



# I was the solitary plover

FRIENDS OF  
*Lorine Niedecker*

## Luther Elementary School Mural Project

The Friends of Lorine Niedecker are pleased to share the most recent Niedecker poetry/art mural installed in the Fort Atkinson School District at Luther Elementary School. This project was lead by art teacher Jessica Zuniga who worked with local artist Jeremy Guzzo Pinc and the student body to create a design around their selected poem. After voting on several possibilities, the students selected the first stanza from "Thanksgiving, Glen Ellen."

Education, kindness  
live here  
Whose dog does not impose  
her long nose  
and barks quietly

The mural is located in the hallway adjacent to the student lunch room, which also serves as the school's auditorium and is the location where the School Board meets. This guarantees that the community will have ample opportunities to view the art and learn another piece by Niedecker. Funding for this project was provided by the Friends of Lorine Niedecker, the Fort Atkinson School District and the Luther Elementary PTO. For additional images and a video created by Luther staff go to: [lorineniedecker.org/friends-lorine-niedecker/poetry-art-projects](http://lorineniedecker.org/friends-lorine-niedecker/poetry-art-projects).





# Friends of Lorine Niedecker Changes

The May 2022 meeting of the Board of Directors of FoLN was Ann Engelman's last as president of the organization. Ann took that role when the group incorporated in 2004 and has served in that capacity for the past 18 years. Ann has been instrumental in furthering the mission of the FoLN.

## Here are just a few of her contributions:

She developed and managed the Lorine Niedecker Wisconsin Poetry Festival for nine years combining poetry and the arts, bringing people to Fort Atkinson from around Wisconsin and the US to celebrate Lorine Niedecker and the written word and demonstrating the importance of Niedecker to the greater Fort Atkinson area.

She developed relationships with residents of the Blackhawk Island Community and specifically the owners of the former Niedecker property on Blackhawk Island creating familiarity and goodwill between the Friends of Lorine Niedecker and the property owners.

Engelman worked with the Jefferson County Parks Department to obtain placement of the former Niedecker cabin at W7309 Blackhawk Island Rd., Fort Atkinson on the State and National Register of Historic Places.

She worked with property owners, the Fort Atkinson Historical Preservation Committee and a local artist to create a series of Niedecker poetry murals on buildings along Main Street in Fort Atkinson, placing Niedecker's words in front of our community and all who pass through it.

Engelman has worked with Fort Atkinson City leaders and the Fort Atkinson Area Chamber of Commerce to educate them about Niedecker's importance in the literary world and therefore to the community of Fort Atkinson.



She has graciously given countless hours of her time to meet with, guide and assist researchers, biographers, students, poets and film-makers to access local Niedecker archives at the Dwight Foster Public Library and the Hoard Historical Museum as well as historic Niedecker locations in Jefferson County.

She has dutifully recorded the annual activities of the Friends of Lorine Niedecker creating a record of the organization to guide it into the future.

Engelman will continue as a Board member. Amy Lutzke has taken on the role of president. The FoLN board has been working on development for the past year. Take a look at the current list of Board members here: [lorineniedecker.org/friends-lorine-niedecker/](http://lorineniedecker.org/friends-lorine-niedecker/).



## Lorine Niedecker's Cedar Chest

Many young women in Lorine's time had a "Hope Chest" that was filled with embroidered items for the time they married and set up their own household.

We are not sure when Lorine acquired the cedar chest. We do know that on her death it was at the foot of her bed on Blackhawk Island and contained her poetry and correspondence.

Albert Millen's daughter, Julie Schoessow, has been in possession of the chest since Lorine died in 1970. Julie has been a friend and resource for the Friends of Lorine Niedecker; she donated the chest to the Hoard Historical Museum during a birthday party for Lorine. It will eventually be located in the Lorine Niedecker room at the museum.

Julie noted, "When our family went to visit my dad and Lorine on Blackhawk Island, there were never papers around. She kept all those in the cedar chest."

*This is a significant gift for which we are grateful.*

# Reaching Through Rooted: Lorine Niedecker's "Paeon to Place"

Lorine Niedecker's "Paeon to Place" relies heavily on Niedecker's lived experiences. Beginning with childhood, moving through her adolescence, and ultimately addressing Niedecker's identity as a poet, "Paeon" utilizes vivid details and objects particular to the writer's own Wisconsin geography. The poem is long, consisting of forty-two five-line stanzas. The stanzas are grouped in variable sets of two, three, or four—and these sections are indicated by extra spaces.

