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RESTING ON WEEDY LAURELS:
LORINE NIEDECKER'S POETICS OF PERSEVERANCE

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ABSTRACT:

Lorine Niedecker began writing poems in the late 1920s from her home by the waters of Blackhawk Island, Wisconsin. This study examines her first associations with and empowerment through the Objectivists' new poetic methodologies of the early 1930s, and it critically examines, through a forty-year opus, her progressively more "reflective" work in tandem to her life-long effort of maintaining crucial ties with urban contemporaries, predominantly Louis Zukofsky.

As a rural, female writer, on the edge of a disbanding group of disagreeable poets who were originally associated with the term, "Objectivist," which Zukofsky had coined for his 1931 issue of *Poetry*, Niedecker's work was often overlooked or pigeonholed as "Regionalist," despite the

fact that her main supporters were from New York, Japan, and England. Niedecker's mostly small poems, with their "deep trickle," have undergone a resurgence of critical interest within the last decade or so, and this thesis bears witness, with prolonged critical analysis, to her life-span of lucent and rhythmic poems. They ebb and flow into and out of her daily life as a lowly paid copy-editor or hospital floor scrubber, and they emanate, with unparalleled wit and lyricism, through the sometimes dreadful, "darkinfested" winter or amidst the ecstasies of spring by the marshes of Lake Koshkonong.

Introduction

Born on 12 May 1903, Lorine Niedecker stayed most of her life on Blackhawk Island, just outside Fort Atkinson, Wisconsin and surrounded by the unpolluted wilderness and waters of Lake Koshkonong and the Rock River. Niedecker grew up in pleasant surroundings in a middle-class home, with her mother's parents owning the main resort for fishermen while her father, Henry Niedecker, seined for carp. Because of Henry's poor investments with his wife's inheritance and an affair, the family's economic status suffered in the mid-twenties, and Niedecker was forced to return from Beloit College in 1924 and take care of her deaf and ailing mother, abandoning her formal study of literature.

After a brief, two-year marriage in 1928 to her neighbor, Frank Hartwig, and after losing her job at the Fort Atkinson library, Niedecker became provoked by Louis Zukofsky's guest-edited, 1931 issue of *Poetry* magazine on the new movement of Objectivist poetry. Though she read voraciously and appreciated the poetry of Wordsworth, she recognized the need for a new, American poetic movement. She had no doubt that Zukofsky's Obectivist issue was the most crucial guide for poets wanting something new. She initiated a correspondence with him, and though Zukofsky

originally encouraged her and sought to expose contemporaries to her work in the early 30s, Niedecker's poetry was often negligently labeled as "Regionalist," despite the fact that the poems reference culturally diverse literary genres, such as the Japanese tanka, and a motley array of historical figures, such as Bashō, Charles Darwin, Thomas Jefferson, or Johannes Kepler, to name a few.

Niedecker began her poetic career with esteem for the Surrealists. This phase of her poetry, however, did not last long or gain her much esteem from the small group of Objectivist poets of whom she had considered herself part. After a brief affair in New York with Zukofsky from 1933-34, which ended with the sorrowful and, for her, unwanted abortion of her twins, Niedecker moved home. She and Zukofsky still wrote one another and offered fervent support of each other's work. They remained friends mostly through correspondence, with only a few short visits. Niedecker's poetry continued to be informed by what she considered the "magic" of the surreal, and she aligned this lyrical "magic" with a more direct style in her 1946 *New Goose* collection. The collection concerns the excesses of consumer culture, following the Great Depression and amidst Roosevelt's New Deal, while also illuminating the "folk"

vernacular of locals from her town or from Madison, where she worked at the library for the Federal Writers' Project from 1938-1942.

As products of a technique she considered "condensing," Niedecker's poems are generally short, sometimes only two lines, yet they are rife with various personae, syntactically playful enjambments, and witty lyricism. Though her perceptions were guided by Objectivist principles, which encouraged thinking clearly with things as they exist, Niedecker's writing is also steeped in the ephemeral processes within the natural world, mimicking her life by the river which often flooded into her home, or in the lives of her loved ones, with intense focus in the biographical poems on her deaf and rigid mother and, by 1951, on her mother's death.

Decades before "composting" became a popular gardening trend for urbanites, Niedecker was writing of the natural compost of her mother's burial land, where "she could have grown a good rutabaga." Apparent in each of her poems is this cyclical sense of everything becoming renewed with purpose, echoing Ezra Pound's poetic imperative to "make it new!" With her "condensery" poetics mocking the new materialism and monotonous surplus of a "factory," Niedecker alternately uses minimal resources (words) while

> simultaneously renewing their properties through how she pairs them or pushes and dangles them away from one another. This resourcefulness, while wedded to modernist ideals, was likely necessitated by her everyday way of life, for she often had to scrounge for resources that most people would take for granted. In one poem, she writes of a "popcorn-can cover" that she applied to the wall of her cabin "so the cold / can't mouse in."[i]

She was occasionally so poor that she had to live without heat or electricity, and if a neighbor didn't drive her into Fort Atkinson, she would often walk from Blackhawk Island to her proofreading job with *Hoard's Dairyman*, which she worked from 1944-50. After one of the common spring floods of Lake Koshkonong into her cabin, she had to sop the water from her wooden floors with area rugs to keep the wood from warping.

Following the death of her mother in 1951 and retirement from *Hoard's* in order to save her failing vision for reading poetry, Niedecker worked for years on a collection entitled *For Paul and Other Poems,* a work never published during her lifetime. The young Paul was Louis and Celia Zukofsky's much doted on violinist son, and Niedecker, being the recipient of humorous letters from the family regarding Paul's ventures, likely found him an enthusiastic resource to elevate her, recently, more isolated and poor lifestyle. Through Zukofsky's

original permission, Niedecker excerpted phrases from the interchanged letters for the poems and worked throughout the fifties on her collection until Zukofsky became agitated with her use of family material and, in 1957, refused to write an endorsement for it. Hurt by his rejection but soon moving on to new work and poetry relationships through connections in the sixties to Cid Corman, Ian Hamilton Finlay, and Jonathan Williams, Niedecker's work began to gravitate even more toward exploration of her beloved wilderness. In 1961, she published her second collection of poems, entitled *My Friend Tree*, through Hamilton Finlay's Wild Hawthorn Press.

In many poems, she depicts herself as nearly isomorphic with birds, foliage, or water, and it is through these layered textures of multiple sensation and memory, beyond the "clarity" of Objectivism, that she begins to move away from Objectivist theory and toward a theory of her own, one which she loosely considered in 1967 to be "reflective."

Niedecker's poems reveal a complex lucidity, where she is often writing from the Objectivist principles proposed by Zukofsky and simultaneously compounding these principles with other genres and personal observations. Her poetic "clarity" is both Objectivist and her own, and her poems, even when they emerge from heavily plangent or confounding origins of loss and failure, resonate with indomitable personal truths.[2]

Niedecker's direct observations of people, the effects of war, other writers and histories, personal relations, and nature are significant to readers not because they emerge from a "Regionalist" perspective; they contain the intense studies of a life which has been "condensed," sometimes ecstatically, into revelatory short poems. The Language poet Rae Armantrout writes of how Niedecker provides readers "a sober reassessment of our significance by placing us on the large canvas of nature."[3] Niedecker's voice is entirely unmistakable, at once radical, constant, absurd, and sharp, and while she does provide a "sober reassessment of our significance," she never makes demands of her readers. Many of the poems begin with directives such as "See" or "Hear," but these words lull, rather than push, the reader into her sensate landscapes or melodies, prompting us toward more receptive states of mind until we are able to move with agility into the minutia of her life by water, where she lived with "a weedy speech" to sustain her until her death at sixty-seven in 1970.

Chapter I

Lorine Niedecker's Objectivist Origins

"I guess my little willows will grow anyhow"[4]

Of her life-long, often flooded home by the Rock River on Blackhawk Island, Wisconsin, Lorine Niedecker playfully wrote to Louis Zukofsky in July of 1938, "Allus sit, here. Sit on the land even when it turns to water. As long as there's a road will be especking youz."[5] Despite her expectations, Zukofsky did not visit. Except for one visit in the summer of 1954, the Objectivist poet, Louis Zukofsky—by 1938 Niedecker's seven-year-long poetic comrade, important first promoter of her poems, valued critic, and former lover—maintained a largely epistolary friendship with Niedecker throughout her life.

Living by a river where water often threatened the diversion of energies toward laborious clean-up efforts rather than artistic or intellectual endeavors, and aware of her physical distance from exploring artistic movements burgeoning in urban settings, Niedecker recognized the potential for her own obscurity as an artist. By 1928, she had published four poems, twice in her 1921 high school yearbook and twice more during 1928 in small magazines of verse. One of these latter poems, "Mourning Dove," confronts the poet's sense of the, by then, "disaffected Imagist."[6] In 1931, at the age of 28 and

ready for an alternate poetic method she might make use of in her work, Niedecker checked out and excitingly read Zukofsky's guest-edited, February 1931 issue of *Poetry* magazine. In it, she found Zukofsky's tenets for the newly coined poetic movement, "Objectivist," so appealing that she boldly initiated a correspondence with him six months after reading them. One of the core rules for achieving Objectivist poetry is to work at "thinking with things as they exist," with "clarity of image and word-tone." [7] The lucidity of these dictums resonated with Niedecker, even though she was unaware of the motives behind Zukofsky's outline of new poetic methods; he had apparently been under pressure by *Poetry* magazine founder, Harriet Monroe, to invent a summative term for this issue's new group of modernist poets.

The group of Objectivist poets, however, became much smaller than those the issue contained, and their views on precisely what "Objectivist" philosophy determined in relation to their work differed greatly. This group included Louis Zukofsky, George Oppen, Basil Bunting, Carl Rakosi, Charles Reznikoff, and Lorine Niedecker.

Perhaps because Zukofsky was—by the time of Niedecker's letter to him half a year after the publication—"bitter about the limited reaction"[8] to the Objectivist issue, perhaps, also, due to the genuine appreciation in Niedecker's response and an

intrigue with the poems she sent him, he replied and encouraged her to submit her work to Monroe for *Poetry* magazine. Niedecker wrote Monroe in November of 1931, and by September of 1933, she had published Niedecker's surrealistic "Promise of a Brilliant Funeral" and "When ecstasy is inconvenient," a poem with a theme of controlled despair. However, Niedecker's lengthy surrealist poem, "Progression"—which she explains to Monroe as a poem of "illogical expression" written "six months before Mr. Zukofsky referred me to the surrealists for correlation"[9]—was rejected.

