

SAMPLER

Bridge of the Ford

ALSO BY SUSAN CONNOLLY

How High the Moon, 1991 (with Catherine Phil MacCarthy)

For the Stranger, 1993

Stone and Tree Sheltering Water: An Exploration of Sacred and Secular Wells in Co. Louth
(with Anne-Marie Moroney), 1998

Race to the Sea, 1999

Ogham: Ancestors Remembered in Stone (with Anne-Marie Moroney), 2000

A Salmon in the Pool: The River Boyne from Source to Sea, A Map of Poetry and Placenames, 2001

Winterlight, 2002

FROM SHEARSMAN BOOKS

Forest Music, 2009

The Sun-Artist (chapbook), 2013

SAMPLER

Susan Connolly

SAMPLER *Bridge
of the Ford*

*visual poetry
from Drogheda*

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for Edel Robinson

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Introduction

In March 2015 I was trying to finish a poem. I realised, as I wrote the date on my draft, that I had been writing visual poetry for a full ten years. Sunlight, a big window, ruler, pencil, compass, tracing paper and rubber were the tools I used to write my first visual poems on sheets of white A4 paper – cutting and pasting, not on the computer, but with scissors and Prittstick.

In 2009 a friend showed me the Olympia portable typewriter which she bought in a charity shop. I looked at this object and a whole range of possibilities opened up in my mind. Years earlier I had given away my typewriter after buying a computer. I borrowed her typewriter and set to work. The first poem I typed on it was ‘The Sun-Artist’. It required a huge amount of concentration and time not to make a mistake and have to start all over again. Later I copied ‘The Sun-Artist’ to the computer in as close a way to its original form as possible. Why, after so many years of writing and publishing lyric poetry, had I turned to visual poetry?

One morning in March 2005 I was writing in Drogheda Library. I knew I definitely had an idea for a poem but I couldn’t find a way into it. Tired of my efforts, I went for a walk around the library to free up my thoughts. When I returned to my desk I decided to write a visual poem, a new departure for me, and soon the words began to flow. I wrote several more visual poems that year. Towards the end of 2005 I was in Toronto, Canada, visiting my brother and his family. He brought me to a bookshop where I bought *Konfessions of an Elizabethan Fan Dancer*, a collection of concrete poetry by the Canadian poet bpNichol. I read and re-read this book at least a dozen times over the next few years.

After reading *Konfessions* I realised that the visual poems I had begun to write were similar to some concrete poetry from the 1960s and 1970s, so I explored that terrain more closely. Concrete poetry is poetry in which the meaning or effect is conveyed partly by visual means, using patterns of words or letters so that the visual elements are as important as the text. Concrete / visual / pattern poetry has roots in the ancient world. Its most famous expression in the English canon is the poem ‘Easter Wings’ by George Herbert. When this poem was first published in 1633, it was printed on two pages of a book, sideways, so that the lines suggest two birds flying upwards, with their wings spread out.

My poetry moved increasingly from freehand word-drawings of a ‘reflection in a mirror’, a ‘tree in leaf’ and ‘five roads’, to poetry which could be made on the typewriter and copied from there to computer. The best font for my work is Courier New, a font which gives equal space to each letter of the alphabet, just like the typewriter which played such an important role in concrete poetry. I also realised that there were other possibilities on the computer: changing the size of the letters, line spacing, colour. Nowadays I use only the computer. However, my visual poems are in the spirit of typewriter poetry and would not have been written without my earlier engagement with the typewriter.

Apart from the influence of certain concrete poets such as bpNichol, Ian Hamilton Finlay and Dom Sylvester Houédard and that groundbreaking anthology published in the USA in 1968, *Concrete Poetry: A World View*,

compiled and edited by Mary Ellen Solt, the other major influence on my visual poetry has been and continues to be three early monastic illuminated manuscripts, *The Lindisfarne Gospels*, *The Book of Durrow* and *The Book of Kells*.

The poems in the first part of the collection, *Bridge of the Ford*, are arranged so that the reader can imagine drifting down the river Boyne in a boat, past the Neolithic tumulus of Dowth, past the mediaeval town of Drogheda (*Droichead Átha* / bridge of the ford) and out towards the sea, taking in on the left side, Baltray, and on the right, Mornington. These sites are in my blood as I grew up and still live in this area. I keep returning inland, year after year, to the high crosses at Monasterboice and I always see something new in these old crosses.

Writing visual poetry has been an exhilarating journey for me. I hope that the commentary which follows the collection is helpful.

