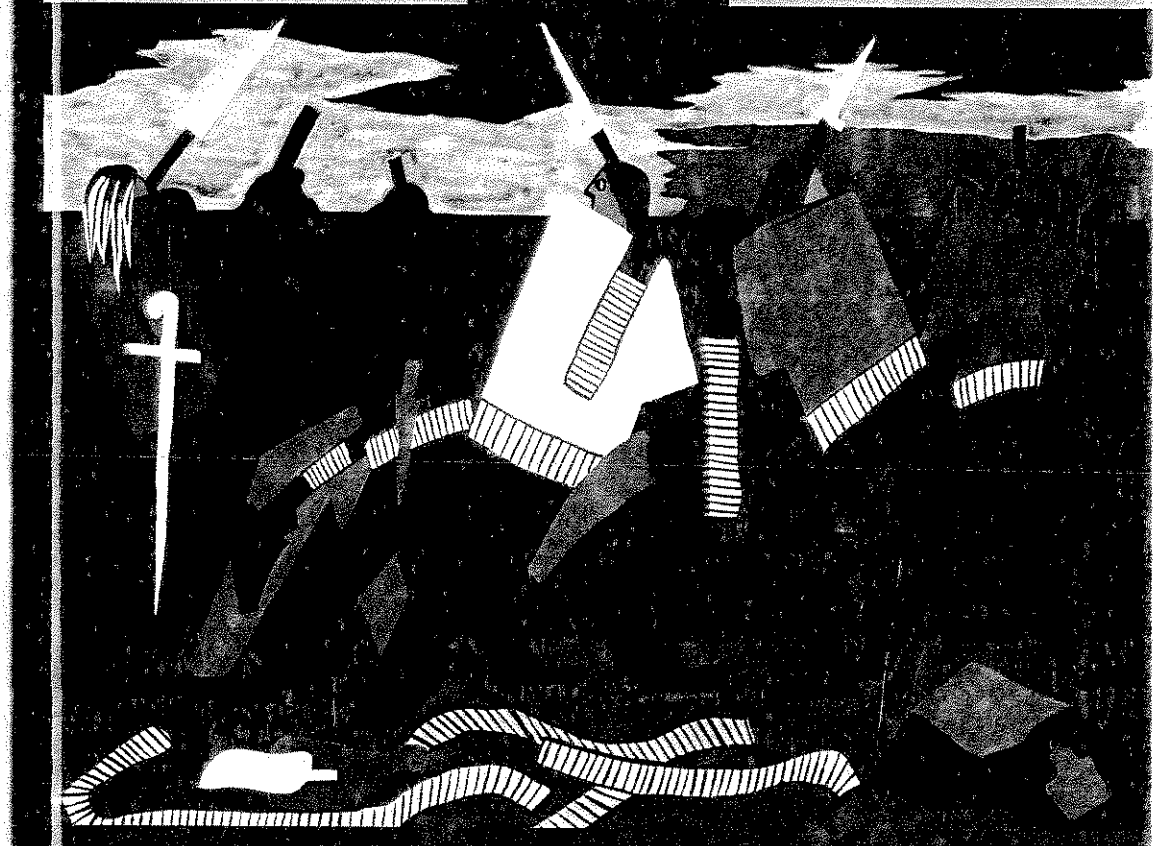
reading the middle generation anew



culture, community, and form in twentieth-century american poetry

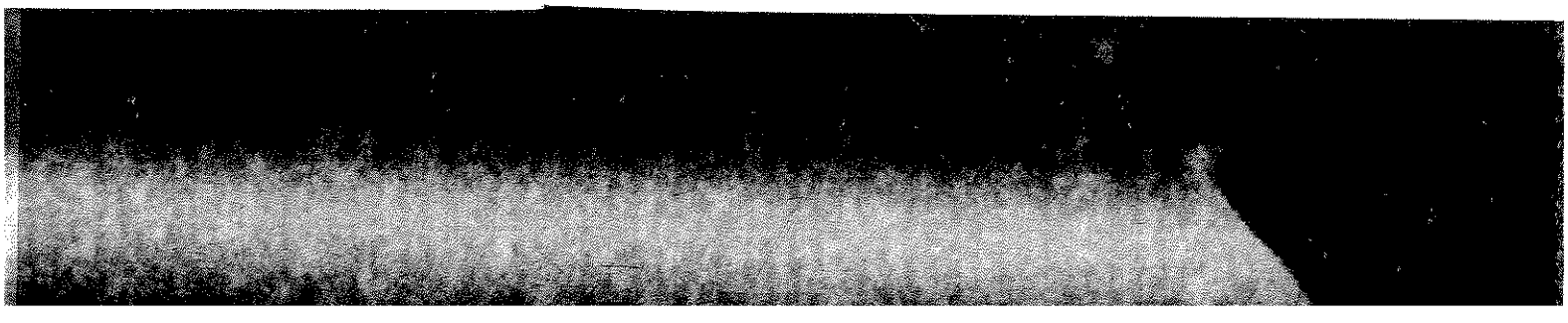
edited by Eric Haralson

reading the middle and Form in generation anew

Culture, Community, Twentieth-Century American Poetry

Edited by Eric Haralson

University of Iowa Press, Iowa City



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For John Hollander

—who got this whole business started—

most warmly and appreciatively

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, 1981.
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I wish I weren't so obsessed in my writing with form, a set form, sometimes it helps and then again it hinders.
—Niedecker to Cid Corman, January 23, 1961

The poetry convinces by its form.
—Robert Bertholf

9 Paradoxes of Form in the Poetry of Lorine Niedecker

Eleanor Berry

In her essay "Format and Form," Adrienne Rich distinguishes between mechanical adherence to an inherited form, whereby it degenerates into mere format, and vital engagement with and resistance to such a form, whereby it acquires new life. She further contrasts the form-shattering of the "avant-garde," typically "privileged by gender and class and . . . defenders of privilege," with the formal borrowings and regenerations of "emerging groups": "The poetry of emerging groups—women, people of color, working-class radicals, lesbians and gay men—poetry that is nonassimilationist, difficult to co-opt, draws on many formal sources (ballad, blues, corrido, reggae, sonnet, chant, cuentos, sestina, sermon, calypso, for a few)."[1] Although Lorine Niedecker has generally been discussed as an avant-garde poet, her eclectic adapting of forms from diverse sources accords with that of Rich's "emerging groups." She was, in fact, both in background and in her adult life, a woman of the working class. Her education, paid for by the labor of her fisherman father, distanced her from others of her class, but she nonetheless retained a deep affinity for elements of it—especially for those who worked in the outdoors.

One of the principal influences on Niedecker's poetry was folk song and folk storytelling. In an early essay on her work, English critic Kenneth Cox

notes, "As first speech-models she remembers 'a happy, outdoor grandfather who somehow somewhere had got hold of nursery and folk rhymes to entrance me' and her mother, 'speaking whole chunks of down-to-earth magic.'"[2] In an enumeration of her everyday activities in a letter to Cid Corman (October 12, 1966), she includes: "sing at the top of my voice when folky records are being played on the phonograph" (Corman, 63).

However, Niedecker's relish for oral folk song and story was accompanied by a literary sophistication that modified their influence on her own work. Her simultaneous closeness to and distance from "the folk" is explicit in a poem on her relation to other residents of Fort Atkinson, Wisconsin, among whom she worked in various low-level jobs, including stenographer and proofreader for *Hoard's Dairyman*:

> I worked the print shop
> right down among em
> the folk from whom all poetry flows
> and dreadfully much else.[3]

Niedecker would almost certainly have agreed with her friend Louis Zukofsky's comment, "There is no use in modern sophistication *trying to get back* to folk art; the result will always be modern sophistication,"[4] and her poetry beautifully exemplifies his qualifying elaboration: "*But* the *essential* technique of folk art (*not* the technique of rhyme scheme, four line stanzas, etc.)—its simplicity, its wholeness of emotional presentation—*can* serve as a guide to any detail of technique growing out of the living processes of any age" (Zukofsky, 70). Even when she does use "the technique of rhyme scheme, four line stanzas, etc.," that technique is modified in her use into something more for the page than for the voice.

