

SOUNDS, VOICES, NARRATORS - *THE SHAWSHANK REDEMPTION* NOVELLA AND MOVIE

Eliza Claudia FILIMON, Assistant Professor, PhD, University of the West, Timișoara

*Abstract: The polyphony of the spoken story on screen is the focus of this analysis. Two key sequences in the movie **The Shawshank Redemption** are brought into discussion, in relation to the literary source, analyzed from the perspective of the multi-faceted concept of heterotopia, in order to expose the importance of technical elements of cinematography in the process of adapting a literary work.*

Keywords: heterotopia, lighting, liminality, sound, space, voice-over

Introduction

Space is a language that can be employed to articulate social relationships, with realms of multiple discourses and fluctuating centres mirroring the stages of identity formation: “Every language is located in a space. Every discourse says something about a space; and every discourse is emitted from a space” (Lefebvre, 1991:132). I invite the reader to catch a glimpse of a masterful cinematographic production based on an equally exceptional literary piece, and listen to the sounds in the movie, or the narrative voices in both the movie and the novella, in order to understand the craft involved in the adaptation from page to screen- Stephen King’s *Rita Hayworth and Shawshank Redemption* (1982) and Frank Darabont’s 1994 adaptation *The Shawshank Redemption*. The literary piece and the movie adaptation are more than a prison story, they represent a verbal and visual metaphor of friendship and hope, stretching beyond the dark prison walls and giving convicts something to cling on night after night.

In the cinema hall, we venture into heterochrony, a characteristic of liminal, overlapping spaces, what I call **heterotopia**; we step into another world for two hours or so, experiencing a disjunction and removal from the real world, without reaching the actual setting of the movie. Yet, as the ending credits roll, we feel as if we had. Making movies is all about inducing a heterotopia, about finding the juxtaposition and intersection where we can simultaneously experience an imaginary and real concept of space.

Heterotopic places are sites which rupture the order of things through their acts of resistance and transgression. The various interpretations given to the term, that I have relied on in my analysis of movie scenes, are rooted in its designation of otherness in terms of spatial position, provided by Foucault (1966). Heterotopia are shaped by the antagonistic relations operating within ambiguous spaces, by strategies of resistance, such as performance and telling stories.

The term **heterotopia** originally comes from the study of anatomy, where it refers to “parts of the body that are either out of place, missing, extra, or, like tumours, alien” (Hetherington, 1998:72).

Heterotopia as a spatial metaphor derives from the ancient Greek pronoun *heteros* ‘other’ and the noun *topos* ‘place’. Coined by analogy to utopia and dystopia, heterotopia means, quite literally, ‘a place of different order’ and refers to an actual place conceived as being otherwise and existing outside normative social and political space. The three main places in his work where Foucault refers most explicitly to heterotopia are, firstly, the introduction to *The Order of Things/ Les mots et les choses*, published in 1966, where he discusses Borges’ Chinese Encyclopedia (1970/1991:xvff), secondly, in the same year, a radio broadcast as part of a series on the theme of utopia and literature, and thirdly, in a lecture given to a group of architects in 1967, ‘Des autres espaces’, only released and published unedited shortly before his death, in 1984, and translated into English as *Of Other Spaces* (1986). In all three cases the key issue raised is that of ordering.

“Utopias afford consolation: although they have no real locality there is nevertheless a fantastic, untroubled region in which they are able to unfold. Heterotopias are disturbing, probably because they make it impossible to name this and that” (Foucault, 1970:xviii)

He gives an inventory of ‘other spaces’, using a puzzling spectrum of examples, identifying six ‘principles’ of heterotopology:

Firstly, heterotopia are found in all cultures and epochs. Heterotopia circumscribe rites of passage, “crisis heterotopias”, such as schools, and “of deviance”, such as prisons. Secondly, heterotopia have a certain function in relation to ‘all’ other sites in a ‘culture’. They are “absolutely different”, and their difference is an effect of the “synchrony of the culture in which [the heterotopia] occur” (1967:241). Thus, their function can change historically. Thirdly, heterotopia can juxtapose within them heterogeneous elements which are ‘in themselves’ incompatible. Heterotopia are ambiguous, contradictory spaces. This third characteristic of heterotopia is the most popular one amongst writers using the word. Edward Soja (1995), in his heterotopologies, concentrates on the holding together of differences within postmodern spaces of Los Angeles. Edward Relph (1991) considers ‘postmodernity’ to be the generalisation of heterotopia, of the pluralistic coexistence of elements which one would ‘normally’ think or find apart. The fourth principle that fuels heterotopia is ‘heterochrony’ or discontinuity in time. The fifth refers to heterotopia’s “system of opening and closing” (1967:243). They may be publicly accessible, such as the prison, though they curiously do not let the visitor in entirely. “[W]e think we enter where we are, by the very fact that we enter, excluded” (ibid.). The last principle refers to the function heterotopia have “in relation to all the space that remains” (1967:243). Either they provide ‘illusion’, making other places in society seem “still more illusionary” or they provide ‘perfection’ (ibid.).

Wearing’s understanding of heterotopia translates as a cathartic place for minority groups, allowing them to “rewrite the script of identity”, “spaces that allows and confine activity” (Wearing, 1998:146). Hall and Huyskens adopt Wearing’s definition of heterotopia, based on the latter’s study of Foucault (1986), and view the term as a reference to “a liberating leisure site or space” with the potential to provide a place for renewal and enhancement of self-esteem. Hall and Huyskens (2002:2) have identified heterotopia as zones to assert or reconfigure identity, places having an empowering force.

The relationship between freedom and order may be tackled in connection to the concept of liminal spaces. The term ‘liminality’ comes from an initial concern with the symbolic ordering properties of the spaces that are associated with rites of passage in small-scale societies (van Gennep, 1960; Turner 1974). Rites of passage are rituals associated with life changes that require the move between different statuses, states, ages or places. Rites of passage are concerned with the ways in which people are socially ordered within society. They involve a process of symbolic transition that van Gennep (1960:11) suggests can be separated, as a process, into three stages: separation, margin and re-aggregation. In the first stage, a person is required to undergo a set of initiation rituals before s/he can take on a new state. S/he is separated physically from the rest of the society and stripped of any previous status and identity. Once this has been achieved, s/he exists in a liminal or marginal phase. Liminality is associated with a transgressive stage of a rite: it is often configured spatially as a threshold, or margin, defined by uncertainty, with a social normative structure temporarily upset. The spaces that they inhabit are also seen as ambivalent and marginal. In the final stage of a rite of passage, the person is reintegrated into society as a new person.

Narrative voice on top of the world

Openness is the chief function of heterotopia in relation to physical, liminal spaces. Two otherwise unrelated spaces are connected, and we are granted entry into what may be called a tangible utopia, a space that is not so perfect as to prevent us from experiencing it. Foucault uses the example of a movie theatre, where our physical space combines with the visual and virtual space onscreen to create an amalgam of two experiences: “a very odd rectangular room, at the end of which, on a two-dimensional screen, one sees the projection of a three-dimensional space” (1986:25).

Frank Darabont follows Stephen King’s text closely, to maximum effect, since the literary explanations and narrative digressions, impossible to render visually, fill the gaps of cinematographic syntax. I have selected two heterotopic spaces in the movie in view of pointing out the importance of **lighting, camera movement, and sound: the roof of the plate factory and the parole approval room**. These two spaces are examples of heterotopia, if we consider their public openness on the one hand, their confining nature in relation to the convicts’ lives, on the other hand. Secondly, the movie frames these spaces in ambivalent lighting key, revealing them as concrete, spatial metaphors of freedom, in line with viewers’ expectations, after an initial distorted presentation. The literary space extends onto the screen with the snatches of discourse the director chose to assign to the narrator in voice over.