Despite Niedecker's tendency toward surrealism, which Peter Nicholls considers "a surrealism of organized sound shapes rather than of dream,"[10] the subconscious, and the illogical in her early, experimental poetic years—with surrealism being an art form that Zukofsky was not at all interested in—Niedecker and "Zu," as she called him, were quickly becoming intimate through correspondence. By 1933, after two years of writing each other, Niedecker visited him in New York. Zukofsky's then friend and occasional lover, Jerry Reisman, recalls her unpacking "an ironing board and an iron" and seeing that the sexually promiscuous Zukofsky "looked a bit worried."[11] Niedecker, however, quickly became Zukofsky's lover, with Dr. William Carlos Williams giving Zukofsky "birth control instructions."[12]

Quarters were tight, with the college student Reisman often coming weekends and working alongside the two in Zukofsky's one-room apartment in the Village. Reisman remembers an instance when Niedecker worked near Zukofsky and "once, Lorine's pen was scratchy and Louis suddenly screamed at her to stop the noise."[13] In fact, many references to Niedecker describe the poet, or implicitly compare her to, a "scribbler," including Niedecker's own self-deprecating description of her poems as "scribbling." Jane Shaw Knox, her first biographer—presumably in the voice of the poet's last husband, Al Millen—writes that while on road trips with her husband, Niedecker "was always scribbling as they drove along."[14] These images of the "scribbling" poet, however, betray the passionate and inexhaustible urgency of her thinking rather than parity with the ersatz hoopla of male-authored, eighteenth-century characters, Pamela or Phoebe Clinket. The results of these energetic note-takings are, besides, predominantly compact and sometimes haiku-like poems, hardly specimens of a "scribbled," imprecise inception. However, by early 1934, Zukofsky was ready for more privacy with less scribbling, so she left to live with her parents again on Blackhawk Island, though she would return to stay with him once more in the spring.

This second visit marks a trauma that initiated an element of tension throughout the rest of their predominantly

correspondence-driven relationship, for, despite the birth control method prescribed by Williams (which he claims was not followed properly), Niedecker became pregnant, wanted to keep the baby, but at Zukofsky's refusal to allow the continuance of the pregnancy, she asked her father for the $150 to have an abortion.[15] In a retrospective of his friend years later, Reisman writes, "After the operation, the doctor revealed that her patient had been carrying twins. Lorine ruefully named them 'Lost' and 'Found.'"[16]

Because much of their correspondence was destroyed in later years, after Zukofsky's incessant prodding and Niedecker's very hesitant cooperation, it is impossible to comprehend what Niedecker was feeling then except through inference from the images in her work. By 1964, for example, she wrote poems in small collections bound with her watercolor paintings, the "Handmade Poems," which she sent out to Zukofsky and other poet friends and supporters, Cid Corman and Jonathon Williams. Though Niedecker "scorned confessional poetry,"[17] she concludes one of these poems on Mary Shelley:

> Who was Mary Shelley?
> She read Greek, Italian
> She bore a child
>
> Who died
> and yet another child
> who died.[18]

The poem centers on the artist and the process of creating "great" works or being intellectually great, yet the significant "void" between the closing stanzas delays the painfully inevitable conclusion, or what Niedecker has chosen as the conclusion, to this inquiry into the life of Mary Shelley; from beneath the surface of "Frankenstein's Creator" and the extraordinary artistic output of Shelley, lies this more, implicitly, monstrous devastation from what never came. The second to last line appears as an ominous plank of frail hope which only drops down into the redundancy of a final "who died," where the word "Who," repeated four times throughout the poem—twice in the question "Who was Mary Shelley?" and three times capitalized—has become so plaintively definitive, a debilitating and lower-cased anonymity: "who."

The antiquated term for giving birth, "bore," is also dramatically significant in regard to Niedecker's experience, as another definition to the verb is "to pierce, perforate, make a hole in or through,"[19] further strengthening the sensation of nulled trauma in the caesura between stanzas as well as defining the process of giving birth as one of inhuman mechanics, where to "bore" through something is often also to break free of it. With Shelley, however, the written redundancy of these children "who died" reveals a haunting bond.

For Niedecker, especially by this later time of 1964, the poem is also a retrospective on the limitations of Objectivist aims, with which she had throughout her career maintained a "distinctly ambivalent relationship,"[20] more definitively diverging from Objectivism by the mid-sixties. For example, on Objectivist ways of visioning, Zukofsky writes this rule: "An Objective: (Optics)—the lens bringing the rays from an object into focus. That which is aimed at."[21] This terminology, however, emphasizes the "seen" object as paramount, yet in Niedecker's "Who Was Mary Shelley?" the word "bore" suddenly seems relevant to the Objectivist lens and to that which is "aimed at," where the ironic "She bore a child" conclusion—with the connotation of "piercing through," the result being two dead children—implies, for Niedecker, a problematic lack in the Objectivist principle to "think with things as they exist." The method of "aiming" at here, though sticking to the existing "facts" of Shelley's life, repeatedly results in death. The poem aligns Shelley's anonymity as a woman and Niedecker's sense of her potential anonymity as a specifically Objectivist artist.

Niedecker's poems were often, from the beginning, written at the edge of the Objectivist core. Her intrigue was with the subconscious, the absurd, the psychological, and dream material, where she articulates her earliest personal philosophy on poetry to Monroe in 1933 by writing, "Poetry to have greatest

reason for existing must be illogical. An idea, a rumination such as more or less constantly roams the mind, meets external object or situation with quite illogical association . . . a thousand variations of the basic tension; an attempt at not hard, clear images but absorption of these."[22] Originally, her work suffered neglect as a result of her abiding by this theory, a neglect likely compounded by the fact that she was the only female of an already avant-garde and small movement of Objectivist poets. Some of her contemporaries and publishers, despite Zukofsky's push for her, found her first poems inconsequential.[23]

William Carlos Williams, not as dismissive as Ezra Pound of surrealist efforts, liked Niedecker's disjunctive word entanglements in "Synamism." "This is new," Williams told Zukofsky, saying he "would publish it first thing if we had a press."[24] From the title of "Synamism," the reader is made aware of the poem's language, rife with non-existent terms, which is intended to spur the reader into unconventionally structured, though still partially recognizable, linguistic associations. Considering Niedecker's early theory on composition, Peter Nicholls writes, "Niedecker focusses on 'the first moments of waking from sleep,' when the 'hard clear images' of conscious perception are somehow 'absorbed' into the residue of unconscious structures."[25] This theory of writing the

subconscious, then, was not as intent upon capturing the latent dream images but on the conscious mind's confluence of those images. The theory also runs fittingly in tandem to Niedecker's lifetime of waiting for the spring flood waters to absorb what might be considered "the hard clear image" of the land: "Allus sit here. Sit on the land even when it turns to water."[26]

Because the poet recognized what she describes to Mary Hoard in an undated letter of the 30s as "the Surrealist tendency running side by side with Objectivism,"[27] Niedecker knew that important feelings existed beneath the surface of what could be explicitly "aimed" at and she would continue with these notions regardless of the Objectivists' general consideration of the surreal as inconsequential. In the same letter, she expresses another personal theory, "I conceive of poetry as the folktales of the mind and us creating our own remembering."[28]

Niedecker's poetry, despite her early interest in the surreal as the personal, subconscious relations embedded in thought or memory, is undoubtedly rooted in Objectivist methodology, as in this poem from her 1946 collection, *New Goose*:

> A monster owl
> out on the fence
> flew away. What
> is it the sign
> of? The sign of
> an owl.[29]

The conclusion to the poem reins in the reader's sense of any potential drama presented in the first line's "monster owl." The poem is compatible with another aim of Objectivist style defined by Zukofsky: "Writing occurs which is the detail, not mirage, of seeing, of thinking with things as they exist, and directing them along a line of melody."[30] The provocative object of "monster owl" becomes less significant to the dominant, monosyllabic melody which transpires like an extension to the sight of the singular owl or as an allusion to the owl's well-known, singular hoots of "who." The only two words that are not monosyllabic, "monster" and "away," become parallels to the reader's sense of potential complexity, where "monster" connotes much more than an alternate word like "big," and "away" causes the reader to speculate on the movement of this owl from the speaker's visual sphere, yet the corralling monosyllabic words insist on a simplicity, a terse explanation to the event, the words pulling the reader back to the speaker of the poem as reference rather than tracking the daunting, myriad of meanings we might otherwise confer upon this disappearing "monster owl." The temptation toward finding meaning through reading into the scene, then, is as unstable as the owl on the fence.

An example of how important this notion of achieving the precise detail was to Objectivists can be found in George

Oppen's somewhat spurious, though very "clear" in its repetition, sing-song of "Clarity, clarity, surely clarity is the most beautiful thing in the / world, / A limited, limiting clarity // I have not and never did have any motive of poetry / But to achieve clarity."[31] Niedecker, while interested in precise detail, was motivated by more than "clarity," as this *New Goose* poem reads:

> There's a better shine
> on the pendulum
> than is on my hair
> and many times
> .. ..
> I've seen it there.[32]

The pendulum is the transformative object, with its gravitational, metronymic motion. The trochaic verse, the end-rhymes and the four dots mark its predictable oscillations as well as, perhaps, the speaker's absorption of its "tic-toc." While the pendulum seems to pose a threat to the woman's fleeting youth, the humorous wit and seeming indifference in the speaker's response to the "better shine" along with her definitive place at the end as the emergent, keen observer—"I've seen it there"—situates her in a similar position to the pendulum's constant and precise power.

The last line of the poem has a similar emphasis on "clarity" as the conclusion to "A monster owl," a type of settling into the actuality of the written event rather than

insisting on something beyond the words in their context. Yet, with subtlety, as Peter Middleton notes, Niedecker leaves the closing pronoun "it" vague, where it might reference the "hair" as being reflected back to the speaker from the bronze pendulum or "a better shine" as an entity of the pendulum, or it might refer to a deeper insight, where the "seen" is more of a self-disclosed revelation. The resolution depends on how the reader identifies with the poem, but Niedecker does not cleave to the principle of "clarity," for the object is not presented as more clearly itself. After absorption of the pendulum's altering melody, the final line functions dually, as a distancing between object and speaker and as a subtle, vague reminder of the intimate appeal to the speaker's thoughts.