The folk impulse in Niedecker's work coexists and is in tension with an impulse to high (or, better, deep) art. In a letter to Corman (January 13, 1963), she muses: "isn't it closer to art when it's still enough (deep enough) to become ice? . . . I'm a little worried—not really, tho—about my own folk impulse lost—lost?—on the way to the ice" (quoted in Corman, 60). Poetry did not "flow" from her as the passage about working in the print shop says it does from "the folk." It did not follow well-worn channels or issue in the formulae of oral improvisation and transmission. Rather, as she says in a poem musing on finally having a book published,[5] for her it

> took a lifetime
> to weep
> a deep
> trickle
> (Niedecker, 195)

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A hint at her process of composition is given by a comment she made to Corman: "For me the sentence lies in wait—all those prepositions and connectives—like an early spring flood. A good thing my follow-up feeling has always been condense, condense" (quoted in Corman, 59–60). This process produced a syntax of highly literate sentences with as many connective words as possible deleted. Further, Niedecker's tendency to compress syntax was accompanied by a predilection for monosyllables, leading to texts with a high concentration of fully stressed syllables. The syntax and diction characteristic of her poetic language contribute significantly to the rhythm of her verse.

Niedecker's mature verse is never rigidly metrical, but much of it hovers around a stress-based or iambic-anapestic measure as a norm. Virtually all of her poetry is in short lines; in all except very short poems, these are grouped into short stanzas or verse paragraphs. Throughout her work, the shortness of the lines and line groups serves to focus attention on the levels of word and syllable. Her lineation and arrangement of lines consistently show great care both for sound and for shape on the page.

To describe accurately the forms of the poetry that emerged from Niedecker's "condensery," we must resort to oxymorons. Her poems are folky-literary, oral-silent, aural-visual, song-speech, condensed-expansive, metrical-free verse. They show her to have drawn, in the manner of Rich's "emerging groups," on a variety of formal sources, popular as well as literary. Far from the mechanical adherence to inherited form that Rich labels "format," they manifest her vital engagement with and resistance to these sources. This essay will examine a few of the ways in which she modified and combined them, and consider some of the resultant effects.

Besides folk songs and Mother Goose, Niedecker's sources of language and form included contemporary conversational speech; prose of earlier periods, including regional history and natural history, letters, and journals; Asian lyric poetry; poetry of premodernist and modernist precursors, notably Dickinson and Williams; and both poetry of and correspondence with postmodern contemporaries, especially Zukofsky.

In her own poetry, Niedecker worked in a variety of forms. Conspicuous among these are stanzaic forms: couplets; tercets, notably stepped tercets reminiscent of but distinct from Williams's stepped triadic line; quatrains, notably modified ballad stanzas; and, most common both as a form for whole poems and as a stanza, quintains. Niedecker's quintains were probably inspired by Japanese haiku sequences (renga), where haiku alternate with two-line units, or by tanka. She also wrote poems in verse paragraphs and with various patterns of indention. To gain insight into the paradoxical nature of Niedecker's verse form, I will examine instances of three of her stanzaic forms — the modified ballad stanza, the quintain, and the stepped tercet.

I will start by looking at three examples of her poems written in a modified ballad stanza, at once drawing on and departing from the influence of folk song and traditional ballad, and combining this influence with others: "Black Hawk held . . . "; "Old Mother turns blue . . . "; and "He lived — childhood summers" (Niedecker, 99, 149, 169–70).

In the early poem "Black Hawk held . . . ," Niedecker has preserved the *abcb* rhyme scheme of the ballad stanza and its alternation of longer and shorter lines, but her lines are more variable in number of stresses and mostly shorter than conventional. Also important to their movement is variability in level of stress; hence, in scanning, I have distinguished four levels of stress: primary stress (/), secondary stress (\), tertiary stress (×), and non-stress (–).[6] Another striking and characteristic feature is the clustering of stressed syllables (indicated by underlining in the transcription).

Syllables	*Stresses*		
		/ \ / – / –	
6	4	Black Hawk held: In reason	*a*
		/ – / – /	
5	3	land cannot be sold,	*b*
		/ – / – – / – – /	
8	4	only things to be carried away,	*c*
		– / – /	
4	2	and I am old.	*b*
		\ / – /– – /	
7	4	Young Lincoln's general moved,	*d*
		/ × – /	
4	2	pawpaw in bloom,	*e*

		× – \ /	
6	4	and to this day	
		/ – – \	
5	3	reason has sm	

The ballad narrative is here radicall
in two stanzas, each constituting
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Syllables	*Stresses*	
		\ / –
8	6	Old Mother t
		\
8	5	"Don't l
		– / –
8	4	I'm blind and
		– / –
6	3	a thimbl

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/ –
n reason *a*

b
/ – – /
rried away, *c*

b

– – /
neral moved, *d*

e

		× – \ / / \	
6	4	and to this day, Black Hawk,	*f*
		/ – – \ /	
5	3	reason has small room.	*e*

The ballad narrative is here radically condensed to two episodes presented in two stanzas, each constituting a single complete sentence. The effect is to replace narrative progression with juxtaposition; the ballad tradition appears to have been combined with imagism. Niedecker's drive toward condensation is also reflected in the syntax, notably the absolute construction in the second line of the second stanza. Even though she was inspired by common speech, her poetry makes frequent use of this distinctly unspeechlike construction. Here, it occurs in a text that represents not only Black Hawk's speech but also direct address to Black Hawk by the poem's speaker. The former type of represented speech properly belongs to the ballad, but the latter is a device of the dramatic lyric. Niedecker has adapted the ballad stanza to write a postimagist lyrical ballad.

In "Old Mother turns blue . . . ," Niedecker again uses a modified ballad stanza, this time for a lyric poem of family and domestic life that evokes emotion almost entirely through representation of the speech of "old Mother"—the mother who spoke "whole chunks of down-to-earth magic." The stanzas depart only slightly from the conventional ballad form, each of the first two lines of the first stanza having an extra stress or two. But this slight departure from convention combines with variation within it in such a way that the lengths of the lines generally diminish through the poem. As in "Black Hawk held . . . ," the rhythm is characterized by variety in degree of stress and by clustering of strong stresses.

Syllables	*Stresses*		
		\ / – \ / – \ /	
8	6	Old Mother turns blue and from us,[7]	*a*
		\ / – / / – – /	
8	5	"Don't let my head drop to the earth.	*b*
		– / – / / – – /	
8	4	I'm blind and deaf." Death from the heart,	*c*
		– / – × – /	
6	3	a thimble in her purse.	*b*

		× – \ / – \ /	
7	4	"It's a long day since last night.	*d*
		/ – / – /	
5	3	Give me space. I need	*e*
		/ / – / – /	
6	4	floors. Wash the floors, Lorine!—	*f*
		\ / /	
3	3	wash clothes! Weed!"	*e*

In the first stanza, besides the partial rhyme of the second and fourth lines, the third line is linked to the second by eye rhyme, and contains the internal reverse rhyme of "deaf" and "death," both of which are also linked by alliteration to "don't" and "drop" in the second line. In the second stanza, besides the full rhyme of the second and fourth lines and the verbal repetition of "floors" and "wash," the final words of the first and second lines are linked by alliteration, and the last syllable of the third line (*-ine*) chiastically repeats the initial consonant and the vowel of the final word in the second line (*need*). The tightly woven sound texture of these stanzas engages both the mental ear and the eye of the silent reader.

Niedecker uses a more substantially modified ballad stanza for a poem on her father's life that is also a comment on her own life and her vocation of poetry. This poem, like traditional ballads a narrative, takes just five stanzas to move from the subject's childhood to his daughter's acceptance of her inheritance. Niedecker follows the ballad's method of selecting high points from a person's life, but idiosyncratically, so as to set the working-class father's ambition for middle-class status for his daughter against her own transformation of the material circumstances of his outdoor labor into intellectual values.

