

An analysis of foreshadowing in Stephen King's *Rita Hayworth* and *Shawshank Redemption*

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Abstract

*This study addresses readers' confusion regarding the plot twist in Stephen King's *Rita Hayworth* and *Shawshank Redemption*, particularly how the surprising ending is narratively constructed through foreshadowing. Although many readers are shocked by the conclusion, they often overlook how subtle narrative clues prepare them emotionally and intellectually for the climax. This study aims to explain how foreshadowing functions as an effective device in constructing the plot twist by analyzing both explicit and implicit forms of foreshadowing in the novella. Using a qualitative literary analysis approach, the study applies Gérard Genette's (1980) theory of prolepsis. Data were collected through close reading, with the researchers acting as a non-participant textual observer. The analysis involved narrative mapping, thematic coding, and systematic classification of foreshadowing elements into linguistic, symbolic, and structural categories, following qualitative observation procedures proposed by Moleong (2017). The findings identify 17 instances of foreshadowing, consisting of 12 implicit and 5 explicit cases. Key narrative elements such as the *Rita Hayworth* poster and the rock hammer illustrate that implicit foreshadowing plays a dominant role in subtly guiding readers toward the plot twist, while explicit foreshadowing provides clearer narrative signals. Overall, the study demonstrates that foreshadowing is central to the novella's narrative coherence and the effectiveness of its surprise ending.*

Keywords: *Foreshadowing; Stephen King; Rita Hayworth; Shawshank Redemption; Plot twist*

INTRODUCTION

Literature is a broad term that includes all kinds of written or spoken works that have artistic and intellectual value. These works are known for their creativity, expression, and their ability to explore human experiences. It covers many forms like poetry, plays, stories, and essays, with novels being one of the most popular and important types. Literature acts like a mirror of society, showing the complexities of human emotions, cultural values, and historical events. As (Green, 2021) says, "literature is not just a bunch of stories or ideas; it is a powerful way for people and societies to express who they are, what they struggle with, and what they hope for". Through its different forms, literature encourages readers to see things from new perspectives, helping them develop empathy, think critically, and understand the world better.

In literary narratives, foreshadowing is often used to provide subtle hints about upcoming events, creating anticipation and building the complexity of the story. This

strategy strikes a balance between guiding the reader and maintaining narrative surprise, resulting in an “aha” moment when these hidden clues are finally revealed. This study identifies a gap in previous research on foreshadowing, which often focuses solely on its predictive functions, without highlighting how the technique can also be employed to obscure or disguise critical plot details.

Foreshadowing, as defined by literary scholars, is a literary device that introduces early hints or clues in a narrative that suggest later developments. It functions as a way to orient readers' expectations and draw them into the narrative's unfolding through subtle clues, symbols, events, dialogue, actions, or descriptions that prepare them for future plot developments without explicit revelation (Baldick, 2015; Culler, 2011; Delport, 2020). Technique that prepares the reader for what is to come (Abbott, 2002) allowing authors to build anticipation and subtly guide reader expectations.

Foreshadowing functions as a narrative strategy that shapes readers' expectations and creates tension by laying groundwork for significant future developments. This technique essentially plants seed in the audience's mind, allowing them to anticipate and create a sense of inevitability about the events that will unfold (Phelan & Rabinowitz, 2018; Burroway, 2019). The significance of foreshadowing as a narrative technique is further reinforced by its connection to Chekhov's Gun principle, which emphasizes that every element in a narrative must serve a purpose. As Chekhov stated, "If you say in the first chapter that a rifle is hanging on the wall, in the second or third chapter it must go off. If it's not going to be fired, it shouldn't be hanging there" (Martinelli, 2020)

Although previous studies have extensively explored foreshadowing in various literary works, there remains a notable gap in analyzing how this technique operates specifically within Stephen King's *Rita Hayworth and Shawshank Redemption* (Kuntonen, 2019) explored foreshadowing as a narrative device in *The Raven Boys* by Maggie Stiefvater, focusing on character-based foreshadowing and how it integrates with broader narrative elements. (Suzanne, 2022) conducted a stylistic study of foreshadowing and flashback in Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* and Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, emphasizing the interplay between narrative techniques across different genres. (Handayani, 2024) analyzed foreshadowing in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, highlighting its role in creating tension and exploring thematic and character development, while (Chandra, 2021) examined the use of foreshadowing to deliver a plot twist in the film *Shutter Island*.

