

Weyman Chan

But I'm no one

Dear Anne Carson,

My friend read me the poem where your mom  
said that the dead walk backwards.

You thought this myth arose from poor translation.

I can attest to your misapprehension.

My social studies teacher in grade 8, Ms Rogers  
believed that it was customary for the Chinese  
to walk backwards when entering a washroom.

So when our class went to Silver Dragon for lunch,  
that's what we did, giggling, even if none of us had to go.

But in my family, we never believed this.

Where do ideas like that come from?

It's true that regret looks back, that death's shadow follows  
us, and your own true companion is solitude,  
whose clarity will fade to black.

It makes sense that the face of death must  
be turned our way. We're still here.

I have to read lots in order to find  
what's useful, Ms Carson.

To walk backwards is to safeguard not-knowing: in the end,  
my striving can't reach more than this. Than this.