

Friends of Lorine Niedecker Issue #7 Winter 2008

I was the solitary plover

a pencil

for a wing-bone

From the secret notes

I must tilt

upon the pressure

execute and adjust

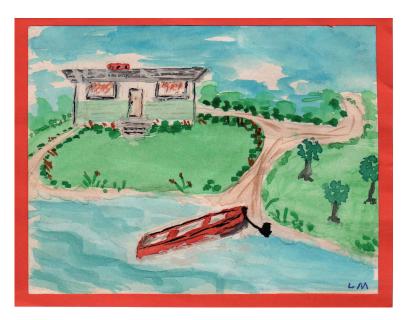
In us sea-air rhythm

'We live by the urgent



wave of the verse"

I was the solitary plover ...



Niedecker Art

This colorful watercolor view of the Niedecker cottage from the river was painted by Lorine Niedecker Millen. It is on the front of a small greeting card that she sent to her step-daughter Julie for her birthday. Julie Shoessow visited Fort Atkinson on a beautiful afternoon this past autumn. We were able to visit all the Niedecker landmarks, hear stories and reconnect. Julie very generously donated this special watercolor, inscribed, "Happy Birthday Julie, Love Lorine and Dad."

A similar version of this painting appears on the dust jacket of "Between Your House and Mine": The Letters of Lorine Niedecker to Cid Corman, 1960 to 1970. The note on the jacket says: "Niedecker watercolor from Homemade Poems, a handwritten booklet sent to Cid Corman in October 1967" (Berg Collection).



Julie donated another watercolor titled "Northwest Depot, Milwaukee 1969." Note that both paintings are signed by Lorine with the initials "LM" in the lower right hand corner.

These items will become a part of the Niedecker collection at the Hoard Historical Museum. Many thanks to Julie for her generosity and for the opportunity to share these with all of you.

To view these paintings in color, go to www.lorineniedecker.org/win08.pdf

a pencil for a wing-bone...

NIEDECKER NEWS

There have been inquiries about the Niedecker cabin and cottage. The property is privately owned and the owners have not been able to visit as regularly as they would like. This spring I contacted them to see if they might consider allowing me to get some work done on their behalf. Bob and Josh Heussner of Fort Atkinson were hired. They have been restoring homes in the Fort Atkinson area. One of their homes was featured on the Fort Atkinson Historical Society's Historic Home Tour. They consented to take on the project and work on the cabin began in June. The cabin was scraped and painted, windows were repaired and new screens built, trees and brush were cleared, a new roof was put on and the beloved pump was painted. At one point during the project it was clear that we needed a push on several projects to move the progress along and I put out a call for help. Volunteers worked tirelessly over a July weekend. The camaraderie was terrific, the spirit of Lorine was present, the river was beautiful and there was only one bee sting. Many thanks to Karl Gartung, Chuck Stebleton, Cathy Cook, Andy Yocom, Steve Seaman, Susan Wenger, Amy Lutzke, Greg Misfeldt, Sylvia Sipple, Karen Laudon, Mary Linton, Pat Moran and Walter Moran.

In September work on the cottage near the river was started. It was painted, the screened porch repaired and re-roofed, the deck scrubbed and stained, and interior repairs were made. We are so grateful to the Gans family for their commitment to the significance of the property. If you visit, please remember that the property is privately owned. We hope to post additional pictures of the project to the Web site at some point.

Ann Engelman

Lorine Niedecker Collected Works

This fall the University of California sent a small postcard announcing a sale. Curious, we went to their Web site and found that the *Lorine Niedecker Collected Works* by Jenny Penberthy was a part of the sale. Our checking account was low (now lower) so we put out a quick call to see if we could raise money to purchase as many copies as possible to accompany the Niedecker Study Unit. We were able to purchase 70 copies. U of C Press sent us 71 and they all had the beautiful dust jackets. (They noted there was no guarantee of this.) Thanks to Don McIlraith at U of C Press for helping us with this order and to all those who donated to this special purchase.



Before



After

Spring Fundraising Event

Ann and Amy are currently working on a FOLN fundraiser for sometime this year, hopefully in spring. Unfortunately, we have no details to provide at this time. We will send a special email bulletin when we know the what, when and where.