## Compressed Syntax.

Throughout the essay I will use the term compression to describe Niedecker's syntax. By compression I mean language which is tightened, abbreviated and condensed. Some conventional elements maybe eliminated. Choices made by the writer, emphasize directness, brevity and intensity. For example, though Niedecker uses stanzas and section breaks she eschews conventional punctuation. There are no periods, though arguably, capitalization indicates sentences and sentence fragments. Specific typographical symbols guide the eye down the page: quotations, dashes, occasional colons and commas. Articles and subjects are dropped, direct objects—emphasized. Take, as an example, the following:

Dancing grounds  
my people had none  
woodcocks had  
backland-  
air around (126-130)

In this sequence Niedecker opens with the object "Dancing grounds." The next two lines, "my people had none/ woodcocks had" showcase both her typical elision—she's left out some kind of phrase explicitly naming what her people did not have in comparison to the woodcocks—and her use of dashes, note the lines "woodcocks had—" plus the hyphenated "backland-/ air around." She does not punctuate the sequence with a period, yet begins the next stanza's first word, "Solemnities (131)" with a capital letter.

As a whole, Niedecker's standard syntax is compressed. As demonstrated above, lines are brief and condensed. Given the poem's signature style, nouns often take center stage in Niedecker's short lines. It happens that the combination of short lines with a clipped syntax produces condensed fragments. The following exemplifies the way Niedecker typically uses fragment throughout Paeon:

Grew riding the river  
Books  
at home-pier  
Shelley could steer  
as he read (101-105)

We can see here four elements of Niedecker's standard compression: "Grew riding the river" (no subject is named); "Books" (single word lines); "at home-pier" (elision for lacking an article); and in the case of line 104, "Shelley could steer," exactly what was steered, Niedecker doesn't say. Niedecker's compression emphasizes concrete realities, but paradoxically it is this same compression which will allow the lyric's sound work to approach the transcendent. I'd like to look closely at the poem's opening sequence and expound on how consonance, single syllable beats, and brevity manage to promote expansiveness.

## Extended Sounds and Concrete Objects.

"Paeon to Place" opens with a list of one syllable nouns: "Fish/ fowl/ flood (1-3)." Even while Niedecker opens the poem in her most extreme version of compression, as I have described, there is an opportunity to read how sound carries the lyric through. In this opening sequence there are no pronouns, no people, there is not yet a narrative, and most importantly: there are no judgements or evaluations. No subjective material is offered. Hard "f" sounds in combination with the speech stresses made by one syllable lines, emphasize the lyric's pounding groundedness. Language is reduced to what is immediate and sensory: the lyric's minimal diction and pounding rhythms make it possible for sounds to suggest other sounds. Consider the entire first stanza.

Fish  
fowl  
flood  
Water lily mud  
My life (1-5)

“Fowl” is preceded by fish, followed by flood, in a stanza ending with “mud.” “Fowl” and “flood” are both one-syllable “f” words using a combination of “o” and “l” phonemes. In this context “fowl” calls toward its homonym “foul”—as in something putrid and disgusting. The text implies foul while stating “fowl.” Niedecker’s compressed syntax makes space for textual meanings which are extended by sound play.

Next because Niedecker layers phonemes—here she begins with a string of “f” consonants—the breaking of the stress pattern is noticeable. This is the case with “Water lily” in the poem’s opening stanza. The trickling softness of the phrase bookended by the pounding single syllables which are threaded with “f’s” and “d’s.” “Fish/fowl/flood (1-3)” afterward, “mud” emphasizes the way the word “lily” sounds. Though Niedecker names material objects rather than abstract ideas, the compressed syntax and compelling variation is what compels the lyric’s movement. “Water lily” ends up standing out. It’s stirring.

What’s more, the entire phrase “Water lily mud (4)” invites multiple readings. First, the line can be read as another list—water, lily, mud. Once again, Niedecker doesn’t use periods and commas appear rarely. This means line breaks and syntax are two tools the reader must use to comprehend the line. “Water lily mud” is preceded, as we have seen, by a list of nouns. It makes sense that the mind would follow this pattern as it moves down the vertical space of the page and read this subsequent line also as a simple list. Second, “Water lily” could be an adjective which modifies mud, as in this is the mud belonging to the water lilies. A third possibility employs a combination of both strategies: the line is referring to two separate nouns: “water lily,” “mud.” Because Niedecker’s compressed syntax makes room for multiple understandings to coexist at once, the lines underscore uncertainty rather than assuredness. While Niedecker’s lyric operates within the boundaries of the physical world, the manner in which she writes about the physical world imbues the language with the ineffable. This means the lyric courts expansion even as it compresses around the object. And so, when the reader reaches the end of the stanza which breaks into “My life,” this fifth and last line succeeds at breaching the transcendent because we’re not totally thrown by the sudden expansion. Later I’ll explore further these periodic shifts into complete statements.