Zukofsky misuses this poem through how he chose to include it in his 1948 anthology, *A Test for Poetry*, as the first part's final poem in a collection emphasizing male poetry throughout history. Middleton recognizes the theme of "women and clarity" as one that reappears throughout Zukofsky's selections, where women are represented as emotional, inept, or frail throughout the poems. The nuances to Niedecker's "There's a better shine" are trumped, and the poem "seems to confirm, from the mouth of a woman poet, that women are rightly depicted as dangerously seductive creatures of passion by the male poetic tradition."[33] By the time the reader arrives at the end of the

first part to read the poem, its dreadful contextualization resonates as "an avowal of female narcissism that endorses the poetic tradition."[34]

Zukofsky, of course, may not have deliberately intended the above reading into his *Test*. Niedecker, as well, may not have analyzed the format of Zukofsky's *Test* in such a way as to feel maltreated, for she cherished the book just as she did so many of his others. Middleton's argument has merit, though, as Zukofsky was, typically, very evasive in expressing his feelings toward women, proposing the often used empty brackets [ ] in the letters between him and Niedecker to "express affection."[35]

In June of 1948, after a weekend of transplanting willows onto her property, Niedecker writes Zukofsky, "Lots of wild mint where I wanted to mow (with corn knife) but I wouldn't, such sweet little things. Everytime I go down there with the intention of mowing I come back without doing it – and I guess my little willows will grow anyhow."[36] A great conservationist, frustrated with those who "cut things down instead of plant,"[37] Niedecker's work on her land is relative to how she writes, not abandoning (cutting down) the surrealist tendency because she found it compatible with Objectivist work. In a letter to her friend, the poet Kenneth Cox, Niedecker writes of her disinterest in reading her work aloud, "For me

poetry is a matter of planting it in deep, a filled silence, each person reading it a silence to be filled . . . to come to the poems . . . with an ear for all the poems can give and he'll hear that as Beethoven heard tho deaf."[38] Believing a poem to impart a type of synaesthetic quality, as the poem seems to become a tangible growth of sound emerging out of the visual-sonic space of a deep silence, Niedecker's response to the wild mint is truly Objectivist in nature, not cutting it to see what she wants to see through force of mental will——following another of Zukofsky's emphases on how to present an "object unrelated to palpable or predatory intent"[39]——but representing the temporality of and potential within the altering textures of her landscape.

Michael Heller also notes of the unobtrusive nature of Niedecker's decision to plant her poems "in deep silence" that it "proposes a contemplative or distancing activity, a form of isolation or separating out similar to the scientist's experimental set-up."[40] Niedecker does, so often, remain the astute observer even when she observes a demotion of her work to the periphery of literary interest, a demotion that Zukofsky frequently caused through his eventual estrangement from and two-time refusal to write an introduction for the writings of his life-long friend. Though the rapidly multiplying mint imposes a threat to the newly established roots of her "little willows," her instinct is to let it be, identifying with the

speaker of "There's a better shine" and the observance of human powerlessness in the face of time.

Niedecker was often responding to, rather than taking part in, Zukofsky's decisions, including his decision to marry Celia Thaew in 1939 which ended any possibility of a future romantic relationship with Niedecker. Though Niedecker became very close to the family, interchanging letters and visiting twice, Zukofsky had made his choice to marry and have a child with Celia, not Niedecker. In a letter to Zukofsky, Celia, and their young son, Paul, on the flora of Blackhawk island, Niedecker concludes, "The little mint fambly is what intrigues me, tho. Some of it has flowers so tiny they remind me of the notes of LZ in his watch pocket."[41] Of Zukofsky's 1978 book, *80 Flowers*, Jenny Penberthy perceptively observes how "the thyme (time) plant, a member of the mint family, pervades Zukofsky's late work,"[42] and she cites from Michele Leggott's thesis, "If mutual use of particular flowers can be argued as an extension of Zukofsky's 'no names' policy in dedicating, inscribing, or simply pitching a poem close to a friend, then Lorine Niedecker is part of *80 Flowers*."[43] Perhaps the pervasive use of thyme in his work is a type of posthumous dedication to Niedecker, a way of letting the memory of her "run alongside" his work. Niedecker's marriage of the wild mint to Zukofsky's "watch pocket" notes, if analyzed through the admission in her earlier

letter of not being able to "cut it down," also gestures to this sense of a mutually masked affection.

Despite Zukofsky's refusal in 1957 to write what Niedecker's would-be publisher, Jonathon Williams, considered as an essential forward to *For Paul and Other Poems*—in which many of the poems were provoked by the affection Niedecker held toward Paul and Zukofsky—Niedecker continued to support Zukofsky's work. The blow of his refusal, however, inhibited Niedecker from going through with the publication of her collection and further increased the likelihood of her anonymity. Niedecker treated her poems, then, in precisely the same way that she treated nature; even when her plantings of "little willows" were threatened amidst a wild mint, she supposed they would "grow anyhow."

Chapter II

New Goose: New Deal

Soon after Niedecker returned home from New York in 1935, she developed a new style of writing steeped in the lyrical material of the "folk": her parents and grandparents and locals from work or town. Some of the themes Niedecker pursues include issues of property rights, the transparency of the fashionable wealthy, concerns of the poor folk, the threat of becoming obsolete, war and violence, and displeasure with a raging commercialism. By grouping these poems into a collection entitled *New Goose*, as a witty modernization of the *Mother Goose* nursery rhymes, Niedecker redacts the ease of joyful, often absurd, phrasing in the children's rhymes into the more macabre realities of the societally deemed "simpleton," another translation of the word "goose."

These poems reveal Niedecker's Marxist sympathies with the literary Left emerging alongside the even more politically involved sympathies found in the works of urban Objectivists like Zukofsky or Oppen. Economic and literary pressures were inevitable for the poorly timed Objectivist movement's early members, spurred by the years of the Great Depression and New Deal, to adapt their works more deliberately toward leftist politics. For example, when writing was considered to be too "tainted by a bourgeois aestheticism," it would not be

published.[44] Along with the cuts in the publishing industry, these avant-garde poets were likely provoked by the threat of becoming obsolete (many did) just as much as by their genuine empathy for the poor, so they often merged their writings into greater compatibility with Communist party beliefs.

While Niedecker depicts dark issues of class struggle and of her family's personal struggles during the years of the New Deal, the reader of *New Goose* achieves a sense of luxuriating in the tempos of these concise musical pieces, as Niedecker herself likely did. She had moved from the subconscious toward what she considers a "more direct consciousness"[45] in these poems, and from this consciousness comes these lucent, melodic lines that playfully thwart the dire conditions of their subject matter, as though Niedecker, with a keener awareness of what was publishable at the time, deliberately conducts her political themes into such exuberant, witty, and indefatigable lyrical amusement. In a letter to Harriet Monroe in 1934, describing her apprehension of a political poetry, Niedecker writes, "The effect of propaganda in poetic (?) form has the effect on me of swearing that I as a writer will portray my epoch and truthfully evoke life in its totalities only as I am able to make magic, magic of dream and deep subconscious and waking isolation thick unto impenetrability."[46] Niedecker's ebullient lyricism trumps the

pomp of the rich in *New Goose* and demonstrates her self-removal from a potentially too-politicized poetry and its deadening effect. Even while she typed and supported Zukofsky's political "A"-8 and was influenced by his leftist friends and Marxist publications,[47] Niedecker's work is permeated with the vernacular "magic" of the folk, a necessity for sustaining her poetic intention to "evoke life in its totalities" and not merely contribute to the ideals of a movement which evokes life by largely basing it on the cursory premise of the poor as being one-dimensionally humdrum or uninspired in their state of abjection.

While Niedecker frequently juxtaposes the luxurious styles of the rich to the portentous concerns of the poor, where poems contrasting garments of the rich with those of the poor, for example, reflect an obviously grave societal disconnect, the poet also revels in her own playful inventiveness, much like the kind of reveling amidst social disconnect or ineptitude in the work of William Carlos Williams ("Danse Russe" or "Tract"), or like Emily Dickinson's reveling in her often curt responses to death. Consequently, the poems often feel triumphs of lyrical buoyancy despite the speaker's economic position in life. Her poem, "Lady in the Leopard Coat" reads:

> Tender spotted
> hoped with care
> she's coming back

from going there.[48]

The staccato tone and brevity of the poem mimic the speed of the leopard while also representing the narrow visual parameters which govern the speaker's ability to offer *any* response to the occult nature of this lady in her leopard coat. The speaker-poet, Niedecker, as part of the folk, is the limited outsider to the luxurious lifestyle of the lady, though her animated words gesture toward the lady's own futility. The opening line, "tender spotted," full of deadening plosives, presents the lady as a target in the crowd (spotted by the poet) just as the leopard she wears was once spotted and killed for the lady's "tastes." The word "tender" emphasizes the link to taste and wealth while also working to subvert the, then, orthodox presumption of a "lady's" quality of weakness or gentleness, for it also connotes the pleasing quality of eating a well-beaten slab of meat as well as referencing a monetary transaction as cash "tendered." This lady has been, unknown to her, "beaten" by the very capitalistic pleasures she naively esteems. The power of the lady's intermittent presence, then, is transfigured from the first line of her sauntering into the speaker's path of vision, as she has been spotted into an ill-fitting revelation of character——spotted also as "dirtied" or "blemished"——rather than emblazoned by her new, though literally dead, "look."

The anonymous nonchalance of the lady's to-ing and fro-ing in the final lines, *because* of the speaker's witty incisiveness, effectively exerts no mystery, as despite the woman's extravagance in attempting to shroud herself in a dual identity of animal/lady, she has already been figured out. The concluding two lines, then, represent the unenlightened indifference in the speaker's motive to care for or "tender to" the lady's whereabouts, though the fittingly resourceful inferences made throughout by the presumably lower-class, outsider speaker are rife with negative insinuation regarding the lady's predatory means to achieving her luxuries.

