

AMERICAN LIFE IN POETRY

A FREE COLUMN FOR NEWSPAPERS BY TED KOOSER, POET LAUREATE OF THE UNITED STATES, 2004-2006
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American Life in Poetry: Column 272

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

Whether we like it or not, we live with the awareness that death is always close at hand, and in this poem by Don Thompson, a Californian, a dead blackbird can't be pushed out of the awareness of the speaker, nor can it escape the ants, who have their own yard work to do.

Yard Work

My leaf blower lifted the blackbird—
wings still spread, weightless,
floating on the loud, electric wind
almost as if it were alive.

Three or four times it flew,
but fell again, sideslipped down
like a kite with no string,
so I gave up. . . I had work to do,

and when the dust I raised
had settled in that other world
under the rose bushes, the ants
came back to finish theirs.

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