Just as Niedecker’s language compresses around the objects which comprise her life, my current circle of experience has narrowed. Living in quarantine under COVID-19 I recognize the clarity that arises as one’s world is reduced to immediate objects. As my external obligations are peeled away, I’ve come to rely on what’s immediately before me. I resolve to be present here and now. I sense this compression, both Niedecker’s and my own, fulfills William Carlos Williams’ well-known (among poets) maxim: “no ideas but in things.” Reading “Paean” during the pandemic I tell myself, no life but in things: a seashell

from a beach vacation, a stoneware mug my friend made me, my bracelet built of rose quartz stones. Yet, in this state of constriction the objects take on more than their materials. Now each represents the associations I have with different places and better times. The objects call to what is outside the objects. Similarly, as Niedecker’s syntax narrows and compresses, forcing an emphasis on nouns—the thingness of the language is what reaches outward, unrestrained.

With respect to the above, I’d like to explore further how intricate sound work can be used alongside the concrete image to reach out toward what is off the page. In *How Poems Think*, poet Reginald Gibbons quotes Ilya Kutik’s commentary on nineteenth century Russian poet Evgeny Baratynsky:

...rhyme is a kind of edge or border that one listens to past—not for the next word, but for the farthest word one can hear. And...rhyme is centrifugal—that is when one word attracts the unexpected rhyme word for itself, the second word throws the poem outward from itself as it exists so far, throws it off what had seemed its course. With this rhyme, the poem throws itself off a path that is safe, with a motion that is justified, created, vouched for, by the rhyme. The first rhyme image launches the second, the second word changes the poem’s direction. (67)

Niedecker’s rhyme achieves the effect Gibbons highlights here. As I’ve shown earlier, compressed syntax allows for rhyme, sound, and object to imply more than is explicitly stated on the page. In the following example, image and sound work in tandem to invite associations. Both end and internal rhyme, metered and not, throw the poem outward toward unnamed possibilities. Stanzas 17 and 18 read:

Anchored here  
in the rise and sink  
of life—  
middle years’ nights  
he sat  
beside his shoes  
rocking his chair  
Roped not “looped  
in the loop  
of her hair” (81-90)

Moving vertically down the page, the phrase “rise and sink” is typical Niedecker. As with the opening stanza, when “fowl” called toward foul, “sink” is underscored by stink. It is the material context which makes this doubling possible, both in terms of the compressed syntax and vivid swamp and fishing



imagery. This same doubling is at work in the subsequent rhyme which follows. Niedecker rhymes chair/hair and looped/loop—but there is an ominous layering at work with the slant-rhymed shoes. Two words which rhyme with “shoes” underlie what’s written on the page. First, in the vertical space on the page, “shoes” is just above “chair” which hints at the word choose, a near homonym of “shoes.” “Shoes” reaches out beyond the word itself. The compressed focus, paradoxically, invites multiple unnamed associations.

Second, the image given in lines 88 and 89, “Roped not ‘looped/ in the loop’ I’d argue, suggests the word noose. In this instance I believe it is as though Niedecker is end-rhyming an image with a word. I’ve illustrated how (1) the vertical space on the page and (2) syntax allow chair/shoes to stack one on-top of the other—implying choose. Now Niedecker rhymes “shoes” with a looped rope. This invites a lyric doubling in which the image of the looped rope implies a word which would end rhyme with shoes: noose. The poem’s consistent focus on the physical world supports lyric doubling, where multiple associations are made manifest—not by complex sentences and heady explorations explicitly named—but by close attention to intricate sound work.

## Complete Syntax, An Inversion.

A poet as rooted as Niedecker manages to court abstract ruminations by occasionally breaking into complete sentences. These breaks work to invert her typical lyric patterns. Paradoxically, the more complete the speaker’s syntax—the more abstract the image. The occurrence of a complete syntax often depicts her most subjective content—that is content related to the “I” of the speaker—yet these moments remain palpably felt (though abstract). In other words, it seems remarkable when the speaker shifts to assertion using simple whole phrases because these moments contrast Niedecker’s mostly elided, fragmented, syntax. Here, I’d like to offer two examples of these shifts. Working in chronological order, I’ll analyze an example that begins with characteristic compression, which I’ll elucidate further, and ends up landing on abstraction. As I’ve shown earlier in the essay, elision and list are used throughout the poem by Niedecker to compress the lyric. To review, this compression works to put our focus on objects, typically nouns, rather than feelings or thoughts belonging to the speaker. For example:

He brought in a sack  
of dandelion greens  
if no flood  
No oranges—none at hand  
No marsh marigolds  
where the water rose  
He kept us afloat (39 – 45)

Theoretically there are four sentences in this excerpt, accepting that Niedecker indicates sentences with capital letters. First, “He brought in a sack/ of dandelion greens/ if no flood”; second, “No oranges—none at hand”; third, “No marsh marigolds/ where the water rose”; and finally, “He kept us afloat.” Of these four sentences, two are elided. For example, the phrase “if no flood” lacks a verb. “No marsh marigolds/ where the water rose” includes object (marsh marigolds) and location via prepositional phrase “where the water rose,” but again, no subject, no verb. There is one fragment: “No oranges—none at hand.” No information is given on who, or what, required oranges, yet the objects (or in this case, lack of) are precisely named (“dandelion greens,” “oranges,” “marigolds”). The effect of these choices are twofold. First, the lyric tightens. Language has been stripped of extraneous information. Second, the language makes its movements with sensory objects rather than rhetoric or narrative structure. There is space for the reader to share in the speaker’s associative discoveries. Since the phrase “if no flood” sets off a cascade of additional “no’s” (four if counting the first “no” in “if no flood”): “no oranges—none at hand/ no marsh marigolds” these meaningful associations and their repetition drive the lyric’s momentum. It can be inferred that one loss leads to another loss, though this is not explicitly stated. The poem, once again, is both rooted and reaching.