The aloofness of the lady in her leopard coat, representing the current state of dying empathies due to savage capitalism, is in direct opposition with the isolationism of this first-person speaker of another "coat" poem:

> My coat threadbare
> over and down Capital Hill
> fashions mornings after
>
> In this Eternal Category's
> land of rigmarole
> see thru the laughter.[49]

This coat does not camouflage or play games with identity. Its "threadbare" quality insists on a pitiful honesty, though one that is clearly not taken seriously at all. The useless state of the coat's condition holds itself up as disillusioned

property in the mirror to the resultant fleeting fashions of capitalism, as the coat "fashions mornings after." By altering the spelling of Capitol Hill, Niedecker expounds the disjoint between rich politicians and bankers and the poor left-overs, where the poor really do seem mere accoutrements in the background of the wealthy. Yet, even here, Niedecker posits the speaker with some sense of power, where the last line touches on the speaker's ability to "see thru" a personal state of subjection to mockery and beyond the temporal gaucherie of the rich just as they ironically "see thru" the graveness of poverty even when it is most apparent in a "coat threadbare."

These poems inhabit the heavily presumptive spheres of the rich, "stripping" them of the heft of their power and seeing through their absurd notions of sustaining their economic well-being, for even "Eternal Category's / land" paradoxically delineates the confines of their eternality as categorical, understood and analyzed. The clunky syllabic junctions in the word "rigmarole" also depict a disharmonic state of communication, where the excessive drivel of politicians results in mechanic-like incessancy following the word "Eternal," which makes the word feel more descriptive of a hell on earth than a heaven. If the purpose of a poem is to be what William Carlos Williams calls "a machine made of words," Niedecker is here contending the mechanically disengaged state of the wealthy with

these six lines of succinct discernment, where the poem exerts a machine-like motion of incising precision.

Niedecker continues to play with the transparency of the wealthy and their fashions. In another poem, a wealthy woman comes to town to buy "silkalene," but the clerk, who calls the woman by the wrong name twice, says she has thrown her supply of silkalene away, suggesting taffeta instead. The conclusion of the poem first reads as the wealthy woman's response:

> No, taffeta
> cracks from hanging, besides
> it's not being worn.
> Mrs. Porra my dear
> if you're going to be hung
> won't crêpe do as weel?[50]

The folk tone, in the last three lines, of the clerk's response, "weel," her seeming ineptitude to call the woman by the right name or to keep up with the latest fashions, and her dense understanding of the lady's meaning of "hanging" do not, ultimately, serve to undermine the authority of the clerk. The upper-class customer, whose name is just as inconsequential as the fashions she desires, provokes the clerk's subconscious disdain to manifest itself through indirect insults by suggesting that the woman will be "hung" and by calling her "Mrs. Porra." Even the suggestion to wear "crepe," as a fabric traditionally worn in mourning is implicative of the clerk's

association of death. The clerk's humorous response is more memorable than the rich woman's obtuse dedication to her fashion, and Niedecker deliberately concludes with this dry humor, essentially excluding the customer by terminating her empty desires, leaving them "hanging."

Violence is often written into the poems as an abstraction, occasionally even dismissed with humor, but a mounting tension, from the beginning, works to dissolve the light-hearted, childhood feelings we typically ascribe to the original Mother Goose. While Niedecker's earlier, surrealist work, like the poem, "Synamism," toys with disjunctive expression, more overt themes of a haunting dismemberment or loss pervade these *New Goose* poems.[51] This sharply critical first poem of the collection is written with a blatantly aggressive, though still lyrically-driven, tone toward the status quo:

> O let's glee glow as we go
> there must be things in the world—
> Jesus pay for the working soul,
> fearful lives by what right hopeful
> and the apse in the tiger's horn,
> costume for skiing I have heard
> and rings for church people
> and glee glo glum
> it must be fun
> to have boots for snow.[52]

Once again, the wealthy mistake as luxuries what the poor consider necessities, fashionable ski costumes and boots for the sake of appearance rather than survival in the snow. They are able to sing merrily of a capitalism that has supported their lives and belief, where the line "rings for church people," along with "Jesus pay" instead of "pray," mocks the type of wealth-driven vow that the rich make with their God and themselves. However, it is the "Have-Nots . . . whom Jesus, not the State, must save; though when the poor enter the church apse in search for Him, the horned tiger of capitalism gores them."[53]

The harsh velar consonants in the closing "glee glo glum" reinterpret the joyful "glee glow" song of the first line; rather than a harmonious joy, the successive "gl" sounds clamor together, a sticky and awkward trekking through unlike the first line's quality of skipping about, and consequently, the vowels slow to an entrenchment in the final, despondent "glum." If contrasting this triad of vowels with the nearly similar and well known threat of "Fee! Fie! Foe! Fum!" from "Jack and the Beanstalk," the reader might infer more from the devastation that the speaker, through a pained sarcasm, represents. The fairytale of poor Jack, unable to provide for his widowed mother, following his magical stalk into the sky only to find a greedy ogre who threatens to "grind his bones" for his bread, is just as unforgiving as Niedecker's "apse in the tiger's horn,"

where the supposed "holy" apse of church is yoked to the deathly greed resulting from capital gain. The "ogre" of the fairy tale mimics this theme; while living in his tower in the sky with his golden harp, golden goose eggs, and golden coins, he mocks the greatness of a God who seems to be aligned with the greed of those below rather than behaving as an empathetic paternal figure to the more unfortunate.

This allusion to "Jack and the Beanstalk" is also pertains to the story of Niedecker's family life, where her mother, Daisy—coincidentally known, through letters from Niedecker to Zukofsky, by the acronym of BP (bean pole) due to her above average height—was deaf and left somewhat alone by her husband. Henry Niedecker made poor investments with his wife's inheritance and family property, later having an affair with the neighbor and shamelessly giving her much of the Niedecker family money and property. Niedecker, sensitive to both of her parents' issues, interjects her mother's bereaved "Mother Goose-ish" voice into many of the poems:

> Well, spring overflows the land,
> Floods the floor, pump, wash machine
> Of the woman moored to this low shore by deafness.

> Good-bye to lilacs by the door
> And all I planted for the eye.
> If I could hear—too much talk in the world,
> Too much wind washing, washing
> Good black dirt away.

Her hair is high.
Big blind ears.

I've wasted my whole life in water.
My man's got nothing but leaky boats.
My daughter, writer, sits and floats.[54]

A clear reference to Whitman's "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd" and T.S. Eliot's re-working of the lilac in *The Wasteland*, the mother's "Good-bye to lilacs by the door" is written as an internal, elegiac monologue lamenting her "wasted" life, where spring, like a speaker in *The Wasteland* believes, invites more death than renewal. The negated synaesthetic potential of the mother, "Big, blind ears," is written as though the poet's construction of such a succinct, sensate phrase—a kind of stinging, slicing into the mother's lament—contains more sensory possibility than its monosyllabic, matter-of-fact characterization of the great (Big) sensory immobility that defines the mother.

The mother's inability to hear has compromised her other senses to the extent that their disparate existences bar any kind of pleasing amalgamation that might muddle them into a place of less need for tidy feelings, a place of "good black dirt." However, as they are——her lilacs meant "for the eye," not for their smell as well, or the handicap of deafness as being implicitly inhibitive of her ability to see——the "spring" only

provokes the mother toward a state permanently bereft of sensorial experience. The periods in each of the last lines, as well, serve as stabilizing points amidst the flood, marking the unwavering abdication of the mother to her empty tenacity. Similar to the portrayal of discordant sensation in the poem, these indirect insults from outsider poet-speaker to mother and from mother to husband and daughter present the reader with an awareness of the family's rather sad and incongruent existence, even while mother and poet-daughter share a similar caustic wit. Niedecker, under the same economic constraints as her mother, however, is not resentful, as she endorses her "floating" life of poetry. Even in these critical *New Goose* poems, which Margot Peters considers to be a collection where the generally not so politically charged poet "sticks it to the rich,"[55] Niedecker's wit throughout offers a resilience, a sense of the poet's ability to "float" above, while simultaneously delving keenly into, the daunting political and economic hardships of her time.

From 1938-42, Niedecker was working for the Federal Writers' Project in Madison, writing biographies of well-known Wisconsin leaders. This poem, in part, concerns her personal fear of obscurity and does not offer any sense of resilience found in many of the others:

> The clothesline post is set
> yet no totem-carvings distinguish the Niedecker tribe
> from the rest; every seventh day they wash:

> worship sun; fear rain, their neighbors' eyes;
> raise their hands from ground to sky
> and hang or fall by the whiteness of their all.[56]

The grammatical order of the poem is curiously more orthodox than many of the others which omit proper punctuation and make use of more nimble syntactical disjunctions. The element of prose, along with this use of conventional punctuation, works as a controlling mechanism alongside the speaker's anxiety of becoming obsolete due to abiding by the socially acceptable, monotonous chores and habits of life. The dark humor of her predicament is in the absurdity of the empty frailty of these white clothes that have the potential to fall from the line as though falling from grace and becoming "impure" through contact with the dirt.[57] The third line's conjoining of the word "rest," offered as a noun for everyone who exists in stagnation among the devout, and the successive phrase "every seventh day they wash," *rather* than rest, reveals that this tribe is already unhinged from socially acceptable notions of grace.

The "tribe's" empty white clothes on the line along with their primitive "hailing" gestures of work as they raise their hands simply to put more clothes on the line mock the assumption of any God as witness to their lives. The actions of the Niedecker tribe, then, actually do leave them as "distinguished" outsiders, though their work only serves to

belittle them to others. They dangle, as their clothes do, from the constraints of convention. Just as the clerk presumed the rich customer would be hanging rather than the fabric itself, Niedecker here examines her sense of painful, personal suspension among the folk who have little concern for the work of poetry, where the folk who have "colored" her poems with the melody of their speech also threaten staunch erasure in a sterile "whiteness."

