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EDITOR'S CORNER

By Andrew P. J. Byrne



**Unpacking the Literary Device of
FORESHADOWING**

In the field of literature, I have always admired storytellers and poets who skillfully craft their narratives and poems while paying close attention to details by using different literary devices such as foreshadowing. This device is difficult to use because it requires a great deal of time and effort to seamlessly and effectively infuse it into a literary work for artistic effects. Similar to hyperbole and caricature, both of which I unpacked in the previous two issues, foreshadowing in American Sign Language (ASL) is not well understood. I believe that the PowerPoint presentation by Linda Wall and Shelley Potma in 2010 in Ontario, Canada first drew our attention to foreshadowing as used in ASL literary works by Ella Mae Lentz (*The Door*) and Sam Supalla (*For a Decent Living*) as two good examples. Both Lentz and Supalla are well known ASL literary performers in the United States. For this editorial, I will discuss what Wall and Potma have to say on foreshadowing and more. Please note that I will only cover Supalla's work for the description of how foreshadowing occurs in an ASL narrative.

To begin, foreshadowing has a long tradition that goes back to the time of ancient Greece. Homer, a well-known Greek literary author, originally composed the two very long epic poems of the *Illiad* and the *Odyssey* orally. Both poems were later converted into written form (Fitzmyer, 1945; Jensen, 1994). "Because [the poems were] originally told orally [and due to their length], Homer had to keep the audience entertained and paying attention to the [poems] by using literary devices like foreshadowing and dramatic irony" (Owl Eyes, 2019, website). Found in all narrative genres (Murfin & Ray, 2018) and poetry, especially epics (Notopoulos, 1951), foreshadowing is "a literary device used...to hint about future events in the story. It is generally used to give insight of a future event within the confinement of a given narrative" (Bitrus, 2015, p. 54). Furthermore, "it actually prepares the [individuals] for the events that are about to happen. It spices up the story by creating dramatic tension or building a mystery. The [individuals] are made to guess

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what might happen next” (Ena & Yulia, 2012, pp. 9-10).

The qualities of foreshadowing that I reviewed in the scholarly literature are consistent with what Wall and Potma tried to explain in regard to ASL literature. Please keep in mind that practically all ASL literary works are signed, not written. ASL is an unwritten language and possesses its own literary tradition in the oral form. The fact that *Illiad* and *Odyssey* originated as oral works (similar to current ASL performances) is both remarkable and flattering.

A close look at Supalla's *For a Decent Living* confirms the use of foreshadowing as a literary device used in the beginning of the narrative. Supalla talks about a deaf boy staggering through a snowstorm from his house to the barn and then finding his boots sinking in manure when entering the barn. Any individual who views the barn incident in *For a Decent Living* cannot help but become anxious to know more about what happens to the boy character regarding adversarial experiences.

As the narrative progresses, it becomes clear that the boy has quickly grown up into a man when he encounters discrimination at the workplace. The setting has changed from the farm to a city. The deaf club where the protagonist comes to is not helpful. The leaders at the deaf club are not optimistic about the employment outlook. The protagonist takes the initiative to seek employment in the aircraft factory. He is rejected numerous times. However, even after he is finally hired, the protagonist has to fight back when he is thought to be dead (based on the decision of an incompetent doctor) after an accident on the job. The protagonist becomes a hero to the aircraft factory as other deaf people are hired.

When thinking about the early part of Supalla's narrative in the barn, the individual viewing the narrative is given a hint about future events in the boy's life that are plagued with workplace discrimination and injustices that are degrading similar to being stuck in the manure. With the boy now a man, he continues to experience struggles in the aircraft factory. The protagonist has a strong and persistent character as shown when he was a young boy walking to the barn during a snowstorm. This explains the protagonist's eventual success in the aircraft factory.

Readers are encouraged to [view the video clip](#) below on the barn incident where foreshadowing occurs in Supalla's *For a Decent Living*.



"Reproduced with permission from DawnSignPress"
Source: Supalla, S., & Bahan, B. (1994). *ASL literature series: Bird of a different feather & for a decent living: Student workbook*. San Diego, CA: DawnSignPress.

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As evident in *For a Decent Living*, foreshadowing can contribute to the complexity and depth in ASL literary works. Thus, to help with our study of ASL literary works, we need to recognize and consider the importance of clues that could predict outcomes. Our appreciation of ASL literature will heighten when we recognize and understand the use of foreshadowing and other literary devices.

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