



“THE GREEN MILE” (1999)

The film *“The Green Mile”* appeared on the screen in 1999 and since that time has conquered millions of hearts in the world. The present film is considered as a Hollywood masterpiece and the acknowledged classic example of the American physiological drama. The scenario of the film *“The Green Mile”* was based on the novel of Stephen King, and successfully directed by the director Frank Darabont, starring talented actors as Tom Hanks, Michael Clarke Duncan, David Morse, James Cromwell, Michael Jeter, Sam Rockwell and others.

In the film *“The Green Mile”* means a death path in the Correctional Facility, and it is called because “of the dark green linoleum that tiles the floor” (Movie Info, n.d.). This green path symbolizes the last passage to eternity, the short piece of a road between life and death. The film director Frank Darabont in collaboration with the author Stephen King managed to create a story “with a beginning, middle, end, vivid characters, humor, outrage and emotional release” (The Green

Mile, 1999). The film director Frank Darabont does “a great job of implying a deeper meaning related to humanity, and whether or not execution is righteous” (Underlying Values of The Green Mile, 2012). The film is constructed as recollections of the former warden Paul Edgecombe (Tom Hanks) from the prison team of the death sentence execution. His memories refer to the events of 1935 when his team received a special prisoner named John Coffey sentenced to death for a cruel murder of two little girls. The entire movie is dedicated to relationship between the death sentenced prisoners and the warders, their spiritual transformation or emotional human failure. The audience comes across with a “complete gallery of characters who build the everyday life of the block and create a cloistered atmosphere between the prisoners and the guards” (The Green Mile: Revising the Life and Death of Jesus, 2003). Bright contradictory, conflicting screen characters manage to keep the audience in emotional tension throughout the entire film. The movie raises the subject about universal human values, people interaction and human relationship at the edge of death. It speaks about the eternal complex battle between Good and Evil, crime and punishment, brutality and compassion.

One of the substantial places of the movie belongs to Paul Edgecomb (Tom Hanks) who is in charge of Death Row in a Correctional Facility in Louisiana state prison called Cold Mountain. He is one of the characters who call true sympathy and respect at the spectators for understanding, patience, helpfulness, and humanity. Though, at the beginning Paul does not look rather compassionate to his inhabitants.

Similar duties and habitual order of life in the death chamber transformed him into the indifferent death machine. Every day emotional stress, when one's life is in a constant jeopardy, Paul's feelings are like in a sleepy regime.

Paul's attitude to his duties is diligent, responsible and professional. He got used to the terrifying nature of his work: death of the sentenced criminals, inhabitants of "*The Green Mile*". His feelings lost their sensitivity, and he hardly could feel anything during the execution. Every action, every small detail, repetitious rehearsals of the executions have become automatic and habitual for him. The monotonous actions lullaby Paul's consciousness. Though, such physiological blockage may be considered as some kind of defense from emotional pain and tortures.

But once his team receives John Coffey in the block he is in charge, the spectators may notice gradual Paul's spiritual awakening. He shows keen curiosity and real interest to this prisoner. Further communication and ambiguous interaction with John Coffey makes Paul start rethinking his own deeds and life in general. He thinks whether he has any right to execute and punish the God's creatures.

The audience supervises step-by-step rising of Paul's personality and humanity as well. One observes his spiritual recovery and human transformation on his developing communication with John Coffey. Paul Edgecomb is a nice, good-natured person, probably better than

any “average Death Row guard, and his staff is competent and humane-all except for the loathsome Percy” (The Green Mile, 1999). He is a loyal and democratic chief who is respected by his colleagues. Paul is a responsible officer, a good reliable, trust-worthy friend who is ready to risk his position but make an attempt to help his friend. Here, we mean his sincere strong desire to save Melinda using John Coffey’s supernatural mysterious gift. Amazed by John Coffey’s “miraculous healing powers and candid, generous personality of the prisoner” Paul starts doubting his guilty mind and shortly managing to assure the other warders in his innocence as well (The Green Mile: Revising the Life and Death of Jesus, 2003). Paul Edgecomb is the one who sincerely believes in John Coffey’s innocence. He even tries to conduct his own investigation to pour more light at John Coffey’s crime, but hardly can alter the route of the events. He can change only his attitude and the surroundings that is under his influence.

The story writer knowingly gives special names to his characters to enforce the role and significance of each person in the entire plot. At first the audience supposes that “*The Green Mile*” seems to be a story of a Black man who is unfairly sentenced and executed. But, then the watchers realize a more profound meaning of the plot and its tight connection with the Bible statements. The movie narrates about life and execution of Christ, about right and wrong, Good and Evil. As regards Paul Edgecomb, one researches that Paul signifies a Biblical apostle and evangelist Paul. In the movie, the character of Tom Hanks symbolizes a Christian preacher who calls for mercy and forgiveness.

