Reading Logs – “Rita Hayworth & the Shawshank Redemption”

Let’s look at King’s book, “Apt Pupil.” Divided into 4 unconnected novellas, each has a supertitle – Hope Springs Eternal, Summer of Corruption, Fall from Innocence, and A Winter’s Tale. Why?

1. Reading Log 8a Mon. 2/16 (noon) SR: 15-36 Setting the Stage
   a. RH&SSR is told from a first person narrator’s point of view by a prisoner named Red. What kind of expectations does the very first sentence of the novella set up for you?
   b. What crime did Red commit and how does he describe it and his incarceration?
   c. On the bottom of page 15, Red asks, “Have I rehabilitated myself, you ask? I don’t even know what that word means, at least as far as prison & corrections go.” What do you think he means by that?
   d. What is Red talking about why he is in prison, he talks about his father-in-law this way; “Her father was agreeable to the marriage is I would take a job at the optical company he owned and ‘work my way up.’ ” (p. 16 middle of first paragraph) Read the rest of the paragraph and try to predict what role that information will play in the novella as the story unfolds.
   e. On the bottom of p. 17, we meet Andy, the novella’s main character. How does Red introduce him to us?
   f. Red takes up 9 pages telling us how and why Andy is in prison. What do we learn about both Andy and Red from how the story is told?
   g. Who is Jake and what is his role in the story?
   h. “I remember the first time Andy Dufresne got in touch with me for something.” (bottom of p. 26). What is the significance of these lines as Red tells the story:
      i. “At Shawshank I was one of those with some weight, and what I thought of Andy would ...(p. 28)
      ii. “You didn’t think of such things in terms of the yard. Quartz was something you picked out of…” (p. 29)
   i. We meet “the sisters” for the first time at the end of the 1st paragraph on p. 31. Who are they and what role do you suppose they’ll play in story? (pp. 31-36)

   a. “About five months later….during a movie show….Andy maneuvered to get next to me, and about half way through the show he leaned a little closer and asked if I could get him Rita Hayworth. To tell you the truth, it kind of tickled me. He was usually cool, calm, & collected, but that night he was jumpy as hell and a little bit embarrassed….overcharged, a man on the verge of blowing his radiator….‘no sweat, calm down. You want the big one or the little one’…‘The big one,’ he said, not looking at me. (bottom of p. 36 to middle of 37) So what is Red thinking about Andy now?
   b. On page 38, Red talks about a “pressure cooker”. What’s his context and what does he want us to know and see in and from those paragraphs?
   c. In the middle of p. 39, Red leads a paragraph with “You may also have gotten the idea that I’m describing someone who’s more legend than man…”
      i. Why does Red think we may have gotten that idea?
         1. Since he’s the narrator and gets to control what’s revealed in the story, what clues has Red given us that would “give us” that idea?
   d. What gift does Andy give Red?
      i. What is the significance of who delivers it and how?
         1. What sort of details does Red use to describe not only the physical gift itself, but also the intangible things tied to it?
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e. One of the pivotal scenes in the novella and the movie begins on p. 40, 2nd full paragraph, “In May of 1950, the powers that be….” and continues until almost the very bottom of p. 48.

   i. Pay careful attention to the imagery, the symbolism, and the language choices that are made, from the other cons’ silence to the various guards’ choices to either be silent or to carefully choose their words, including Hadley and Andy himself.
   1. What tale do both the silences and the word choices tell us?
      a. When we watch the movie, please pay careful attention to the body language– including facial expressions – during this roof-top scene.

f. Without much of a segue – in fact no transition at all, Red leaps to the 1950 World Series. (p. 48)

   i. Who is Brooksie and how does he fit into this story, both in the novella and the movie version?
   ii. Why does Red tell us this, “Andy succeeded to Brooksie’s job and he used the same force of will I’d seen him use on Byron Hadley to get what he wanted for the library, and I saw him gradually turn one small room…lined with Reader’s Digest Condensed Books and National Geographics into the best prison library in New England.” (bottom of p. 49)

3. Reading Log 8c       Fri. 2/20 (noon)      SR : bottom of 55-73      Time, Tommy, Tension, & Tragedy

   a. How does Red show us the passage of time? Why does he choose this means and method?
   b. “A terrible thing happened to Andy in late March or early April of 1963,” Red tells us in the middle of p. 56. What was it? And how does it affect the ongoing story?
   c. Who’s Norton and why do we care that his “Inside-Out” program was featured as a success story in Newsweek magazine, as a “…real advance in practical corrections and rehabilitation.” (p. 57)

      i. Was it?
      ii. What’s that got to do with Andy, the wife-killing rock hound with the poster of the most current scantily-clad bathing suit babe hanging on the wall of his cell?
      iii. Why does Red tell us “I got the story a chunk here and a chunk there over a space of 7 years, some of it from Andy – but not all.” (p. 58)

   d. Red claims “Until he met Tommy Williams, I don’t think he knew how bad it could get.” (p. 58)

      i. What happens when Andy finds Tommy?
      ii. How does Red’s “Things come in three major degrees in human experience… (starts in middle of page 68) move the story forward?
         1. Pay careful attention to the imagery and metaphors.

   e. Note the change in Andy’s physical appearance (1st full paragraph on p. 69) and how Red ties it to what was going on in the outside world, beyond the prison walls.

   f. What triggers the Warden’s rant “because people like you make me sick”? (71)

      i. Why are the warden’s threats to turn the library into a paint closet again so effective?
         1. What does the library represent?
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g. Red begins the final piece of this section by telling us “Time continued to pass – the oldest trick in the world, and maybe the only one that really is magic” (bottom of p. 71) and ends with, speaking of Andy, “He had taken that invisible coat out of the closet and put it on again.” (bottom of p. 73)
   i. When did we see/hear about this coat before?
      1. What is the significance of it coming out again?
      2.

