American Life in Poetry: Column 810

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

There will be many, many poems written about these days of great fear the world is enduring, just as there were after 9/11, and I like to think this one by Richard Levine, who lives in Brooklyn, will have long legs, one generation leading the next as they walk together into an uncertain future. His most recent book is Richard Levine: Selected Poems, (Future Cycle Press, 2019).

Sheltered in Place

You watch your boy struggle with giving up the turtle, returning it to the pond where he’d found it on a walk—first time you’d all been out in days.

How thoughtful he thought he’d been, making it a home in the home where the family sheltered in place. How he cared for his armored friend.

Having picked flowers, knowing they’d die, you understand the urge to pluck the exotic, the beautiful—any diversion from fear, which is in itself a disease.

That morning, you helped your boy give up the idea of living forever.