



Friends of
Lorine Niedecker

Issue #26
Summer 2017

I was the solitary plover



Lorine Inspires Another School

Pictured above are the enthusiastic students of Barrie Elementary School in Fort Atkinson. They completed a painted mural in the hallway that includes words of Lorine Niedecker. Guided by teacher Susie Belzer the mural carries the river painted in the lunch room out into the hallway. We are thrilled that Lorine is now present in yet another Fort Atkinson School.

Lorine Niedecker Day Declared State-wide

On Wednesday, May 10, 2017, the Wisconsin Legislature declared Friday, May 12, 2017 Lorine Niedecker Day. (Niedecker was born on that date in 1903.) State Rep. Cody Horlacher (R-Mukwonago), who sponsored the legislation, read a proclamation and delivered several lines of Niedecker's poetry from the Assembly floor before the unanimous voice vote.

Up in the balcony observing the celebration were Ronnie Hess, a Friends of Lorine Niedecker board member and chair of the newly formed Education Committee, and Joel Van Haafden, a member of the committee.

Van Haafden had met Rep. Horlacher while both of them worked on establishing a warming house at Haumerson's Pond recreation area. As The Daily Union (in a front-page story) reported, "Van Haafden reached out to

Horlacher's office about the possibility of a proclamation recognizing Niedecker's birthday." Rep. Horlacher was quoted as saying, "I think it's a great idea because she is influential, not only to the region, but also to the state and nationally."

The proclamation read, in part:

1. Whereas Lorine Niedecker's reputation as a major twentieth-century poet has expanded since her death in 1970 with the publication of her collected works and two editions of correspondence, and
2. Whereas Lorine Niedecker has been referred to as "The Emily Dickinson of the Midwest," and
3. Whereas Lorine Niedecker is well-known internationally, her poetry translated into Spanish, Portuguese and French, and

I was the solitary plover

a pencil

for a wing-bone

From the secret notes

I must tilt

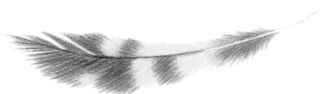
upon the pressure

execute and adjust

In us sea-air rhythm

"We live by the urgent

wave of the verse"



4. Whereas she became admired by her poetic peers for the subtlety of her tightly crafted, nuanced and ironic poems, as well as for her total devotion to her calling, and

5. Whereas she is perhaps best known as a “poet of place” who wrote about the Blackhawk Island that she loved.

The official plaque has been placed inside the Lorine Niedecker Room at the Dwight Foster Public Library in Fort Atkinson.



Close Reading

Matthew Hamblin

Lorine Niedecker’s life on Blackhawk Island is often written about in terms of alienation and isolation, especially in regard to her perceived seclusion from avant-garde poetry circles.¹ Niedecker’s relative rural isolation was, however, a deliberate choice that shaped her innovative poetic practice which was based on syntony – the state of being harmoniously responsive to one’s surroundings.² As Jenny Penberthy observes in her introduction to *Lorine Niedecker: Collected Works* (2002), Niedecker’s poetry is ‘distinguished by its attentive use of sound, a consequence perhaps of her poor eyesight and her experience of her mother Daisy’s deafness, but also of her immersion in the rich soundscape of Blackhawk Island, her life-long home’.³ Niedecker’s poetic practice is not only characterised by a deep engagement with place, but as this close reading hopes to demonstrate, by a particular attentiveness to her sounded environment.

Bird singing
ringing yellow
green

My friend made green

ring

—his painting—

grass

the sweet bird

flew in⁴

An immediately striking detail in this untitled poem from 1965 is the repetition of the sound *in*, which appears seven times in the 18-word poem. The first stanza ‘Bird singing / ringing yellow / green’ not only tells us that the speaker is experiencing a ringing but also attributes an aural quality to colours, which are ordinarily thought to be a visual sensation.⁵ By including the sound *in* seven times the reader also experiences a ringing (if we think of *in* as onomatopoeic for a sonic ‘ring’). The positioning of the *in* within the poem further demonstrates how the visual and aural qualities work together with the poem’s semantic meaning. *in* appears five times in the first five lines.⁶ The sixth line ‘—his painting—’ is bordered by dashes which act to both visually align the words with their semantic meaning and generate a pause both before and after them.⁷ The meaning of the following word ‘grass’ is unclear; does it represent the friend’s painting of grass which is so vivid the colour ‘rings’? Does the painting depict a ring of grass? Is the speaker looking out of the window at the grass? The positioning of the word, indented and surrounded by the white of the page, heightens this uncertainty – ‘grass’ appears to represent the only pauses for silent contemplation in the poem.⁸ The silence is immediately shattered by both the following content – the ‘sweet bird’ flying in – and the return of the phoneme *in* and, therefore, the commencement of the ringing.⁹ Much like the

for a wing-bone

painter of the poem who makes green 'ring', Niedecker has made her poem reverberate.

