



## QUEERING PRISONIZATION ; A REVISIONING OF DARABONT'S *THE SHAWSHANK REDEMPTION*

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### ABSTRACT

“Bull queers take by force.It’s all they want or understand . If I were you , I’d grow eyes in the back of my head .” Ellis Boyd Redding nicknamed “Red” advises Andy Dufresne during the beginning of the latter’s prison life . Wrongly accused of murdering his wife and her lover , Andy Dufresne was ordered to serve two life sentences back to back in the notorious Shawshank prison .*The Shawshank Redemption* is the story of Dufresene’s prison life .Andy Dufresne goes through the process of prisonization not just to accommodate himself in the prison but more importantly to liberate himself from the prison .This paper attempts to point out that if compulsive heterosexuality is the norm of outside world , it is situational homosexuality which reigns within the confinements of a prison .

Key Words : Crisis of Masculinity , Queer culture , Prisonization , Situational homosexuality

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“Bull queers take by force.It’s all they want or understand . If I were you , I’d grow eyes in the back of my head .” Ellis Boyd Redding nicknamed “Red” advises Andy Dufresne during the beginning of the latter’s prison life . Wrongly accused of murdering his wife and her lover , Andy Dufresne was ordered to serve two life sentences back to back in the notorious Shawshank prison .*The Shawshank Redemption* is the story of Dufresene’s prison life .Andy Dufresne goes through the process of prisonization not just to accommodate himself in the prison but more importantly to liberate himself from the prison .This paper attempts to point out that if compulsive heterosexuality is the norm of outside world , it is situational homosexuality which reigns within the confinements of a prison .The character of Bogs Diamond in the film *The Shawshank Redemption* played by Mark Rolston serves as the perfect example .

Prisonization , a term coined by Donald Clemmer in his book *The Prison Community*(1940)

refers to the process by which inmates adapt to the prison life and the subcultures that are present . According to Catherine D. Marcum , prisons are same-sex societies, which makes being in them even more of an adjustment from living in a free world with access to both sexes and other opportunities. Further, residents share all aspects of their lives with the others in that facility (Hensley et al., 2003). As interaction with family and friends during incarceration is limited, if even existent, inmates will often become emotionally and physically dependent on each other in many ways . “Put your trust in the lord . Your ass belongs to me ”.This very statement by Warden Norton , said while welcoming Andy and his fellow prisoners to Shawshank is tinged with situational homosexuality .

Many inmates who indulge in homosexual relationships within a prison do not necessarily regard themselves as homosexuals (Hensley, Tewksbury, and Wright, 2001). In what is termed situational homosexuality, individuals who

are immersed in single-sex environments resort to same-sex sexual activity to relieve desires with the understanding they will return to heterosexual sexual activities once removed from the segregated environment (Sagarin, 1976). Ibrahim (1974), one of the first researchers to examine situational homosexuality, determined that six factors within the structure of a prison contribute to this behavior:

1. A prison is a sex-segregated community and sexual gratification can only be achieved through a person of the same sex.
2. Although the behavior is forbidden and regulated, it is often tolerated by corrections officers and other inmates. This passive acceptance encourages the creation of status roles, where some inmates are assigned more masculine identities while others are seen as weaker.
3. Insufficient work opportunities lead to boredom and idle time for long periods. Inmates who work are kept busy and are less likely to participate in deviant behaviors.
4. Overcrowding of prisons causes close quarters for inmates, in which they watch each other change clothes and use the bathroom. Older inmates often take advantage of this situation with the younger inmates.
5. The current classification system of inmates does not segregate individuals based on sexual preference.
6. Complete isolation from the outside world and the norms of society can influence inmates to develop their own norms, one of those entailing sexual interaction with other inmates.

Coming with the tagline “fear can hold you prisoner, hope can set you free” , *The Shawshank Redemption* has been largely analysed as a movie faithfully portraying Jean Paul Sartre’s Existentialist philosophy . However a queer reading of this movie is equally valid based on the prisonization process of Andy and his fellow prisoners as well as by focusing on the character of Bogs Diamond and his group nicknamed as “sisters” .When the bus carrying the fresh batch of convicts including Andy enter the compound of Shawshank prison , the long standing prisoners of Shawshank including “Red” and his batch crowd around to watch them .When Andy and his batch of convicts step out of the bus , the cries of

“fresh fish” , “fresh fish” , “we are reeling them in” start resounding in the air .Fish has since long been considered as a phallic symbol .The importance of this symbolism to this movie later becomes clear as the attempts by “Red” and his friends especially Heywood to emotionally breakdown the new prisoners consists of sexual innuendoes and perversely sexual dialogues .Later when Andy meets Bogs Diamond and his group of “sisters” , the situational homosexuality within Shawshank prison becomes clearly evident . The following talk takes place during Andy’s first night in Shawshank prison .

VARIOUS VOICES (O.S.)

Fishee fishee fisheeee...You're gonna like it here, new fish. A whooole lot...Make you wish your daddies never dicked your mommies...You takin' this down, new fish? Gonna be a quiz later.

(somebody LAUGHS)

Sshhh. Keep it down. The screws'll hear...Fishee fishee fisheeee...

RED (V.O.)

The boys always go fishin' with first-timers...and they don't quit till they reel someone in.

The VOICES keep on, sly and creepy in the dark...

INT -- VARIOUS CELLS -- NIGHT (1947) 22  
thru thru 25

2g ...while the new cons go quietly crazy in their cells. One man paces like a caged animal...another sits gnawing his cuticles bloody...a third is weeping silently...a fourth is dry-heaving into the toilet...

