

Here are my Wings Analysing Sign Language Poetry

Sign language poetry, like poetry in any language, uses a heightened form of the language (“art sign”) for aesthetic effect (Sutton-Spence 2005). The language in the poems is foregrounded by an obtrusiveness that stems from its difference from everyday language. The language may be obtrusively regular, as the poet uses devices and signs already existing in the language with exceptional regularity or it may be obtrusively irregular as the poet’s novel and creative forms bring the language to the foreground. The foregrounded language can bring with it additional meaning, to create multiple interpretations of the poem.

The work with sign language poetry began with the development of a method close textual analysis of signed poetic performances of the work of the late Dorothy Miles, the pioneer of BSL poetry.

This work led to conference presentations and publications, including the book Sutton-Spence - *Analysing Sign Language Poetry* (prepared with the help of Gillian Rudd at Liverpool University and Paddy Ladd here at the Centre for Deaf Studies) published by Palgrave in 2005.

Explaining the work to members of the Deaf community and sign language learners, has led to an increased awareness of signed poetry within the Deaf community a greater and more involvement with Deaf poets. In February 2005 we held an evening of celebration of BSL poetry, attended by members of Bristol’s Deaf community, at which Paul Scott performed his own BSL poems. The success of this evening led to two more sell-out events at the Guildford Book Festival, at which Paul performed his poems and Rachel Sutton Spence lectured on the importance of sign language poetry. This resurgence of enthusiasm for sign language poetry shows no sign of abating.

