

# AMERICAN LIFE IN POETRY

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

AMERICAN LIFE IN POETRY © 2005 THE POETRY FOUNDATION WEBSITE: WWW.AMERICANLIFEINPOETRY.ORG CONTACT: ALP@POETRYFOUNDATION.ORG

## American Life in Poetry: Column 043

BY TED KOOSER, U.S. POET LAUREATE

Lola Haskins, who lives in Florida, has written a number of poems about musical terms, entitled "Adagio," "Allegro," "Staccato," and so on. Here is just one of those, presenting the gentleness of pianissimo playing through a series of comparisons.

### To Play Pianissimo

Does not mean silence.  
The absence of moon in the day sky  
for example.

Does not mean barely to speak,  
the way a child's whisper  
makes only warm air  
on his mother's right ear.

To play pianissimo  
is to carry sweet words  
to the old woman in the last dark row  
who cannot hear anything else,  
and to lay them across her lap like a shawl.

From "Desire Lines: New and Selected Poems," BOA Editions, Rochester, NY.  
Copyright © 2004 by Lola Haskins and reprinted by permission of the author  
and the publisher. This weekly column is supported by The Poetry Foundation,  
The Library of Congress, and the Department of English at the University of  
Nebraska, Lincoln. The column does not accept unsolicited manuscripts.

American Life in Poetry ©2005 The Poetry Foundation  
Contact: alp@poetryfoundation.org