

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.

### <b>Interests and Themes</b>

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.

### <b>Literary Awards</b>

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

# 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



# Playing Dead

Our father liked to play a game.  
He played that he was dead.  
He took his thick black glasses off  
and stretched out on the bed.

He wouldn't twitch and didn't snore  
or move in any way.  
He didn't even seem to breathe!  
We asked, Are you okay?

We tickled fingers up and down  
his huge, pink, stinky feet—  
He didn't move; he lay as still  
as last year's parakeet.

We pushed our fingers up his nose,  
and wiggled them inside—  
Next, we peeled his eyelids back.  
Are you okay? we cried.

I really thought he might be dead  
and not just playing possum,  
because his eyeballs didn't twitch  
when I slid my tongue across 'em.

He's dead, we sobbed—but to be sure,  
I jabbed him in the jewels.  
He rose, like Jesus, from the dead,  
though I don't think Jesus drools.

His right hand lashed both right and left.  
His left hand clutched his scrotum.  
And the words he yelled—I know damn well  
I'm way too young to quote 'em.

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