The urgency for conducting research on *An Analysis of Foreshadowing in Stephen King's Rita Hayworth and Shawshank Redemption* is important for several key reasons. First, Stephen King is famous for his complex and skillful storytelling, and this novella is one of the great examples of his works. *Rita Hayworth and Shawshank Redemption* is one of his most well-known works, praised for its emotional depth and clever narrative. The story is especially famous for its surprising plot twist, which often leaves readers amazed and makes them want to reread the story to find the hidden clues that lead to the twist. However, many readers feel confused when they encounter the plot twist because they don't fully understand how it was built up. This gap in understanding highlights the need

for a deeper analysis of how foreshadowing is employed to create a successful plot twist that delivers a powerful sense of surprise and satisfaction.

Rita Hayworth and Shawshank Redemption is an ideal text for English language instruction due to its accessible yet rich literary language, compelling narrative structure, and profound thematic depth. The novella's varied vocabulary, authentic dialogue, and effective use of literary devices such as foreshadowing and symbolism provide excellent opportunities for language development and critical analysis. The story's psychological depth and moral dilemmas stimulate meaningful discussions, and its balanced mix of description and dialogue supports comprehensive skill development in reading, writing, and analytical thinking.

In short, this research is important because it addresses a common issue for readers being surprised by a plot twist without knowing how it was done. By exploring the role of foreshadowing through Genette's theory of prolepsis, this research aims to explain how effective plot twists are created, helping readers and writers better understand and appreciate the art of storytelling. This makes the study relevant not only to Stephen King fans but also to anyone interested in how stories are crafted to leave a lasting impact.

METHOD

This research employs a qualitative research method with a content analysis approach to examine foreshadowing in Stephen King's *Rita Hayworth and Shawshank Redemption*. Qualitative research explores and understands meaning ascribed to social or human problems (Creswell, 2018) and produces descriptive data in the form of words rather than numbers (Moleong, 2017; Semi, 2012), making it appropriate for literary analysis. The study applies Gérard Genette's (1980) theory of prolepsis to examine how temporal manipulation anticipates future events and shapes readers' expectations. The primary data source is the original literary text, which forms the basis of analysis (Leavy, 2014).

Data collection was conducted through three stages: close reading, transcription, and cross-verification. Close reading was used to identify explicit and implicit foreshadowing, enabling the analysis of narrative structures and subtle textual cues (Burroway, 2019; Flick, 2018). Identified foreshadowing elements were then transcribed and coded into linguistic, symbolic, and structural categories to create a systematic record of narrative hints. Data analysis followed qualitative procedures involving organization, coding, and pattern identification (Creswell, 2014), with cross-verification comparing foreshadowing instances to the novella's final plot revelation. This systematic classification and interpretation clarify how foreshadowing functions as a narrative strategy to build suspense and guide readers toward the unexpected plot twist.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

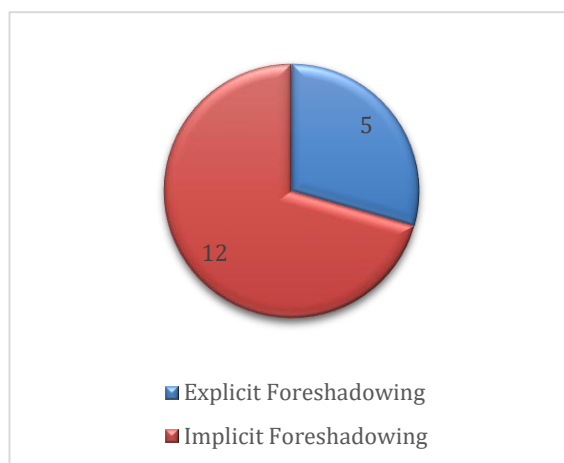


Figure 1. Diagram data of foreshadowing

This study investigates how Rita Hayworth and Shawshank Redemption uses foreshadowing to reveal the story's plot twist, Andy Dufresne's escape and his mysterious disappearance. The data were collected through close reading of King's novella, identifying 17 foreshadowing instances, categorized into 5 explicit and 12 implicit clues. These elements are distributed through symbols, dialogues, narrative commentary, and structural hints. Following systematic coding, each excerpt was marked (e.g., E₁ for explicit 1, I₁ for implicit 1) and grouped into explicit and implicit categories. A closer look at the narrative structure reveals that foreshadowing plays a crucial role in building tension and preparing readers for the unexpected plot twist at the end. Stephen King skillfully employs foreshadowing or prolepsis, as termed by Gérard Genette, as a literary technique to subtly hint at future events, particularly Andy's carefully planned escape.