Though *New Goose* was accepted for publication by James A. Decker in 1939, World War II interfered, so it was not until after he had returned in 1946, leaving Niedecker out "hanging" indeed, that it was at last published. William Carlos Williams wrote in a letter to Niedecker, "The book's a good one in the way I want books of poems to be good. It is good *poetry*. It is difficult and warm. It has a life to it," yet despite his appreciation and other favorable reviews by her contemporaries, *New Goose* did not sell well. Zukofsky even encouraged Niedecker to submit several of her works to libraries and universities because he knew they would not buy it. The publication did provide Niedecker a stronger sense of her capability as an artist, separate from life with her ailing mother and inconstant father, so at her request, her father built her a small cabin by the river. Though the practice of her work obliged her to labor through low paying editing jobs, ultimately becoming a cleaner

at the hospital in order to save her eyes for poetry, Niedecker knew that what she had accomplished necessitated her autonomy from the daily monotonies of her "tribe."[58]

Chapter III

"The Way She Runs" Alone: Niedecker in Isolation

In the poems after 1945, Niedecker shifts her attention more toward private relations—with nature and birds, her parents, her thoughts on other writings, and Zukofsky's son, Paul. The move toward greater solitude was, in part, due to a prolonged discomfort with the condescending manners of co-workers at *Hoard's Dairyman*, a proofreading job in Fort Atkinson which she worked only to bide time for poetry and basic necessities like oil for her heater. The folk with whom she had established certain conviviality in her *New Goose* poems were becoming, at times, a source of strain rather than "music."

Also, the war had ended, but such invasive forces—knowledge of gross desolation in the threat of an atomic bomb, an increasing number of hunters in blaze orange or tourists in campers encroaching upon the beloved natural preserves of her Blackhawk Island—became either overwhelming mental sources of consternation or living infestations surrounding her new privacy of cabin life. In a poem beginning, "In the great snowfall before the bomb," Niedecker writes:

> I worked the print shop
> right down among em
> the folk from whom all poetry flows
> and dreadfully much else.[59]

The peaceful white blanket of soft snowfall should act to visually dissolve the dualities inherent in nature, to make life quiet. However, mechanic (the print shop) and human noise and tensions arise amidst this snowfall as forces of extirpation, foreshadowing the unnatural quieting by the falling of a bomb rather than snow. Niedecker's acknowledgement of ease of "flow" in poetry derived from the folk is inseparable from the same sense of ease that marks the folk's ability to swiftly engage destructive force, the "dreadfully much else."

Working hard hours and walking long miles in the cold, when times were really hard, often to return to her unheated home to sleep in her heavy coat, Niedecker had fallen out of tune with the melodic "magic" of her folk base which she had worked to preserve throughout *New Goose*. Her folk, in tandem, were disbanding from their once more easily transposable melodies:

> The elegant office girl
> is power-rigged.
>
> She carries her nylon hard-pointed
> breast uplift
> like parachutes
> half-pulled.
>
> At night collapse occurs
> among new flowered rugs
> replacing last year's plain
> muskrat stole,
> parakeets
> and deep-freeze pie.[60]

This office girl recalls Wallace Stevens's supine woman in the beginning of "Sunday Morning," as she stretches at breakfast over a rug with "the green freedom of a cockatoo," yet Niedecker's office girl, though mechanically and *not* fundamentally power-rigged, does not have the power to dream lazily as Stevens's woman does, as though the self-destructive tensions she embodies throughout the day "collapse" by nightfall to reveal her weakened state before such *pretensions*. The longest line of the poem mimics the tension this girl thrusts into the workplace, where "hard-pointed" extends outside the lengths of other lines just as she uses her breasts to "stand out" from the rest. However, her possessions betray her ultimate loneliness. Each of them betray her need to be comforted—against the barren floor or the cold, the sound of her silence at home, and her incapacity for making her own warm sustenance at the end of a work day—rather than demonstrating any possession of power.

Ironically, while Stevens's society-chiding woman, through self-established comforts, at first drifts freely into dream, unencumbered in her peignoir and mimicking her rug's cockatoo of "green freedom," Niedecker's girl, alternately putting herself out into the world as much as is physically possible, becomes a product of mere survival, collapsing upon

her rugs like a vestige of war from the ersatz dream of self-empowerment. The last line intimates that the American dream is not "easy as pie" but a daily hardening of the self, a "deep-freeze" into astute willingness to abide by a patriarchal system that rewards those unmoving, "power-rigged" breasts. The perfection of the girl's office-realm is based on the stilling of her natural beauty, her breasts in controlled stagnation as a kind of death, much like the woman of "Sunday Morning" realizes with the never-rotting fruit of "paradise" and the phrase "Death is the mother of beauty."[61] The office-girl deflates each day into what remains of her pitiful life-reserves at home.

Niedecker, working for space to think and write, however, was returning home in a similar state of exhaustion, with much less enthusiasm or capacity for art due to workplace and physical tensions. Working as a proof-reader was taking its toll on her already poor vision. The poem headed "On a row of cabins / next my home" reads:

> Instead of shaded here
> birds flying through leaves
> I face this loud uncovering
> of griefs.[62]

Instead of the more usual respite nature offers her in many poems, her mind is here assaulted by the birds' intrusion of her shade. Subsequently, her mood converges with the action of the birds, their incessant noise and disruption as parallels to the

intensity of the "griefs" on her mind. The birds' ruffling of the leaves also overturns her griefs, compelling her to "face" them in the light, literally and with courage, rather than merely using the heft of them as a shady blanket under which to hide. The word "uncovering" connotes "both a revelation . . . and a divesting of all shelter."[63]

The grievances Niedecker refers to could be, by the 1950's, from many sources. The poem is undated but likely written in 1952 or 1953. She, at last, had to quit her job at Hoard's in 1950 due to failing vision. Her mother died in the summer of 1951, with her father following three years later, in the summer of 1954. Though she had more time for poetry, her project "For Paul and Other Poems," written from 1949-1953, with many of the poems directed to or doting on Zukofsky's son, Paul, was becoming a source of tension between her and Zukofsky. Though he originally supported Niedecker's use of details from his letters describing the life of his violinist son, and though he was working more thoroughly than ever before as Niedecker's best critic and editor, by March 15, 1951, Niedecker writes Zukofsky, "I have the feeling you don't quite get me these days [ ] I'm writing you too much and you are too busy."[64]

The "For Paul" poems are, sometimes, uncomfortable to read if read in the context of her life through letters to the Zukofsky family because it seems that the poet is at pains to be

more involved in Paul's experiences. Niedecker's biographer considers how the family becomes a kind of "holy trinity" for the poet, and while this phrase is too strong, especially for the unreligious, secularist poet, Paul definitely becomes a celebrated child in whom Niedecker celebrates the achievements of and lives through on occasion. With a maternal voice, she uses Paul's familial nick-name and writes many of the poems to him as though advice: "How bright you'll find young people,/ Diddle,/ and how unkind."[65] The voices of Zukofsky, Paul, and Niedecker all mingle in the poems, where Niedecker often extracts whole phrases from Zukofsky's letters, and while she employs other voices, her parents', and occasionally inserts the presence of Paul's mother, the poems are heavily constructed around the former three voices.

However, the possibility that Niedecker's solitude and the loss of her mother caused her to enter a depressive state presumes a more fundamental prospect for Niedecker's turn toward Paul. Living after the atrocities of World War II and the atomic bomb, an increasingly poor Niedecker existed in survival mode amidst hostility at *Hoard's,* a fact which likely caused her to recognize the usefulness of Paul. His youthful energy could bolster her enthusiasm for the only work she considered integral to her existence: poetry. The death of her aloof mother, whom Niedecker describes in a poem as "darkinfested," might have

provoked the poet toward greater intimacy with Zukofsky and his family as a means to placate a possibly genetic "darkinfested" nature. Niedecker was certainly cognizant of the impact of her choice to live alone, and she often directs her poems to other artists and writers, as though writing to close friends. Here, she identifies with the loner poet, Li Po:

> Swept snow, Li Po,
> by dawn's 40-watt moon
> to the road that hies to office
> away from home
>
> Tended my brown little stove
> as one would a cow—she gives heat.
> Spring——marsh frog-clatter peace
> breaks out.[66]

Niedecker must be writing with Li Po's poem, "Drinking Alone by Moonlight" in mind, where the poet realizes his lack of friends while drinking his wine and cleverly invites the moon and his shadow to dance and make merry with him. Niedecker entertains a more modern sobriety, where the "40-watt" moon rather unnaturally dangles as an electric fixture, perhaps from the office which it will light her path toward. Not romanticizing the moon, it only serves as an indifferent, electrified tool, rather than merry friend, helping her to see well enough to work before actually making her way to work. Yet Niedecker, in a similar need of company as Li Po, animates her

world as best as she can, transforming her stove into a comforting cow until the noise and warmth of spring returns to melt away the mental loneliness provoked by the silence of winter.

The phrase "peace / breaks out" is a curious alteration of the more typical "war breaks out," implying that peace, if restrained, arrives through work, energy, and noise, "clatter," rather than being understood as affiliated with silence and placidity. The visible fact that the peace does "break out" from the poem itself implies that Niedecker's poem has either corporeally prohibited such peace, with lines like bars, or, more likely, that it has contained it all along, nurturing it until it has garnered the strength to break out, as a "piece" separate from the whole which had before embodied it. The poem embraces Taoist belief, Li Po's philosophy, of opposites existing in relation to one another, as winter gives way to spring and the effort of sweeping snow gives way to the seeming effortlessness of a peace that "breaks out."

For Niedecker, "peace" was never permanent. In 1952, she writes Zukofsky of the limits of the mind, of how it seems "an aeronautical appendage, something in space to explore but well enough tied to the world of the body to suffer."[67] Many of the poems that form the manuscript collection she hoped to publish as "For Paul and Other Poems" are an effort of absorbing

the loss and physical pains of her world and reestablishing them anew in a safer place, adapting them toward less intimidating scenarios, where the child, Paul, is often the recipient of her conversions. Like her poems in *New Goose*, Niedecker works to find a structure that might give the sometimes "darkinfested" material of her poems a more melodic ease, and the happy fiddler, Paul, described with such enthusiasm in letters from Zukofsky, becomes her naturally infectious source.

This longer poem reads as a decrescendo, conversely quieting on its way down the page rather than resounding in *Fortissimo* strength, as it resolves in more hopeful possibility even while maintaining a marriage of dark and child-like material throughout:

> Lugubre for a child
> but for you, little one,
> life pops
> from a music box
> shaped like a gun.
>
> Watch! In some flowers
> a hammer drops down
> like a piano key's
> and honeybees
> wear a pollen gown.
>
> A hammer, a hummer!
> A bomber in feathers!
> Hummingbirds fly
> backwards—we eye
> blurred propellers.

