

Classic Poetry Series

Andrew Hudgins

- poems -

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Andrew Hudgins (22 April 1951 --)

Andrew Hudgins was born into a military family and spent his early childhood moving from base to base. When he was in high school, his family made its last move, to Montgomery, Ala., where his father subsequently retired from the service. Although an average student, Hudgins read voraciously as a child. He decided to become a writer, but, to please his parents who were concerned about his ability to support himself, he earned a teaching certificate while attending college. After graduating in 1974 with a BA in English and history from Huntingdon College, he taught for one year in the Montgomery public school system.

To further his writing ambitions, Hudgins attended the University of Alabama, earning an MA in English in 1976. He then spent two years studying at Syracuse University in New York. Upon his return to Montgomery, he taught composition as an adjunct instructor at Auburn University at Montgomery. He then enrolled in the Writers' Workshop program at the University of Iowa, from which he earned an MFA in 1983. He joined the English department at the University of Cincinnati in 1985 and is now on the English faculty of Ohio State University. Hudgins began publishing his work while still in graduate school. His first book of poems, *Saints and Strangers*, was published in 1985 and was a Pulitzer Prize finalist. In addition to his many literary awards, Hudgins has also held a number of fellowships in poetry, including residencies at Yaddo and the MacDowell Colony, a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts in 1986, and a Guggenheim Fellowship in 2004.

Interests and Themes

Some of Andrew Hudgins's poetry has been seen to embody the Southern Gothic tradition: grotesque imagery combined with a strong sense of history, religion, and family. Some of his poems are narrative and are told from the points of view of historic or religious figures. He has also written and published personal essays and literary criticism.

Literary Awards

Witter Bynner Award, American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, 1988

Alabama Author Award, Alabama Library Association, 1988, for *Saints and Strangers*

Hanes Award for Poetry, Fellowship of Southern Writers, 1995

Alabama Author Award, Alabama Library Association, 1996, for *The Glass Hammer: A Southern Childhood*

Harper Lee Award for Alabama's Distinguished Writer, 2005, Alabama Writers' Forum and Alabama Writers Symposium

Eserleri:

Diary of a Poem (2011)

American Rendering: New and Selected Poems

Shut up, you're fine!: poems for very, very bad children (2009)

Ecstatic in the Poison (2003)

Babylon in a Jar. 1998. (2001)

The glass anvil (1997)

The Glass Hammer (1994)

The Never-Ending (1991)

Praying drunk (1991)

After the lost war: a narrative (1988)

Saints and Strangers (1985)

Blur

Storms of perfume lift from honeysuckle,
lilac, clover—and drift across the threshold,
outside reclaiming inside as its home.
Warm days whirl in a bright unnumberable blur,
a cup—a grail brimmed with delirium
and humbling boredom both. I was a boy,
I thought I'd always be a boy, pell—mell,
mean, and gaily murderous one moment
as I decapitated daises with a stick,
then overcome with summer's opium,
numb—slumberous. I thought I'd always be a boy,
each day its own millennium, each
one thousand years of daylight ending in
the night watch, summer's pervigilium,
which I could never keep because by sunset
I was an old man. I was Methuselah,
the oldest man in the holy book. I drowsed.
I nodded, slept—and without my watching, the world,
whose permanence I doubted, returned again,
bluebell and blue jay, speedwell and cardinal
still there when the light swept back,
and so was I, which I had also doubted.
I understood with horror then with joy,
dubious and luminous joy: it simply spins.
It doesn't need my feet to make it turn.
It doesn't even need my eyes to watch it,
and I, though a latecomer to its surface, I'd
be leaving early. It was my duty to stay awake
and sing if I could keep my mind on singing,
not extinction, as blurred green summer, lifted
to its apex, succumbed to gravity and fell
to autumn, Ilium, and ashes. In joy
we are our own uncomprehending mourners,
and more than joy I longed for understanding
and more than understanding I longed for joy

Andrew Hudgins

Day Job and Night Job

After my night job, I sat in class
and ate, every thirteen minutes,
an orange peanut—butter cracker.
Bright grease adorned my notes.

At noon I rushed to my day job
and pushed a broom enough
to keep the boss calm if not happy.
In a hiding place, walled off

by bolts of calico and serge,
I read my masters and copied
Donne, Marlowe, Dickinson, and Frost,
scrawling the words I envied,

so my hand could move as theirs had moved
and learn outside of logic
how the masters wrote. But why? Words
would never heal the sick,

feed the hungry, clothe the naked,
blah, blah, blah.
Why couldn't I be practical,
Dad asked, and study law—

or take a single business class?
I stewed on what and why
till driving into work one day,
a burger on my thigh

and a sweating Coke between my knees,
I yelled, 'Because I want to!'—
pained—thrilled!—as I looked down
from somewhere in the blue

and saw beneath my chastened gaze
another slack romantic
chasing his heart like an unleashed dog
chasing a pickup truck.

And then I spilled my Coke. In sugar
I sat and fought a smirk.
I could see my new life clear before me.
It looked the same. Like work.

Andrew Hudgins

In

When we first heard from blocks away
the fog truck's blustery roar,
we dropped our toys, leapt from our meals,
and scrambled out the door

into an evening briefly fuzzy.
We yearned to be transformed—
translated past confining flesh
to disembodied spirit. We swarmed

in thick smoke, taking human form
before we blurred again,
turned vague and then invisible,
in temporary heaven.