Let’s return to my reason for analyzing this stanza in the first place. Compared with the compression Niedecker establishes here, the stanza’s end—much like what occurs in the poem’s first stanza (see “My life”)—is abstract. “He kept us afloat”—a simple complete statement, arguably devoid of any concrete images. This full-on sentence plays inversely to the sequence’s preceding incompleteness. Ironically, the rooted syntax reveals an intangible image. In this way Niedecker can anchor her more abstract sequences with clarity of syntax.

Niedecker uses this strategy more than once throughout “Paean.” Take for example the following excerpt, stanza twenty-two.

I was the solitary plover  
a pencil  
for a wing-bone  
From the secret notes  
I must tilt (106–110)

In this case the section begins with an uncharacteristically complete phrase, “I was the solitary plover.” Unlike many (not all) other sequences in “Paean” there is a clear subject, “I” verb “was” and predicate, “the solitary plover.” Yet again, the complete sentence doesn’t make for an objective image. Paradoxically, it will work to support ambiguity as one may read

the subsequent lines in multiple ways. It's possible to read the sequence as meaning: "I was the solitary plover/ (with) a pencil/ for a wing-bone" (106-109), (in which case "with" is omitted); or as one of two other possibilities: the speaker is a solitary plover using her pencil to fly, the speaker has exchanged her wing-bone for a pencil and instead of flying, she writes. Rather than stating the speaker's ambivalent relationship with her writing, here Niedecker implies it by offering multiple readings.

Further, as the stanza goes on it becomes increasingly abstract. "From the secret notes/ I must tilt." These notes could be (1) handwritten scraps of language, or perhaps (2) the sound of the plover's call. Either way, it's a challenge to picture a bird who tilts on its own birdsong or flies on figurative messages. The reason the reader can stick with the accumulating abstractions has a lot to do with the uncharacteristically complete syntax which begins the sequence. These complete sentences ("He kept us afloat" and "I was the solitary plover") come alongside to enhance the poem's lofted moments. Though Niedecker consistently uses compressed syntax to allow for sound work which will extend her concrete images, she also uses complete syntax to ground her images when they move toward subjective abstraction.

## Material Sound, Abstract Image: Another Inversion.

These occasional inversions of usual patterns can also be observed in Niedecker's intricate sound work. There are instances when the sounds themselves operate as material, rather than that to which they refer. At times abstract moments will be anchored solely by the sounds made by the rhythms of the words on the page.

Operating inversely to what I've observed earlier, in stanza twenty-three sound will attract and anchor abstraction.

upon the pressure  
execute and adjust  
In us sea-air rhythm  
"We live by the urgent wave  
of the verse" (111-115)

In combination with the three-word line, the preceding stanza break emphasizes "upon" and "pressure" which further underscore "u" sounds. The consonance in the word pair "pressure/ urgent" slant rhyme with "execute." "Adjust" is a near straight rhyme with "in us." This attention to "u" sets up the lyric's movement in the stanza's final two lines "We live by the urgent wave/ of the verse." It's all too easy for the receptive mind to see the word "universe" in the sequence, though it isn't actually on the page. One of the reasons this occurs is that the phrase "of the verse" is abstract. Hence, we may easily substitute this phrase for what's familiar and known, universe. Secondly,

of-the-verse" and "un-i-verse" are sonic parallels. In American English, the "i" in universe is pronounced as "uh" which rhymes with "the." Once again, Niedecker is using sound to suggest or imply more than is stated explicitly. Except in this case the doubling made via sound work helps to hold down abstraction as "wave/ of the verse" carries multiple semantic meanings: the gravitational waves of the universe, the waves of sound made by a verse of poetry, the waves in a lake, or perhaps even the waves of air on which the plover tilts. The three-word multi syllable lines (by contrast extended) and sound play make for a lyric that is both steady and far-reaching. Niedecker's lyric is one that ripples with life. Which begs the question: how can I write a poem too, rippling with life? How can I too, ripple with life in my current circumstances?

