of being a normal person. Andy calls his fellow inmates "colleagues" and lets his "colleagues" enjoy the leisure of repairing their own roofs like a normal person, and at this moment they feel like free people. This is both self-redemption and the redemption of others, and for the first time, people feel his heroic nature, which fully embodies the courage and commitment to think about others and solve their difficulties, so that the prisoners can also live with dignity and freedom.

The library symbolizes the freedom and dignity of human beings. However, the establishment of the prison library has two purposes: the first is to allow the inmates to gain knowledge and feel the meaning of life. Since Andy took over as librarian, he used the same method he used against Hali to get what he wanted for the library. He gradually put this originally placed only the "Reader's Digest" and "National Geographic" two books of the small room constantly expanded the best prison library in New England. He started by putting a suggestion box by the door and patiently sorting out the books the inmates wanted to read. Then Andy kept writing to the state legislature, asking for funding to support the prison library, and although he was refused, the state legislature slowly rose from \$200 to \$1,000 to support the expansion of the prison library, thanks to Andy's persistent efforts. The purpose is to help several inmates to obtain a diploma. It can be seen that the times make the heroes, and Andy, as the elite of the previous bank, matched his social status with his language, behavior and thoughts.

## 4 Analysis of Personal Heroism Connotations in Terms of Gothic Conflict

In modern Western times, the core concept of liberalism is to advocate and defend individual freedom. Under the colonial rule of the United States over the past three hundred years, liberalism has formed an ideological tradition that has influenced its economy, culture, politics and other fields. The Shawshank Redemption is mainly reflected in three aspects: messianism, individualism and liberalism. The chapter focuses on the liberal connotations of individual heroism to analyze the Gothic conflict between hope and institutionalization.

The Gothic novel is a special genre of Romantic literature, known by critics as "noir romance". However, the Gothic novel focuses on the exposure of sin and darkness in two ways: in terms of plot, it exaggerates violence and horror; in terms of thematic ideas, it explores deeply, especially morally, by revealing social, political, ecclesiastical and moral concepts, and by revealing the dark side of human nature. The aesthetic basis of the Gothic novel is the magnificent beauty associated with fear [6]. The conflict between light and darkness, good and evil, is the most prominent, universal and persistent theme of Gothic novels, and it has been present throughout the history of Gothic novels. The Shawshank Redemption is one of the most famous Gothic novels, and its Gothic color is mainly expressed in the conflict between humanity and tyranny, freedom and confinement, hope and institutionalization.

Reed says, hope is a dangerous thing, a source of mental anguish. He is indeed qualified to say so after thirty years in a cramped prison. For from the day he entered, the warden had said, "Give your soul to God and your body to me". Except for the cigarettes he could get and the playing cards with naked women on them, nothing else seemed to grow within these dark walls. That's how a prison transforms a man, where time is measured not in days, months or years, but in decades. When you see that suddenly the years have passed and the journey of life can only be measured in time, anyone's hope will be gone. However, the stubborn Andy always believes in hope and never fails to build his own hope, and he always tries to rekindle the hope of his fellow inmates with books and music.

Shawshank is like a microcosm of the real world, where there is the broadest "law-abiding" citizens, there is the bully running the market, the abuse of power, and opportunists, of course, and there are lurking and waiting for the wise man. The "reformed" people are thrown back into the darkness again and again, and those in power do their dirty work but preach "the way to salvation" in front of the public, as if it is only when there are no angles in their character, no spark in their minds, and they are "institutionalized" that people become accustomed to the reverse. It seems that people can only survive peacefully when they have no edges, no spark in their minds, and are "institutionalized" and used to being submissive. According to Reed: "When you first go to prison, you hate the walls around you; slowly, you get used to living in them; eventually you find yourself having to live by them. That's institutionalization[6]. While Old Bos was freed physically, his soul was irrevocably institutionalized. He was unable to escape his inability to adapt to freedom, and hung himself from a beam. Red, as wise as he was, was saddened to find that he had to report to his manager to urinate,

otherwise he could not squeeze out a drop of urine. He also considered how to violate the rules in order to return to prison, and even considered leaving the same way as Bose. At this point, the body of freedom is split from the mind of freedom. Reed is also on the verge of death, but Andy's promise to him before he escapes from prison saves him, explicitly, from the hope and expectation of good. Andy tells him, "Hope is good - maybe even the best thing on earth. And good things never go away."

