

Sweet Disorder: Homage to Anne Sexton

"A sweet disorder in the dress
 Kindles in clothes a wantonness:
 A lawn about the shoulders thrown
 Into a fine distraction-
 An erring lace...
 Do more bewitch me than when art
 Is too precise in every part."

- *Robert Herrick*

Relaxed and smiling, you sit there, at ease,
 The famous poet-teacher at her desk.
 And resting in your face and eyes there is
 A look of unc cosmetic glamour like
 The easy confidence an athlete has
 When what she does has undergone the check
 Of measurements, and now is clear as glass.
 So there you sit, your chair tipped back, a glass
 Half-emptied in your hand, and now permit
 Neither the worry of love nor of work
 To bother you; the moment lets you pause.
 Nor can I interrupt here, nor trespass:
 Your photograph's more private than a book.

Your desk is strewn with papers, hardly neat,
 But you had more than house-keeping to do,
 And more to put in order than will show.
 Your type-writer is there, the instrument
 That bore an army of ideas, plans
 And prayers. This desk, more than a birth-place is
 An operating table where you salved
 And severed, tended, amputated, healed
 Your wounds and those of others that you took
 For them to talk about their pain.
 And which is the truer report to take,
 The doctor's diagnosis or the howl
 Of those who feel the cutting of the pain?
 Good doctors utter both - feel pain wide awake
 And learn to know what remedies work best.
 You traded wounds for words in every spell,
 And paid in patience for each sentence done.
 The bargaining was hard; the deal went well.

And here

You did *The Awful Rowing Toward God*.
You pulled the boat alone a distance out,
With little for a map, no stars about,
No one on board to wake to quell the flood,
And no port very near.

Your mind, by instinct happy, came on doubt,
And poems were your means to search it out.
You knew all hope and doubt, like Simone Weil,
And doubting had the better part of you.
A doubt that broke a way inside your heart
Performed your poems and required your art.

But you had more to order than we know.
Your God was the awed one out of the world.
To you at work, a mother with her brood,
Love sometimes seemed less love than work to do.
You loved, and knew more love than love could tell.
Now I look at this picture of your desk
And search its sweet disorder for a hint
Or answer to your secret, deepest, last,
Which you could not explain in secret verse.

— Hamish Guthrie