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## Poems

Andrew Taylor

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## Poems

### **Abstract**

LEARNING HOW TO WIN AT TENNIS, WASHING

# Andrew Taylor

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## LEARNING HOW TO WIN AT TENNIS

The tennis court was a harsh arena,  
a theatre of shame, a brutal rectangle  
brimming with embarrassment and fear  
for a boy with a bad serve. Only  
my backhand was any good — low, sneaky  
and sinister, it skimmed the net  
unaccountably finding my enemy's blind spot.

My best returns were verbal — a volley  
of bright remarks, with a crafty topspin  
of irony that sent them whipping forward  
as they touched down. Unfortunately  
they didn't contribute to the score, while a batch  
of aces from the opposition did.

My own serve was disastrous. The ball  
lacked all decorum, but had an erratic  
career of its own. What I did best  
I soon learnt, was losing, and I practised that  
to perfection. In every match, I reasoned,  
somebody must lose. On the other hand  
nobody *has* to win — so why should it be me?

I swore my own tennis court oath —  
to lose with persistence, determination and skill.  
That way I sided with the underdog,  
assured that my reward, the grand slam  
in the face of all tyrannical opponents,  
was mine hereafter. I was spared a mantel  
of tasteless trophies, a life sentence of weekends  
barracking talented offspring, and pre-  
tournament nerves. I'd planned it all in advance.

Occasionally my strategy broke down.  
A mean little runt who'd never held a racquet  
beat me once at my own game.  
Another opponent cheated, spraining a wrist.  
But mostly it was triumph after triumph.  
With nerves of steel and faultless ineptitude  
by a single stroke — rearranging the rules —  
I'd go down victorious, a snicker on my lips.

## WASHING

The garden's afloat with washing  
that swims like a school of colourful jellyfish  
in shallow becalming sunlight.  
Underpants, little dresses, a teeshirt  
bearing a heron and another  
stamped boldly WANTED, they play  
with the flimsiest rumours of breeze  
like innocent friends  
empty of everything this morning  
but morning's fragrance, sunlight.

When I take them inside  
the clothes-stand will be an autumn tree,  
its smooth limbs empty for a moment  
then filled, extravagantly, with midday.