Syllables	*Stresses*		
		– / / – / –	
6	3	He lived—childhood summers	*a*
		– \ /	
3	2	thru bare feet	*b*
		– / – / – /	
6	3	then years of money's lack	*c*
		– /	
2	1	and heat	*b*

		– \ – / –
8	4	beside the rive
		\ –
4	3	came his
		/ – /
6	3	woman, lost h
		/ ×
2	1	prologue
		– \ – /
8	4	to planting tre
		– \
4	2	beneath
		– \
3	2	where grass-st
		– \
4	3	the mars
		– / – –
6	3	To bankers or
		– / –
6	3	he opene
		– / –
7	3	He wished his
		– /
5	2	to work i
		– – / –
7	3	but he'd given
		– – /
4	1	to sustai
		– / – /
4	2	a weedy speec
		– / –
6	2	a marshy

In contrast to the closed stanzas o
the first two of the five stanzas are

– \ /
since last night. *d*
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– / –
hood summers *a*
/
et *b*
– /
ney's lack *c*

b

– \ – / – × – /
8 4 beside the river—out of flood *d*
\ – / /
4 3 came his wood, dog, *e*
/ – / – / –
6 3 woman, lost her, daughter— *f*
/ ×
2 1 prologue *e*

– \ – / – \ – /
8 4 to planting trees. He buried carp *g*
– \ – /
4 2 beneath the rose *h*
– \ /
3 2 where grass-still *i*
– \ / /
4 3 the marsh rail[8] goes. *h*

– / – – \ /
6 3 To bankers on high land *j*
– / – – / \
6 3 he opened his wine tank. *k*
– / – / – / –
7 3 He wished his only daughter *f*
– / – – /
5 2 to work in the bank *k*

– – / – × – /
7 3 but he'd given her a source *l*
– – / –
4 1 to sustain her— *m*
– / – /
4 2 a weedy speech, *n*
– / – – / –
6 2 a marshy retainer. *m*

In contrast to the closed stanzas of the two poems looked at earlier, here the first two of the five stanzas are strongly enjambed, the fourth moder-

ately so. The lines are both shorter and more variable in length than in the two earlier poems, none of the stanzas conforming fully to the 4343 stress distribution pattern of common measure, the last three even disrupting the length relationships of that pattern. The syllable-level rhythm is mainly rising, with the exception of the second stanza, where it modulates through the second line, consisting of an initial trochee and a spondee, to the fully trochaic third and fourth lines. The thematic resolution in the final sentence of the poem (the last stanza and a half) is supported by a clear return to the dominant pattern, with iambic-anapestic regularity sustained over the final six lines.

As in "Old Mother turns blue . . . ," the terminal rhyme of the second and fourth lines is only part of the sound repetition and modulation that binds the stanzas together. Especially remarkable is the reverse rhyme in the second stanza, linking "wood" and "woman," "dog" and "daughter," "lost" and "prologue." In the same stanza, there is also the eye rhyme of "wood" with "flood." The last two stanzas are also especially tightly woven by sound repetition. In the penultimate stanza, the sound of the rhyme pair "tank" and "bank" is anticipated by "bankers" and "land" in the first line. The first two lines are linked by the bisyllabic partial rhyme of "high land" and "wine tank," the second and third lines by the assonance of "opened" and "only," and the last three lines by the alliteration of "wine," "wished," and "work." In the final stanza, the first two lines are linked by the alliteration of "source" and "sustain," and the third line given unity by the assonance of "weedy speech."

While the ballad stanza lay ready to hand in the folk tradition, Niedecker's extensive use of quintains is remarkable inasmuch as, according to T.V.F. Brogan, "In all languages, quintains are rarer than quatrains."[9] In a December 1956 letter to Zukofsky, Niedecker speaks of "the 5-liners with 2 words rhyming . . . which form I'll be using often from now on if you like it." In an aside, she asks self-mockingly, "did I create a new form or cremate? influence of haiku I suppose."[10] The question reflects her awareness that her formal invention is a sort of adaptive re-use, taking over a preexisting structure while refitting it to suit a different time, situation, and language.[11]

Rather than writing haiku in English, Niedecker developed a flexible form that she used for poems similar in kind to haiku—poems evoking emotion through presentation of natural and/or domestic imagery, often with reference to the season. From Western verse tradition she draws the

device of rhyme, which, in these sr
a contrast between the material of
two lines, such as is sometimes fou
"lower" lines in tanka (Earl Mine
1265). All of these aspects are evide
that refers to the annual flooding t
Black Hawk Island:

Syllables	*Stresses*	
		/ \
3	2	Springtime's w
		/ –
2	1	water-
		/
1	1	yield
		× – /
3	1	but the field
		\ – /
3	2	will return

The poem pivots on the rhyme o
"yield" in collocation with "water"
water on land in the seasonal flood
the harvest of farmers' fields to wi
applied. The absent (covered) field
enacting the reemergence that the
predicates. The syllable-level rhythr
return, as the rocking (cretic) move
second and third, where the line di
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device of rhyme, which, in these small poems, she often uses to highlight a contrast between the material of the first three lines and that of the last two lines, such as is sometimes found between the three "upper" and two "lower" lines in tanka (Earl Miner, "Tanka," in Preminger and Brogan, 1265). All of these aspects are evident in an untitled poem (Niedecker, 184) that refers to the annual flooding that she and her family experienced on Black Hawk Island:

Syllables	*Stresses*		
		/ \ /	
3	2	Springtime's wide	*a*
		/ –	
2	1	water-	*b*
		/	
1	1	yield	*c*
		× – /	
3	1	but the field	*c*
		\ – /	
3	2	will return	*d*

The poem pivots on the rhyme of "yield" and "field." The oddness of "yield" in collocation with "water" evokes the unsettling encroachment of water on land in the seasonal floods and at the same time brings to mind the harvest of farmers' fields to which the word "yield" is more usually applied. The absent (covered) field thus evoked appears in the next line, enacting the reemergence that the clause ("but the field / will return") predicates. The syllable-level rhythm also enacts such a disappearance and return, as the rocking (cretic) movement of the first line is disrupted in the second and third, where the line division splits the trochaic "water" from the long, stressed monosyllable "yield," then recurs in the fourth and fifth. Sound repetition (beyond the rhyme of the third and fourth lines) also contributes to the movement of the verse. Assonance in long *i* and alliteration in *w* and *t* induce us to draw out the first two lines. In appropriate contrast, the final line trips along quickly.

Reflecting her impulse to condense, Niedecker's lines in her "5-liners" are considerably shorter than those conventionally used in English-language haiku (5–7–5 syllables) or tanka (5–7–5–7–7 syllables). Sparest of all, appropriately, is a poem of late fall (Niedecker 219):

Syllables	*Stresses*		
		– / \	
3	2	O late fall	*a*
		/	
1	1	marsh—	*b*
		/	
1	1	I	*c*
		/ – – \	
4	2	raped by the dry	*c*
		/ \	
2	2	weed stalk[12]	*d*

All the words are monosyllabic; one, given its own line, consists of a single letter. That single letter somewhat resembles a Japanese or Chinese written character—a single visual form representing at once a syllable and a signified. Here, the visual form contributes to the meaning, the straightness and solitariness of the one-letter word implicitly characterizing the speaker, its resemblance to a "dry / Weed stalk" simultaneously suggesting a likeness between the speaker and the dormant weeds around her—an implication reinforced by the rhyme. With this poem, Niedecker seems to push as far toward an ideogrammic text as one can with a sayable text in a phonetic alphabet.[13]

In these two "5-liners" and some others as well, Niedecker achieves, in part by the omission of connective particles, what she praises Cid Corman for achieving by the same method: "Stark, isolated words which must somehow connect with each other and into the next line and the sense out of the sound" (quoted in Corman, 66). Such poems make apprehensible the sensuous properties and thingliness of single words, as well as of the poem itself. In other poems, she uses her five-line form to produce somewhat different effects. Poems of found oral or written speech make apprehensible the sensuousness and materiality of the represented speech. Still other poems foreground the visual aspect of the form. To gain a full appreciation of Niedecker's achievement in creating/cremating this form, we need to consider her use of it as a stanza. For examples, consider two short, text-based poems, "Linnaeus in Lapland" (Niedecker, 181) and "Otherwise" (284), and the long autobiographical poem "Paean to Place" (261–69), where the quintain appears with various patterns of indention.

