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Epitaphs for Lorine. 1973

Penland, North Carolina: The Jargon Society, 1973

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EPITAPHS FOR LORINE



JARGON 74:
THIRTY-TWO POETS CELEBRATE
LORINE NIEDECKER (1903-1970)

FRONTISPIECE PRINT: *rosemary*
BY A. DOYLE MOORE

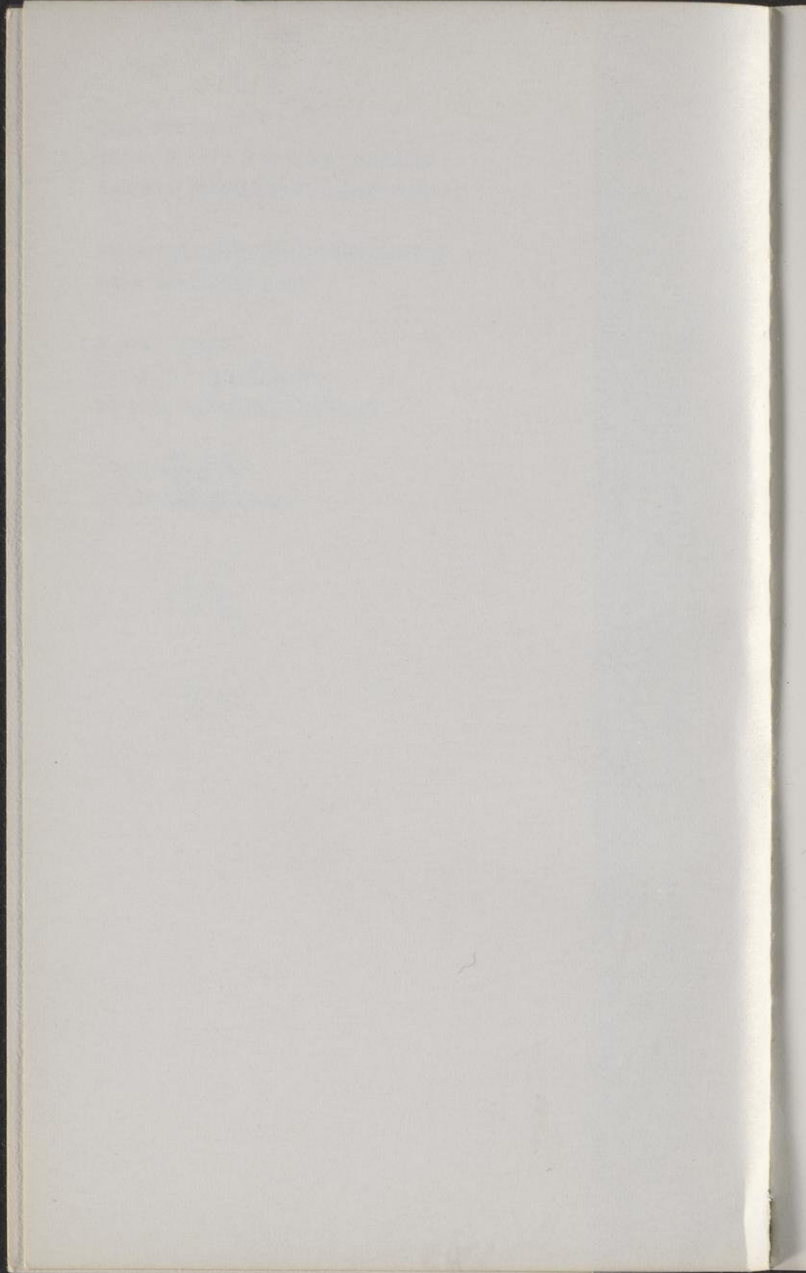
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EPITAPHS FOR LORINE



Small, faint text, possibly a signature or date, located below the illustration.