Freed of bodies by the fog,
we laughed, we sang, we shouted.
We were our voices, nothing else.
Voice was all we wanted.

The white clouds tumbled down our streets
pursued by spellbound children
who chased the most distorting clouds,
ecstatic in the poison.

Andrew Hudgins

In The Well

My father cinched the rope,
a noose around my waist,
and lowered me into
the darkness. I could taste

my fear. It tasted first
of dark, then earth, then rot.
I swung and struck my head
and at that moment got

another then: then blood,
which spiked my mouth with iron.
Hand over hand, my father
dropped me from then to then:

then water. Then wet fur,
which I hugged to my chest.
I shouted. Daddy hauled
the wet rope. I gagged, and pressed

my neighbor's missing dog
against me. I held its death
and rose up to my father.
Then light. Then hands. Then breath.

Andrew Hudgins

Steppingstone

Home (from Court Square Fountain—
where affluent ghosts still importune
a taciturn
slave to entertain
them with a slow barbarous tune
in his auctioned baritone—
to Hank Williams' headstone
atop a skeleton
loose in a pristine
white suit and bearing a pristine
white bible, to the black bloodstain
on Martin King's torn
white shirt and Jim Clark's baton,
which smashed black skulls to gelatin)
was home, at fifteen: brimstone
on Sunday morning, badminton
hot afternoons, and brimstone
again that night. Often,
as the preacher flailed the lectern,
the free grace I couldn't sustain
past lunch led to clandestine
speculation. Skeleton
and flesh, bone and protein
hold—or is it detain?—
my soul. Was my hometown
Montgomery's molten
sunlight or the internal nocturne
of my unformed soul? Was I torn
from time or was time torn
from me? Turn
on byzantine
turn, I entertain
possibilities still, and overturn
most. It's routine
now to call a hometown
a steppingstone—
and a greased, uncertain,
aleatory stone
at that. Metaphors attune
our ears to steppingstone,
as well a corner-, grind-, and millstone—
all obtain
and all also cartoon
history, which like a piston,
struck hard and often
that blood-dappled town
scrubbed with the acetone
of American inattention. Atone
me no atoning. We know the tune
and as we sing it, we attain
a slow, wanton,
and puritan

grace, grace can't contain.

Andrew Hudgins

The Unpromised Land, Montgomery, Alabama

Despite the noon sun shimmering on Court Street,
each day I leave my desk, and window-shop,
waste time, and use my whole lunch hour to stroll
the route the marchers took. The walk is blistering--
the kind of heat that might make you recall
Nat Turner skinned and rendered into grease
if you share my cheap liberal guilt for sins
before your time. I hold it dear. I know
if I had lived in 1861
I would have fought in butternut, not blue
and never known I'd sinned. Nat Turner skinned
for doing what I like to think I'd do
if I were him.

Before the war
half-naked coffles were paraded to Court Square,
where Mary Chesnut gasped--"seasick"--to see
a bright mulatto on the auction block,
who bantered with the buyers, sang bawdy songs,
and flaunted her green satin dress, smart shoes,
I'm sure the poor thing knew who'd purchase her,
wrote Mrs. Chestnut, who plopped on a stool
to discipline her thoughts. Today I saw,
in that same square, three black girls pick loose tar,
flick it at one another's new white dresses,
then squeal with laughter. Three girls about that age
of those blown up in church in Birmingham.

The legendary buses rumble past the church
where Reverend King preached when he lived in town,
a town somehow more his than mine, despite
my memory of standing on Dexter Avenue
and watching, fascinated, a black man fry
six eggs on his Dodge Dart. Because I watched
he gave me one with flecks of dark blue paint
stuck on the yolk. My mother slapped my hand.
I dropped the egg. And when I tried to say
I'm sorry, Mother grabbed my wrist and marched me
back to our car.

I can't hold to the present.
I've known these streets, their history, too long.
Two months before she died, my grandmother
remembered when I'd sassed her as a child,
and at the dinner table, in midbite,
leaned over, struck the grown man on the mouth.
And if I hadn't said I'm sorry, fast,
she would have gone for me again. My aunt,
from laughing, choked on a piece of lemon pie.
But I'm not sure. I'm just Christian enough
to think each sin taints every one of us,
a harsh philosophy that doesn't seem

to get me very far--just to the Capitol
each day at noon, my wet shirt clinging to my back.
Atop its pole, the stars-and-bars,
too heavy for the breeze, hangs listlessly.

Once, standing where Jeff Davis took his oath,
I saw the Capitol. He shrank into his chair,
so flaccid with paralysis he looked
like melting flesh, white as a maggot. He's fatter now.
He courts black votes, and life is calmer than
when Muslims shot whites on this street, and calmer
than when the Klan blew up Judge Johnson's house
or Martin Luther King's. My history could be worse.
I could be Birmingham. I could be Selma.
I could be Philadelphia, Mississippi.

Instead, I'm this small river town. Today,
as I worked at my desk, the boss
called the janitor, Jerome, I hear
you get some lunchtime pussy every day.
Jerome, toothless and over seventy,
stuck the broom handle out between his legs:
Yessir! When the Big Hog talks
--he waggled his broomstick--I gots to listen.
He laughed. And from the corner of his eye,
he looked to see if we were laughing too.

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