The two quintains of "Linnaeus in Lapland" are ample enough to capture the musing tone and freely associative movement of journal writing:

Syllables	*Stresses*	
		/ – \
5	3	Nothing worth
		– / – –
7	2	except an Andr
		– – / –
6	2	with quadrangu
		– /
2	1	the boo
		– – / –
4	1	of the people
		/ – / –
6	3	wet inside: they
		– / –
5	2	to church thru
		– – /
6	2	or be taxed—t
		– –
4	1	from th
		– – /
3	1	of the leaves

In contrast to the monosyllables of
includes the conspicuously polysylla
and several words of two syllables. T
much lower than in the poems exam
mainly anapestic. Niedecker uses th
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and to juxtapose different strands of
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The "shoots" that are the focus of th
the people's wet "boots," which he s
quintain, the partial feminine rhym
"bosoms" again juxtaposes the bota
ing that, both in Lapland itself and i
displaced from the human realm to

"Otherwise" is another poem con
of Gerard Manley Hopkins in a lett

Syllables	*Stresses*		
		/ – \ / –	
5	3	Nothing worth noting	*a*
		– / – – / –×	
7	2	except an Andromeda	*b*
		– – / – – /	
6	2	with quadrangular shoots—	*c*
		– /	
2	1	the boots	*c*
		– – / –	
4	1	of the people	*d*
		/ – / – – /	
6	3	wet inside: they must swim	*e*
		– / – – /	
5	2	to church thru the floods	*f*
		– – / – / –	
6	2	or be taxed—the blossoms	*g*
		– – / –	
4	1	from the bosoms	*g*
		– – /	
3	1	of the leaves	*h*

In contrast to the monosyllables of "O late fall," "Linnaeus in Lapland" includes the conspicuously polysyllabic "Andromeda" and "quadrangular" and several words of two syllables. The proportion of stresses to syllables is much lower than in the poems examined above; the syllable-level rhythm is mainly anapestic. Niedecker uses the single late rhyme, together with stanzaic enjambment, to highlight a discontinuity in the reference of the text and to juxtapose different strands of the speaker's thought. Linnaeus's note about the flora of Lapland is interrupted by an aside on Lapland society. The "shoots" that are the focus of the botanist's attention are juxtaposed to the people's wet "boots," which he scarcely notes in passing. In the second quintain, the partial feminine rhyme of "blossoms" with the metaphorical "bosoms" again juxtaposes the botanical with the human, perhaps suggesting that, both in Lapland itself and in Linnaeus's attention, beauty has been displaced from the human realm to the plant.

"Otherwise" is another poem constructed of found written speech—that of Gerard Manley Hopkins in a letter to Robert Bridges:

Syllables	*Stresses*		
		\ / – – / –	
6	2	Dear friend: If the poem	*a*
		– / – /	
4	2	is printed few	*b*
		– / – / – / –	
7	3	will read and fewer scan it	*c*
		\ / \ – / –	
6	2	much less understand it	*c*
		× – /	
3	1	To be sure	*d*
		– / – /	
4	2	the scanning's plain	*e*
		– / – /	
4	2	but who will veer	*f*
		– – / – – / – /	
8	3	from the usual stamp and pound	*g*
		/ – / – / – /	
7	4	Other work?—I've not yet found	*g*
		– / \ /	
4	2	the oak leaves' law . . .	*b*

As Niedecker's quintains in "Linnaeus in Lapland" accommodate the written speech of a notebook, so those in "Otherwise" accommodate the written speech of the letter to a colleague in the art of poetry. As in "Linnaeus in Lapland," here, too, the proportion of stresses to syllables is relatively low. The syllable-level rhythm is iambic-anapestic—with more variety than "the usual stamp and pound." The structural division created by the single rhyme is used to mark the ends of sentences and, in the second quintain, a shift in topic. Hopkins's study of the natural world, referred to in the last two lines of the poem, is thus juxtaposed with his prosodic practice, treated in the preceding eight lines, implying, perhaps, a common element in his two pursuits—a passion for subtle pattern. In appropriating Hopkins's written speech, Niedecker conveys her affinity for this passion applied alike to poems and to plants.

When we turn from these shorter poems to the long poem "Paean to Place," we find a variety and flexibility in Niedecker's handling of the quin-

tain even greater than the short poe
that variety is in the visual aspect of
that makes it impossible to ignore.
different patterns of indention, whi
flecting the order of their first appe

A. The second and third lines ar
fourth line is indented the sar
fifth returning to the left mar
B. Only the third line, sandwich
beginning at the left margin,
C. The first two lines and the fif
third and fourth are progress
D. The format is similar to C, di
fourth lines are indented the

The stanzas are arranged in fiftee
that, in each group, the beginnin
beginning of a sentence, and the e
end of a sentence. Within groups,
enjambment, both prospective an
poem, the groups function essenti
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of the poem, B for a few stanzas in
two short consecutive later groups
its stanzas). The bulk of the stanz
overall appearance is of a slender
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This variation combines with the
of stanzaic enjambment and with t
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will serve to illustrate many of the
stanzas on Niedecker's father and
format, the second and third retur
will be maintained for the followi
gether not only by a chronological

tain even greater than the short poems might lead us to anticipate. Part of that variety is in the visual aspect of the form, which is given a prominence that makes it impossible to ignore. The forty-one quintains exhibit four different patterns of indention, which I will designate A, B, C, and D, reflecting the order of their first appearance:

A. The second and third lines are progressively indented, and the fourth line is indented the same amount as the second, with the fifth returning to the left margin.
B. Only the third line, sandwiched between two pairs of lines beginning at the left margin, is indented.
C. The first two lines and the fifth begin at the left margin, while the third and fourth are progressively indented.
D. The format is similar to C, differing only in that the third and fourth lines are indented the same amount (instead of stepped).

The stanzas are arranged in fifteen groups of two to four stanzas, such that, in each group, the beginning of the first stanza coincides with the beginning of a sentence, and the end of the last stanza coincides with the end of a sentence. Within groups, there are varying degrees of stanzaic enjambment, both prospective and retrospective. In the argument of the poem, the groups function essentially like verse paragraphs, with a shift in topic from group to group. The A format is used only for the first stanza of the poem, B for a few stanzas in the first two groups and exclusively for two short consecutive later groups. D is used only for one late group (all its stanzas). The bulk of the stanzas in the poem have the C format. The overall appearance is of a slender ribbon of text winding down the pages. All of the formats except B seem to flow forward strongly, then dip back briefly, thus generating a strong forward momentum in the reading.

Niedecker's handling of the quintain form also produces considerable variation in the density of sound texture as one moves through the poem. This variation combines with the absence or presence, nature and degree, of stanzaic enjambment and with the shifting format, to affect the reader's pace in reading and experience of tension and relaxation. Two passages will serve to illustrate many of the effects. The first is a group of four early stanzas on Niedecker's father and mother. Its first stanza introduces the C format, the second and third return to B, then the fourth resumes C, which will be maintained for the following fifteen stanzas. The group is held together not only by a chronological narrative but by stanzaic enjambment—

retrospective, prospective, then retrospective again (retrospective and prospective enjambment are indicated in the transcription by backward- and forward-pointing arrows, respectively):

Syllables	*Stresses*		
		– / –	
3	1	My father	*a*
		– \ /	
3	2	thru marsh fog	*b*
		\ /	
2	2	sculled down	*c*
		– \ /	
3	2	from high ground	*c*
		\ – /	
3	2	saw her face	*d*
		× – / –	
4	1	← at the organ	*e*
		\ – / – \ / –	
7	4	bore the weight of lake water	*f*
		× – /	
3	1	and the cold—	*g*
		– / – / – – /	
7	3	he seined for carp to be sold	*g*
		× – / –	
4	1	that their daughter →	*f*
		\ × /	
3	2	might go high	*h*
		– /	
2	1	on land	*i*
		– /	
2	1	to learn	*j*
		\ – / \	
4	3	Saw his wife turn	*j*
		/	
1	1	deaf	*k*

		× – /
3	1	← and away
		/
1	1	She
		– \
3	2	who knew b
		– /
2	1	and ro
		× / – /
4	3	no longer play

The syllable-level movement is i
stresses rising from a secondary to
lying uniformity of syllable-level r
weight, speed, and length. The clus
movement, giving a sense of arduo
higher proportion of unstressed sy
ment speeds up, to slow again with
the third and fourth and, in the la
The sense of the passage is also e
in the lengths of the lines. Line ler
speaks of the father's prime of act
spareness in the last two stanzas,
deafness.