The poem also encapsulates another defining feature of Niedecker's poetic practice, the conflation of the visual and the aural. Within the word 'painting' there is both a visual 'in' and a sonic *in*. The first 'in' does not ring like the other seven because the 'i' joins with the preceding 'a' to make the phoneme /a/, a different sound altogether from the second 'in' (*in*). Despite having a different sound and therefore not rhyming sonically, the first 'in' of 'painting' does create an eye rhyme with the other seven 'in's. This interplay between the visual and the sonic may be a formal reference to the subject matter, a poetic approach that Niedecker often practiced.

In her biography of Niedecker, *A Poet's Life* (2011), Margot Peters claims that Niedecker wrote the poem about a painting of a golden prothonotary warbler painted by her friend Gail Roub.¹⁰ Peters says that although Niedecker never saw the prothonotary warbler she would often hear it in spring and in autumn as it took a break from its migration path to feed in the wooded swamps near her Blackhawk Island cabin.¹¹ If the prothonotary warbler is indeed the bird of the painting and therefore the poem, then the fact that Niedecker's encounters with the bird were primarily aural may give basis for her use of the visual 'in'. While the poem begins with the sound of the bird (in both content and in speech sound), the eye rhyme is introduced in the fourth-last-line '—his painting—'. This could be a reference to the fact that Roub's painting allowed Niedecker to 'see' the bird (the composer of the ringing), rather than just hear it — which is why the reader, much like Niedecker, experiences a painting with the visual 'in', a visualisation of the cacophony.

1. Rachel Blau Duplessis, 'Lorine Niedecker, the Anonymous: Gender, Class, Genre and Resistances' *Sibila* < <http://sibila.com/brenglishlorine-niedecker-the-anonymous-gender-class-genre-and-resistances-23439> > [accessed Thursday 12th May 2016].

2. Peter Middleton, 'Lorine Niedecker's "Folk Base" and Her Challenge to the American Avant-Garde' in *The Objectivist Nexus: Essays in Cultural Poetics*, ed. by Rachel Blau Du Plessis and Peter Quartermain (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1999), p. 161.

3. Jenny Penberthy, 'Life and Writing', in *Lorine Niedecker: Collected Works* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), p. 2.

4. Lorine Niedecker, *Lorine Niedecker: The collected Works* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 2002), p. 221.

5. *Ibid*, p. 221.

6. *Ibid*, p. 221.

7. *Ibid*, p. 221.

8. *Ibid*, p. 221.

9. *Ibid*, p. 221.

10. Margot Peters, *Lorine Niedecker: A Poet's life* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2011), p. 196.

11. *Ibid*, pp. 196-197.



Save the Dates!

2017 Lorine Niedecker
WI Poetry Festival will be
September 29 and 30.

Hoard Museum
401 Whitewater Ave.
Fort Atkinson, WI

Details available on Page 9
Schedule has been posted to:
lorineniedecker.org/festival.cfm

From the secret notes

POETRY

Water / Rock
Lorine listens
lays folk/
lore
along the muddy
shore of Rock
River.

Lorine lies
the night
listens
to Rock/
River
rhythms
tumbling

and
night creatures
scattering
bones
until they
float
gnawed
and striking.
Word

Nancy Shea

Evergreen

With fierce verticality
they rise from a soft snow-dusted
rust of needles
cold conifers whisper a green solace
embedded in winter's solstice

these Spring days they tower
darkly in the path
of late afternoon light
while deciduous trees
breezily dapple
in sunlight play

even in this verdant overflow
spruce, cedar, and pine
harbor snow dreams
remember when your grandfather
took you skipping
through the cemetery
after dinner
holding warm your hand

Sylvia Cavanaugh



Meditation from the Cabin Window (Blackhawk Island, May 30, 2017)

Lorine's trees, her rocks, her day-break
birdsong, her stillness of deep night.
Hum of insects, tree frog's thrum.
The river today running fast and brown.
The forest floor, all mud and water.
Water. Always the water.

