

Author's Note

Almost all of the poems in this book were written in the four years since the publication of *The Bright Tethers: Poems 1988 to 2016*. Like the poems in that pocket-sized red book, the poems in this pocket-sized blue book fit the definition I gave there of my poetry as ‘a sudden revelation, but of something I realised I had always known’.

Letting go, finally, of so many poems at once did have a liberating effect. I became more prolific than before, and I was already (since moving to Ireland and starting a family) the most prolific I had ever been. And I wrote – at over two hundred lines – the only long poem to be found in my work. But even this wasn't a studied affair. For a number of years now I have almost never written, or typed, a poem; mainly because lines come to me when I'm without notebook, pen or computer – such as on the drive in to Belfast in the mornings. Now this reliance on memory has become an article of faith, or at least a superstition. If I forget some lines – well, that just means they weren't memorable.

An obvious objection is: how could this principle have applied in the case of the book's title poem, which consists entirely of words written in letters home by my father when he was on National Service in Korea? I had been typing up for my brothers the deteriorated fragments of letters (they were a lifeline to the memory of the man we had all four of us lost at a young age) when some phrases and sentences started to repeat in my head. I had thought these words would be a starting-point for a new poem of my own, but I ended up acting as vehicle not ventriloquist. The origins of this apparently contrived poem were just as involuntary as those of the other poems here.

The book ends with a cycle of poems that were recently set to music by the Toronto-based composer, David Jaeger. This is the third cycle we have collaborated on to date, and there have also been individual pieces: some compositions are for unaccompanied voice, some for piano and voice (soprano, mostly), some for cello and others for piano and recitation (by me). Several of the pieces have been performed in Toronto and Belfast, and (since lockdown) in various online settings. I would like to put on record my gratitude to David for stirring, in a new way, my passion for music and the word.

David Cameron