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Critical Disability Studies

Professor Lindgren

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ASL Poetry

For this project, I started with an original poem that I wrote sitting outside on a beautifully sunny day. This poem is a collection of the feelings I was experiencing at that time, my surroundings, and images that came to my mind while looking at nature. For reference, the words in italics are directions I gave myself on how I should be moving my body at that time to fully encapsulate what I wished to say with my signs. Of course, this poem is not how the finished project turned out to be. In my final taping of the poem, I felt the need to add more signs for breaths, clouds, blooming, swaying, and sunlight. I believe this is something important to recognize in ASL poetry. Signs can be added to make a poem more complete, (by complete, I mean smoother, rougher, more expressive, etc...) There is also not the feeling of messing up by not signing every word right. Many times, if you sign one word wrong, it can be turned into a pause with more facial expression, or a body movement that encapsulates what you want to say better than your original sign did. All that being said, I invite you to first watch the video of the poem being signed, then read the following rough translation below.

Resiliency in Interdependence

A flower. Blooming, growing, thriving. (*standing straight*)

A storm hits! Lighting! Wind! Rain! Terror! Destruction! (*Slowly creeping downwards*)

The flower is gone....(*completely on the ground*)

But wait....(*rising up*) in the distance

If you look closely...(*moving closer to camera and almost fully risen*)

One, small, flower remains (*Happiness on face, incomprehensible joy*)

It tries and tries to grow (*tired looking, almost giving up*)
But it cannot grow alone... (*looking dejected and searching for help*)
(*looks into sky with joy on face & excitement*) Then, the birds come! And the sunlight! (!!!)
The birds help shelter the flower and now the rain does not harm it.
The rain is soft & peaceful.
The clouds sway, gently.
The sunlight is warm, cozy, and loving.
The flower has all it needs in the world around her.
And once again, she will rise, and breathe. (*standing straight, tall, and at peace*)

Some final thoughts...

The beauty I find in ASL poetry is that the words can blend together in a way that typical spoken word poetry cannot. One often thinks of rhyming as a necessary component of a poem, but when one is able to sign the words they are expressing anywhere in space and time, the words flow in such a way that traditional rhyming is not needed. The whole body is used. It is used in a way such that the whole person is involved. Not just the mouth of the person speaking. Not just the brain forming the words. Not just the fingers and arms creating the signs. The Whole Body. By doing so, a sort of dance is created. A dance of the words, and a way to express oneself in a way that is not "equal" to spoken word poetry, but rather, entirely different. This is the bulk of why I am so drawn to ASL poetry. It seems, to me, the epitome of deaf culture showcased for how beautiful and unique it truly is.

Works Referenced

Spoken Without Words: Poetry with ASL Slam

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dmsqXwnqIw4&list=TLPQMTUwNTIwMjAfx-h-RbZd8Q&index=1>

Deaf Heart- (ASL Poem)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3jskB4GJJj0>

Peter Cook- Flying words project

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JnU3U6qEibU&t=74s>