Jean Preston

execute and adjust

Rotary Garden, Janesville

A monk bends low to sweep.
Red maple leaf falls,
settles in a groove of raked gravel.
In the distance, a bell.

In front of the tea house
I pocket a smooth stone.
It is for a friend
who is dying.

Inside, hot tea steams
in white ceramic cups.
A bowl of rice rests on the bench.
Breeze urges bamboo chimes to rotate.

The monk teaches
let go of longing and aversion.
Will I miss the day more
than I welcome night?

Stream reflects moonlit
ripples over stones
returning to mountain rain.
Red ribbon shimmers and spins.

Mary Rowin



Lantern low, a hearth dim
The moon, a dog, her snore

A grand adventure

“A month on Ronsard”
(I took longer)

Bury me in a tree
so she can bust
me out

Steven Manuel

Careful,
 you say
rock blue
the river
I say,
 I write
to not think
about you
stone guide
these two lines
shoring
simply the folds of my brain
the *I*-space
or a space in between
thigh-like
 when/where do
two become one
by shadow,
luster touch,
she shape,
you helped me make
that then went missing
never heard you say the word life
but I said your name once & dreamt of drowning in its sound
a deep silence for God to play in.
Your jay bird warning.

Lara Schoorl



From the secret notes

Growing Season

All of us —
leaf flower stem —
strain to the light
proliferate
seize space
crowd others out

Growing season's short
We maximize
our plots
the spotlight
dowses of rain
tickling insects

Days flash past
Grasp one hold fast
plant our heels
slow Earth's wheeling
Soon enough
we'll all fall flat

Georgia Ressmeyer



A Warm Room

But not silence
Whirring heater
A door that shuts opens again
A cup that touches the table
The table that scratches the tile floor
Everything is grounded
The snow bedding down the grass
Dried prairie plants offered to the wind
The branches of trees stretching earthward
As much as to sky.
Quiet me in this noise
I live in
In this place A Warm Room

Ronnie Hess

Like that

the sparrows, how they flew inches over
never touching the gravestones

those corners of forever
by which I mean

both small bird and stone

or even the way sadness comes
sometimes

with all of its weight
unexpected

or waking to wind
in the night

and finding, unexpectedly,
the heart

Yellow Boat

Early afternoon
September's tides
water so blue
it breaks
the thing inside of you
that has tried
to stay unbroken
for so long (for)

as long
as there has been
earth and strand
the sea
has known the way

and how

Jeanie Tomasko

execute and adjust

If you keep writing, you won't disappear.

You tell your toddler son to close his eyes
and visualize
a hollow tree trunk.
Your sheets so soft
against bare feet,
though your toes are never painted.

In yoga, you decide your favorites
are child's pose, downward dog
and the emerald green
polish of your neighbor's toes
Alive,
you keep writing
and intermittently pedaling
toy tractors.

Emilie Lindemann



NEWS

What Region?

The Friends of Lorine Niedecker are pleased to announce that the first two titles from *What Region?*, our monograph series honoring the work and the legacy of Wisconsin's most famous poet, have now been released as .pdf files which will be available at the Friends' website: <http://www.lorineniedecker.org/>. These monographs are: "Lorine Niedecker's Century 1903-2003" by Jenny Penberthy and "Increase Lapham & Lorine Niedecker" by Paul G. Hayes & Martha Bergland.

The Friends are also pleased to announce the addition of David Wilk and Jenny Penberthy to the editorial board of *What Region?*, joining current members Tom Montag, Karl Gartung, and Chuck Stebleton. David Wilk is a poet and publisher and he was editor of one of the first extended examinations of Lorine's work

gathered in his magazine, *Truck #16*. Jenny Penberthy, of course, was editor of the incomparable *Lorine Niedecker: Collected Works*. Welcome, David and Jenny.

The monograph series is intended to provide the interested lay reader with access and insight into the life and work of Lorine Niedecker. The ideal monograph will read more like a personal essay than an academic treatise, and will offer advancement of our understanding of Lorine based in the evidence of her biography and her writing.