Dear fiddler: you'll carry
a counter that sings
when man sprays
rays
on small whirring things.[68]

Many writers were by then consumed with the repercussions of the atomic bomb. Gertrude Stein playfully wrote in her "Reflection on the Atomic Bomb" that she simply never could take any interest in it, maintaining her typical sentence contortions and word-variations and writing the nonchalant observation, "Sure it will destroy and kill a lot, but it's the living that are interesting and not the way of killing them, because if there were not a lot left living how could there be any interest in destruction."[69] Niedecker is also very witty in shunning the daunting properties of violence and the atomic bomb. Both writers assault the powerful integrity of the bomb by dwarfing its authority through play and detachment. Niedecker ingeniously dissolves the deadly capacity of the bomb by contrasting it with music and life. Man's insect-like spraying down of the bomb's rays—ironically, a radiation that would kill all insects—seems nothing more than a mechanical and hasty effigy to the melodious dance of the honeybee as it is alternately "sprayed" by life-giving pollen.

The third line's "life pops" and subsequent jutting of the next line establishes a pattern of positive displacement and oomph within negative (white) space throughout the poem, strengthening Niedecker's belief that it is through the atomity of space, the often unseen or disregarded elements, from which genuine power emerges. By contrasting the large-scale and gratuitous damage of bomb and war to the melodious minutia of life-generation in nature, Niedecker establishes the patterns of violence as a clumsy clone to the more regal dance of life. The bee succeeds in a "gown" of pollen rather than detritus, where the potentially violent "hammer" is transfigured through comparison with the gentle bending of a flower's pistil or gentle tap-down of a piano's hammer on its string, both being often unseen processes. An accompaniment in the phenomenon of the tiny hummingbird's often undetectable wings in flight also precedes the mechanical effort of a propeller's simulated motion. The fact that a small child will carry his violin as a counter, as a physical refutation, to the damage of war presumes that smallness not only has the chance to contest the indomitable but the capacity to thrive beyond the seemingly omnipotent.

Throughout these poems, Niedecker proceeds to examine subtleties in the proximity of life and death, in the abruptness

of death and necessary transitioning of whatever it leaves behind:

> July, waxwings
> on the berries
> have dyed red
> the dead
> branch[70]

In sustaining their lives, the birds accentuate death. The dwindling syllabic count along with the shift toward a rapid succession of plosive consonants emphasizes how the "waxwings" imitate death, as though the "wax" of their name is prelude to the melting down of berry juice over the branch. Some of Niedecker's lines dealing with death are witty in their dry humor, like "I'll roof my house and jump from there / to flooring costs"[71] or "the clocks are dead, / past dead,"[72] yet most of the poems focusing on death carry an air of mystery, like the poems concerning her mother's death. Less witty, and in a sudden hush or stilled tempo, often accented by a landscape of snow, they are poignant because of Niedecker's prolonged and recurrent treatment of the memory of her mother and the difficulty of transcribing what she discovers of this elusive woman's life.

Niedecker writes BP's final words as the conclusion to one poem:

"It's a long day since last night.
Give me space. I need
floors. Wash the floors, Lorine!—
wash clothes! Weed!"[73]

The wry peculiarity in her mother's hope to attain space through weeding and chores is quite sad, as though she is trying to maintain the same sense of control over her dying that she had with her household, the exclamations serving as final protests of her authority in the absurdity of the effort and also as instances of more chaotic urgency toward emotional expression, though she is clearly incapable of an emotional intimacy with those who love her. Rachel Blau DuPlessis observes how the panic of this protest stems from the mother's knowledge of her immanent death, where the earth must be prepared for her or remain an otherwise very frightening opposite to the "domestic order and containment" of her clean household floors.[74]

This poem reiterates her mother's resourcefulness, her intense focus on visual potentialities, and her controlled or tempered nature:

Dead
she now lay deaf to death

She could have grown a good rutabaga
in the burial ground
and how she'd have loved these woods

One of her pallbearers said I

like a dumfool followed a deer
wanted to see her jump a fence—
never'd seen a deer jump a fence
pretty thing
the way she runs[75]

Emanating with lucid tenderness, Niedecker's closing lines achieve a sense of resolution, signifying weightless liberation through the delicate deer's jumping beyond the graveyard fence. The structure of the poem seems to imitate the structure of a formal letter, where Niedecker's word-play of "Dead" is the ironic beginning instead of "Dear," though the "deer" is spotted later, as though the poet is ironically loosening her hold on objective observation, moving toward a private closure of feeling, of "dearness," through her, at first, objective notice of the deer. The early observations in the poem are like those the mother would have made of her burial ground, noticing the "good black dirt" for gardening. The mother's lifelong intent to maintain control is interjected through her daughter's matter-of-fact thoughts until the poet forges beyond her reason, "a dumfool," in the act of following the dear. Implicitly seeing her mother in the female deer, BP transcends her supposed "ungraceful" or unappealing nature, becomes delicate and "pretty," a thing to behold.

The works in “For Paul and Other Poems” reveal Niedecker establishing control in revealing violence or war as petty, with the power-rigged girl, or adapting it into a place of light music, as she often did in the poems for Paul, yet they also reveal Niedecker in a deeper meditation with the uncontrollable, in the fissures of transitory life. She tends to her subjects throughout with such alacrity that the reader is thoroughly disarmed by the intensity of her voice, each poem a piece of her music. Though Jonathan Williams offered to publish “For Paul and Other Poems” for $200 in December of 1956, Zukofsky’s refusal to write the introduction or forward came as a major blow to Niedecker. Though she had intended an eight-part structure of the “For Paul” poems, she instead dismantled her work—which would not be printed together again during her life—and she published the poems in small magazines.

Chapter IV

Life by Water: Wreathed in "Weedy Speech"

After years of exertion on her "For Paul" poems, Niedecker went back to work as a hospital cleaner from 1957-1963, and her poetic output became infrequent. However, in 1960 she submitted her poems to Cid Corman, the publisher of *Origin*, which instigated a decade of correspondence and friendship. They had a mutual appreciation for each other's poetry, and he published a total of seventy-five of her poems throughout his life. Also, her 1946 *New Goose* was discovered by fans in England and Scotland, with Ian Hamilton Finlay writing praise in 1961 and gaining her permission to re-print some of *New Goose* along with new poems.

Within the year, *My Friend Tree* was published by Wild Hawthorn Press. Niedecker, then fifty-eight, compares this sudden interest and the printing of another book to the work of her water pump. It took an entire lifetime, she writes, "to weep / a deep / trickle."[76] This trickle is implicitly hopeful and disappointing at once, for the etymology "involves 'running' and therefore paradoxically evokes the new running water while limiting its flow."[77] One limitation to Niedecker's ease of flow was Zukofsky's second refusal to write an introduction for her book, explaining that he was not writing introductions to his work or others, though he had just written a preface to Jonathan

Williams's book in 1959.[78] However, because Niedecker was connected to contemporary poetry through Corman and Jonathan Williams, Zukofsky's continued disengagement from her work was not as hurtful.

Poetry came to the forefront again during 1963, in part because of the poet's new, enthusiastic fans and in part because she had attained more financial security after retiring and marrying Al Millen, a house painter whom she met after he arrived on Blackhawk Island to buy a home from her earlier in the year. While Niedecker was finally able to stop working and focus on her poetry, self-assured of the merit of her minimalist poems enough to write "No layoff / from this / condensery,"[79] the poet simultaneously curtails the authority of her work's constancy by writing, after observing the "star ticks" of her alarm clock, "I rise / to give the universe / my flicks."[80] While the lines carry a diminutive tone, Niedecker is also becoming more self-assured in these pen "flicks" and their ability to offer some star-like illumination not totally overlooked in the expansive universe. Though her poems might sometimes be, to her, like inconsequential star-flicks in the vastness of universe, they simultaneously provide her with a "strange courage" to write, as she rises like William Carlos Williams's ancient star which, he writes, shines "alone in the sunrise / toward which you lend no part."[81]

Niedecker's "strange courage" allowed her to steep her poetic syntax in the rhythms of nature. Her poems of the sixties are her most concentrated studies on human and elemental nature, where she so provocatively depicts them as inseparable—with subtle yet radical inversions or confluence of one into the other—that the line between the two is easily marred, becoming a temporal yet always advancing "wave-line" upon the mind with its diminishing shoreline of rational distinction.

Her poem, "TV," diminishes the rational voice of the person speaking on TV by comparing the television to "the compound eye / of the insect" and further traces the devolution of the knowing TV speaker and sophistication of the modern TV by noting how the ubiquitous "wave line" moving across the screen reflects back, traces humanity's elemental beginning as it moves "on shell, sand, wall / and forehead of the one / who speaks."[82] The "sureness" of the mind's relation to authoritative speech—of the human as being evolved toward such rational capability and of the TV's "compound" power of vision—is replaced by the irregular "shore-ness" of the mind's relation to the wave's undulating advance upon all matter and gulping sweep of erasure.

Experimenting with the Japanese tanka, a five-line haiku-like structure without the regular stress pattern, Niedecker moves somewhat away from the objectivist emphasis on seeing "the thing as it is" and into a discourse of more sensorial

involvement, examination and conciliation. The tanka form served as a guiding structure to condense the heightened intensity of her studies, where sensations provoked by nature are often transmuted into human expression, as in this poem regarding her mother:

> Hear
> where her snow-grave is
> the *You*
> *ah you*
> of mourning doves[83]

The physicality of this landscape reverberates as the mourning doves' sounds give it shape; the reader is only able to be "here," in the landscape of the poem, through "hearing" it and being viscerally attuned to its rhythms. The mourning doves are written into their sound with a calm, sensuous intonation through the slowed step-down of "*You* / *ah you*," and the reader subsequently feels swayed through the open consonants and vowels of the final lines into the landscape's copula of sorrow. Yet, the presence of the birds at the grave is also hopeful; spring is coming.

Still writing life into death and vice versa, Niedecker is attentive to the rapid conversions of both, beginning one of her more frequently anthologized poems, "Lake Superior," with "In every part of every living thing / is stuff that once was rock."[84] By startling away the socially expected explanations of

life, with a wit akin to Dickinson's scientifically incisive poetry, she examines life and death as naturally synonymous. Niedecker's honest observation and swift juxtapositions continue to blur societally forced dualisms between life and death:

> White
> among the green pads—
> which
> a dead fish
> or a lily?[85]

The poem begins in a painterly way, almost with a romantic tone, as though she will be describing Monet's lilies, yet Niedecker interrupts the easy flow with a probing voice, clashing into the serenity of the first two lines through the aggressive sound of "which." The abrasive interruption is ironic when considering how viable either natural object, dead fish or lily, could actually be as the "white" of line one.