Niedecker Biography Online

As part of a grant to digitize historical Fort Atkinson documents, the Jane Shaw Knox biography of Lorine is now available online. You can access it here:

http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/WI.FANiedecker

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From the secret notes I must till ...

POETRY

from The Colors Project

Honeysuckle budding sunshine carves holes in my eyes at the center of the flower the soft light wheel a vans motor running A portrait In the morning a pump shutting out bird calls, heaters and refrigerators We will put you in an envelope to try your feathers slip slip so you will have to pay close attention hair bleached by the sun how the teenager pays attention? what is muddled at first at times grows clear in time barely and I will bathe Warm me in an essence of what is left of you What is perceptible? rhymes jaune or four syllables in Spanish spreads the call to rivers beaches, and the children playing with building and the making of the ephemeral this is my deep trickle Lorine as we your words play call and response so engrained each plump grain has become cell in me absorbed as we reach toward the sun absorbing light more than we can handle giving it all giving what we can our words our narrow limit softening the hard meeting the chair sit bones coming out of excrement and rising back into it to seek sweet suckling

Eléna Rivera



upon the pressure...

LIFE BY WATER

i.m. Lorine Niedecker

How could she live here where the river in flood brings mud?
Giving the house to the water each spring—doorway, walls, rug?
Wading the road where Lake Koshkonong overflows, we learn.
What's a home—armchair and cupboard? Or wading boots, rainhood, water's surge of driftwood, a hundred white pelicans above.
And if once the Rock River, rising and rising, carried a house away to the marsh, neighbors, in winter, would pull it back over ice to the peninsula named island for what it becomes.
Rolling our pants' legs, breathing in gusts of rain-sheeted air, we push through river of road pebbled by rain, lapping our knees—water, the fluid world we enter, brings flood, force, fount, flow; waves breaking on doorsteps, floating the lawn chairs.

-originally appeared in *The Antigonish Review* (Canada)

AFTER NIEDECKER

winter
silence
cracked
a wracked
word

-originally appeared in *Hummingbird*

Robin Chapman

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BLACKHAWK ISLAND ON A JUNE NIGHT

We walk in dark lit only by splotches Of window-light, a campfire Where teenagers drink beer Around the flames that blot us out. Boat lights bob on the black lake. Shadow and rustle of willow and popple,

Niedecker walking easy beside us Pointing out marsh heron, frog splash, In the water-speaking night. Ahead, the tavern's yellow light, Budweiser girls pinned up on the pine, Regulars ordering one more of the same.

Robin Chapman

-originally appeared on Tom Montag's *The Middlewesterner Blog*, online.



HE CAME FOR WORK AT THE NIEDECKER PLACE

When the flood came in & left the foundation damaged

he brought his toolbox & tool belt took out his pry bar

removed the rot. I told him my ideas

for improvements: the addition of boards to block the river view

so I could see and not be seen. Privacy key. Neighbors

like to know what's going on.

Walking down the gravel road brown's in all the colors now.

At the neighbor's a plastic deer propped against a maple for shooting practice.

Come around here some more. I like the way you wield that hammer, the way you know what I mean when I speak about some boards so as to see without being seen. The way you look down & smile at my jokes. I've been telling them to the stove for some time to the muskrats

I know to be walking around outside my door.

Lisa Kundrat

Lisa is currently an MFA student in poetry at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. She says: "I loved the tour I took of Lorine's cabin with my fellow students and Jean Valentine last October and was fascinated by the surroundings and the stories we heard about her life. I was particularly intrigued by the story of Lorine meeting her second husband later in life when he came to do some work on her place. Imagining the meeting resulted in the attached poem, *He Came for Work at the Niedecker Place*."

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In us sea-air rhythm...

RED READ

Is that redbud blink or cardinal's eye below the windblown new moon?

CICADA

Terrible night
Storm yet to come
Cicada drum

REVELATION OF THE CLOUD

wind clouds boom the hubbub starts again

Jeffrey Beam



WHAT WOULD LORINE NIEDECKER SAY?

If Lorine Niedecker were living today, And she read my poetry, I wonder what she would say,

"No depth, no form, it needs condensing.
Too much like Mother Goose recompensing.
Oh, it's reflective, but not Haiku.
It would not be classified as objective, that's a

clue."
She would probably say, "It's warm, it's funny and touches the heart,

It pulls you right in, from the start."

