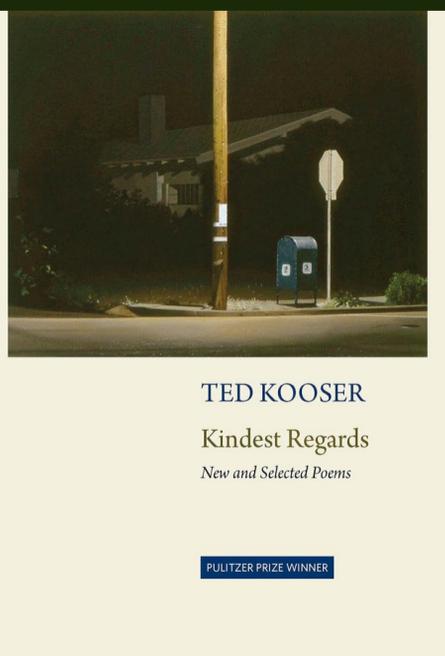
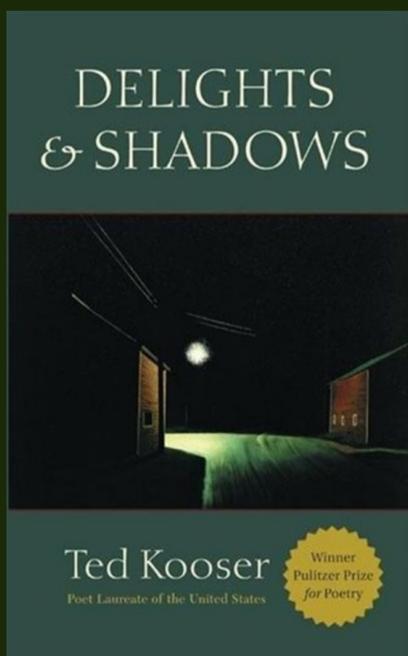
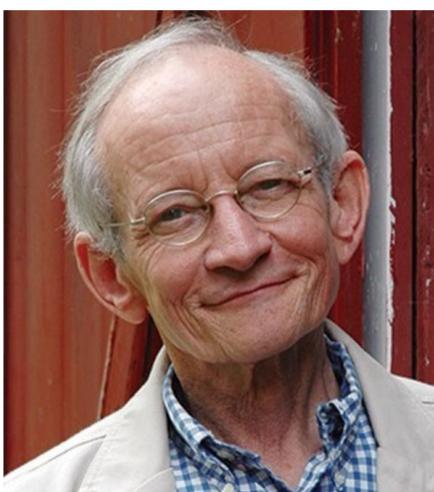


Plenary Speaker -

Ted Kooser

Highly regarded Nebraskan poet **Ted Kooser** will headline the 2020 CSC. A two-time United States Poet Laureate (2004-2006) and Pulitzer Prize winner (2005), Kooser is currently a Presidential Professor at The University of Nebraska, teaching the writing of poetry. His poetry has been collected in a number of full-length volumes and special editions and has appeared in many literary periodicals. *Delights and Shadows* took the Pulitzer and his most recent collection, *Kindest Regards* (2018), celebrates his sixty years as a working American poet.



Director's Comments

The CSC has a remarkable record of presenting the nation's leading poets, gifted men and women of letters. Over the last decade we've featured Billy Collins, Dana Gioia, Christian Wiman, Linda Pastan, Marie Howe, Tracy K. Smith and Naomi Shihab Nye. Now, **Ted Kooser**, the former U.S. Poet Laureate and Pulitzer Prize winner, joins the illustrious group.

Kooser's writing is known for its clarity, precision, and accessibility and he will prove an exceptional conversation partner for multiple disciplines.

But, I can better *show* his genius than label it.

So, to whet your appetite for Kooser's work, here are two poems that reveal his skill at describing the particulars of the "human condition." The first is from an early collection and presents a haunting image of a troubled family, created whole cloth from what they have left behind.

"Abandoned Farmhouse," Flying at Night: Poems 1965-1985. © University of Pittsburgh Press

He was a big man, says the size of his shoes
on a pile of broken dishes by the house;
a tall man too, says the length of the bed
in an upstairs room; and a good, God-fearing man,
says the Bible with a broken back
on the floor below the window, dusty with sun;
but not a man for farming, say the fields
cluttered with boulders and the leaky barn.

A woman lived with him, says the bedroom wall
papered with lilacs and the kitchen shelves
covered with oilcloth, and they had a child,
says the sandbox made from a tractor tire.
Money was scarce, say the jars of plum preserves
and canned tomatoes sealed in the cellar hole.
And the winters cold, say the rags in the window frames.
It was lonely here, says the narrow country road.

Something went wrong, says the empty house
in the weed-choked yard. Stones in the fields
say he was not a farmer; the still-sealed jars
in the cellar say she left in a nervous haste.
And the child? Its toys are strewn in the yard
like branches after a storm-a rubber cow,
a rusty tractor with a broken plow,
a doll in overalls. Something went wrong, they say.

The second poem comes from Kooser's Pulitzer Prize winning collection. Like "Abandoned Farmhouse," this poem is situated in the harsh geography of the Midwest. On the surface the poem is a stirring ode to his beloved parent. But, notice how Kooser holds the tension to the very end, deepening his human relationship through their engagement with the beauty and hope of nature.

"Mother" Ted Kooser, *Delights & Shadows*. © Copper Canyon Press, 2004.

Mid April already, and the wild plums
bloom at the roadside, a lacy white
against the exuberant, jubilant green
of new grass an the dusty, fading black
of burned-out ditches. No leaves, not yet,
only the delicate, star-petaled
blossoms, sweet with their timeless perfume.

You have been gone a month today
and have missed three rains and one nightlong
watch for tomadoes. I sat in the cellar
from six to eight while fat spring clouds
went somersaulting, rumbling east. Then it poured,
a storm that walked on legs of lightning,
dragging its shaggy belly over the fields.

The meadowlarks are back, and the finches
are turning from green to gold. Those same
two geese have come to the pond again this year,
honking in over the trees and splashing down.
They never nest, but stay a week or two
then leave. The peonies are up, the red sprouts
burning in circles like birthday candles,

for this is the month of my birth, as you know,
the best month to be born in, thanks to you,
everything ready to burst with living.

There will be no more new flannel nightshirts
sewn on your old black Singer, no birthday card
addressed in a shaky but businesslike hand.
You asked me if I would be sad when it happened

and I am sad. But the iris I moved from your house
now hold in the dusty dry fists of their roots
as green knives and forks as if waiting for dinner,
as if spring were a feast. I thank you for that.
Were it not for the way you taught me to look
at the world, to see the life at play in everything,
I would have to be lonely forever.

As you can see Kooser is a literary artist of the highest order and his work with us will provide language to help frame "A Livable World: Partnerships in Creation, Justice, Wellness and Economy." Make plans now to join us, June 3 – 5, 2020!

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