

Henry Stimpson – Three Poems

Anne Sexton's Advice

Craving a drink and a smoke
after our writing class ended at 3,
Anne Sexton held court at The Dugout,
a dim cave where she dished on agents,
poets and pop songs in her throaty voice,
laughing raucously. And then
a haggard air would gray her face and pass.
We didn't know she drank too much.

A plain thin girl asked her about modeling,
which Anne had tried in her 20s.
“You sell your body
worse than a prostitute,” she rasped.
I hoped to work in publishing.
“Oh, be a milkman!” she said—
a stress-free fresh-air job for a poet.

Two years later, I drove a cab.
I stopped by The Dugout and told her
I'd be getting a master's degree
to become a librarian, a good job for a poet.

“The only thing I'd like about it
would be getting my hands first
on those fresh new books!”
Anne sighed, caressing an invisible one
and inhaling the smell of imagined ink
—the last time I saw her.

Divine Details

Caress the detail, the divine detail
—Vladimir Nabokov to his students at Cornell

Fruithead, goon, looks swank—
teenage slang he earwigged
riding city buses and jotted down
to ventriloquize Lolita.

Diagrams of 2,000 butterflies'
sex organs he measured
under a microscope and used
to untangle the species of the Blues.

*Emma's eyes, hands,
sunshade, hairdo, dress, shoes—
Flaubert's divine detail his students
had to recite to make the grade.*

*The sheer weight of a raindrop,
shining in parasitic luxury
on a cordate leaf caused its tip to dip,
and what looked like a globule of quicksilver
performed a sudden glissando down the center vein
—a vision at 15 that unleashed a torrent of poems.*

He Hailed My Cab One Evening

Brookline, Massachusetts, 1973

Paunchy, fiftyish, in glasses and nylon windbreaker,
the man stood numbly by the trolley station,
stubs raining from the pockets of his plaid pants.
He said he parked his car in the lot, and
now it was gone, stolen, so I drove him
to the police station, where he told me
he lost every last cent at the Wonderland
dog track but he'd pay me if I drove him home.
I simmered while he talked to the cop and then
gave him crap as we motored to his bungalow.
“Wait here,” he said, and shuffled up the walkway.
I sat in the dark thinking I was a fool
to trust this shell-shocked gambler when
at last he ambled out and dropped
seven silver dollars in my supplicant hand.

Henry Stimpson's poems, essays, humor, and articles have appeared in *Cream City Review*, *Poet Lore*, *Lighten Up Online*, *Rolling Stone*, *Muddy River Poetry Review*, *The Aureorean*, *Common Ground Review*, *VollBrooklyn*, *Poets & Writers*, *The Boston Globe*, *Yankee*, *New England Monthly*, *Bostonia*, *Ovunque Siamo*, *Mad River Review*, and *The Philadelphia Inquirer*.