

# 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 479

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

The Impressionists, on both sides of the Atlantic, gave us a number of handsome paintings of rural scenes, and here's a poem by the distinguished American poet, Catharine Savage Brosman, that offers us just such a picture, not in pigments but in words.

### Cattle Fording Tarryall Creek

With measured pace, they move in single file,  
dark hides, white faces, plodding through low grass,  
then walk into the water, cattle-style,  
indifferent to the matter where they pass.

The stream is high, the current swift—good rain,  
late snow-melt, cold. Immerging to the flank,  
the beasts proceed, a queue, a bovine chain,  
impassive, stepping to the farther bank—

continuing their march, as if by word,  
down valley to fresh pasture. The elect,  
and stragglers, join, and recompose the herd,  
both multiple and single, to perfect

impressions of an animated scene,  
the creek's meanders, milling cows, and sun.  
Well cooled, the cattle graze knee-deep in green.  
We leave them to their feed, this painting done.

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