Rosmarinus officinalis

EPITAPHS FOR LORINE

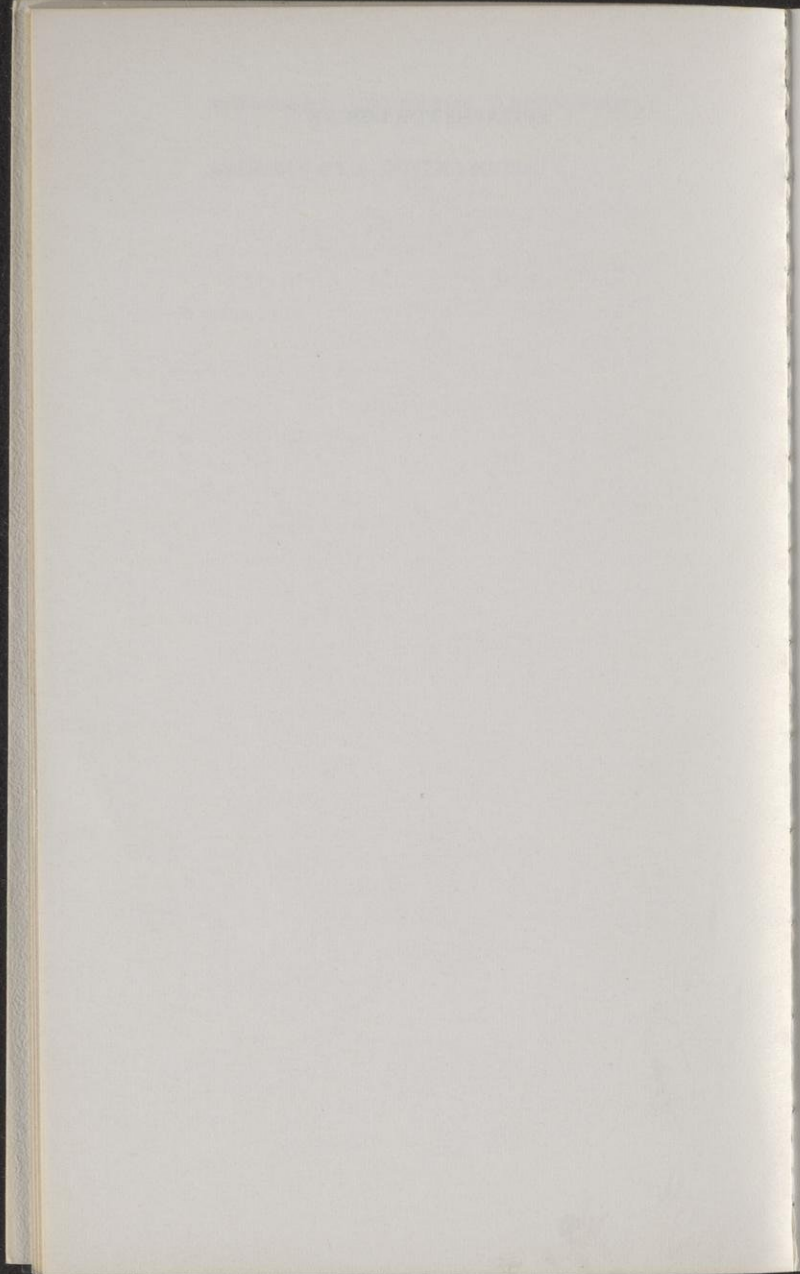
EDITED AND INTRODUCED
BY JONATHAN WILLIAMS

THE JARGON SOCIETY
PENLAND NORTH CAROLINA
1973

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DESIGNED BY A. DOYLE MOORE

EPITAPHS FOR LORINE



"NO LAYOFF

FROM THIS

CONDENSERY"

on January 2, 1971, the madison, wisconsin *capital times* ran a brief obituary. The salient points of this notice were the following: "FORT ATKINSON—Funeral rites for Mrs. Albert Millen, 67, a well-known wisconsin poet, who died Thursday (December 31, 1970) in a madison hospital after a brief illness, will be held here Sunday . . . she wrote under her maiden name, Lorine Niedecker, and had written a number of books of poetry that were published internationally . . . Mrs. Millen had been a contributor of poetry to many newspapers in the United States." pretty damn hopeless. A wisconsin cousin (her closest friend) has still never read any of her poems. The report goes: "Hell, I didn't even know the woman," said one of Ft. Atkinson's prominent citizens. "But I heard she had kind of a negative personality." secondly, she wrote very few books indeed. and third, she was not a blue-haired lady who poured treacle into columns of newspaper verse. Basil Bunting, who was visiting wisconsin at the time of her death, wrote the *capital times* a letter suggesting their words might be more savory and accurate than they, in fact, were. I presume he told them his opinion, that Lorine Niedecker was the best contemporary poetess. "No one is so subtle with so few words." in any case, the newspaper did not publish Mr. Bunting's letter. To

my knowledge, the *new York Times* printed no obituary at all, despite letters from myself and others, and, I am told, telephone communications from Louis Zukofsky. There is not much to say, really, except that she died much as she had lived: in privacy.