Buoyed by Repetition. I am listening to a podcast on a Tuesday in March featuring the poet Oliver de la Paz. Home, he says, is a place of ritual, comfort and belonging. The next day I substitute teach for a fifth-grade classroom at my son's school. The children ask me about coronavirus. One student asks if it is like the flu, and I say yes, it is somewhat like the flu, only it is more contagious and can be more serious for older adults. How can you be so calm he asks me. I think about home, about comfort, ritual, belonging. We are vulnerable, I say to him, but we are vulnerable every day, before adding, your ten minutes are up. Later on my lunch break I will read that on this Wednesday the World Health Organization has officially pronounced COVID-19 to be a global pandemic. I cope by repeating my routine. Amidst uncertainty I am steadied by ritual.

In a poem like "Paeon to Place" Lorine Niedecker succeeds in both grounding the poem in the concrete, while lofting the lyric toward the immaterial via assonance, consonance, and rhyme. This simultaneous grounding in and reaching out is further supported by repetition. I've been so far analyzing how Niedecker, who we perceive to be anchored and grounded, manages to negotiate lofted and transcendent moments in her work. It's my assertion that repetition operates as an element of macro-level cohesion. As the complex negotiations and inversions of compression and extension accumulate, repetition cues the reader on how to formulate a broader whole. This is especially needed when a long poem moves associatively, as is the case with "Paeon to Place." Like rituals which steady the anxious mind, through repetition the reader encounters and is able to manage the lyric's accumulating momentum. Repetition is used to make recognizable and familiar continual renegotiations between subject and object, concrete and abstract. Climactic instances succeed when the reader is set-up to accept and expect sudden moves.

When Niedecker erupts out of her customary rootedness, she steadies her choices with words and phrases that have appeared

consistently throughout the entire poem. The sudden shift in feeling is accessible even when it marks a dramatic disruption of the poem's established norms.

O my floating life  
Do not save love  
for things  
Throw *things*  
to the flood  
  
ruined  
by the flood  
Leave the new unbought—  
all one in the end  
water (176–185)

It's that first, "O my floating life" that's so astounding. An abstract image requires the speaker to forgo her usual distance, so the move to direct address helps sustain this moment. By varying her syntax, Niedecker is also signaling that something significant is happening. However, what I'd like to call attention to are three themes Niedecker mentions previously. By the time we are two thirds of the way through the poem, the reader is cued into the importance of water, life, and floating. References to life occur at line five ("My life"), lines eighty-two and eighty-one ("in the rise and sink/ of life") and line one-hundred-fourteen ("We live by the urgent wave"). There are three references to floating, some which include water bug images: "he kept us afloat" (45), "He could not—like water bugs—stride surface tension" (71-73), and "Grew riding the river" (101). Finally, there are many, many references to flood: "if no flood" (41), "River rising—flood" (156), "she/ who knew how to clean up/ after floods" (165-167). By assembling a vocabulary of concepts which are repeated consistently throughout the poem, repetition keeps the reader engaged as momentum builds. These themes, repeated throughout, frame the entire poem. They are familiar places to which the reader can return when tensions threaten to tear the whole apart. So, when Niedecker opens with a four-word line, erupts into complete statement, sidelines concrete images, and moves almost entirely into the subjective with "O my floating life" it reads as a culmination of the text. The reader recognizes every word here as fundamentally significant to the poem.

Additionally, while Niedecker is wonderfully specific throughout "Paeon,"—hers is a world of water lilies, plovers, water bugs, woodcocks, irises, hummingbirds, minnows, duckweed, carp and speedwells—this sequence is startlingly general:

for things  
Throw *things*  
To the flood  
  
ruined  
by the flood  
leave the new unbought—  
all one in the end— (178–184)

Repetition is also what makes words themselves to become the concrete material which lifts the language toward the transcendent. As I've shown in an earlier instance with her sound work, there are occasions when Niedecker operates inverse to her own norms. This means at times her lyric moves so abstract, that sound work becomes the very material which keeps the lyric grounded in the concrete immediate. There are two primary reasons, I think, this sequence works to accelerate, rather than stall, the poem. First, this break into abstraction "things" "new unbought" "all one" occurs near the end of the poem. This means Niedecker (1) has already had the opportunity to provide contrast with concrete images and (2) set up an expectation for lyric complexity which happens alongside sonic compression. When Niedecker repeats flood and things, the words themselves take on the whole of the concrete images she's used throughout the poem. Since she says things twice in succession it's also clear this move is intentional. The speaker isn't haphazardly filling-in the lyric with general information; she's been clear and specific throughout the poem. She's using "things" here to hold all the life she's included up until this point. Then, by buoying the moment with repetition, the sequence takes on an almost liturgical high-sounding diction. Her use of command further contributes to this moment's loftiness. It comes across as a ritualized action, a kind of sacramental moment. The lyric enacts the speaker's intimate connection to water, which both takes and makes her life. "All one in the end—/ water (84-85).

