

# AMERICAN LIFE IN POETRY

A FREE COLUMN FOR NEWSPAPERS BY TED KOOSER, THE POET LAUREATE OF THE UNITED STATES

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## **American Life in Poetry: Column 020**

BY TED KOOSER, U.S. POET LAUREATE

In this fascinating poem by the California poet, Jane Hirshfield, the speaker discovers that through paying attention to an event she has become part of it, has indeed become inseparable from the event and its implications. This is more than an act of empathy. It speaks, in my reading of it, to the perception of an order into which all creatures and events are fitted, and are essential.

### **The Woodpecker Keeps Returning**

The woodpecker keeps returning  
to drill the house wall.  
Put a pie plate over one place, he chooses another.

There is nothing good to eat there:  
he has found in the house  
a resonant billboard to post his intentions,  
his voluble strength as provider.

But where is the female he drums for? Where?

I ask this, who am myself the ruined siding,  
the handsome red-capped bird, the missing mate.

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