The lines of each stanza are bou
tion and modulation. There are fu
group, partial rhymes in the first a
there are envelope rhymes as well a
fourth lines. In the first stanza, th
ther," "fog," and "face" links the t
rhyme. In the second stanza, "bor
rhymes with the first syllable of "
alliteration of "weight" with "wate
gether the second and fourth lines,
with "carp" supplements its rhym
the fourth; assonance of "weight"
well, to the fourth. Even in the au
with "high" binds the first line, and

ective again (retrospective and pro-
the transcription by backward- and
:

a
b
c
c
d
e
f
g
g
f
h
i
j
j
k

		× – /	
3	1	← and away	*l*
		/	
1	1	She	*m*
		– \ /	
3	2	who knew boats	*n*
		– /	
2	1	and ropes	*n*
		× / – /	
4	3	no longer played	*l*

The syllable-level movement is iambic-anapestic, even the clusters of stresses rising from a secondary to a primary stress.[14] Despite this underlying uniformity of syllable-level movement, the lines vary noticeably in weight, speed, and length. The clustered stresses in the first stanza slow its movement, giving a sense of arduousness to the action described. With the higher proportion of unstressed syllables in the second stanza, the movement speeds up, to slow again with the increased density of line breaks in the third and fourth and, in the latter, a recurrence of clustered stresses. The sense of the passage is also enacted by an increase, then a decrease, in the lengths of the lines. Line length swells in the second stanza, which speaks of the father's prime of activity and hope, then shrinks to a stark spareness in the last two stanzas, which tell of his wife's withdrawal into deafness.

The lines of each stanza are bound together by extensive sound repetition and modulation. There are full rhymes in the middle stanzas of the group, partial rhymes in the first and last. In the second and last stanzas, there are envelope rhymes as well as the immediate rhyme of the third and fourth lines. In the first stanza, the alliteration of the terminal words "father," "fog," and "face" links the three lines that do not participate in the rhyme. In the second stanza, "bore," at the beginning of the second line, rhymes with the first syllable of "organ," the terminal word of the first; alliteration of "weight" with "water" and of "seined" with "sold" binds together the second and fourth lines, respectively, while alliteration of "cold" with "carp" supplements its rhyme with "sold" to link the third line with the fourth; assonance of "weight" with "seined" links the second line, as well, to the fourth. Even in the austere third stanza, assonance of "might" with "high" binds the first line, and alliteration of "land" with "learn" links

the second line with the third; "deaf," alone in the last line, is conspicuously and expressively excluded from the sound patterning. In the equally austere final stanza of the group, the double rhyme is supplemented by the linking of "no," at the beginning of the last line, through alliteration to "knew" in the third and through assonance to the rhyme words "boats" and "ropes" in the third and fourth. The sound repetition is made conspicuous by the shortness of the lines and stanzas and by the additional white space of the indentions.

The second passage that I will examine consists of two groups of three and two stanzas, respectively, about the poet herself, occurring at the middle of the poem. The first group maintains the C format begun in the group examined above; the second group is the first of two groups in the B format, its only occurrence in the poem after the opening two groups. In the transcription below, the terminal sounds for the two groups are marked separately.

Syllables	*Stresses*		
		– / – /	
4	2	I grew in green	*a*
		/ – /	
3	2	slide and slant	*b*
		– / – /	
4	2	of shore and shade	*c*
		/ \ /	
3	3	Child-time—wade →	*c*
		– /	
2	1	thru weeds	*d*
		/ – – / –	
5	2	Maples to swing from	*e*
		/ – – / –	
5	2	Pewee-glissando	*f*
		– /	
2	1	sublime →	*g*
		/	
1	1	slime- →	*g*
		/	
1	1	song	*h*

		× / –
6	3	Grew riding th
		/
1	1	Books
		– /
3	2	at home-p
		/
4	2	Shell
		– – /
3	1	as he read
		/ – – /–
9	4	I was the solit
		– / –
3	1	a pencil
		× – /
4	2	for a wing-l
		– – / –
5	2	From the secr
		× – /
3	1	I must tilt
		– × – /
5	2	upon the pres
		/– \ × –
6	3	execute and ac
		– \ / \
5	4	In us sea-ai
		– / – –
7	3	"We live by th
		– – /
3	1	of the verse"

The first two quintains of the first repetition—in this case, onomato vowels imitate the sounds of water a of this imitative sound texture sug

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ntains the C format begun in the
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		× / – – / –	
6	3	Grew riding the river	*i*
		/	
1	1	Books	*j*
		– / \	
3	2	at home-pier	*k*
		/ – – /	
4	2	Shelley could steer	*k*
		– – /	
3	1	as he read	*l*
		/ – – /–\– / –	
9	4	I was the solitary plover	*a*
		– / –	
3	1	a pencil	*b*
		× – / \	
4	2	for a wing-bone	*c*
		– – / – /	
5	2	From the secret notes	*d*
		× – /	
3	1	I must tilt	*e*
		– × – / –	
5	2	upon the pressure	*f*
		/– \ × – /	
6	3	execute and adjust	*g*
		– \ / \ / –	
5	4	In us sea-air rhythm	*h*
		– / – – / – /	
7	3	"We live by the urgent wave	*i*
		– – /	
3	1	of the verse"	*j*

a

b

/
shade *c*
\ /
me—wade → *c*

d

–
rom *e*

f

g

g

h

The first two quintains of the first group are exceptionally dense in sound repetition—in this case, onomatopoeic. The sibilants, liquids, and semivowels imitate the sounds of water and wind-blown foliage, and the richness of this imitative sound texture suggests the child's immersion in sensuous

experience of the natural world around her. Its last quintain, referring to the growing child's entry into the world of books, is appropriately sparser in its sound patterning. The second group, presenting the speaker as a young poet, is also relatively unobtrusive in sound patterning; indeed, it is without rhyme. What draws our attention here is not so much the sound of the lines as their movement. Especially notable is the stanzaic enjambment splitting the clause "I must tilt // upon the pressure" over two lines separated by white space, inducing a kinesthetic sense of the metaphoric action the clause describes.

Also conspicuous is a shift in diction and syntax from the preceding group, announced in the first line by the polysyllabic "solitary." Abstract words like "pressure," "execute," and "adjust" contrast strikingly with the concrete vocabulary evoking the speaker's childhood. The syntax, likewise, is more sophisticated than the simple sentences and fragments of the first group. The first sentence is extended by an absolute construction as a free modifier; in the second, the subject is preceded by a prepositional phrase, and the predicate is a complex verb phrase. The third sentence is an absolute construction, and in the last (a quotation), the verb is modified by a prepositional phrase whose object is modified by a further prepositional phrase.