I'm sure she would not be unkind, But I know in my soul I do not have a Niedecker mind. I will never win any poetry awards, Or be published in books abroad.

Everyone has activities to pass the time of day. They work, they read, they sing, they play. I write poetry when the mood strikes me. It's my way of expression. It's my therapy.

Mary Riedy



my pillow in moon light

drifting pages close on the last sliver

before falling

*

cedar boughs

heavy new snow

dampening sound

slouch and crunch of

fern fronds

*

"We live by the urgent ...

O of the mouth of carp

full of moon

quarters and polished stones

happy living in my coat

nymphs shed their skin

*

LANGUAGE LESSON

companions on a corner in pouring rain

offer their umbrella and a chance to practice

i write some words in melting workbooks

my own bleeding letters kanji

*

from the wave viewing pavilion tiny boats bounce on the sun falling sea

rice planting month

come and gone a sticky autumn grass

seated in dew prayer garlands melt counting stepping stones

some small stars origami moon

Laura Winter (1958 -)

This poet and artist was born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin and currently lives in Portland, Oregon. The western landscape with all its hoo doos, headlands, basin and range, whitewater and rain are the foundation from which she works. Winter's love for improvised music also informs how she approaches using the English language. Improvised music structures – soundscapes and silences - create an interesting tension between sound, words and silence in the landscape of her imagist poetry.

Winter has been widely published and her work has appeared in numerous periodicals, including: A Change In Weather, Anthology of Midwest Women Poets; High/Coo; Boom; Cream City Review; Anemone; Poetic Space; Portland Review; Mr. Cogito; Z Miscellaneous; Perceptions; Pointed Circle; Fireweed; Portlander, Plazm, Rain City Review, Talus And Scree, Northwest Literary Forum, Portlandia Review Of Books, Hummingbird, and The Temple, The Oregonian, Origin.

Winter currently publishes TAKE OUT, a bag-azine of art, writing and music that features powerful voices from around the globe. Some her poetry and music projects include work with musicians Vinny Golia, Torsten Mueller, Garth Powell, Rob Blakeslee, Billy Mintz, Michael Bisio. She has been the guest of honor for the SilentArt Festival 2007 in Bochum Germany.

wave of the verse

MANIPULATING GODDESS

the painting is what the paint does

to know gives into the it is not so

easy to let go of the so of it's pre disposition

that is any other test nor meant to

be careful w proposition s to use anything throw any phrase remembered

thing is not the color do ing the dropping of nor any away demands her

good nor bad

but what is done did I say or mean or do what besides more is than that a lot of things?

That I thought that I thought that I thought

that I was do ing what was never done was never said

adequately or done through voodoo system other wise religion insists on tech

nique defined and sign my name useless use less paint and useless (use less what is

left is ancient /

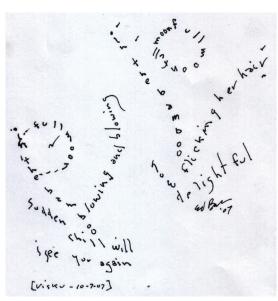
next step

given

Ed Baker 12/29/2007







Visku

Ed Baker



READING LORINE NIEDECKER

who told her second husband (after they married) "I am a poet"

'a what?"

*

the silence singing

the poem (let us confess it) is not immutable

nor is the river

of flesh (carnelian) bones of white quartz

there is a river in this city

sluggish mud-grey not given to flooding

carrying too much history

wintergreen (pipsissewa) astringent, tonic, alterative

and Darwin wrote:

"I have been making some little trifling observations which have interested and perplexed me much."

This poem of mine was originally published in 1986 and then collected in a book of mine called 5 Easy Pieces (Shearsman Press 1997).

Billy Mills Limerick Ireland

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LORINE'S WINDOW

after visiting Lorine Niedecker's shack at Black Hawk Island

To catch a glimpse, to see her work,

To feel the spark at the heel of this buffalo writer.

Word alchemy. Did she use twelve steps to distill?

Essence is there always. She condensed and gave us more.

Nancy Rafal

- originally published in the Wisconsin Poet's Calendar 2002, copyright 2001



Mystery Poem

In the Summer 2007 issue of Solitary Plover we published a poem titled *Lunar Eclipse*, *March 3, 2007*. I was not able to match this poem with a poet but since then have learned that it was written by Donna Pecore of Chicago.