Susan Connolly

April 2016

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Bridge of the Ford

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Winter Solstice at Dowth, 3pm

1.		2.	
	t	j	
	h	u	
hunkered	e	s	as if
		t	
down			we sat
	c		
in the	h	y	side by
fallen	a	o	side,
	m	u	
snow	b		slowly
	e		
	r		
		a	
we watch		n	turning
		d	
the sun	f		the original
	i		
sweep	l		light-
	l	i	
through	s		filled
		h	
the bars	w	e	pages
	i	r	
of the	t	e	of the
	h		
locked			Book of
		t	
gate –		o	Kells
	l		
	i		
	g	s	
	h	e	
	t	e	

The Sun-Artist

at the Cross of Muiredach, Monasterboice

deep shadowed
s deep shadowe s
s deep shadow s
su deepshado su
su deepshad su
sun deepsha sun
sun deepsh sun
suns deeps suns
suns deep suns
sunse dee sunse
sunse de sunse
sunset d sunset
sunset sunset
sunset r sunset
sunset re sunset
sunse ren sunse
sunse rene sunse
suns renew suns
suns renews suns
sun renewsr sun
sun renewsre sun
su renewsrene su
su renewsrene su
s renewsrenew s
s renewsrenews s
f renewsrene f
fa renewsrene fa
fa renewsren fa
fad renewsre fad
fadi renewsr fadi
fadi renew fadi
fadin rene fadin
fadin ren fadin
fading re fading
fading r fading
fading fading
fadin p fadin
fadin pa fadin
fadi pat fadi
fadi patt fadi
fad patte fad
fad patter fad
fa pattern fa
fa patterns fa
f patternsp f
f patternspa f
patternspat

deepshadowed sunset renews fading patterns

i l l u m i n a t i o n
 s i l l u m i n a t i o s
 s i l l u m i n a t i s
 s u i l l u m i n a t s u
 s u i l l u m i n a s u
 s u d i l l u m i n s u d
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 s u d d i l l u m s u d d
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 s u d d s h a d o s u d d
 s u d d s h a d o w s u d d
 s u d s h a d o w s s u d
 s u d s h a d o w s h s u d
 s u s h a d o w s h a s u
 s u s h a d o w s h a d s u
 s s h a d o w s h a d o s
 s s h a d o w s h a d o w s
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 w o r l d f w o r l d
 w o r l d f l w o r l d
 w o r l f l u w o r l
 w o r l f l u t w o r l
 w o r f l u t t w o r
 w o r f l u t t e w o r
 w o f l u t t e r w o
 w o f l u t t e r i w o
 w f l u t t e r i n w
 w f l u t t e r i n g w

sudden illumination shadow-worlds fluttering

Monasterboice, c. 900 AD

1.

2.

```
uuuuuuuuu m. iiii iiii rrrrrrrrrr m eeeeeeeee
uuuuuuuuu u l. llllllll rrrrrrrrrr r e eeeeeeeee
uuuuuuuuu uu ii. llllllll rrrrrrrrrr rr ee eeeeeeee
uuuuuuuuu uuu iii. llllllll rrrrrrrrrr rrrr eee eeeeeee
uuuuuuu uuuu llll. llllll rrrrrrrr rrrrrr eeee eeeeeee
uuuuu uuuuu lllll. llll rrrrr rrrrrr eeeee eeeee
uuu uuuuuu llllll. lll rrr rrrrrrrr eeeeeee eee
uu uuuuuuu lllllll. ll rrr rrrrrrrr eeeeeee ee
u uuuuuuuu llllllll. l r rrrrrrrrrr eeeeeee e
uuuuuuuuu lllllllll rrrrrrrrrrr eeeeeeeee
m ddd ddd ddd aaaaaaaa m m cccccccc hhhhhhhh m
d ddd ddd ddd aaaaaaaa a c cccccccc hhhhhhhh h
dd ddd ddd ddd aaaaaaaa aa c cccccccc hhhhhhhh hh
dd ddd ddd ddd aaaaaaaa aaaa c cccccccc hhhhhh hhh
dd ddd ddd ddd aaaaaaaa aaaaa c cccccccc hhhh hhh
dd ddd ddd ddd aaaaa aaaaaa c cccc ccccc hhhh hhh
dd ddd ddd ddd aaaa aaaaaa c cccc ccccc hhhh hhhh
dd ddd ddd ddd aa aaaaaa c ccccc cccc hh hhhh
dd ddd ddd ddd a aaaaaa c ccccc ccc hh hhhh
dd ddd ddd d m aaaaaa c ccccc ccc m hhhhhh
dd ddd ddd d m aaaaaa c ccccc ccc m hhhhhh
```

SAMPLE

Bridge of the Ford 1

Droichead Átha

d r o d a g
r
t d r **o** g h a d e d
r **i** i r
o d **c** o
i r **h** g
d r o i c h e a d á t h a h
g a r e
h d o e d
d d á c d a
r o t h a
o g h e g
h a d h
e
d r o c h a t a t h a

the old names for the town

troid
tredagh
drohed
droched
drodag
droghade
droghdogh
drochatatha
droichead átha
drogheda

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