The variation in diction and syntax over the two groups of quintains helps effect a corresponding variation in the syllable-level rhythm. The first stanza of the first group is characterized by regular alternation of stressed and unstressed syllables, at least in its first three lines. Especially conspicuous are the four phrases consisting of alliterating monosyllabic lexical words separated by a monosyllabic function word and all having the same (–) / – / stress pattern. The regular alternation between fully stressed and unstressed syllables is disrupted in the fourth line with the compound "Child-time," and the last alliterating cretic phrase, "wade / thru weed," is broken over the line division. With the beginning of the second stanza, the sound of triple meter enters the passage, its first two lines having identical patterns of falling rhythm—a dactyl followed by a trochee. The tripping movement is slowed by the succession of three stressed syllables in the next three single-stress lines, "sublime / slime- / song." In the third stanza of the group, an appropriately rocking rhythm is created by two phrases, "riding the river" and "Shelley could steer," with the same choriambic shape: / – – / (–). The opening of the second group is strongly differentiated by an iambic tetrameter line (with reversed first foot). The verse then continues iambic-anapestic until the unsca
of the group, then appropriately retu
lines with their image of "the urgent

The B format Niedecker uses for
the two-quintain group that follows i
employs in the poem. Where they ar
thrust downward, it is symmetrical,
drawing it down the page. Thus, th
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in the flow of the poem. As this ex
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nonstanzaic poems, in the quatrains
win," and, notably, in several poems
descriptive-meditative work "Winter
Niedecker's stepped tercets, Robert
part line enters her work . . . , but r
sentence length stanza, and only slig
Niedecker has modified Williams's
that her stepped tercets—as much o
punctuation. However, he is wrong
length. As Williams does with his
forward momentum that the steppe
continuing sentences past the end
third lobe of the line), ending them
or second line.

The overall effect of Niedecker's r
to increase attention to individual w
number and intensity of points of e
between her tercets places more em
ning of the next than there is on the
triadic lines. Her lineation cuts the
partitioning of his long line. Furthe
intonational divisions of a natural,
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ues iambic-anapestic until the unscannable third line of the second stanza of the group, then appropriately returns to iambic-anapestic in the last two lines with their image of "the urgent wave of the verse."

The B format Niedecker uses for this two-quintain group (and also for the two-quintain group that follows it) contrasts with the other formats she employs in the poem. Where they are asymmetrical, with a strong diagonal thrust downward, it is symmetrical, inviting the eye to linger instead of drawing it down the page. Thus, these two pairs of quintains, both presenting images of the poet developing in a watery solitude, create a pause in the flow of the poem. As this example illustrates, the variations in the quintain's format in "Paean to Place" are functional, serving to differentiate passages and to affect how we read them.

The quintains of "Paean to Place" are not the only verse where Niedecker makes use of stepped indention. She employs it in several short nonstanzaic poems, in the quatrains of the longer text-based poem "Darwin," and, notably, in several poems in stepped tercets, including the long descriptive-meditative work "Wintergreen Ridge" (Niedecker, 247–57). Of Niedecker's stepped tercets, Robert Bertholf comments, "Williams' three-part line enters her work . . . , but modified into a unit of composition, a sentence length stanza, and only slightly punctuated." Bertholf is right that Niedecker has modified Williams's stepped triadic line[15] into a stanza and that her stepped tercets—as much of the rest of her verse—largely eschew punctuation. However, he is wrong in characterizing her tercet as sentence length. As Williams does with his triadic line, Niedecker reinforces the forward momentum that the stepped format imparts by, for the most part, continuing sentences past the end of the third line (in Williams's case, third lobe of the line), ending them intrastanzaically, at the end of the first or second line.

The overall effect of Niedecker's modification of Williams's triadic line is to increase attention to individual words and sounds through increasing the number and intensity of points of emphasis. The white space intervening between her tercets places more emphasis on the end of one and the beginning of the next than there is on the beginnings and endings of Williams's triadic lines. Her lineation cuts the syntactical string finer than Williams's partitioning of his long line. Further, whereas his partitioning reflects the intonational divisions of a natural, if heightened, oral performance of the text, Niedecker's very short lines cross-cut such divisions.

To gain a greater understanding of how Niedecker's stepped tercets both

resemble and depart from Williams's stepped triadic line, I will consider her use of it in the long poem "Wintergreen Ridge." As Williams does with his triadic line, Niedecker here effectively uses variations in the relation of sentence and stanza to control the pace of the poem. It begins slowly, with sentence and stanza, phrase and line, congruent:

Where the arrows
of the road signs
lead us:

Life is natural
in the evolution
of matter
(Niedecker, 247)

The pace quickens with the third stanza, where a semipredicative structure ends with the second line, and the third line launches a new clause with a sentence adverb:

Nothing supra-rock
about it
simply →

butterflies
are quicker
than rock
(Niedecker, 247)

The return to coincidence of sentence ending and stanza boundary helps to set off these opening four stanzas as a sort of prologue.

This opening passage of "Wintergreen Ridge" is a remarkable instance of how Niedecker uses condensation to achieve expansion. These elliptical sentences take us from the modest perspective of a road trip to the vast matter of the emergence of life on this planet. This dual perspective is maintained throughout the poem. In a way reminiscent of Williams's long poem "The Desert Music," the ordinary vacation trip opens a window on the vista of geological ages; close scrutiny reveals cosmic process. All this is conveyed through highly compressed sentences broken over short stanzas of short lines.

The momentum generated by the imagery of these opening stanzas is soon reinforced by stanzaic enjambment, at first retrospective, then prospective:

Man
lives hard
on this stone per

← by sea
imagines
durable works

← in creation here
as in the center
of the world

← let's say
of art
We climb →

the limestone cliffs
my skirt dragging
an inch below →

the knee
the style before
the last
(Niedecker, 247–48)

The sentence does not end here. It
last the least"—at the beginning
do not end together for another se
stanzas.

The return to coincidence of se
pause in the narrative, where the s
on the "flowering ridge" from whi
tum of the climb is arrested; when
a movement more of meditation th
accomplished through modulatior

We are gawks
lusting

← after wild orchids
Wait! What's this?—
sign:

stepped triadic line, I will consider
reen Ridge." As Williams does with
ely uses variations in the relation of
of the poem. It begins slowly, with
ongruent:

a, where a semipredicative structure
d line launches a new clause with a

ending and stanza boundary helps
a sort of prologue.
:en Ridge" is a remarkable instance
achieve expansion. These elliptical
rspective of a road trip to the vast
is planet. This dual perspective is
way reminiscent of Williams's long
ry vacation trip opens a window on
ay reveals cosmic process. All this is
entences broken over short stanzas

gery of these opening stanzas is soon
rst retrospective, then prospective:

Man
lives hard
on this stone perch

← by sea
imagines
durable works

← in creation here
as in the center
of the world

← let's say
of art
We climb →

the limestone cliffs
my skirt dragging
an inch below →

the knee
the style before
the last
(Niedecker, 247–48)

The sentence does not end here. It is extended by an elliptical aside—"the last the least"—at the beginning of the next stanza. Sentence and stanza do not end together for another seven stanzas, after a total of twelve open stanzas.

The return to coincidence of sentence and stanza in stanza 17 marks a pause in the narrative, where the speaker contemplates a sign encountered on the "flowering ridge" from which the poem takes its title. The momentum of the climb is arrested; when the pace of the verse picks up again, it is a movement more of meditation than of narration. This whole transition is accomplished through modulation in the relation of sentence and stanza:

We are gawks
lusting

← after wild orchids
Wait! What's this?—
sign:

Flowers
loveliest
where they grow

Love them enjoy them
and leave them so
Let's go!

Evolution's wild ones
saved
continuous life

← through change
from Time Began
(Niedecker, 248–49)

The colon at the end of the first full stanza quoted above induces us to pause and contemplate the sign's message that follows. The first clause of that message is fitted into a closed stanza, again inducing us to linger. With "Let's go!" in the last line of the next stanza, we are invited to join the speaker in a new pursuit or ramble, no longer "lusting // after wild orchids."