AL



ESSAYS

Writing Historical Motion

Lorine Niedecker's poems "Lake Superior" and "Paean to Place" are poems of history – natural, personal, and some portion of humanity's. They operate on different scales, comprised of vastly different materials. These differences provide the striking visual contrast between the poems, which otherwise have quite similar forms and styles (both recognizably those of Niedecker), distorting through their malleability or rigidity that which appears on the page.

Donald Davie writes in his essay "Lyric Minimum and Epic Scope" that "Lake Superior" is comprised of "twelve short or very short passages of verse" (144). Judging by the larger spatial breaks, "Paean to Place" has the same number, though it seems to be a disservice to both poems to consider each as a disconnected or even loosely connected collection of passages. Examining the poems as they appear in Niedecker's The Granite Pail, where the breaks are merely blank space, rather than Davie's inclusion of the more divisive visual break of the ellipsis of star characters, reveals a more organic, self-referential element to these pauses. The enjambed spaces in "Lake Superior," connecting across the leaps of time between the historical events of the narrative, mimics the layers of rock below the surface the lines of cleavage and fracture, yet still unified. This is the omnipresent mineral, the separation which still allows for cohesiveness.

In the same way, "Paean to Place" states the contained kinetics of the poem in its first line: "And the place was water." The poem, speaking of the marshes, mimics the movement of the waters against the bank – each "passage" is the movement forward or backward, and the pause at the nadir or zenith before the direction changes. The topics might seem to change, yet they are part of the greater flow of the poem, dragging away the materials obscuring the past of her family, and moving forward to deposit new materials from her own experiences in the



present. Niedecker is giving and taking in her narrative of the waters in the same manner that those waters provided for and destroyed segments of her life.

Davie focuses on the historical aspects of "Lake Superior," and later berates himself for perhaps devoting too much of his attention to those elements. In focusing on the individual facts, separating elements too much from the whole, he does not devote much of the attention of the essay to the flow (present in both the poem he looks at and the other) - the flow of rock, water, and blood. As Niedecker crafts this flow, it does not demand the reader's constant attention, though it does insinuate itself in the subconscious during reading. It provides a perpetual added depth to elements which might at times seem too distant, personal, or foreign to a reader without Niedecker's knowledge of encyclopedic historical facts or firsthand experiences (as she shows in speaking of the gopher at Sand Lake, these moments are at times distant or seemingly lost even to her). The combination of enjambment and organic breaks and pauses connect the poems, the readers and poet, the present and past, with the rocks that were once mud that was once people that were once rocks.

Davie, Donald. "Lyric Minimum & Epic Scope: Lorine Niedecker." *PN Review* 8, no. 5 (1981): 31-33.

Kerry Delaney



Fog-Thick Morning

Do we, as writers, use events to mirror things that have deeper significance for us?

A little over 20 minutes down the road from where I live—and 60 years ago—there was a woman who scrubbed floors in the Fort Atkinson hospital and spent much of her life beside a flooding river in a barren cottage without electricity or running water. Unknown to those who

came in contact with her, she also wrote relentless poetry which today is included in the *Norton Anthology* alongside such literary giants as Emily Dickinson and William Carlos Williams.

For example:

Fog-thick morning—
I see only
where I now walk. I carry
my clarity
with me.

Now there are various small collections of her poems and two books of correspondence she had over a 20-year period of time, but *nothing* that correlates her life with her work. I figure this is something I can handle and since, in 2003, we are coming up on the 100th anniversary of her birth, there may be a marketing opportunity for a short, inexpensive paperback that I publish myself. I call the book *America's Greatest Unknown Poet*.

It seems Lorine set her sights beyond Black-hawk Island...and her connection to that other world was Louis Zukofsky—a young New York intellectual making waves in the poetry community.

Here are the words of Zukofsky's friend, Jerry Reisman, who came to know Lorine well:

"In the early 1930s I lived in the South Bronx with my parents and was a physics major at CCNY. Louis Zukofsky and I were close friends. Frequently, on weekends, I rode the subway to his Manhattan apartment and did my homework there.

"I had read most, if not all, of his letters to and from Lorine Niedecker. Neither Louis nor I had ever met her and we both looked forward to her impending visit. I believe Louis expected her to stay, at most, two weeks. The year was 1933.