The *Shawshank Redemption* uses a microcosm of a prison to reflect the many problems of real life with Gothic contrasts and the shocking power of Gothic fiction: institutionalized persecution of humanity, disillusionment, split personality, perversion, crime, and so on. More and more literary works and films are focusing on, expressing, reflecting and revealing these themes. As long as they still exist, Gothic novels and Gothic techniques will not die out. Only with the Gothic approach can disillusioned people be activated from the state of emptiness and paralysis, rekindle the trace of humanity that has not yet been extinguished, regain the pursuit of dreams, the pursuit of freedom, and complete the real redemption in life.

## 5 **The Impact of Personal Heroism in *The Shawshank Redemption***

Individual heroism is a social system that contradicts collectivism and shows a very different character from it in its treatment of the relationship between the individual and the group. Respecting and honoring the rights of the individual is an important characteristic of one's heroism, and in *The Shawshank Redemption*, this spirit is what gives the heroes in their novels their supernatural power and immortality. What are the implications of the "individual hero" in American popular fiction, a long-standing spiritual consciousness in American culture, as it has developed and changed? This paper will analyze it in terms of the conflict between social rights and individual freedom .

The concept of good and evil of human beings has long been discussed in literature. After the 20th century, the human living environment has been subjected to man-made destruction and diseases, and the concepts of rationality, faith and morality established by human beings for thousands of years are gradually disappearing, and the nature of human beings is constantly being questioned, and they are full of worries and despair about their future and destiny. Under such circumstances, many modern writers have turned to express their own subjective spiritual world, most of them are deep in the abyss of emptiness and pessimism, and a large number of "human evils" appear in literature, making them feel that the meaning and value of human existence are seriously challenged.

Andy's road to salvation is full of despair and heaviness. What makes him not aggrieved, not angry, not desperate during this period, always maintain a calm, strong heart?The answer is obvious: Andy has an extraordinary sanity, which allows him to navigate between gain and loss, to get rid of his hatred, to transcend himself, and finally to reach the other side of freedom. His works rarely depict how Andy dug his hole with difficulty, tenacity and cleverness, but he shows that Andy always kept his

benevolence in this evil city, and he stuck to his principles, to his feelings, rights and values. Reason keeps him from ever succumbing to his belief in human disharmony, which gives him infinite hope and illusion to keep fighting for his salvation and true freedom.

The name of *The Shawshank Redemption* is also a symbol. Shawshank is a symbol of darkness and evil, and the word "salvation" in the Old Testament-Isaiah is an expression of the idea of Jesus. This is a question to ponder, because the characters in this work do not see "religion as the basis of social life" as the early American immigrants did, and did not engage in any religious activities. The protagonist [7] . Andy does not wait for God's salvation, but rather saves himself by his insistence on benevolent humanity, saves himself, and gains a new life. In fact, in the 20th century, due to the lack of religious belief, the term "humanism" instead of Godism seems to have become less familiar. Many American authors have long found that "material wealth is the agent of corruption and industrial technology is the root of humanity." The salvation of Stephen King's "alternative" character Andy from decades of hard work and misery in Shawshank Prison is not the ordinary Christian salvation, but a more apt term because it reflects the author's deep concern and reflection on contemporary society and contemporary human nature.

## 6 Conclusion

*The Shawshank Redemption* takes redemption as its theme, with hope and freedom as the main line, and fully expresses the redemption of the main character Andy for himself and the lack of faith in the crowd by using the theory of individual heroism and the writing techniques of irony, symbolism and Gothic conflict. Andy's successful escape is not only the redemption of himself, but also the redemption of others' spiritual personal heroes. Hope is a bright light that illuminates us more about Andy's courage, calmness and wisdom, and more importantly, his perseverance and never giving up. Personal heroism is embodied to the fullest extent, and at the same time personal heroism set off the craze of the American hero dream, which largely contributed to the success of the novel, so much so that it was adapted into a movie and won the world's recognized unanimous acclaim. The ideas and concepts embedded in individual heroism are constantly adapting to the times. With the acceleration of the process of world economic integration, cultural exchanges between different countries are becoming richer and more adapted to the requirements of the times. Looking at the inheritance and shaping of heroism in our country, we should reflect on the heroic paradigm in its culture. We should shape heroes with multiple paradigms, distinctive personalities and diverse personalities in order to carry the spirit of Chinese culture, educate the people and promote social progress.



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