

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 449

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

I'm a sucker for miniatures, I suppose because it's easy to believe I have control over my world when some of its parts are very small and I have positioned them to my liking. Here's a telling poem about a tiny plastic soldier by Mary M. Brown of Indiana.

Classic Toy

The plastic army men are always green.

They're caught in awkward poses,
one arm outstretched as if to fire,
legs parted and forever stuck on a swiggle
of support, as rigid and green as the boots.

This one has impressions of pockets,
a belt, a collar, a grip on tiny binoculars
intended to enlarge, no doubt, some
tiny enemy.

In back, attached to the belt is a canteen
or a grenade (it's hard to tell). The helmet
is pulled down low, so as to hide the eyes.

If I point the arm, the gun, toward me,
I see that this soldier is very thin.

It's almost unreal, how thin he is.

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