

Katha Pollitt on: "The Awful Rowing"

Like Sylvia Plath, with whom she is often paired, Anne Sexton arouses strong feelings of popular adulation and critical unease. How could it have been otherwise? At a time when American poetry was nearly as male-dominated as football, she wrote frankly, extravagantly and without apology about the experience of women. Scarcely less important, she was a democrat practicing the most snobbish of arts. While most of her colleagues were scholars and critics and translators with university affiliations, she was a junior-college dropout and suburban matron who began writing poetry after watching a television program called *How to Write a Sonnet*. With her recurrent bouts of madness, her suicide attempts (she finally succeeded in 1974), her flamboyant sexuality and her vibrant physical presence on the poetry-reading circuit, she fit as no poet since Dylan Thomas the popular stereotype of the self-destructive genius--beautiful, damned and oh-so-sensitive. It was a role she exploited to the hilt.

From "The Awful Rowing" *The Nation* (1981)

Publication Status:

Excerpted Criticism [1]

Publication:

- Private group -

Criticism Target:

Anne Sexton [2]

Author:

Katha Pollitt [3]

Source URL: <http://modernamericanpoetry.org/criticism/katha-pollitt-awful-rowing>

Links

[1] <http://modernamericanpoetry.org/category/publication-status/excerpted-criticism>

[2] <http://modernamericanpoetry.org/poet/anne-sexton>

[3] <http://modernamericanpoetry.org/creator/katha-pollitt>