He wants the others to believe John Coffey's innocent and kind nature, his readiness to help people. After all, he sees his mission in putting people to the right course and decides to join a correctional facility for the juvenile criminals to stop the evil in the seed. He becomes John Coffey's disciple as a Jesus Christ's follower in the attempt to make people better and help them out.

The surname Edgecomb means "dweller at, or near the ridge of a valley" (Meaning-of-Names, n.d.). The discussed character dwells on the so-called Valley of Death where he is forced to face death every day either it is in the eyes of the sentenced or during the death procedures. More above, having received a gift of long-long life, Paul can symbolize eternity that lies in the eternal battle of the Good and Evil. Or maybe, his long life symbolizes punishment for innocently killed soul?

The next character of the movie *"The Green Mile"* who deserves audience's attention and compassion is undoubtedly John Coffey (Michael Clarke Duncan). Stephen King himself makes a parallel of John Coffey with Jesus Christ. It is a reason his character has the same name abbreviation as Jesus Christ. Moreover, if one wants to know the etymology of the name "John", one may discover that the name John means "God is Glorious", and the surname "Coffey" signifies "victorious" (Meaning-of-Name, n.d.). It is rather meaningful. John Coffey possesses similar traces of character as Jesus Christ: he has an open heart full of kindness, warmth and compassion. John Coffey is surprisingly tall that may symbolize the greatness of God. He

is a giant that may symbolize boundless kindness and love. He governs “the miraculous power of healing the sick and the dying”: the audience may witness how he cures Paul’s urinary infection and brings back Mister Jingles to life. After all, he gifts full recovery to Warden’s wife - Melinda Moores - from the incurable disease she is terribly suffering of “by breathing the disease out of her, similar to a “breath of life.”(The Green Mile: Revising the Life and Death of Jesus, 2003). It is within John’s nature to help people, not to be indifferent, blind or deaf to somebody’s pain. He is aware of the world violence, cruelty, sufferings, and this awareness and sensitiveness hurt him greatly. He cannot ignore a call for help, even if it is speechless and soundless. His readiness to answer a call becomes a reason of his unjust accusation in a bloody sadistic murder of two little sisters whom he tried to save. Unfair judgement and further execution obviously tie John Coffey with Jesus Christ. They both obediently accept destiny, and ready to die for the sin of the other without an attempt to save themselves. Here, one may observe a bright example of self-sacrifice.

Steven D. Greydanus (n.d.) in his article “The Green Mile” describes John Coffey as “mysterious character...immense, ponderous, elusively spiritual, dimwitted to be sure, but so well-meaning and good-hearted that any criticism or persecution seems somehow mean and unfair (The Green Mile, n.d.).

His name as well as his actions glorifies God and eternal faith in good nature of people. “He’s more of a good-natured bear than a man” (The

Green Mile, n.d.). But with development of the events one can realize that despite of his enormous physical force and horrifying appearance, he is inoffensive and unprotected as an innocent child. It is especially emphasized when he requests to leave the lights because of his fear of darkness. Even his imprisonment and sentence to death have not made him become cruel and did not harden his heart. He continues to do good to the people. People, who come across with John Coffey, are like going through catharsis and rethinking of one's life significance. John Coffey symbolizes kindness, humanity and forgiveness.

The next character one cannot miss is Percy Wetmore. Percy Wetmore is completely a contradictory person in comparison to any other warders in the Green Mile. He has an authoritarian personality and cruel, sadistic, cool-blooded nature. He causes only scorn, disrespect and disgust to him as from the officers and the prisoners as well. The movie watchers have already prepossession to Percy once they come to know that he is a nephew of the Governor. But, once we see the character itself on the screen, this feeling does not vanish. It is becoming stronger due to his unpleasant appearance and ill manners. This young guy is successfully promoted by his aunt, and he accepts life as it is, without putting much effort to change it or do something on his own. He is a person without any kind of core, dignity and pride, deprived of any virtues and mercy. Once his attempts to impose his will on the others collapsed, he shamefully retreated and accepted Paul's demands. Moreover, he is a coward guy. He is brave demonstrating his power in front of the locked prisoners and a mouse, but in the face of a

real danger, he loses any ability to act and resist. One may watch Percy's unexplainable desire to anguish, make people suffer physically and emotionally. He is cool-blooded and absolutely calm during death execution but later he gets vindictory punishment for his groundless cruelty and rotten mind. He ends up in a mental ward as a patient. Therefore, he completely justifies his name as far as Percy means "Diminutive of Percival: Pierces the valley" emphasizing his weak, mean, loathsome nature (Meaning-of-Names, n.d.) His surname "Wetmore" signifies dwell at, white moor meaning that Percy has become a victim of his own efforts. Percy Wetmore symbolizes the Evil in conjunction with the deadly sins as anger and pride. More above, he signifies the triumph of Good over the evil nature.

