

Classic Poetry Series

Don Paterson
- poems -

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Don Paterson(1963 -)

Don Paterson is a Scottish poet, writer and musician.

Don Paterson was born in Dundee. He won an Eric Gregory Award in 1990 and his poem *A Private Bottling* won the Arvon Foundation International Poetry Competition in 1993. He was included on the list of 20 poets chosen for the Poetry Society's 'New Generation Poets' promotion in 1994. In 2002 he was awarded a Scottish Arts Council Creative Scotland Award.

His first collection of poetry, *Nil Nil* (1993), won the Forward Poetry Prize for Best First Collection. *God's Gift to Women* (1997) won the T. S. Eliot Prize and the Geoffrey Faber Memorial Prize. *The Eyes*, adaptations of the work of Spanish poet Antonio Machado (1875-1939), was published in 1999. He is also editor of *101 Sonnets: From Shakespeare to Heaney* (1999) and of *Last Words: New Poetry for the New Century* (1999) with Jo Shapcott. His latest collection of poems, *Landing Light* (2003), won both the 2003 T.S. Eliot Prize and the 2003 Whitbread Poetry Award. He has also published three collections of aphorisms, *The Book of Shadows* (2004), *The Blind Eye* (2007) and *Best Thought, Worst Thought* (2008).

Don Paterson teaches in the school of English at the University of St. Andrews and is poetry editor for the London publishers Picador. An accomplished jazz guitarist, he works solo and for ten years ran the jazz-folk ensemble, *Lammas*, with Tim Garland. He lives in St. Andrews, Scotland.

Orpheus, his version of Rilke's *Die Sonette an Orpheus*, was published in 2006.

He was appointed Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) in the 2008 Birthday Honours.

My Love

It's not the lover that we love, but love
itself, love as in nothing, as in O;
love is the lover's coin, a coin of no country,
hence: the ring; hence: the moon—
no wonder that empty circle so often figures
in our intimate dark, our skin-trade,
that commerce so furious we often think
love's something we share; but we're always wrong.

When our lover mercifully departs
and lets us get back to the business of love again,
either we'll slip it inside us like the host
or we'll beat its gibbous drum that the whole world
might know who has it. Which was always more my style:

O the moon's a bodhran, a skin gong
torn from the hide of Capricorn,
and many's the time I'd lift it from its high peg,
grip it to my side, tight as a gun,
and whip the life out of it, just for the joy
of that huge heart under my ribs again.
A thousand blows I showered like meteors
down on that sweet-spot over Mare Imbrium
where I could make it sing its name, over and over.
While I have the moon, I cried, no ship will sink,
or woman bleed, or man lose his mind—
but truth told, I was terrible:
the idiot at the session spoiling it,
as they say, for everyone.
O kings petitioned me to pack it in.
The last time, I peeled off my shirt
and found a coffee bruise that ran from hip to wrist.
Two years passed before a soul could touch me.

Even in its lowest coin, it kills us to keep love,
kills us to give it away. All of which
brings us to Camille Flammarion,
signing the flyleaf of his *Terres du Ciel*
for a girl down from the sanatorium,

and his remark—the one he couldn't help but make—
on the gorgeous candid pallor of her shoulders;
then two years later, unwrapping the same book
reinscribed in her clear hand, with my love,
and bound in her own lunar vellum.

Don Paterson

Poetry

In the same way that the mindless diamond keeps
one spark of the planet's early fires
trapped forever in its net of ice,
it's not love's later heat that poetry holds,
but the atom of the love that drew it forth
from the silence: so if the bright coal of his love
begins to smoulder, the poet hears his voice
suddenly forced, like a bar-room singer's -- boastful
with his own huge feeling, or drowned by violins;
but if it yields a steadier light, he knows
the pure verse, when it finally comes, will sound
like a mountain spring, anonymous and serene.

Beneath the blue oblivious sky, the water
sings of nothing, not your name, not mine.

Don Paterson