**Lauren K. Carlson** is the author of a chapbook *Animals I Have Killed* (Comstock Review Chapbook Prize). You can find her poems in publications such as *Tinderbox Poetry Journal*, *Waxwing* and *Salamander Magazine* among others. Her manuscript in progress was awarded the 2022 Levis Prize from Friends Of Writers. For more see [laurenkcarlson.com](http://laurenkcarlson.com).

## Summer supper

table set, bread and butter, hearty salad  
flowers from the morning garden

this room with light you swear is breaking

everything is breaking  
but it is your very own—

and how it has become that,  
after all



## Somewhere in my body is an ocean I made up

I dreamed I gave you a wind globe  
yes, full of wind instead of snow

and you followed the sails  
and the wind-full spinnakers

easterly to far off  
where there wasn't land

but there was a light  
and inside the light

there was a compass a map  
a notebook of stars

I dreamed I gave you the question  
and you gave it back to the answer



**Jeanie Tomasko** is the author of several poetry collections.  
She is a recently retired RN and lives in Middleton.  
Visit her and her blue dog at [jeanietomasko.com/thebluedogblog](http://jeanietomasko.com/thebluedogblog).

## June in the Marsh

Turtles sun themselves on logs  
resettle in water with a plop,

waddle out of the ponds  
cross streets, lumber into yards.

People shuffle behind, protective as painted  
and Blanding's cross streets.

Then a very large olive-green shell  
twelve inches in diameter at least

head pushed into my snow-on-the-mountain,  
dirt, stones and sand strewn on the driveway

her back to me, as eggs drop in the hole she's dug  
not shy about her business but gone

when the job is done.



**Mary C. Rowin's** poetry has appeared in a variety of publications.  
Nominated for a Pushcart, Mary's poetry awards include prizes from  
The Nebraska Writers Guild, and *Journal from the Heartland*.

## Chicken Rapture

As if eating  
chocolate cake  
topped with ganache  
or cheesecake  
enrobed in raspberry sauce  
but it is only oatmeal  
no milk salt sugar  
her favorite treat  
not the usual pellet food.  
One bite and she is in rapture  
her vocalization utterly changed  
not squawking or trilling  
but singing cooing purring  
She would lick her beak  
if she could



**Ronnie Hess** is an essayist and poet, author of five poetry chapbooks  
and two culinary travel guides. She lives in Madison. Find her at [ronniehess.com](http://ronniehess.com)



## Hiking the Conservancy Trail on Washington Island

I see little of what's ahead or to the sides,  
my gaze glued to the rough ground underfoot,  
vigilant for wet leaves and rocks, for branches  
grasping at my feet. I hear my students' sure steps  
behind me, ahead of me. Envy their speed and fearless  
energy, their calcium-rich bones. I smell bug spray  
and damp dirt and the mustiness of felled birch trees,  
feel their inevitable decay, wonder at them, once so tall and green.



**Jean Preston** holds a B.A. from Carthage College and an M.F.A. in creative writing/poetry from the University of Southern Maine's Stonecoast Writing Program. Recently retired from Carthage College, Jean served there as an Administrative Assistant for 11 years, followed by 14 years directing the Brainard Writing Center and teaching as an adjunct assistant professor of English. Jean was the 2014-2015 Poet Laureate of Kenosha, Wisconsin, and is the author of two poetry collections, *All the Queen's Horses* and *Like a Small Bird Soaring*, a chapbook, *Sixteen Mothers*, a photo journal, *Tete's Story*, and a children's book, *Banner and the Butterfly*. She is now busy writing, volunteering, and enjoying her family.

## He Called Me by Name

The young girl in the purple coat and red shoes  
spinning circles as she skips  
among a flock of burnt-orange chickens wearing red combs—  
Welsummers  
counting and naming every last one  
while feeding them  
against the backdrop of a blue sky, hinted with clouds.  
It feels familiar.



## Some See a Weed

Life requires less and less  
Love blooms even in the cracks  
hard places  
in between sides with cemented views  
roots tough as dreams

Their seeds blow on a wish  
hitch a ride, spread



**Angela Hoffman** lives in Wisconsin. Her poetry has appeared in *Solitary Plover*, *Wisconsin Fellowship of Poets Museletter* and calendar, and *Your Daily Poem.com*. She committed to writing a poem a day during the first two years of the pandemic. Angela's interests in spirituality and personal growth inspire her poetry.

## As We Stand Dying

What words do we need  
if any, as we stand dying

What would words do if  
there is no one else to leave behind

*You are not a human being in search of a  
spiritual experience. You are a spiritual being  
immersed in a human experience.*

Teilhard de Chardin's words philosophize  
expulsion from the garden without blame

the veil falls  
the rainbow lives

to be close to you,  
I come here *where*

It is white and empty  
Not yet cold not

Yet without you



**Donna Fleischer's** poetry books include *<Periodic Earth>* (Casa de Cinco Hermanas Press, 2016) and *Twinkle, Twinkle* (Longhouse Publishers, 2011). Her widely anthologized poems also appear in *Contemporary Haibun*, *EOAGH*, *Kō*, *Marsh Hawk Press Review*, *Naugatuck River Review*, *Otoliths*, *Spiral Orb*, *The Helix*, and *The Solitary Plover*. She received the support of a Tupelo Press – Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (Mass MoCA) residency and the University of Hartford Poetry Award.