"When Lorine arrived, she and Louis exchanged shy greetings and Louis introduced her to me. Of course she already knew about me from Louis's letters. Later, when she began to unpack her things and Louis saw what she had brought—an ironing board and an iron, for example—he concluded that she was prepared

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to stay a long time. He looked a bit worried. He had not planned to have a long-term live-in relationship with Lorine."

I can't recall any experiences of women stalking me, though there was a time in the Army when my ex-wife and I were visited by Phyllis, an attractive school-friend of hers who came to stay in our very small studio apartment in the German village where we lived. I remember thinking that this would be interesting, especially when she feigned interest in my poetry. But Phyllis quickly fell for a baby-faced punk musician and moved out ten days after her arrival.

Well Lorine and Zukofsky hit it off OK. In fact she became pregnant. Jerry Reisman continues:

"Lorine wanted to keep the child, but Louis insisted that she terminate the pregnancy. Lorine promised to have the child in Wisconsin, raise it on Blackhawk Island and never bother Louis for support money or anything else. Louis was adamant. Nothing remained but to find a reliable abortionist and the money to pay for the operation.

"One of my cousins recommended a female doctor. Her fee was \$150—a lot of money in those days. Lorine obtained the money from her father.

"After the operation, the doctor revealed that her patient had been carrying twins. Lorine ruefully named them 'Lost' and 'Found.' Physically, she recovered quickly; but I think she must have ached for her twins all the years of her life."

In her poem about Mary Shelly, Lorine writes:

Who was Mary Shelley? What was her name before she married?

Who was Mary Shelley? She read Greek, Italian She bore a child

Who died and yet another child who died.

Lorine went back to Wisconsin. And Zukofsky? He eventually got married and had a son, Paul, by his new wife. Lorine continued to exchange letters with him over the next ten years, often more than one a week—a correspondence that is for each of them, their greatest output. During the period of his son's childhood, Zukofsky's letters are full of accounts of Paul's antics. Lorine used these anecdotes to write poems about Paul, which also suggest an embedded homage to Zukofsky.

FOR PAUL

Paul
now six years old:
this book of birds I loved
I give to you.
I thought now maybe Paul
growing taller than cattails
around Duck Pond
between the river and the Sound
will keep this book intact,
fly back to it each summer

maybe Paul

Niedecker's For Paul poems identify a 'family' composed of the Zukofskys and herself. At first, Celia and Louis welcomed her attachment to Paul, and the child apparently enjoyed her attentions too. However Niedecker's choice of Paul as a focus for her poems went awry. The poems pressed into Zukofsky's privacy; perhaps they began to seem too public and intrusive and Zukofsky felt compelled to retreat a bit. In 1961, when two of the poems were to be published in My Friend Tree, he asked that she remove the overt biographical content from the titles and dedications.

Ah ha! I think as I discover the story behind Lorine's nurturing poems about Paul. What if our writing is more than a means for us to delude ourselves by transforming one thing into something else? In fact, what if it is the opposite. What if writing allows us to confront indirectly what we cannot head on? I recall a mystery novel I wrote whose hero is my rather non-

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communicative son. Though it is fictional I have to flesh out many of the emotions from my own experiences and in some strange way, I came to know myself through this use of him better than through poetry which I've always considered more personal and revealing than fiction.

The written, edited and printed book, *America's Greatest Unknown Poet*, sells moderately well at the Niedecker Centennial, at which I am also asked to speak. Most of the presenters have PhDs and are associated with university literature programs. I can't help but think that my former neighbor would be somewhat bored by what they have to say.

And my novel? It's never published, but looking back at it now the remarkable thing is that at its conclusion the young narrator goes to live at the house where his father recently died. Digging through that man's possessions the son comes to appreciate his dad. The truth I am indirectly confronting is that this is what I want my son, Karl, to feel for me.

Six months after the Centennial I am able to get a national distributor for the Niedecker book. But it's not surprising the book isn't more successful. Her work isn't uplifting in the same way that a popular song or a decorative painting might be. These are not poems to be recited at graduations or anniversaries. That's because there are troublesome things deeply ingrained in them; though even here she's selective. She writes about her working-class husband, but very little about her philandering father who "kept" another family (a mistress and her daughter-he bought the husband acquiescence with gifts of land). She writes critically of her deaf long-suffering mother, but not about Louis Zukofsky and Cid Corman whose friendships she courts over her lifetime. She writes about the child, Paul—Zukofsky's son but (with the one exception I've already quoted) not about the aborted twins she might have had by him. Or is this true?

