

Greg Johnson on: "The Truth the Dead Know"

In that strange, bitter elegy, "The Truth the Dead Know," Sexton seems to eschew the common rituals of mourning: "Gone, I say and walk from church, / refusing the stiff procession to the grave"; she prefers, instead to "cultivate myself" and to avoid such a powerful intimation of mortality as the death of both parents within a few months. The poem ends, however, by emphasizing not her own refusals but those of the dead, and into her voice creeps something like envy. . . .

From "The Achievement of Anne Sexton." *The Hollins Critics* (1984)

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