The next character one wants to take a look is Brutus Howell. He is Paul's lieutenant at the Green Mile. He is "rock-solid and dependable" (The Green Mile, 1999). Brutus Howell, despite of his visual male brutality, does not cause any negative emotions at the viewers. He gives the impression of stability, reliability and trust. He belongs to such type of people who never betrays and lets one's down. It is shown when he agrees to risk and participate in "John Coffey's walk" for Melinda Moore's sake. Brutus demonstrates good, friendly relationship with the other colleagues. He shows up good physical form and fast reaction when his colleagues are attacked by the "Wild" Bill. He is a person whose heart has not hardened considering complicated conditions and circumstances of his work. He does not allow himself and anybody else to insult or sneer at the executed. The audience is

inspired with respect to him. Brutus, as well as Paul starts being more compassionate to the ones who join their death chamber. His surname means “seeing clearly”, the individual with such a name should be a good psychologist. He should realize the motives of behavior of the prison dwellers finding a common language with them. Keeping in view religious symbols in the movie, the audience may contrast Brut with” the centurions that accompanied Jesus and crucified him” (The Green Mile: Revising the Life and Death of Jesus, 2003). All the centurions act not on their will, but because they were forced to fulfill the order. Brutus Howell and the other prison warders as Biblical centurions have to accomplish their job duties trying to give some kind of hope and support to the death sentenced.

The intermediary place in the present movie belongs to the character captain Warden Hal Moore. He does not participate in everyday life of the Green Mile, but in good friendly relationship with its chief – Paul Edgecomb. This character is shown for demonstration of true, sincere love to his deadly sick wife, and endless despair and fear realizing one’s inability to help. He is quite skeptical in John Coffey’s gift and ability to cure, but he is ready to try the chance just to help his wife. At the beginning, Warden Hal Moore is an embodiment of disappointment and tiredness from life. He is exhausted with his wife’s sickness, dull work and dark future. But, once his wife has been cured, his soul has got a new chance for living.

If to compare Warden Hal Moores with the Bible symbols, he may

symbolize Judas. Just to remember as he signed the act of execution for John Coffey “after the latter saved Moores' wife from her cancer, thus appears like a traitor” (The Green Mile: Revising the Life and Death of Jesus, 2003). He was at the edge of losing his dearest human being – his wife (“Moore means: dweller in, or near, the marsh or high wasteland” (Meaning of Names, n.d.). Warden means “guard” (Meaning of names, n.d.). Once again the author makes the accent on corruption and cowardice of the human nature and greatness of God. Instead of being grateful to John Coffey, Warden Hal Moores does not try to do anything to save him. What does it mean? Fear and vanity can control one’s mind.

One of the brightest, the most negative and inadequate character of the movie is William Wharton. He is a young but a horrible, bloody murderer whose personality is completely degraded and ruined. His devastated nature strives for further devastation and destruction of life. He has an unbearable temper and dangerous behavior. Wharton brings some abnormal excitement inside primarily calm life of the Green Mile. He is also sentenced to death and supposed to wait for his turn. But hardly the audience can notice any trace of redemption. He does not try to confess his sins, seek for forgiveness and spend the last days thinking about eternity. His instinct of destruction is the main motive and stimulator of his actions. This wild, unstoppable, crazy energy attacks and kills everything and everybody on its path. The purpose of Wharton’s life is in his own and somebody’s deaths. He does not possess any human features, and hardly can be considered

as a member of a society. Life for him does not have any value including his own. The “Wild” Bill portrays violence, cruelty, hatred to anything alive, wildness and embodiment of all imaginable negative features a man can have. Though, his name means “protector” and the surname “shore, bank”, he enters into open contradiction and antagonistic relationship with a human nature (Meaning-of-Names, n.d.). William Wharton nicknamed as “Wild Bill” is a pure personification of the Devil. It is like Satan runs his mind and actions giving him supernatural strength, and scornful attitude to the values and virtues of life. The killing of William Wharton and the further madness that hit Percy Wetmore “shows that divine justice is eventually administered, in spite of human justice” (The Green Mile: Revising the Life and Death of Jesus, 2003).