The last lines' question—meant to directly illumine this paradoxically obscure "white" rather than allowing the poem to continue evasively dabbling around in the colors of its source—curiously becomes an open-ended resolution to the first line's isolated mystery. The white lily, associated with virtue and purity of the Madonna, seems to match the singularity and hierarchical presence of the first line's "White." The lily is of course also linked primarily to its own death and to death in general as the flower of funerals, so the speaker's first

impression of this "white" as a possible "dead fish" is based in her own practical observations. The question, then, appeases itself; because the two things are so nearly related, either answer is inconsequential.

Some of Niedecker's poems begin to unite matter so intimately that they become concrete, where her writing emerges as fine embroidery on the page, soft imprints of words as luxurious images:

Honest
Solid
The lip
of tipped
lily

A quiet flock
of words
not the hound-
howl
holed[86]

Both lily and quiet flock are related to the poet's work, where the first stanza implicitly parallels the not yet budding lily lip, with emphasis on how it is "tipped," to the similar appearance of the tipped lip of a fountain pen. The stanza's angle and fine point, as well, imitates the appearance of a pen. The truth coming from the writer's pen is thus compared with the etymological root to the "truth" of the lily's name. The next stanza furthers the poem's concrete structure by wedding the

words written to the image of the "quiet flock," again pushing the words out to a point. However, the fragility of life and art is threatened by external violence, the hunters with their hounds' howling to disrupt the quiet work of the artist, causing the words to fall off and the poem to end, as though each word is "holed" by gunshot just as the falling birds are.

Silence was crucial for Niedecker's work. Though her marriage with Al Millen allowed her to travel to Lake Superior or South Dakota, providing her more time to write, and though they were fairly complementary partners, he was also an alcoholic, often hindering the poet's enthusiasm for art through his frequent outbursts. Some of her work develops the dismal side of their marriage, deftly presented in these dark lines: "I married / and lived unburied."

The nature of Blackhawk Island must have become an even greater escape from the occasionally prosaic turf of marriage. Elizabeth Arnold considers how the reader is often able to locate Niedecker in the treetops in her poems.[87] In fact, her head is frequently submerged in some kind of foliage, as in the poem where her "griefs" merge with the birds' uncovering of leaves. Reprieve from life is often identified with the shade and privacy of leaves, as she writes in her poem "Fall": "We must pull / the curtains— / we haven't any /leaves."[88] And we

find the poet slowly zooming out, as though through a camera lens, from her precise etching of the tree leaves:

> The eye
> of the leaf
> into leaf
> and all parts
> spine
> into spine
> neverending
> head
> to see[89]

A concrete poem in the shape of the leaf, the poem is also connecting human physical traits to the leaf's, panning out from its particularities toward its overall mass, the leaf as a whole but also the tree top composed of leaves as isomorphic with the human "head." The resolution is in the poem's "condensing," a convergence of multiplicity into the oneness of the unbroken words "neverending" and the singular containment of "head." With the compound of "neverending" sounding closely to "never rending," the distinction of this solitary mass of nature as unbreakable is furthered.

The poem entertains a religious and sensual tone in its esteem for the life observed, as though slipping the eye slowly down the filaments of the leaf. The repeated pattern of "leaf into leaf" and "spine into spine" resonates as a life-giving celebratory inversion of the finality to the funereal "ashes to ashes" and "dust to dust." Similarly, the connotation of

"neverending" with heaven's eternality is attributed, rather, to the human and leaf "head," as though the physical world could finitely displace its own temporality.

Despite the interruptions to her thinking, Niedecker did believe in an eternality of art, in its revisionary properties, even if the rest of the world disregarded it. Writing one poem from the perspective of a haughty, self-righteous poet, the speaker insults Niedecker's merit by describing his art as "wreathed / rose words" while threatening the persistence of Niedecker by his insult, written as an inquiry into why she insists on doing away with his "rose" language: "you weed / you pea-blossom weed / in a folk / field." [90] The poet depicts herself as a modernist far removed from the sentimentality of Romantic poets, where the deep pooling of vowels in "wreathed / rose words" mock their excess and recall the modernist transitioning marked by Stein's famous "A rose is a rose is a rose."

The poem is also a meditation on how much of the literary world was continuing to pigeonhole her as a folk regionalist. After all, Hamilton Finlay first sought to reprint her *New Goose* poems primarily because of his affinity with how she wrote the folk, relating to them because of the modern folk movement in Scotland. In 1963, she selected many of her newer poems for a book titled *T&G*, after Lawrence Durrell's "Tenderness and

Gristle" or, as Jonathan Williams considered more fitting for the chiseling, carpenter-like poet, "Tongue and Groove." While Williams published the book in 1963 through Jargon Society, the hard copy, due to the publisher's financial issues, did not reach Niedecker until 1969. In a letter to Corman, one year before her death, Niedecker expresses her well-warranted outrage as to where the University of Wisconsin library designated the book: "with regional materials." She writes, "I should ask: What region—London, Wisconsin, New York?"[91] Niedecker's work—appreciated by Corman in Japan, Hamilton Finlay in Scotland, and Williams in England, concerned with the letters of Thomas Jefferson or John Adams, influenced by Bashō, Darwin, and Asa Gray, to name a few—could hardly be classified as only "regional material."

Even Zukofsky, unknown to Niedecker, wrote a 1961 letter to Corman of the poet's works in "For Paul," claiming that they lacked literary longevity due to their intense focus on "sentiment of the affections."[92] Years after he had first situated her poem in his 1948 *A Test for Poetry*, "There's a better shine," with the very near-implication of female fragility and emotion, Zukofsky was now more direct with the acridity of his insult. Even if Niedecker was more often writing from the more intimate spaces of memory and emotion, she never doubted the strength of her spare, modernist poems which

only occasionally sprang from sentiment, never stagnated into it. The insult of the latter poem, nearly as putrid as Zukofsky's, is desperate, even whiney in its repetition of "weed," the inevitable associated rhyme of "plead" felt just as strongly. The sensed ephemerality of the anonymous poet's dying "rose words" amidst a fortification of "folk weeds" is excruciating.

Niedecker often compares her poetic work to weeds, to their resourceful and indefatigable longevity. She writes of her work as able to "sustain her" through "a weedy speech / a marshy retainer."[93] In another poem, she observes how the maples' leaves have died, yet the weeping willow "hangs green":

> and the old cracked boat-hulk
> mud-sunk
> grows weeds
> year after year[94]

Niedecker, if like the weeds, is remarking on the perseverance of life and art, their ability to so efficiently "make use of" even when cradled by a dead tool of practicality, the "mud-sunk" fishing boat.

In her last years, Niedecker turned to what she termed a "reflective" style, first intimating this change in a 1967 letter to her friend, Gail Roub. As a style that moves beyond objectivism, she writes:

> The basis is direct and clear—what has been seen or heard—but something gets in, overlays all that to make a state of consciousness...The visual form gives off after it's felt in the mind. A heat that is generated and takes in the whole world of the poem. A light, a motion, inherent in the whole.[95]

Incorporating this synaesthetic style, where light, motion, and heat simultaneously illumine the basis of the poem, Niedecker also elongated her poetic structures, writing some of her most exquisite, rhythmic works. She originally adopted Williams's triadic stanzas as the suiting template for her poem "My Life by Water," where each stanza seems to ripple outward as new yet interconnected utterance:

> My life
> by water—
> Hear
>
> spring's
> first frog
> or board
>
> out on the cold
> ground
> giving[96]

The poem offers a gentle ebbing, pulling the reader into the sound of the poem, just as viscerally as in her "Hear / where her snow-grave is," where the sound of the doves' "You/ ah you"

impresses a sensuality into the somber landscape. “My Life by Water” is also immediately intimate, quickly inviting the reader in through the senses, “Hear,” and beyond the presumed privacy of the first line’s “My life.” Mary Pinard observes how the poem “dangles its compact stanzas down the page, like a series of porous rooms spilling into and out of each other the images, sounds, and pauses of the poem.”[97] Niedecker conflates the physical “giving” of the board in the mud with the offering of frog song, and the “direct and clear basis” of the poem’s cold ground is—through the intertwining of sound, motion, and light of spring—giving way to a generated “heat.”

The tones in her last poems are often so sensuous, so critically attuned with scientific precision while also blithe and mellifluous with intense focus on her material. In one of her longer poems, “Paean to Place,” for example, she delves into her life and her parents’ lives and the history of their sometimes pleasurable, sometimes confining interrelations. After writing the family into water throughout, she expresses sensitivity toward her father’s exhaustion in marriage as he sits “anchored” at mid-life:

> beside his shoes
> rocking his chair
> Roped not “looped
> in the loop
> of her hair”[98]

The only capital letter of "R" in "Roped" is significant, visibly forming the nearly pulled knot if a rope, just short of the second connection which would reveal it closer to the symbol of a figure-eight "loop." He is as incapable of sensual expression toward his wife as he is of moving out of the placating rhythms of his rocking chair and back into the "loop" of life.

Unlike her father, and even after a hard, physically laborious and often lonely life, Niedecker is more astute than ever, totally "looped" into the rhythms and "reflective" patterns of her final poems. It is as though the poet, like the "neverending head" of leaves she had observed, is in fact displacing the temporality of life with a poetic voice that seems to be "growing" toward a stronger mass in lengthy poems—like "Paean to Place" or her final poem, "Darwin"—as well as growing younger through the sudden energetic ventures into these more open poetic landscapes.

Niedecker's youthful voice was abruptly stopped when she suffered a cerebral hemorrhage on 1 December 1969, paralyzing her on one side to where she could not speak. However, after a lifetime of much "gristle" in the wilderness of Blackhawk Island or working as a hospital floor-cleaner, it is characteristic of Niedecker to have maintained her perspicacity up to the time of her death thirty days later, for her husband understood only

after she had died that the words she murmured to him in the hospital were "kiss, kiss."[99] Not capable of offering a sentimental goodbye of wreathed "rose words," nor would she likely have if she could, her casual "kiss, kiss" is as brief and energetic a goodbye to life as the majority of her poems are in their incisive "flicks" across the page.