INT -- RED'S CELL -- NIGHT (1947) 26

Red waits at the bars. Smoking. Listening. He cranes his head, peers down toward Andy's cell. Nothing. Not a peep.

HEYWOOD (O.S.)

Fat-Ass...oh, Faaaat-Ass. Talk to me, boy. I know you're in there. I can hear you breathin'. Now don't you listen to these nitwits, hear?

INT -- FAT-ASS' CELL -- NIGHT (1947) 27

Fat-Ass is crying, trying not to hyperventilate.

HEYWOOD (O.S.)

This ain't such a bad place. I'll introduce you around, make you feel right at home. I know some big ol' bull queers who'd love to make your acquaintance...especially that big white mushy butt of yours...

And that's it. Fat-Ass lets out a LOUD WAIL of despair:

FAT-ASS

OH GOD! I DON'T BELONG HERE! I

WANNA GO HOME!

INT -- HEYWOOD'S CELL -- NIGHT (1947) 28

HEYWOOD

AND IT'S FAT-ASS BY A NOSE.'

Later Andy meets Bogs Diamond and his group of "sisters". Bogs Diamond and his group of "sisters" are bull queers. Bull queer is a man who enjoys having sex with other men, but only without their consent. The more their prey wiggles and attempts escape the happier the bull queer, due to this their prey are sometimes known as 'wigglers'. The following scene describes Andy's first meeting with the bull queers.

INT -- SHOWERS -- DAY (1947) 34

Shower heads mounted in bare concrete. Andy showers with a dozen or more men. No modesty here. At least the water is good and hot, soothing his tortured muscles.

Bogs looms from the billowing steam, smiling, checking Andy up and down. Rooster and PETE appear from the sides. The Sisters.

You're some sweet punk. You been broke in yet?

Andy tries to step past them. He gets shoved around, nothing serious, just some slap and tickle. Jackals sizing up prey.

BOGS

Hard to get. I like that.

Andy breaks free, flushed and shaking. He hurries off, leaving the three Sisters laughing.

"Red" gives the following advice to Andy regarding the "sisters"

RED

Word gets around. The Sisters have taken a real shine to you, yes they have. Especially Bogs.

ANDY

Tell me something. Would it help if I explained to them I'm not homosexual?

RED

Neither are they. You have to be human first. They don't qualify. (off Andy's look)

Bull queers take by force, that's all they want or understand. I'd grow eyes in the back of my head if were you.

Andy Dufresne was violently assaulted by "sisters" many times during his first two years in Shawshank prison. However after he financially helped Captain Byron Hadley and he was recruited by Captain Norton for his money laundering operations, Andy was freed from the violent assaults of sisters as Bogs was brutally beaten up by Captain Byron Hadley. After that incident "sisters" never laid a finger on Andy again. The following violent encounter was the last one between Andy and the "sisters".

Bogs shoves Andy to the center of the room.

BOGS

Ain't you gonna scream?

Andy sighs, cocks his head at the projector.

ANDY

They'd never hear me over that.

Let's get this over with.

Seemingly resigned, Andy turns around, leans on the rewind bench -- and curls his fingers around a full 1,000 foot reel of 35mm film. Rooster licks his lips, pushes past the others.

Me first.

Okay.

Andy whips the reel of film around in a vicious arc, smashing it into Rooster's face and bouncing him off the wall.

Fuck! Shit! He broke my nose!

Andy fights like hell, but is soon overpowered and forced to his knees. Bogs steps to Andy, pulls out an awl with a vicious eight-inch spike, gives him a good long look at it.

Now I'm gonna open my fly, and you're gonna swallow what I give you to swallow. And when you d mine, you gonna swallow Rooster's. You done broke his nose, so he ought to have somethin' to show for it.

Anything you put in my mouth, you're going to lose.

You don't understand. You do that, I'll put all eight inches of this steel ii your ear.

Okay. But you should know that sudden serious brain injury causes the victim to bite down. Hard. (faint smile)

In fact, I understand the bite-reflex is so strong the victim's jaws have to be pried open with a crowbar.

The Sisters consider this carefully. The film runs out of the projector, flapping on the reel. The screen goes white.

You little fuck.

Andy gets a boot heel in the face. The Sisters start kicking and beating the living shit out of him with anything they can get their hands on. In the theater, the convicts are CHANTING AND CLAPPING for the movie to come back on.

Bogs didn't put anything in Andy's mouth, and neither did his friends. What they did do is beat him within an inch of his life...

In this movie Bogs Diamond is Andy's first enemy within the confinements of Shawshank prison. The homosexual orientation of Bogs can be read as a type of situational homosexuality. There are no references anywhere in this movie indicating him as a regular homosexual. Besides, every six factors pointed out by Ibrahim (1974) contributing to situational homosexuality is valid in the case of Bogs

Diamond. Bull queers can also be read as a sub variety or deviant form of "wolves" or "top men".

*The Shawshank Redemption* is above everything else an allegory about holding onto a sense of personal worth, despite everything. It is a touching tale of hope and redemption. This paper is only a modest attempt to highlight the queer element of this movie, hitherto ignored or only given scant attention by critics and reviewers of this movie. I have used the concepts of 'Prisonization', 'Situational Homosexuality' as well as the 'Deprivation theory' put forward by Donald Clemmer to shed some light on the queer element of this movie.

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