

# AMERICAN LIFE IN POETRY

A FREE COLUMN FOR NEWSPAPERS BY TED KOOSER, POET LAUREATE OF THE UNITED STATES, 2004-2006  
AMERICAN LIFE IN POETRY © 2006 THE POETRY FOUNDATION WEBSITE: WWW.AMERICANLIFEINPOETRY.ORG CONTACT: ALP@POETRYFOUNDATION.ORG

## American Life in Poetry: Column 094

BY TED KOOSER, U.S. POET LAUREATE, 2004-2006

While many of the poems we feature in this column are written in open forms, that's not to say I don't respect good writing done in traditional meter and rhyme. But a number of contemporary poets, knowing how a rigid attachment to form can take charge of the writing and drag the poet along behind, will choose, say, the traditional villanelle form, then relax its restraints through the use of broken rhythm and inexact rhymes. I'd guess that if I weren't talking about it, you might not notice, reading this poem by Floyd Skloot, that you were reading a sonnet.

### Silent Music

My wife wears headphones as she plays  
Chopin etudes in the winter light.  
Singing random notes, she sways  
in and out of shadow while night  
settles. The keys she presses make a soft  
clack, the bench creaks when her weight shifts,  
golden cotton fabric ripples across  
her shoulders, and the sustain pedal clicks.  
This is the hidden melody I know  
so well, her body finding harmony in  
the give and take of motion, her lyric  
grace of gesture measured against a slow  
fall of darkness. Now stillness descends  
to signal the end of her silent music.

Reprinted from "Prairie Schooner," Volume 80, Number 2 (Summer, 2006) by permission of the University of Nebraska Press. Copyright © 2006 by the University of Nebraska Press. Floyd Skloot's most recent book is "The End of Dreams," 2006, Louisiana State University Press. This weekly column is supported by The Poetry Foundation, The Library of Congress, and the Department of English at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. We do not accept unsolicited manuscripts.

American Life in Poetry ©2006 The Poetry Foundation  
Contact: alp@poetryfoundation.org  
This column does not accept unsolicited poetry.