Throughout the novella, foreshadowing contributes to the emotional tone and dramatic irony of the story. A clear example of explicit foreshadowing is Andy's request for a rock hammer. At first, the object seems harmless, merely a hobby tool for carving stones. However, it is later revealed to be central to Andy's escape. What initially appears as a minor detail turns out to be a major narrative device.

He smiled a little at that. "I wonder if you could get me a rock hammer." (I, Chapter 3, page 12)

The datum shows a direct dialogue from Andy to Red, requesting a rock hammer. The use of direct dialogue in this instance emphasizes Andy's careful planning, as the rock hammer is an essential tool for his escape. The rock hammer is not immediately understood for its significance but becomes increasingly important as the story unfolds.

Another iconic example is the Rita Hayworth poster. It is assumed to be simple decoration or a symbol of hope, but it later becomes the key to concealing the tunnel Andy has been digging for nearly twenty years. The use of such objects to foreshadow future revelations strengthens the unity and coherence of the plot, while maintaining a sense of mystery and surprise.

"So he came to me and asked if I could get him a Rita Hayworth poster. Not a little one but a big one." (I7, Chapter 13, page 75)

The quote is a narrator's statement, where Red narrates a crucial moment in Andy's plans. The poster, while appearing to be an ordinary request, is a symbolic item in the story, and thus represents implicit foreshadowing of Andy's eventual escape. The large poster is not just a decoration, but a cover for the escape tunnel that Andy will dig over many years.

"I talked to Normaden once about Andy. 'Nice Della,' Normaden said. It was hard to make out anything he said because he had a harelip and a cleft palate; his words all came out in a slush. 'I liked it there. He never made fun. But he didn't want me there. I could tell.' Big shrug. 'I was glad to go, me. Bad draft in that cell. All the time cold. He don't let nobody touch his things. That's okay. Nice man, never made fun. But big draft.'" (I11, Chapter 7, page 38)

I11 shows dialogue from Normaden, one of the prisoners at Shawshank, describing his experience living in the same cell as Andy. This dialogue is implicit foreshadowing, as Normaden's comment about the "draft" in Andy's cell can be seen as a subtle hint about the escape route that Andy had been preparing. The cold draft in Andy's cell, which Normaden mentions, is likely a foreshadowing of the hole Andy had been digging to escape Shawshank.

"When I get out of here," Andy said finally, "I'm going where it's warm all the time." He spoke with such calm assurance you would have thought he had only a month or so left to serve. "You know where I'm goin, Red?"
"Nope."
"Zihuatanejo," he said. (E1, Chapter 11, Page 57)

E1 shows direct dialogue from Andy to Red, where Andy reveals his plan for life after Shawshank, stating that he intends to go to Zihuatanejo, a small town in Mexico. This dialogue is explicit foreshadowing, as Andy directly tells Red about his intended destination once he is free. The assurance in Andy's tone suggests that he already has a clear plan in mind for the future, even though he is still incarcerated at Shawshank.

"...Remember that hope is a good thing, Red, maybe the best of things, and no good thing ever dies..." (E2, Chapter 14, page 86)

The dialogue is significant because it shows Andy's understanding that even in the darkest of places, hope is what keeps people alive and motivated. It provides both literal and figurative foreshadowing: Andy's hope fuels his plan to escape, and the impact of his words ultimately helps Red find the courage to embrace hope after serving his time.

To create a compelling twist, a writer must first establish audience expectations. In this case, the first-person narration by Red plays an important role. Since Red doesn't know Andy's full plan, the reader is equally unaware. This limited perspective allows suspense to build naturally. As (Seger, 2010, p. 80) points out, a great twist works best when the audience eventually realizes that the path they've followed was misdirected from the start.

Ultimately, the foreshadowing techniques used by King not only build narrative tension, but also serve to reinforce the novella's core moral message: that hope and resilience can lead to freedom, even in the most oppressive circumstances. Through careful layering of proleptic hints both explicit and implicit, King crafts a story that rewards close reading and delivers a satisfying, emotionally resonant conclusion.