Besides the relation of sentence and stanza, other variations in Niedecker's stepped-tercet verse also function to control reader attention. Most notable are variations in the density of sound repetition and in the closeness to iambic-anapestic regularity. "Wintergreen Ridge" includes catalogs of plant names, selected and ordered as much for their sound and rhythm as for the images they convey and the actual plants they designate. The following three stanzas constitute such a catalog of plant names:

/
Found:
/ – – / \
laurel in muskeg
– / – / \ –
Linnaeus' twinflower

– / –×
Andromeda
– / – × – /
Cisandra of the bog
/ \ –
pearl-flowered

/ – \ –
Lady's tresses
/ – \ –
insect-eating
/ – \
pitcher plant
(Niedecker, 250)

The numerous compound words istic stress pattern of primary str word of the compound, secondar second. There are two variants— and "pearl-flowered"; / – \ (–), as "pitcher plant." In the first stanza larger repeated stress pattern, (–) second. Besides repetition of stre together by alliteration, assonance

To get a sense of how the variou of syntax to line and stanza, stress to signal shifts in intensity and to an extended stretch of text from zas 43–55). It begins (with the se to the preservation of Wintergree of women, proceeds through a se and ends with a single sentence of three stanzas:

/ – /
Women saved
– \ – /
a pretty thing: T

– / – – /
"a good to the heart"
– / \ /
It all comes down
– – /– –
to the family

– \ – / –
"We have a lovely

/ – \ –
Lady's tresses
/ – \ –
insect-eating
/ – \
pitcher plant
(Niedecker, 250)

The numerous compound words mark the passage with their characteristic stress pattern of primary stress on the accented syllable of the first word of the compound, secondary stress on the accented syllable of the second. There are two variants—/ \ (–), as in "muskeg," "twinflower," and "pearl-flowered"; / – \ (–), as in "Lady's tresses," "insect-eating," and "pitcher plant." In the first stanza, the compound words also enter into a larger repeated stress pattern, (–) / – / \ (–), the third line echoing the second. Besides repetition of stress patterns, the whole catalog is bound together by alliteration, assonance, internal rhyme, and reverse rhyme.

To get a sense of how the various formal features of the verse—relation of syntax to line and stanza, stress patterning, and sound—work together to signal shifts in intensity and to distinguish and unify passages, consider an extended stretch of text from around the middle of the poem (stanzas 43–55). It begins (with the second line of a stanza) by referring back to the preservation of Wintergreen Ridge and its wildflowers by a group of women, proceeds through a series of associatively linked recollections, and ends with a single sentence of generalizing reflection occupying exactly three stanzas:

/ – /
Women saved
– \ – / /
a pretty thing: Truth:

– / – – /
"a good to the heart"
– / \ /
It all comes down
– – / – –
to the family

– \ – / –
"We have a lovely

za quoted above induces us to pause
ollows. The first clause of that mes-
inducing us to linger. With "Let's
e are invited to join the speaker in a
g // after wild orchids."
tanza, other variations in Niedeck-
to control reader attention. Most
und repetition and in the closeness
green Ridge" includes catalogs of
ach for their sound and rhythm as
ual plants they designate. The fol-
atalog of plant names:

/ – / – ×
finite parentage
/ – ×
mineral →

/ – ×
vegetable
/ – ×
animal"
/ × \ /
Nearby dark wood—
– / – – /
I suddenly heard
– /
the cry
× / –
my mother's

\ – /
where the light
\ /
pissed past
– / – × /
the pistillate cone
\ – /
how she loved
\ / –
closed gentians
\ – /
she herself →

\ /
so closed
– – / – \ /
and in this to us peace
– / –
the stabbing →

/
pen
/ \ –
friend did it
/ – – /
close to the hear

/ – /
→ pierced the woods
/
red
/ –
(autumn?)

\ – × – / –
Sometimes it's a pleasure
– /
to grieve
– /
or dump →

– / \ / –
the leaves most brilliant
× – /
as do trees
– × \
when they've no

– – /– \
of an overload
– /– \
of cellulose
– – \ /
for a cool while
(Niedecker, 252–53)

The first few stanzas are closed o
next; they have little sound repe
for the most part smoothly iambi
line of the third complete stanza q

/
pen
/ \ –
friend did it
/ – – /
close to the heart

/ – /
→ pierced the woods
/
red
/ –
(autumn?)

\ – × – / –
Sometimes it's a pleasure
– /
to grieve
– /
or dump →

– / \ / –
the leaves most brilliant
× – /
as do trees
– × \ /
when they've no need →

– – /– \
of an overload
– /– \
of cellulose
– – \ /
for a cool while
(Niedecker, 252–53)

The first few stanzas are closed or only logically continuous one with the next; they have little sound repetition, and their syllable-level rhythm is for the most part smoothly iambic-anapestic until the heavily stressed last line of the third complete stanza quoted. Immediately preceding this heav-

ily stressed line, a series of four consecutive polysyllabic words ("parentage," "mineral," "vegetable," "animal"), each of the last three given its own separate line, repeats the same / – × stress distribution, creating a sense of heightened patterning. Another feature contributing to a perception of heightened patterning is rhyme—of unstressed or minimally stressed syllables ("family" and "lovely," "mineral" and "animal").

The heavy stresses of "Nearby dark wood" combine with the allusive resonance of the image to create an increase in intensity. The stanza that follows it is formally unremarkable, allowing the emotionally charged episode it presents to be considered without distraction. In the next stanza, however, the curious image of the light "piss[ing] past / the pistillate cone" is presented in language obtrusively dense in sound repetition, all the lexical words except the last being linked by alliteration, assonance, consonance, and even fuller repetition. The sound linking continues through the next several stanzas: "cone" is echoed by "closed" in the first and second stanzas following it and by "close" in the third following stanza. The word "peace," following the last occurrence of "closed," is linked through alliteration to "pen" in the next stanza and "pierced" in the one after that, while assonance links "friend" and "red" to "pen."

A number of other formal features combine to contribute to a sense of agitation in this passage. Unlike elsewhere in the poem, sentence beginnings ("there the light . . . ," "how she loved . . . ," "friend did it . . . ") are not punctuated by initial capitals. One sentence interrupts another—"friend did it . . . " intervenes between a subject, "the stabbing pen," and its predicate, "pierced the woods / red." The emotionally charged conflation of pen and knife, red leaves and heart's blood, is introduced by the syntactically awkward line "and in this to us peace" and emphasized by the isolation in separate lines of the monosyllabic "pen" and "red." In the final two tercets of the passage, all the lines have a strong-onset, primary stress reinforced (in every line except the last) by alliteration and/or assonance. The polysyllabic lines are all falling or rocking in rhythm.

After so much disruption, it comes as a relief to find a sentence beginning with an initial capital and at the beginning of a stanza. The sense of release, analogous to what the poem's speaker expresses ("Sometimes it's a pleasure / to grieve"), is then sustained by a syntax of extension, providing several points of closure within the three-stanza sentence, and by the coincidence of sentence ending and stanza boundary. The unity conveyed by the tidy fit of sentence to stanzas is enhanced by sound repetition: the first and second stanzas are bound together by the partial rhyme of "grieve"

and "leaves" and by the assonanc
the lines of the final stanza are wo
"cellulose," and "cool while." Th
the trochaic trimeter of the first li
eter to a consistently rising rhythi
the double iamb of the last line.

As is apparent from our brief
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gate meaning to infinity in readers
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IN ALL HER POETRY, from short ly
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or fragments of found speech or f

Rich's notion of formal borrov
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illuminating perspective on Niec
woman with working-class roots,
poet from "emerging groups" eng
ety of sources. Does this suggest t
than as an avant-garde poet? If s
the other "objectivists"? Though
dominant culture—in their case, l
work, too, includes borrowings f
drew from and adapted the forms
and story, as well as of imagist fre
canzone, sestina, and Greek lyric,
verse in the modes of Pound and

ecutive polysyllabic words ("parent-
"), each of the last three given its own
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ıture contributing to a perception of
ınstressed or minimally stressed syl-
l" and "animal").
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motionally charged conflation of pen
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d by a syntax of extension, providing
hree-stanza sentence, and by the co-
za boundary. The unity conveyed by
hanced by sound repetition: the first
ıer by the partial rhyme of "grieve"

and "leaves" and by the assonance of both with "trees" and "need," and the lines of the final stanza are woven together by the liquids of "overload," "cellulose," and "cool while." The syllable-level rhythm modulates from the trochaic trimeter of the first line through two lines of iambic monometer to a consistently rising rhythm for the final two stanzas, to end with the double iamb of the last line.

