

Classic Poetry Series

G.E. Patterson
- poems -

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G.E. Patterson()

Poet, critic, and translator G. E. Patterson grew up along the Mississippi River and was educated in the mid-South, the Midwest, the Northeast, and the western United States.

His collections of poetry include *To and From* (Ahsakta Press, 2008), and his first book, *Tug* (1999), won the Minnesota Book Award.

Patterson's awards include fellowships from the Bread Loaf Writers Conference, Cave Canem, the Djerassi Foundation, the MacDowell Colony, and the Minnesota State Arts Board.

After living in the Northeast and on the West Coast, he now makes his home in Minnesota, where he teaches.

Autobiographia

I had everything and luck: Rings of smoke
blown for me; sunlight safe inside the leaves
of cottonwoods; pure, simple harmonies
of church music, echoes of slave songs; scraps
of candy wrappers -- airborne. Everything.
Mother and father, brother, aunts, uncles;
chores and schoolwork and playtime. Everything.

I was given gloves against winter cold.
I was made to wear gloves when I gardened.
I was made to garden; taught to hold forks
in my left hand when cutting, in my right
when bringing food to my mouth. Everything.

I had clothes I was told not to wear outside;
a face you could clean up almost handsome;
I had friends to fight with and secrets, spread
all over the neighborhood; the best teachers,
white and colored. I'm not making this up.
I knew that I had everything. Still do.

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It May Happen

as though it doesn't matter what is real

<i> " . . . something almost . . . with asking."
—Brenda Hillman</I>

According to their signs we're in the country
Far off things are being put on the record
Where it may not matter to anyone
If the shadows hide themselves behind rain
The canal opening below the sky
Daytime moving in swirls the painted colors
Or the idea wind sometimes stops and starts
What we might more properly call nostalgia

If we wanted to we could follow later
Without giving up his place in the world
A color postcard folded in our pockets
The light informing us it's afternoon
When what we feel is we remember feeling
Not long ago it was the time before

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The Responsibility Of Love

Where you are now, the only lights are stars
and oil lamps flaring on vine-covered porches.
Where you are now, it must be midnight.
No one has bothered to name all the roads
that overlook the sea. The freshened air
smells of myrtle and white jasmine. A church
stands on the headland, and I hope it might
keep one thought of me alive in your head.

Autumn is here: warm days becoming cold.
The trees dropp more leaves, love, each time it rains.
I eat my meals with the TV turned on,
but softly so the neighbors won't complain.
The kilim is stained by the food I spilled
the first day-and the second-you were gone

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