[i] Peter Nicholls observes how "the pragmatic know-how of the resourceful blocking of a hole is twinned with an equally 'pragmatic' pleasure taken in the materials of language, in the 'popcorn-can cover' with its spitting consonants and bouncing vowels." Peter Nicholls, "Lorine Niedecker: Rural Surreal," in *Lorine Niedecker: Woman and Poet*, ed. Jenny Penberthy (Orono, ME: National Poetry Foundation, University of Maine, 1996), 193.

[2] In a 1962 review for *Kulchur* of *My Friend Tree*, literary critic Gilbert Sorrentino writes, "These poems are brief records of failure in the overall world which surrounds them, and in which they exist as brilliant markers." Gilbert Sorrentino, "Lorine Niedecker," quoted in *Something Said: Essays* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1984).

[3] Rae Armantrout, "DarkInfested," in *Collected Prose* (San Diego, CA: Singing Horse Press, 2007), 64.

[4] Lorine Niedecker, *Niedecker and the Correspondence with Zukofsky 1931-1970*, ed. Jenny L. Penberthy (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 149.

[5] Ibid, 124.

[6] Jenny L. Penberthy, ed., *Niedecker and the Correspondence*, 18.

[7] Louis Zukofsky, "Sincerity and Objectification." *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse* 37, no. 5 (1931): 272-73.

[8] Margot Peters, *Lorine Niedecker: A Poet's Life* (Madison, Wis: Terrace Books, 2011), 36.

[9] Lorine Niedecker, "Letters to *Poetry* Magazine," in *Lorine Niedecker: Woman and Poet*, ed. Jenny L. Penberthy (Orono, ME: National Poetry Foundation, University of Maine, 1996), 177.

[10] Peter Nicholls, "Lorine Niedecker: Rural Surreal," in *Lorine Niedecker: Woman and Poet*, 212.

[11] Jerry Reisman, "Lorine: Some Memories of a Friend," in *Lorine Niedecker: Woman and Poet*, 35.

[12] Ibid., 36.

[13] Ibid., 35-36.

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[14] Jane Shaw Knox, *Lorine Niedecker: An Original Biography* (Fort Atkinson, Wis: Dwight Foster Public Library, 1987), 25.

[15] Mary Oppen, wife of George Oppen—another Objectivist poet and friend to Zukofsky—remembers Niedecker from the time of her visits to Zukofsky. During an interview, she remarked that abortion "was the most common form of birth control then . . . Women were pretty matter-of-fact about abortions; it was accepted but hidden": Mary Oppen, interview with Glenna Breslin, 10 February 1986.

[16] Jerry Reisman, "Memories," 36.

[17] Margot Peters, 50.

[18] Lorine Niedecker, *Collected Works*, ed. Jenny L. Penberthy (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 213.

[19] *Oxford English Dictionary*, 3rd ed, s.v. "bore."

[20] Rachel B. DuPlessis and Peter Quartermain, eds., "Introduction," *The Objectivist Nexus: Essays in Cultural Poetics* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1999), 10.

[21] Louis Zukofsky, *Prepositions: The Collected Critical Essays of Louis Zukofsky* (London: Rapp & Carroll, 1967), 12.

[22] Lorine Niedecker, "Letters to *Poetry* Magazine," 178.

[23] In an irritated letter responding to Zukofsky's expressed pleasure at Pound's decision to publish Niedecker's poems in his *Bozart-Westminster* of 1935, Pound explains his real reason to do so: "Surrealism (meaning the yesteryear variety) is a painter's show / what fahrtin literature has it got?. . . I don't think yr / Niedecker is so hot. . . . It got by because I printed one tadpole on each recommendation of qualified critics." Quoted in Margot Peters, *Lorine Niedecker*, 45.

[24] The Objectivists, contrary to Williams's "publish it first thing if we had a press," did actually have a press called the OP. Margot Peters, *Lorine Niedecker*, 45, 273.

[25] Peter Nicholls, "Lorine Niedecker," 201-205.

[26] Lorine Niedecker, *Niedecker and the Correspondence*, 124.

[27] Lorine Niedecker, "Local Letters," in *Lorine Niedecker: Woman and Poet*, 87.

[28] Ibid., 88.

[29] Lorine Niedecker, *Collected Works*, 103.

[30] Louis Zukofsky, *Prepositions*, 12.

[31] George Oppen, *The Collected Poems of George Oppen* (New York: New Directions, 1975), 185.

[32] Lorine Niedecker, *Collected Works*, 101.

[33] Peter Middleton, "Lorine Niedecker's 'Folk Base' and Her Challenge to the American Avant-Garde," in *The Objectivist Nexus*, 163.

[34] Ibid., 165.

[35] Margot Peters, *Lorine Niedecker*, 38.

[36] Lorine Niedecker, *Niedecker and the Correspondence*, 149.

[37] Ibid., 153.

[38] Lorine Niedecker, "Extracts from Letters to Kenneth Cox," in *The Full Note: Lorine Niedecker*, ed. Peter Dent (Devon, Eng.:Interim Press, 1983), 42.

[39] Louis Zukofsky, *Prepositions*, 16.

[40] Michael Heller, "The Objectified Psyche: Marianne Moore and Lorine Niedecker," in *Lorine Niedecker: Woman and Poet*, 231.

[41] Lorine Niedecker, *Niedecker and the Correspondence*, 154.

[42] Jenny L. Penberthy, *Niedecker and the Correspondence*, 154.

[43] Michelle Legott, quoted in Jenny Penberthy, *Niedecker and the Correspondence*, 155.

[44] For more on the Objectivist movement and the political pressures on writers of this time, see Eric Homberger, "Communists and Objectivists," in *The Objectivist Nexus: Essays in Cultural Poetics*, ed. Rachel Blau Duplessis and Peter

Quartermain,(Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1999), 124.

[45] Lorine Niedecker, "Letter to Harriet Monroe," in *Lorine Niedecker: Woman and Poet*, ed. Jenny Penberthy (Orono, ME: National Poetry Foundation, University of Maine, 1996), 188.

[46] Ibid.

[47] Margot Peters,46.

[48] Lorine Niedecker, *Collected Works*, 86.

[49] Ibid.

[50] Ibid., 88.

[51] For more on Niedecker's poems concerning these themes of disjunction and dismemberment, see Eleni Sikelianos, "Life Pops from a Music Box Shaped Like a Gun: Dismemberments and Mendings in Niedecker's Figures," in *Radical Vernacular: Lorine Niedecker and the Poetics of Place*, ed. Elizabeth Willis (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2008), 31-40.

[52] Lorine Niedecker, *Collected Works*, 85.

[53] Margot Peters, 54-55.

[54] Lorine Niedecker, *Collected Works*, 107.

[55] Margot Peters, 78.

[56] Lorine Niedecker, *Collected Works*, 100.

[57] Peter Middleton, "The British Niedecker," in *Radical Vernacular*, 256.

[58] Margot Peters, 76-78.

[1] Lorine Niedecker, *Collected Works*, 142.

[2] Ibid., 136.

[61] Wallace Stevens, "Sunday Morning," *The Palm at the End of the Mind: Selected Poems and a Play*, ed. Holly Stevens (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1971), 5-8.

[62] Lorine Niedecker, *Collected Works*, 134.

[63] Alan Marshall, "'I am alive—because / I do not own a House': Emily Dickinson, Mina Loy, and Lorine Niedecker," American Experimental Poetry and Democratic Thought (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 138.

[64] Lorine Niedecker, *Niedecker and the Correspondence with Zukofsky 1931-1970*, ed. Jenny L. Penberthy (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 178.

[65] Lorine Niedecker, *Collected Works*, 139.

[66] Ibid., 126.

[67] Lorine Niedecker, *Niedecker and the Correspondence*, 198.

[68] Lorine Niedecker, *Collected Works*, 128-29.

[69] Gertrude Stein, *Writings 1932-1946* (New York: The Library of America, 1998), 823.

[70] Lorine Niedecker, *Collected Works*, 174.

[71] Ibid., 155.

[72] Ibid., 164.

[73] Ibid., 149.

[74] Rachel Blau DuPlessis, "Lorine Niedecker, the Anonymous." In *Lorine Niedecker: Woman and Poet*, ed. Jenny Penberthy (Orono, ME: National Poetry Foundation, University of Maine, 1996), 135.

[75] Lorine Niedecker, *Collected Works*, 150.

[76] Ibid., 195.

[77] Peter Middleton, "The British Niedecker," in *Radical Vernacular*: *Lorine Niedecker and the Poetics of Place*, ed. Elizabeth Willis (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2008), 250.

[78] Margot Peters, 151.

[79] Lorine Niedecker, *Collected Works*, 194.

[80] Ibid., 288.

[81] William Carlos Williams, "El Hombre," in *The Collected Poems of William Carlos Williams: Volume One*, 1909-1939, ed. A. Walton Litz and Christopher J. MacGowan (New York: New Directions, 1991), 76.

[82] Lorine Niedecker, *Collected Works*, 239.

[83] Ibid., 181.

[84] Ibid., 232.

[85] Ibid., 184.

[86] Ibid., 288-89.

[87] Elizabeth Arnold, "On Lorine Niedecker," *Chicago Review* 49, no.1(2003):107.

[88] Lorine Niedecker, *Collected Works*, 242.

[89] Ibid., 241.

[90] Ibid., 240.

[91] Lorine Niedecker, *Between Your House and Mine: The Letters of Lorine Niedecker to Cid Corman, 1960-1970*, ed. Lisa Pater Faranda (Durham: Duke University Press, 1986), 208.

[92] Louis Zukofsky to Cid Corman, quoted in Margot Peters, *Lorine Niedecker: A Poet's Life*, 146.

[93] Lorine Niedecker, *Collected Works*, 170.

[94] Ibid., 223.

[95] Lorine Niedecker to Gail Roub in *Lorine Niedecker: Woman and Poet*, ed. Jenny Penberthy (Orono, ME: National Poetry Foundation, University of Maine, 1996), 86.

[96] Lorine Niedecker, *Collected Works*, 237.

[97] Mary Pinard, "Niedecker's Grammar of Flooding," in *Radical Vernacular*, 27.

[98] Lorine Niedecker, *Collected Works*, 223.

[99] Doris Perkin quoted in Margot Peters, *Lorine Niedecker: A Poet's Life*, 251.

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