The editorial board is currently seeking additional monographs to further the series. Monograph authors receive a stipend of \$250. Essays for consideration (or summaries of proposed essays) should be submitted to the Managing Editor, Tom Montag, at tmmontag@centurylink.net.



Friends of Lorine Niedecker Develop Study Unit

The Friends of Lorine Niedecker is excited to announce that a new study guide has been designed to teach middle school students about Lorine Niedecker's work, and is now available from the Friends' website. The online guide introduces 6th through 8th graders to the poet's work, while also teaching them about the natural world.

The study units, for example, include instruction on the poems *July, waxwings*, and *Linnaeus in Lapland*. The lessons ask questions such as, "What is a naturalist?" and "What is a cedar waxwing?" helping students place the image of a bird into a particular context, and encouraging a deeper understanding and respect for the environment or natural world. The lessons can be used both in the classroom and outdoors. The unit is finalized with a creative writing assignment at a local park or nature center.

Niedecker, who was born and raised in Fort Atkinson, WI, and lived on Blackhawk Island along the banks of the Rock River, was called a "poet of place." She had a deep appreciation for nature, often recognizing animals and

In us sea-air rhythm

plants in her poems, and referencing the scientific classification system devised by Swedish scientist Carl Linnaeus.

The study guide was written over several months by Fort Atkinson educators Joel Van Haaften and Kathryn Irvine. Both are actively involved with the Friends of Lorine Niedecker and serve on its education committee.

Van Haaften hopes there will be broad implementation of the study guide. "Because of the Fort Atkinson Middle School's proximity to the Bark River Nature Trail and Haumerson's Pond we are hoping that this unit will work well with our students in Fort Atkinson," Van Haaften says. But he adds, "We designed the study unit for any school in Wisconsin willing to learn through a multi-disciplinary approach involving poetry, creative writing, and natural sciences."

The guide was devised as part of a revitalized education initiative. There are plans for a study unit for 4th and 5th graders, as well as for a pilot project this fall for area educators on "Teaching Lorine Niedecker." A study guide for high school students in a twentieth-century literature class was created several years ago. Both it and the new middle-school study guide are available at <http://lorineniedecker.org>.



CONTRIBUTORS

Originally from Pennsylvania, **Sylvia Cavanaugh** has a background in Urban Planning and teaches high school cultural studies. Her chapbook, *Staring Through My Eyes*, was published in 2016 by Finishing Line Press.

Donna Fleischer's poems and essays appear in literary anthologies and journals worldwide. < *Periodic Earth* >, is her fourth chapbook. She makes her living by assisting the University of Hartford's departments of biology and chemistry as an office coordinator.

Matthew Hamblin has recently completed a Masters at the University of Glasgow on Lorine Niedecker. He lives in Nottingham where he co-edits the poetry and visual art zine *FRONT HORSE*.

Ronnie Hess is a journalist and poet. She is the author of three poetry chapbooks: *Whole Cloth*, *Ribbon of Sand*, and *A Woman in Vegetable*; as well as two culinary travel guides: *Eat Smart in France* (2010) and *Eat Smart in Portugal* (2017). She lives in Madison, WI.

Emilie Lindemann's first full-length collection of poetry is *mother-mailbox* (2016, Misty Publications). She is an Associate Professor of English at Silver Lake College and lives on a farm in rural Manitowoc County.

Steven Manuel is editor of *from a Compos't*, a poet and lives in Asheville, NC.

Jean Preston holds an M.F.A. in Creative Writing from the Stonecoast Writing Program. She authored *All the Queen's Horses* and *Sixteen Mothers*, and her poems have been published in various publications. Jean directs the Writing Center at Carthage College.

Georgia Ressemeyer, a Pushcart Prize poetry nominee, received this year's Honorable Mention Award in the Lorine Niedecker poetry contest sponsored by the Council for Wisconsin Writers. Her third poetry book, *Home/Body*, is out in August of 2017 from Pebblebrook Press, an imprint of Stoneboat Literary Journal.

Mary C. Rowin received an Honorable Mention in the 2017 Wisconsin People and Ideas Writing Contest. Her poems have appeared recently in *Hummingbird*, *Oakwood Literary Magazine*, *The Drowning Gull* and *you are here*, *The Journal of Creative Geography*.

Lara Schoorl is a poet and art historian from The Netherlands, and lives in Los Angeles. She is a co-author of the *end of may* and editor of the experimental exhibition publication, *Institutional Garbage*, forthcoming also, with the Green Lantern Press.