## Language Lost

Children be quiet  
Go home and go to bed  
Gimme a kiss  
In the name of the Father  
and the Son and the Holy Ghost  
was all I could say in Polish

I heard the talk of  
parents and grandparents  
Never learned the language  
but when I hear it now  
it sounds the strong juicy  
musical chords of memory

Elizabeth Harmatys Park



**Elizabeth Harmatys Park** is a teacher, a learner and a poet. Park has received the First Place Jade Ring Poetry Prize awarded by the Wisconsin Writers Association. Her poetry has been published in journals and in anthologies such as *Bards Against Hunger*, *Ariel*, and *The Milwaukee Anthology*. She writes with Authors Echo in Burlington, WI and is a regular contributor to the *Wisconsin Poetry Calendar*.

## Panicles of Brome

Seed heads on a single  
stem of grass  
shaken at my ear  
a faint rattle  
like tiny castanets.  
Imagine a field of them!



## Summer Solstice

In the long grass an iris grows  
I bend to its petals and smell the sky  
and the blueness of spring  
while summer twines round  
and offers me the willows, robins  
and the wild, wild wind.



**Mary Fry** was raised in rural Michigan close to Lake Huron, surrounded by rivers, streams and fields. To this day, residing in the city and working in emergency medicine, she still considers nature her closest companion and writing to be a necessary outlet. She enjoys reading and creating poetry and has been published in several local anthologies. She finds inspiration in the sparseness and beauty of Lorine Niedecker's work.

## TWO POEMS | SAME DAY & nearsame DATA

*Partial bird's-nest of daffodil and crocodile and other things*

Numb hoodfée fib tread-down crook and duskness Medea. Thriamb and shanty. Altdorfer's Wild Man, 1508. Not a gravel-worm. Slavers of image.  
She invented dye; the Etruscans, the trumpet. Here cold ears. 80 teeth.

Waves of goose-skin, passing over the body,  
or ogee plus chilled wind odyssey, there,  
*ketch ketch ketch*



## Gardening suggestion

Daffodils  
in Hades?

For these pale,  
tired-out chaps  
n ladies?

Plant dandelions, teeth of lions,  
whose aired grandfathers float

a greywhite,  
muzzy glow

as ghosts go.



**Steven Manuel** is editor of *from a Compos't*, a poet and lives in Providence RI

## Niedecker's Inland Sea

Big sea strong travel  
north line trees, Hwy 2.  
Leather car seat smooth.  
Thermos opens brief  
near pencils sharpened  
for log flooded with wet  
words, covered rocks  
freighters in pockets, castle  
work that reaches Sault  
Sainte Marie by sundown.  
Granite, the nettles sing  
crickets chirp like loons  
with shadowy presence  
of gigantic waves  
impurities in the rock.  
Gulls follow ferries  
waterfowl, stone quarried  
near lone rock grottoes  
with herons and owls  
drying words like day  
reaching morning light.  
A book for our friends.  
Journal travelogue poems  
North and South shore  
journey like Marquette  
Joliet kicked up in Exodus  
antique, blood in black  
mineral. Storm beaten  
fishing villages, my ashes  
taken to Sand Island.



**Tyler Farrell** teaches poetry, drama, film, creative writing, Irish/British literature, and study abroad programs to Ireland and London at Marquette University. Farrell has published three books of poems with Salmon Poetry and a biographical essay for *James Liddy's Selected Poems* (Arlen House, 2011). Raised in Milwaukee, Farrell has always had a deep interest in Wisconsin history and subscribes to Fernando Pessoa's philosophy that "where we are is who we are." Farrell's everlasting love for Lorine Niedecker is currently centering around her poetically documented trip to Lake Superior and her chronicle of the Apostle Islands (WPA, 1941).

## Next

They have things for you to do  
and nothing you have to.

•

Puzzles in the sun room  
impressionist prints down the hall  
those doors.

•

You know what's going on  
and you don't.

•

*Don't touch me!*  
the pain of being  
                    bathed.

•

Bring me a sandwich that's too much.

•

It was Monday or Tuesday  
maybe the weekend

whenever it was  
no one was there.

•

The room next  
to yours is  
empty now.



## A Room

Night  
fall  
wine

•

Old man's  
kitchen table's  
a card table.

•

Tipsy I straighten the crucifix.

•

His illness having passed, an old man is weightless.

•

The woodpecker done, I drive a nail for this picture, fly off.

•

Our rooms fill up and we die.