00:33:24-00:37:42 - About a dozen convicts at Shawshank prison are selected to work on the roof of the car plate factory with buckets full of hot, black tar. In contrast with their presentation within the confining walls of the prison in previous sequences, where their lack of freedom is apparent, the roof of the car plate factory is a heterotopic space, giving the convicts a breath of fresh air and a bird’s eye view on the surroundings. They are no longer physically low, but literally on top of the world they inhabit as convicts. The guards and the working convicts are presented as separate groups, as if there was no need for the formers’ supervision. The filmic mise-en-scene keeps either of the groups in the foreground in middle close-up, while the other group’s actions are visible in middle long shot. At the same time, regardless of which of the groups is in focus, the shot-reaction-shot editing technique informs

the viewers that the convicts overhear Hadley's dialogue with the other guards. Camera tilts and pans give fluidity to the convicts' activity from the start of the sequence, as two guards politely make way for them to carry the tar bucket. The absence of rails or any wire enclosure, along with the constant view of the blue sky underlie our assumption of an ensuing key point in the development of the action. This is the moment Andy intervenes in the guards' discussion, to his co-workers' horror, as they would all expect severe punishment for any unsolicited opinion.

'Andy.....Andy....Andy'
Keep tarring (SR script)

The scene is short, intense, there is no space for voice-over, so the concerned look on Red's face best captures visually the literary source text:

“What I did was to keep on running tar onto the roof as if nothing at all was happening. Like everyone else, I look after my own ass first. I have to. It's cracked already, and in Shawshank there have always been Hadleys willing to finish the job of breaking it.”

(King,1982:24)

The guards are in the shade, the convicts are in high-key yellowish sunlight, so that Andy comes from the lit space into the shade to address Hadley, metaphorically leaving his filthy task to give advice to a morally dirty guard. Danger is evoked with the help of camera movement, as Hadley forces Andy to the edge of the roof, threatening to push him as a sign of feeling offended by his remark. The camera whirls around them, driving the viewers dizzy, then an abrupt tilt offers us a most interesting switch between a high-angle shot of Andy and a low-angle shot of him, which anticipates his upper-hand in the outcome of the situation. Slow camera movement, pan and zoom on the faces of the convicts drinking their beers, further intensify the idea of freedom which the voice-over comments upon. Top lighting dominates the shots of the convicts, but this time the space in the shade is occupied by Andy, in line with the literary source text. Side-lighting on his face, focused in close-up, against the greyish sky in the background acquires new meanings, a clue to Andy's thoughts of freedom, underscored by soft, non-diegetic music, and the voice-over commentary which follows the literary source with the notable addition-

We were the kings of the world... (SR script)

“Only Andy didn't drink. I already told you about his drinking habits. He sat hunkered down in the shade, hands dangling between his knees, watching us and smiling a little...

So, yeah - if you asked me to give you a flat-out answer to the question of whether I'm trying to tell you about a man or a legend that got made up around the man, like a pearl around a little piece of grit - I'd have to say that the answer lies somewhere in between.

All I know for sure is that Andy Dufresne wasn't much like me or anyone else I ever knew since I came inside. He brought in five hundred dollars jammed up his back porch, but somehow that graymeat son of a bitch managed to bring in something else as well.

sense of his own worth, maybe, or a feeling that he would be the winner in the end ... or maybe it was only a sense of freedom, even inside these goddamned grey walls. It was a kind of inner light he carried around with him.” (King, 1982:27)

Speech will set you free

The second heterotopic space under scrutiny is the room some convicts enter every ten years during their sentence, to try their chance of getting out of prison on parole. The system of opening and closing is visually addressed in the three separate, yet almost identical sequences presenting Red before the committee, after serving twenty, thirty and forty years in prison. The scenes are similar in terms of *mise-en-scene* and lack of non-diegetic sound. Diegetic sounds dominate the opening and closing of the scenes with emphasis on opening and closing the cell door and the door to the meeting room, marking the rejection of his first two appeals and his prolonged stay in Shawshank. The novella refers to the narrator's thoughts on the concept of 'rehabilitation' in the opening pages, and these are the strong points in the film narrator's discourse before the committee in the first two meetings, when his appeal is rejected:

“Have I rehabilitated myself, you ask? I don't know what that word means, at least as far as prisons and corrections go. I think it's a politician's word. It may have some other meaning, and it may be that I will have a chance to find out, but that is the future ...

something cons teach themselves not to think about. ..Enough hate eventually piled up to cause me to do what I did. Given a second chance I would not do it again, but I'm not sure that means I am rehabilitated.” (King, 1982:2)

Scene 1: 00:06:45 - 00:08:04

The scene starts with Red entering the room. In front of him are five men who will decide his future fate. The camera does not focus on these people much, but on Red. The camera eye follows him in eye level, medium close-up shot. Some anxiety can be seen on Red's face, and he seems a bit disturbed and scared. During their conversation the camera slowly closes on Red and zooms from the medium close position to the medium close up, focusing on his head and revealing his current state of mind. At the end of the conversation, after he is rejected he steps out of the room and goes up the stairs into the courtyard of the prison.

Lighting is important in this scene since it mostly renders Red's emotional state. In the first moments of the scene there is not lighting at all but as the Red moves into the room, it becomes brighter. When he sits Red is lit from the front side, whereas the men he is speaking with are back-lit. His discourse seems rehearsed, he points out that he has learned his lesson and is no longer a danger to society, therefore he has been rehabilitated. Unfortunately he is rejected and goes into the courtyard of the prison. When Red steps out of the room and into the courtyard he goes up some stairs bathed in sun light, hinting that although he was

rejected, he is content with his current condition. During this scene there are diegetic sounds such as the opening of the door, birds, different voices of the cons in the courtyard and other sounds from nature, supporting the current state of the narrator.

Scene 2: 01:13:00 - 01:13:50

Red's second appeal is strikingly similar to the previous one. Red enters the room from a black fade-out transition which marks the darkness of his cell. Camera movement, angle and distance are the same as in the previous scene. After ten years, Red seems more relaxed, as if he knows that he is going to be rejected. He seems very calm and sincere but his lack of eye contact with the members of the board signals his impossibility to connect with these men, who, consequently, reject him. Lighting is a bit different than in the previous scene in one detail: there is more light in the room, and Red's body is well lit, the only sounds are the door opening and closing, and the dialogues.

Scene 3: 02:05:51 - 02:08:21

After serving forty years of his sentence Red is finally released. The literary source text finds its visual rendition in this third sequence.

RED:

Rehabilitated. Let's see now. You know, come to think of it, I have no idea what that means.

MAN #2

Well, it means you're ready to rejoin society as a--

RED

I know what you think it means. Me, I think it's a made-up word, a politician's word. A word so young fellas like you can wear a suit and tie and have a job. What do you really want to know? Am I sorry for what I did?

- -----

MAN g2

Well...are you?

RED

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...stupid kid who did that terrible crime...wish I could talk

sense to him. Tell him how things are. But I can't. That kid's long gone, this old man is all that's

left, and I have to live with that.

(beat) "Rehabilitated?" That's a bullshit word, so 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. (SR script)

Camera movement, shot distance and shot angle are exactly the same as in the previous two scenes where Red faced the same committee. The difference the viewers notice first is the narrator's blue shirt. Secondly, he looks at the people before him all the time. Top lighting is the third major addition, completed by a slow zoom on Red from medium shot to

close-up. Red's face is bright when he sits suggesting he has redeemed himself so far and that he should be released.

Conclusion

Sound does not feature heavily in the selected scenes, as much as in the escape sequence or the ending scene. However, dialogue and voice over supply not only the necessary information but also trigger emotions and expectations in the viewers. A movie scene is a complex texture of lighting, movement and sound, and its value resides in the director's craft of balancing these elements carefully enough to transpose us from the cinema hall into the heart of action and emotion.

Storytelling mediates the transformation of fiction into film, and the resulting narrative worlds are defined by anachronism and dynamic meanings. The reader/viewer is entangled into a narrative weaved from the tessellation of time frames, in the hands of a narrator who crosses diegetic levels.

The movie screen is no longer a flat surface, but a site of alterity which transforms Stephen King's characters from letters on the page to voices and entities, who have stepped outside the frame of the text.

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