Nancy Shea has been a reader and writer of poetry for many years. She grew up in Janesville, WI. Her mother had visited the Hoard Historical Museum one day and told her that an internationally known poet had lived on Black-

(Continued on back cover.)

"We live by the urgent"

**Lorine Niedecker Wisconsin Poetry Festival
September 29 and 30, 2017
Hoard Historical Museum, Fort Atkinson, WI**

Friday, Sept. 29

- 8:00 a.m. – 6:00 p.m. Dwight Foster Library is open **Library**
Lorine Niedecker Room is open for reading, writing and quiet reflection
- 9:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. Hoard Historical Museum is open **Museum**
Exhibits include the Lorine Niedecker Room and Native American and regional history, books and regional gifts.
Festival info, maps, information for self-guided tours of LN sites including her cabin on Blackhawk Island and gravesite will be available at the Museum and Library.
- 5:00 Dinner gathering **Café Carp**
- 6:30 Open Mic –James Roberts, moderator **Dwight Foster Library**

Saturday, Sept. 30

- 8:00 Farmers Market, Poem While You Wait, Paul Wiegel, Fox River Poetry **Across from Library**
- 10:00 Poetry Cafe and Poetry Store Open **Hoard Museum**
Registration, freebies, exchanges, light refreshment, Poet's book shop
- 10:00 Festival Welcome and Niedecker News and LOTS of it - Ann Engelman
- 10:15 40 Years Later - David Pavelich, Director, UW-Madison Special Collections
Taking inspiration from the recent rediscovery and return to Fort Atkinson of over 100 books and literary magazines from Lorine Niedecker's personal library, this presentation discusses the poet's fascinating book collection: how was it formed? What does it include? And most importantly, what does the book collection tell us – if anything – about Lorine Niedecker?
- 11:00 Lorine For a New Generation - Several educators and community members will present their programs and resources that have engaged students and poets in the spirit of Lorine. Specific ideas will be shared. Panel: Jean Preston – Carthage College, Joel Van Haaften – Fort Schools, Chris Fink – Beloit College, Amy Lutzke – Friends Of Lorine Niedecker
- 12:00 Lunch** (Box lunch available, signup open in August.)
- 1:00 Blackhawk Island Writer's Workshops **Blackhawk Island**
- Lorine's Cabin. Rita Mae Reese facilitator (Free, limit to 20, registration required.)
 - BHI Walk and Observational Poetry. Chuck Stebelton and Richard Meier (Free, registration required.) This approx. 2 mile walk will start at the top of Blackhawk Island Road and end at the Island Bar and Grill.
 - Rock River. Explore the Rock River Walk in Fort Atkinson on your own, curl up in the Lorine Niedecker Room or other Lorine destination to write.
- 4:00 Wisconsin Poetry Festival Open Mic — Moderator-Rita Mae Reese **Island Bar and Grill**
This Open Mic is open to all. Participants of the Writer's Workshops are especially encouraged to read poems from the afternoon, or bring another poem to share.
- 5:15 Island Bar and Grill for dinner and the Lorine Niedecker Grasshopper Invitational.

*More information about the Festival presenters is available on the Web site.
www.lorineniedecker.org or Google Wisconsin Poetry Festival.*

ABOUT US

The Friends of Lorine Niedecker is a non-profit corporation. There are no staff, just devoted volunteers. Our goals include preserving and expanding the legacy of Lorine Niedecker, as well as, offering educational materials, access to archives, a semiannual newsletter and events as time and resources are available. We are supported through donations and grants.

Donations are always welcome and are fully tax-deductible.

The Solitary Plover is issued twice yearly, in winter and in summer. Sign up for the email version on our website.

Friends of Lorine Niedecker
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Fort Atkinson, WI 53538
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Find Lorine on Facebook

hawk Island. This bit of news lay silent for over twenty-five years until Nancy moved to the area. Now she is a member of The Friends of Lorine Niedecker, where she shares her appreciation of Lorine Niedecker poetry with a scholarly crew.

Jeanie Tomasko is the author of a few books, most recently *The Collect of the Day* (Bent Paddle Press), and *Violet Hours* (Taraxia Press), a collection of the antics of a unique little girl. She can be found on her website (jeanietomasko.com).

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