4. Reading Log 8d   Mon. 2/23 (noon)  SR: 74-92  Fantasy, Frustration, Fear, and Faith

   a. Red starts p. 74 with what will be a long recounting of one of his most memorable chats with Andy. He says they are having a chat in the yard while the other prisoners are in the Visitors’ Hall “telling sincere lies” to their families “under the watchful eyes of the screws.”
      i. Why does Red frame the scene this way?
      ii. What do Red and Andy talk about in the yard?
      iii. Red wraps up this segment (p. 80, 1st full paragraph) back in his cell later that night, “But by that night in my cell I felt like a prisoner again……And in the background I could hear the bay of bloodhounds.”
         1. What is Red trying to tell us in those two paragraphs?
            a. Why does he mention that he “…couldn’t wear that invisible coat the way Andy did” (p. 80)
               i. What is he trying to remind us of?
            b. Red then says, it leads us to the “subject of jailbreaks.”
               i. Red then takes up a good couple of pages chronicling the various attempts, successful and not. What does this accomplish?
               ii. Red sort of wraps up his overview at the bottom of p. 83 “Also, Andy had brains and he had heart, Norton was determined to use the one and crush the other.”
                   Why tell us that here?
               iii. Mid-page 84, twenty-three pages shy of the novella’s end, Red leads with “In 1975, Andy Dufresne escaped form Shawshank. He hasn’t bee recaptured, and I don’t think he ever will be.” Why tell us that now?
         iv. What does “Everything stopped being routine” on page 85 mean?
            1. How were the details of Andy’s escape revealed?
            2. How were they described?
               a. What imagery was used?
               3. What does Red want us to know when he tells us, “It was as if Andy’s defection from our happy little family had driven Norton right over the edge of some private irrationality that had been there for a long time….certainly he was crazy that night”? (p. 88)
                  a. Red caps that thought with “And by God, it almost seemed to me that somewhere I could hear Andy Dufresne laughing.” (p. 88)
                     Why make that claim?
            v. How did the warden finally verify how Andy escaped?
            vi. What prompted this from Red, “Maybe because half of me was with Andy Dufresne, Andy Dufresne who had waded in shit and came out clean in the other side, Andy Dufresne, headed for the Pacific.” (p. 89)
            vii. “Andy told me once that all of geology is the study of pressure. And time, of course.” What is Red trying to tell us on the bottom of p. 92?
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5. **Reading Log 8e**   **Wed. 2/25 (Noon) SR: 93-107**   **Red Fills in the Details and the Cracks**

   a. Left on his own in prison, Red looks back at all the “clues” he missed along the way.
      i. In the last full paragraph on 94, Red starts with “And I have another memory, very strong but unfocused…..” which continues to the end of that paragraph.
      What is Red trying to do here?
      1. What are “cheaters” (p. 94) and how did Red think Andy might have used them?

   b. In the second full paragraph (p.95), why does Red claim “I doubt he had any real plans or hopes of breaking out, at least not at first.” What does this accomplish?
      i. He follows it with a “second assumption?” What’s his goal?

   c. What’s Red’s point when he tells us at the end of the first full paragraph that “When he’d finished, the screwhead started to put out his hand…..He’d forgotten , for a moment, you see, that he was dealing with a mascot, not a man….He was a good nigger.” (p. 96)

   d. Even though Andy is clearly gone and probably safe, why does Red go through a litany of the “what ifs’?” e.g. “the most ghastly irony I can think of would have been if he had been offered a parole.” (p. 97)
      i. He starts his “guesses” on the bottom of page 97. What purpose do they serve?
      1. What kind of visual and other sense data does he give us?
      ii. In the middle of page 98, he says his “educated guesses run out.” What happens from there?
      iii. What evidence is there that Andy really got away safely?

   e. Red confides in us that “Writing about yourself seems to be a lot like sticking a branch into clear river water and roiling up the muddy bottom.” (6th full para. on p. 100)

   f. What does Red do when the little voice in his head challenges him, claiming he wasn’t really writing about himself and that he was, after all a *minor* character? (7th full para. on p. 100)

   g. Red once again speaks about birds, something he hasn’t done since very early in the novella. Why now and how does it connect to the prior bird talk? (final para. on p. 100)

   h. Red offers the image, not of a branch stirring up a river bed, but of his thoughts being “pencil-prodded up” (p. 101) How does that help clarify Red’s “journey”, although he is still in his cell?

   i. After a break in the page and the narrative – an actual horizontal line drawn part way across the page –, on page 101 Red goes back to writing. How is Red different after jumping that line?

   j. Starting on p. 104, Red begins his own journey to freedom, even though he has been out of prison for awhile.
      i. Red talks about a “fool’s errand” and his travels to Buxton. Why couldn’t Red read the letter while he was in the field? (p. 106)

   k. What happens to Red that he now can call the narrative he never thought he’d never finish “a manuscript” (p. 106) and that he can tell us that it comes down to just two choices: “get busy living or get busy dying” (p. 106)Is the ending of the novella satisfying? If not, how would you revise/rewrite it?

Light; freedom; hope; peace; turmoil; abuse; guilt; innocence; external vs. internal; consolation vs. condemnation; redemption; and more ....