

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 668

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

I've had a couple of aquariums (or is the plural aquaria?), but I didn't take very good care of either one. The glass clouded over with algae, and the fish had to live on whatever they could scrounge because I'd forget to feed them. Some liked eating each other. But here's a poem (a sonnet!) about an aquarium you can actually see into. The poet, Kim Addonizio, lives in California, and her most recent book is *Mortal Trash* (W. W. Norton, 2016).

Aquarium

The fish are drifting calmly in their tank
between the green reeds, lit by a white glow
that passes for the sun. Blindly, the blank
glass that holds them in displays their slow
progress from end to end, familiar rocks
set into the gravel, murmuring rows
of filters, a universe the flying fox
and glass cats, Congo tetras, bristle-nose
pleocostemus all take for granted. Yet
the platys, gold and red, persist in leaping
occasionally, as if they can't quite let
alone a possibility—of wings,
maybe, once they reach the air? They die
on the rug. We find them there, eyes open in surprise.

American Life in Poetry is made possible by The Poetry Foundation (www.poetryfoundation.org), publisher of *Poetry* magazine. It is also supported by the Department of English at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln. Poem copyright ©1994 by Kim Addonizio, "Aquarium," from *The Philosopher's Club*, (BOA Editions, Ltd., 1994). Poem reprinted by permission of Kim Addonizio and the publisher. Introduction copyright ©2018 by The Poetry Foundation. The introduction's author, Ted Kooser, served as United States Poet Laureate Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress from 2004-2006. 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.