**John Martone's** work can be found (among other places) at his scribd page--  
[scribd.com/john-martone-2968](https://www.scribd.com/john-martone-2968)



## Cold

brother Bill,  
cold, that house  
always cold, three  
cabins pushed together  
your tiny bedroom  
part of a porch  
doors to nowhere  
oil heater  
couldn't keep up

I did well  
you did better  
bought a Bentley  
penthouse condo  
on the beach

we never had  
to be cold again  
an accomplishment  
I wanted to put  
in your obituary.



**Marilyn K. Moody** is a poet from the Denver area. She was selected for the 2021-2022 class of the Lighthouse Writers Workshop Poetry Collective. She has published work in *Rise: An Anthology of Change*, *Progenitor Art & Literary Journal*, and *Chiaroscuro: An Anthology of Virtue & Vice*. Find her work at [marilynkmood.com](http://marilynkmood.com)

## Conifers in a Storm

A cloud lingers &  
lowers

itself. They lift  
to meet it,

drink from a swirling  
gradient

of gray-scale, sway  
fern-like

branches, reach for each  
other  
like siblings.



## After Five Years of Planning

The immigrant crossed the border,  
his papers in perfect order.  
*I'm landing*, he said at customs,  
and signed the forms they offered.  
His co-workers cheered the news.  
He ate soup for supper.

Later, he punched in numbers  
to connect to the United States.  
*This is the best day of my life*,  
he told the one who answered.



## The Guardian Hawk

*For Larry Gibson (1946-2012)*

She birthed the boy  
on Kayford Mountain  
let us guide him—

bear, bobcat, me  
the ways of ginseng  
& blackberry

his mother looked  
to the sky  
to find him

he rooted deep  
as the shagbark  
hickory

Coal Company man  
came to buy  
Kayford

& the mountain cried  
See this blasted  
wasteland

turn now  
to Kayford's  
cloud forest

My friend lies  
in Kayford Mountain  
resting now in peace

His mother chose us well



**Margaret Coombs** is a former college librarian who lives in Manitowoc, Wisconsin. She first discovered Lorine Niedecker's poetry when she took Al Filreis's ModPo MOOC. She learned more about Niedecker's poetry from Tom Montag in classes he taught at The Mill. Most recently, she studied Lake Superior in a course designed by Paul E. Nelson of the Cascadia Poetics Lab. She hopes to attend a Niedecker Festival in the future and continues to look for opportunities to study and be inspired by Niedecker's life and work.

## Barn Swallows

At the Main Street Bridge a faint breeze,  
the taco truck parked halfway over as always,  
awaiting the hungry, the Rock River high from  
rain, bronze Chief Black Hawk peering into the  
muddy water with his torch, and there they are  
in sleek scads, swooping, diving on a dime,  
the color of midnight, tails like scissors, or a V  
for victory, all the while chirping jovially,  
catching countless unseen things on the wing,  
hatched from dewy newness to keep such nimble  
marauders alive and thriving here, a wing's width above  
a flood-prone river where Niedecker once dreamed  
and observed as the water edged closer,  
where we now spy a reception at the VFW,  
the party in early revelry, the bride bewitching  
my daughter with her creamy princess dress,  
the Hmong women casting their lines  
a little further down, competent and serene,  
a lone mallard sailing overhead, offering  
a single *quack* of benediction to all, to us  
and those swallows, tirelessly darting their  
abundant prey to awaiting mouths, packed  
in mud grottoes affixed to the arched  
cement underbelly, pausing only a moment  
before flicking away again  
into the golden candle of last light.



**Jef Leisgang** lives in Fort Atkinson with his family and loves travel  
and exploring in nature. His poems have previously appeared in *Steam  
Ticket*, *Plainsongs*, *Flint Hills Review*, *Wisconsin Review*, *Verse Wisconsin*,  
and elsewhere.



### windswept snow

i d w e t s o  
w i n s e t o w  
i n w e n o  
w i n d w e p t n o w  
i n e p t s o w  
w i n d s w e p t s n o w

## Undone

The pressure of the undone  
mounts like winter.  
A stack of unread books  
next to the other stack,  
unread email, bills to pay,  
the lawn in need of a mow,  
fence slats in need of repair,  
the relationship crying for a vacation  
either together or apart.  
What's to be done?  
A to-do list, to add more winter?



**Michael Dylan Welch** has had his poetry performed for the  
Empress of Japan and at the Baseball Hall of Fame, printed  
on balloons and chiseled into stone. He is president of the  
Redmond Association of Spokenword, curates SoulFood  
Poetry Night, and is founder of National Haiku Writing  
Month ([www.nahaiwrimo.com](http://www.nahaiwrimo.com)). You can learn about his  
many books, and read his poems, essays, and reviews  
(published in hundreds of journals and anthologies in  
at least twenty languages) at his website, [graceguts.com](http://graceguts.com).

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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.

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