It seems to me that someone who lives a life of metaphors can easily substitute one person for another when, for her own mental health, she needs the kind of distancing art provides. Her father and husband meld together, as do Lorine and her mother and the live child and dead twins. Of course it's more complicated than that. But part of the fun of literature (despite disdain for it from the academic community) is this gossipy, quasi-psychoanalytic speculation. Niedecker's cryptic poetry is full of tantalizing clues and references that encourage it.

Wilderness
You are the man
You are my other country
and I find it hard going

You are the prickly pear You are the sudden violent storm

the torrent to raise the river to float the wounded doe

What is clear is that she not only chooses subjects that are difficult, but ones that have multiple layers of meaning and in which there is a kind of resolution (if from nothing else, from the beauty of their perfectly matched content and form).

Let me generalize and identify steps of this process. These apply to prose and film as well as to poetry. To me, what's most intriguing is that this is a vertical approach (as opposed to the horizontal or linear way we usually think associate with developing a piece of writing). Here are the eight stages as I see them:

Eight Stages of Creative Processing

- 1. EXPOSURE In the first stage we absorb the world and its experiences through our senses and intuition.
- 2. REACTION In the second our unconscious dreams and fantasies put these in a form we can handle.
- 3. INVESTMENT As we take ownership of the subject our empathy grows for the characters or people who are part of the story and we

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further invest our feelings in their conflict.

- 4. REALIZATION Next we make this tangible as a short story, poem, article, play or book, giving it dramatic structure that heightens those emotions.
- 5. VERIFICATION Fifth, we test its effectiveness on others through classes, readings, and critique groups—clarifying, refocusing, reinterpreting.
- 6. REVISION In the sixth stage we incorporate that feedback into our project often mirroring a larger theme beyond our original scope.
- 7. PUBLICATION We find an audience through being published or performing the piece.
- 8. EXPANSION Encouraged by success we return to the initial stages and do more of the same at an even deeper level.

The purpose of this process is not only to create a final product but to encourage us to dig deeper and deeper. For example, Lorine Niedecker is infatuated by Louis Zukofsky for some reason. She fantasizes about a life with him and makes that dream a reality (Stages #2 & #3). Or tries to. He doesn't want her pregnancy so she (Stage #4) through poetry creates an alternative—projecting her feelings onto Paul. But this is not acceptable (Stage #5) so she eventually turns to another subject—the man who becomes her husband late in life and is less qualified to object to her work. Albert O. Millen, a hard drinker, then in his 59th year, was divorced after the youngest of their four children, Gael, left for college. He'd lost his right hand in a printing press accident in Oshkosh in his 20s, and now he was a maintenance painter nearing retirement. Millen bought a grey cottage a few lots east of Niedecker's cabin as a place to live and fish (Lorine's father had been a carp seiner).

We, reading her poetry, might very well be driven back to Stage #1. Was she trying to regain her father through Zukofsky? Is she, herself, the child she wants to save from abortion?

Something in the water like a flower will devour

water

flower

It may be dangerous to do this with someone else's work, but as writers it is key to our uncovering greater depths in our own. Not that this is a conscious process. As the short story writer Andre Dubus says: "I try never to think about where a story will go. This is as hard as writing, maybe harder because I want to know what the story will do and how it will end and whether or not I can write it. But I must not know or I will kill the story by controlling it. I work to surrender. When we speak from the heart, with no plan, no point to make, we discover truths we did not know that we knew." In other words we become active, rather than passive, readers of our own work. With a little practice anyone can become a good writer, but great writers—such as Lorine Niedecker—are those who are great readers of what they write.

This is an excerpt from a two-part presentation on the creative process by poet John Lehman appearing in Issues #39 and #40 of Rosebud magazine. John's book on Lorine Niedecker, America's Greatest Unknown Poet, is available at bookstores and from amazon.com and CustomerDirectBooks.com.

John Lehman





Besides the many helpers and contributors named within, this issue of the *Solitary Plover* is brought to you by:

Amy Lutzke, Dwight Foster Public Library and Ann Engelman

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