Table 1. Data rubric of the foreshadowing

Num	Narration	Location	Code s	Types of Foresha- dowing		Forms of Foreshadowing			
				E X	IM	DG	NO S	NA S	SY
1.	"And so when Andy Dufresne came to me in 1949 and asked if I could smuggle Rita Hayworth into the prison for him, I said it would be no problem at all. And it wasn't."	Chapter 1, p.2	I4		?		?		?
2.	He smiled a little at that. "I wonder if you could get me a rock hammer."	Chapter 3, p.12	I1		?	?			
3.	"It was about five months later that Andy asked if I could get him Rita Hayworth."	Chapter 5, p.21	I5		?		?		
4.	"Rita Hayworth hung in Andy's cell until 1955, if I remember right."	Chapter 8, p.39	I6		?		?		?
5.	"So he came to me and asked if I could get him a Rita Hayworth poster. Not a little one but a big one."	Chapter 13, p.75	I7		?		?		?
6.	"...Remember that hope is a good thing, Red, maybe the best of things, and no good thing ever dies..."	Chapter 14, p.86	E2	?		?			
7.	"Pressure. Andy told me once that all of geology is the study of pressure. And time, of course..."	Chapter 13, p.74	I12		?		?		
8.	"You know where I'm goin, Red?" "Nope." "Zihuatanejo," he said.	Chapter 11, p.57	E1	?		?			

Abbreviations:

Types of Foreshadowing :

EX = Explicit

IM = Implicit

Forms of Foreshadowing:

DG = Dialogue

NAS = Narrative Structure

NOS = Narrator Statement

SY = Symbols

Discussion

In this discussion, the researchers will further develop how Stephen King used foreshadowing in *Rita Hayworth* and *Shawshank Redemption* to build suspense and prepare readers for the plot twist that occurs at the end of the story. There are two significant points: 1) the effectiveness of foreshadowing in building tension, and 2) its function in revealing the plot twist. Stephen King skillfully uses both subtle and symbolic foreshadowing to plant narrative clues throughout the story. For example, the Rita Hayworth poster and the rock hammer appear as ordinary items but later gain greater narrative significance. These objects gradually raise tension and spark curiosity, reflecting what (Delpont, 2020) calls “early hints” that keep readers engaged. As (Gottlieb, 2019) explains, foreshadowing is a technique that prepares the reader for what is to come, allowing anticipation to build subtly. The use of such symbolic cues, as noted by (Yousef, 2024), heightens suspense and emotional engagement.

Furthermore, these narrative elements are tied to the Chekhov’s Gun principle: “If you say in the first chapter that a rifle is hanging on the wall, in the second or third chapter it must go off” (Martinelli, 2020, p. 124). Andy’s escape tools are examples of this, where seemingly trivial details become crucial to the plot. (Ringo, 2025) points out that such clues make readers feel as though they are uncovering secrets alongside the protagonist. This study also connects to (Chandra, 2021) analysis of *Shutter Island*, where foreshadowing similarly builds tension and leads to a twist. While Chandra examines a film, this research focuses on a novella using Genette’s theory of prolepsis. Despite the differences in medium and method, both studies highlight foreshadowing’s role in reinforcing suspense and deepening thematic layers.

Lastly, foreshadowing in King’s novella also reinforces the central themes of hope and freedom. These hints whether in symbols, conversations, or narrative structure prepare the reader for the plot twist without revealing it too soon (Marshall, 2025). (Shuhaib, 2024) states foreshadowing works by subtly planting suggestions or warnings that shape reader expectations. These cues are not only plot devices, but emotional signposts Andy’s references to Zihuatanejo, for instance, symbolize his vision of liberation. This aligns with (Culler, 2011; Daniel, 2018; Delpont, 2020) who agree that foreshadowing orients the reader toward future developments. In the end, foreshadowing in this novella not only leads to a surprising revelation, but also delivers a message about resilience and the human spirit.

CONCLUSION

From the analysis of these types, it can be observed that implicit foreshadowing is used more dominantly by Stephen King in the novella. Implicit foreshadowing appears more frequently throughout the story, creating a slow and steady buildup of suspense that

engages the reader's curiosity and encourages them to piece together hidden clues. This gradual unveiling helps make the plot twist more believable and satisfying, as readers recognize how earlier hints connect to the final revelation. Explicit foreshadowing, although less frequent, serves an important role in providing clearer signals that confirm Andy's plans and guide the reader's expectations.

In conclusion, the way King balances these two types of foreshadowing really makes the story work. It adds emotional depth, highlights themes like hope and freedom, and keeps readers hooked until the big reveal. This study shows that foreshadowing is a powerful tool that storytellers use to keep their audience engaged while still preserving the surprise until the very end.

The researchers encourage future studies to explore foreshadowing in a wider range of literary genres and works beyond Stephen King's *Rita Hayworth and Shawshank Redemption*. Including different genres such as mystery, thriller, or fantasy could provide a richer understanding of how foreshadowing functions across various narrative styles. The researchers suggest that future researchers strengthen the practical relevance of their work by connecting foreshadowing analysis to contemporary storytelling media, such as films, television series, or digital narratives. Examining how foreshadowing operates in modern visual media will add depth and applicability to literary studies.

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