As is apparent from our brief forays into "Wintergreen Ridge" and "Paean to Place," Niedecker's drive to condense is simultaneously a drive to expand the room the poem gives readers to make meaning. Her work reflects her conviction that the value of a poem lies in its capacity to propagate meaning to infinity in readers' minds, and that this capacity derives in part from the elimination of connective particles, allowing lexical words to juxtapose in sound and sense. The construction of her series, sequences, and long poems replicates on a larger scale the construction of her syntax: elements of the work's argument or story are left free of connective material, juxtaposed for readers to connect them in their minds.

IN ALL HER POETRY, from short lyrics to long poems, sequences, and series, Niedecker adapted and regenerated the forms that she drew from various sources. She did not simply use these forms as she found them, producing what Rich calls "format"; rather, she took them as the basis for new formal constructions of her own. These forms make palpable the materials of which they are made, whether separate words and particles of the language or fragments of found speech or found writing.

Rich's notion of formal borrowing and regeneration, as distinguished from both mechanical adherence to form and form shattering, offers an illuminating perspective on Niedecker's poetry. As a rural midwestern woman with working-class roots, Niedecker seems a clear instance of a poet from "emerging groups" engaging with forms from an eclectic variety of sources. Does this suggest that she is more usefully seen in this way than as an avant-garde poet? If so, what about her friend Zukofsky and the other "objectivists"? Though male, they, too, were separated from the dominant culture—in their case, by their ethnic identity as Jews. And their work, too, includes borrowings from various formal sources: Reznikoff drew from and adapted the forms of legal testimony and of Biblical song and story, as well as of imagist free verse, and Zukofsky adapted those of canzone, sestina, and Greek lyric, as well as musical forms and those of free verse in the modes of Pound and Williams.

Thus it appears that focus on formal borrowing and regeneration, rather than exclusively on form shattering or even formal invention, is likely to illuminate not only Niedecker's poetic practice but that of her fellow objectivists. Further, I would suggest that it is also a useful focus for study of the major modernists, poets of the avant garde, whom Rich opposes to poets of emerging groups. The major modernists were not exclusively form shatterers. Pound, for one, adapted an extraordinarily wide range of forms, including Provençal, Anglo-Saxon, and Chinese. Adapting and renewing forms is not so much opposed to form shattering as complementary to it; both are means toward the making of vital forms for new poetries.

Notes

A version of this essay was presented for the panel "Interaction of Free Verse and Meter" at the 2001 Northeast Modern Language Association annual meeting in Hartford, Connecticut. My thanks to Natalie Gerber for organizing that panel and for her comments on that version.

1. Adrienne Rich, "Format and Form," in *What Is Found There: Notebooks on Poetry and Politics* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1993), 227. Subsequent references appear in the text.

2. Quoted in Cid Corman and Lorine Niedecker, "With Lorine / A Memorial: 1903–1970," *Truck*, no. 16 (Summer 1975): 76. Subsequent references appear in the text as Corman.

3. Lorine Niedecker, *Collected Works*, ed. Jenny Penberthy (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002), 142. Subsequent references will appear in the text.

4. Zukofsky apparently compiled *A Test of Poetry*, the book in which this comment appears, partly for Niedecker (New York: Jargon/Corinth Books, 1964). She typed the manuscript for him and attached great value to the book. Subsequent references appear in the text.

5. The book was *My Friend Tree*, published in 1961, when Niedecker was fifty-eight. She had one earlier book publication, *New Goose*, in 1946.

6. In marking stresses, I seek to reflect the variations in articulatory effort entailed in an oral rendition of the poems, as I would read them. In my scansions, I mark as bearing primary stress many syllables that, in a prose transcription, I would take as bearing only secondary stress. Division into lines, especially short lines, promotes and equalizes stresses. Even with their lineation, however, Niedecker's texts invite considerable variability of stress in performance.

7. The normally unstressed preposition and pronoun "from us" I read as here bearing rhetorical stress.

8. If "marsh rail" is read as a compound (rather than as a noun with another noun as modifier), the primary stress

second.

9. T.V.F. Brogan, "Quintain," in *The N* ed. Alex Preminger and T.V.F. Brogan (I 1993), 1012. Subsequent references appe and "Preminger and Brogan" for the vo

10. In Jenny Penberthy, *Niedecker and* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Pres

11. Niedecker's comment that she'll be on" is reminiscent of Williams's 1955 d far as I know, . . . I shall use no other fo the culmination of all my striving after a of the past," with the difference that Ni achievement (William Carlos Williams, ed. John C. Thirlwall [New York: New

12. In marking stresses, I have treate tively, it could be read as a noun with a stress would fall on "stalk."

13. This poem of Niedecker's may bri poem, Cummings's "l(a" (Cummings 6 even more fully ideogrammic.

14. A possible exception is "lake wate modifier. It could instead be read as a "lake."

15. Robert Bertholf, Introduction to Lorine Niedecker, ed. Robert Bertholf (For a full account of the view of Willia sons with Niedecker's stepped tercets l triadic-line verse, "William Carlos Will Its Prosody," *Twentieth-Century Literature*

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Corman, Cid, and Lorine Niedecker. " *Truck*, no. 16 (Summer 1975): 57–90.

Cummings, E. E. *Complete Poems, 1913–* vanovich, 1972.

noun as modifier), the primary stress will fall on the first word instead of the second.

9. T.V.F. Brogan, "Quintain," in *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. Alex Preminger and T.V.F. Brogan (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 1012. Subsequent references appear in the text as "Quintain" for this essay and "Preminger and Brogan" for the volume as a whole.

10. In Jenny Penberthy, *Niedecker and the Correspondence with Zukofsky, 1931–1979* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 230.

11. Niedecker's comment that she'll be using her five-line form "often from now on" is reminiscent of Williams's 1955 declaration concerning his triadic line, "As far as I know, . . . I shall use no other form for the rest of my life, for it represents the culmination of all my striving after an escape from the restrictions of the verse of the past," with the difference that Niedecker is strikingly less confident of her achievement (William Carlos Williams, *The Selected Letters of William Carlos Williams*, ed. John C. Thirlwall [New York: New Directions, 1957], 334).

12. In marking stresses, I have treated "weed stalk" as a compound. Alternatively, it could be read as a noun with a noun modifier, in which case the primary stress would fall on "stalk."

13. This poem of Niedecker's may bring to mind a similarly short and very thin poem, Cummings's "l(a" (Cummings 673), which dispenses with sayability and is even more fully ideogrammic.

14. A possible exception is "lake water," which I have taken as a noun with noun modifier. It could instead be read as a compound, with primary stress falling on "lake."

15. Robert Bertholf, Introduction to *From This Condensery: Complete Writing*, by Lorine Niedecker, ed. Robert Bertholf (Penland, NC: Jargon Society, 1985), xxvi. For a full account of the view of Williams's triadic line assumed in the comparisons with Niedecker's stepped tercets here, see my paper on the prosody of his triadic-line verse, "William Carlos Williams' Triadic-Line Verse: An Analysis of Its Prosody," *Twentieth-Century Literature* 35 (1989): 364–88.

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10 My Name Is Henri: Contemporary Poets Discover John Berryı

Stephen Burt

When John Berryman's *77 Dream S* ers recognized it not just as the fu *age to Mistress Bradstreet* (1956) and *T* brilliant response to Robert Lowell' so new it was hard to describe. Eli has the feeling 100 years from now 'discovery'—*hasn't one*?"[1] Berryman his peers, winning the Pulitzer Priz and National Book Award for *His* in Berryman supported a critical jo 1970s and later prompted two biogr

Yet after his death in 1972, Be (other than those who had known l istent. His unpredictable blend of e to imitate than his so-called confe American dialect, and his sometime imagined poetic forebear. The poet self-mythologizing, the frequently t