

September 2016 – Monthly Review

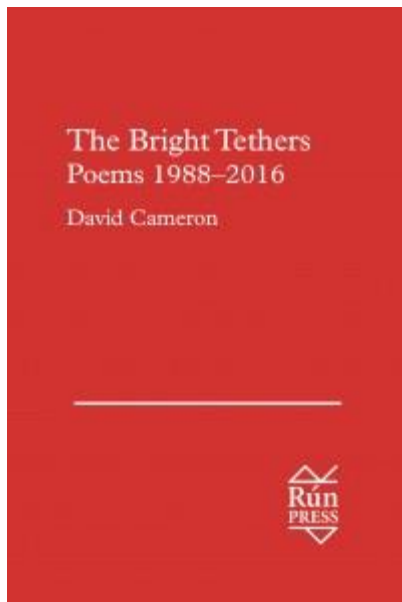
THE BRIGHT TETHERS

Poems 1988 – 2016

DAVID CAMERON

Rún Press ‘Pocket Poems’

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INTRODUCTION

This is the first collection of poems by David Cameron, who was born in Glasgow in 1966. Cameron has been dedicated to poetry all his life. He has said that when he first began to read books, ‘I saw that poems spoke about things that weren’t ordinarily spoken about.’ One event that could not be ‘ordinarily’ spoken about may have been the death of his father George Cameron following a road accident when bicycling to work: both he and his wife Mary (née McDade) were industrial chemists residing in a suburb of Glasgow, East Kilbride. George Cameron’s family were originally from a Gaelic speaking area of the Highlands, and his mother’s family were from Tyrone and Sligo in Ireland. His father, originally Protestant, had converted to Catholicism, and the McDades were Catholic, so Cameron was brought up as a Catholic.

Cameron has been writing poems since his early teens, but ‘kept poems under wraps’ in his early twenties until he sent some to Martin Seymour-Smith who replied that he was ‘a real poet’, and as

Cameron puts it ‘provided the affirmation I sought’. This seems to have been enough. Cameron does not hawk his poems around much – although he has found publishers for a novella and short stories, *Rousseau Moon* (2000) and for a literary crime novel, *The Ghost of Alice Fields* (2014), and he has written reviews and had poems published in a dozen or so periodicals. He won the Hennessy Award for Poetry in Ireland in 2014, and that year he edited and introduced *The Poems of Martin Seymour-Smith*.

The Camerons (the name in Gaelic means the Crooked-noses) and the McDades (the ‘sons of David’) may be said to be clans, but this Cameron belongs to no clan: he is one of the most independent-minded men I know. He has never worked for an institution. After university in Aberdeen (where he began in English Literature and ended in Social Anthropology) he worked briefly in a fish factory and a dairy, then as a care assistant in a ‘hospital school’ for Epilepsy in Surrey. Later he lived and wrote in a cottage ‘underlooking’ the Forth Bridge in Edinburgh, then he moved to Amsterdam where his wife Louise Rice studied glass art. In Amsterdam, Cameron worked as a free-lance language tutor, then as a writer-editor for the European Cultural Foundation (ECF). For some years the Camerons lived in Leitrim where he continued working for the ECF, and since 2015 they have lived in Northern Ireland where he works as a learning consultant.

Cameron does not make a living from literature, and certainly not from poetry. He goes out to work, in one world or another, and he sells his ideas and his skills, but he will never sell his soul. And as an editor he works with words: his poems are spontaneous and inspired, then carefully crafted. He lives an ordinary and unassuming life as a family man, and many of his poems are about ordinary things, but they are not ordinary poems. He sees from a different angle – the poet’s angle. He is not only, as Seymour-Smith put it, ‘a real poet’, he is a real person – and has been called by at least one friend ‘the real David Cameron.’

I have known Cameron since we started corresponding in 1998. Whether playing football with children, or talking humorously as he washes the dishes or on walks along the sea, or over a drink, there is something serious about him – in the old sense of being consistent across any ‘series’ of events. I trust his judgment. And it is hard won. He thinks for himself. Whether these poems are light-hearted or heavy-hearted, the reader will take them seriously.

Cameron cares about being a father – to his own children and, I suspect, to himself. Some people who grow up without a father get stuck in seeking for a father in others. Cameron finds a father in himself. Some of these poems are about fathers and sons. Others are about passions and fears. The changing landscapes of Cameron’s emotions, and of his lives in Scotland, Holland, and Ireland permeate these poems. They are about what IS. They contain few generalisations, and no ‘shoulds’.

Cameron does not teach poetry or write essays about it, but he is as curious as any inspired poet about ‘what poetry is’. His way of exploring this is in his stories and novels, especially the unpublished *Femke*, in which a young woman in Amsterdam becomes the executor of a dying poet, De Koning. The series of 12 sonnets in this collection which begin the section ‘Ring of Truth’ are written ‘as’ De Koning, and in the novel *Femke*, De Koning may be writing them ‘as’ someone else. Who writes a poem? Where does it come from? How does it come from nowhere to move the writer as well as the reader? The writer *is* the first reader of the poem.

As the first reader, Cameron works carefully on his poems. But what strikes me most is their capacity to surprise me. They have clearly surprised him. (Given his high standards for poetry, he would not have written them otherwise). Cameron has remarked that some of the De Koning poems, written as it were in a voice not his own, moved him to tears. Some of the poems in this extraordinarily varied collection have moved me to tears also. Others make me smile. Many make me wonder about life and death. All of them add something to my sense of the world.

Seán Haldane