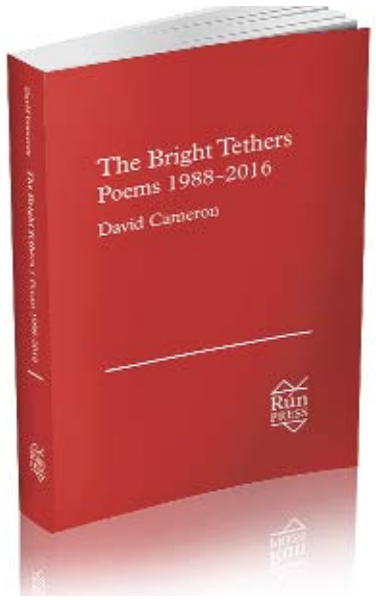
THE BRIGHT TETHERS POEMS: 1988–2016

DAVID CAMERON



FOUR DECADES OF poem-writing have gone into the making of The Bright Tethers. This is the best of Cameron, whose achievement is steadily gaining recognition (his poem 'Night Singing' is read in Irish schools; in 2014 he received the Hennessy Literary Award for Poetry). As he says in the Author's Note: 'This is the book I have been writing all my life, and that all my life has been writing.'

Some of the book's poems were published in periodicals (The London Magazine, Stand, The Rialto, The Dark Horse, etc.), but mostly they have circulated among appreciative fellow poets. Cameron's themes may be the big ones of love and death, but the details are those of ordinary life. Robert Nye has praised Cameron's writing for its 'quality of verbal alchemy by which it transmutes the base matter of common experience into something like gold'.

The earliest influences on Cameron have been the deepest: Donne, Blake and Hardy; Edward Thomas, the early Eliot, Rosenberg, Graves and Riding.

David Cameron left Manorhamilton a year ago to start a new job in Belfast, after more than a decade in Leitrim, during which time his three children were born. He himself was born in Glasgow in 1966. His two books of fiction, Rousseau Moon and The Ghost of Alice Fields, were chosen among the Books of the Year (2000 and 2014) in the UK press. He is married to the Irish glass artist Louise Rice,

The book's publisher is the Cork-based Rún Press, whose co-owner is the Irish poet Seán Haldane. The Bright Tethers is the third book in its Pocket Poems series (the previous two were the complete poems of the Irish diplomat Valentin Iremonger and the English critic and biographer Martin Seymour-Smith). Pocket Poems brings the German 'Taschenbuch' tradition into the English speaking world. These are full-sized editions that are small enough to be genuine pocket books.

THE BRIGHT TETHERS

Where does he go now, if not into ditches,
Like the parson unsteady on his bicycle,
This man for whom life ceased to have meaning?
He let it go, the secret, like a great fib
We are glad to be rid of, the greatest secret
No loved one, even, gets to share with us.

He let it go, and himself went, unshaven,
Not as on Sunday mornings, the lie-ins:
This time he had a desperate look on him.
Is he at peace, yet, among nettles?
Who will find him, now he has slackened
The bright tethers that had bound him to his life?

THE LAST INSTRUCTION

After he's read – out loud – the last instruction
On a packet of porridge oats, my son
Frightens me with the prospect of my own
Deep-seated melancholy being passed on
To this still playful but too serious boy,
As he asks: 'Why do we have to enjoy?'

FIASCO

I spent Christmas alone;
No, not alone,
My companion
A one-eyed cat called Fiasco.

Being clueless about wine
And the exchange rate of the guilder,
I washed down the roast chicken
With a bottle of dirt-cheap plonk.

In the line of vision
Of that cat's enlarged eye,
I watched Jimmy Stewart
Say 'Thataboy Clarence' – till tears fell.

Hugging the toilet bowl
As I puked up my guts
(The wine, it must have been):
Was that when I felt most alone?

No, there have been worse days and nights
Resistant to anecdote, none
Graced by that matchless cat.
Fiasco!

A RIVER, LOVE

I have stepped into the same river twice.
You were there both times, were both times the same,
Not quite surefooted on the stepping stones;
Just as you were when I first spoke your name

– Whispering it, in my room again, alone.
That double-edged river ran quietly
Past the housefront. We watched it from the window
The next time you came.
Now you turn and say:

'There is such tallness in my family,'
Wondering if our three could be as tall
As we watch them run. This much water's flowed.
And so, as the night traffic starts to crawl

In a city long left behind, we stare
At the window-framed mountain peak above
The town we've settled into, still the same
Two people joined by time, a river, love.

Snippet

Heart on the Hill

Mairéad Ní Uigínn—Love Leitrim. Photo: Joe Sheerin

December 2015 saw a collaboration between Love Leitrim and Darragh Wilkins, Artist in the Community, the creator of what came to be known locally as 'the Heart on the Hill'. This was a huge lit up heart of lights which lay on the side of Benbo mountain facing Manorhamilton.

Local people loved the sight of the heart lighting up in the darkness in that winter month. Just as night fell, rather than pull across their curtains, people living in sight of the heart left their curtains open to view this lighted heart.

In the Love Leitrim group our heart symbolises the pulse of Leitrim, love of community, creativity, our environment, our place. In conversations about the impact of this project, locals told stories of their grief being somehow lightened by the sight, others spoke of the joy they felt and the sense of hope in seeing this giant heart appear out of the darkness.

Sometimes art and creativity speaks to us like nothing else can, it stirs our emotions and often offers comfort, love, beauty, possibility and the 'Heart on the Hill' was such an offering.

In appreciation of the many people who contributed to making this heart light up the mountain.