Epitaphs for Lorine is to serve several purposes, primarily to register a sense of what the poems—and her devotional life—have meant to a number of poets. There are a few telling omissions. (Some through their lack of response; some one or two, because my perhaps wrongheaded sense of decorum insists that not every ambitious trimmer and scribbler at large be allowed access to one's shelves and kind thoughts.) Another aim: to remind readers that her poems are in print—by the *Jargon Society* in the United States and by *Fulcrum Press* in Great Britain. Cid Corman (who visited Ft. Atkinson just before Miss Niedecker's illness and who, fortunately, made the only recording of her reading poems that we shall have) has been named literary executor. Her husband, Mr. Albert Millen, carried out the immediate requests, that certain material be destroyed and that other manuscripts (published and unpublished) be distributed among the libraries at the University of Texas, Boston University, and the University of Wisconsin. It is the *Jargon Society's* intention to publish a final *Collected Poems* as soon as Mr. Corman has been able to examine all the extant work.

I would like to thank Al Millen for his kindness in putting up with my letters and questions; and for supplying the snapshot of L.N. Felix Pollak, curator of rare books at the university of Wisconsin, has been steadfast in supplying us with local news . . . Also my thanks to Clayton Eshleman, editor of *caterpillar*, for publishing my long letter about Lorine Niedecker and the baleful state of the Republic in issue 15/16. one appreciates a place to give vent.

there is no epitaph here from the Wisconsin writer, August Derleth, because he himself died on July 4, 1971. it took me over two months to hear the news in England, as it took a month to hear of Miss Niedecker's death when I was in North Carolina last winter. it all seems more and more like the 19th century, with everybody locked up in the attic or too callous to care. I don't venture that August was a 'great' writer. but I do know that he was a man who did enormous amounts of hard literary work, who answered his mail, wrote useful reviews, and behaved like a true man of letters. he was a writer who truly felt 'at home'—that in itself is a regional oddity. I corresponded with Derleth from 1944 when I was in my H. P. Lovecraft frenzy and, ever since, had admired his energy as the publisher of *Arkham House*. on my visits to 'Place of Hawks' at Sauk City, Wisconsin, I also liked his zest, the largeness with which he did everything from wrap books and talk and drink to the mandarin way he'd order Chinese food in the culinary wilds of the

town of barraboo. so, at the end of this note to introduce a tribute to Lorine niedecker, this added salute to Augie. Let others not forget that Miss niedecker's T & G (collected poems 1936-1966) received only two reviews in the united states which examined the book with any amplitude of spirit and perception. August Derleth's was one of them. perhaps some of those who consider themselves his literary betters would have a world less snide, less pathetically minimal, and less tenuous if they had half his generosity and ability to respond.

Jonathan williams
corn close, dentdale,
sedbergh, yorkshire,
England
october 26, 1971

Eyesight / A. A. AMMONS

it was may before my
attention came
to spring and

my word I said
to the southern slopes
i've

missed it, it
came and went before
I got right to see:

don't worry, said the mountain,
try the later northern slopes
or if

you can climb, climb
into spring: but
said the mountain

it's not that way
with all things, some
that go are gone

/ BASIL BUNTING

to abate what swells
use ice for scalpel.
it melts in its wound
and no one can tell
what the surgeon used.
clear lymph, no scar,
no swathe from a cheek's bloom.

/ HAYDEN CARRUTH

who writes epitaphs
writes his own? O.K. Here's mud
in your eye, Lorine.

some smoke for Lorine Niedecker / THOMAS A. CLARK
(from M. Minnaert's "Light & colour in the open air")

the particles of the smoke
scatter blue light much more
than red or yellow

when the particles are very large
the scattered light is white

it is clear then that the blueness
is not an inherent property
of the smoke
but the colour of smoke
depends on the manner
in which it is illuminated

for all the light falling
on the cloud of smoke
must ultimately leave it

black Hawk Island / CID CORMAN

All her father's trees
her eyes refer us
to in passing on

the way to her place
by the river road
stripped of their shade now.

FOR *Lorine Niedecker* / GUY DAVENPORT
(*on a theme from Alkman*)

Three seasons:
summer green with grain,
flowers by the door.

Autumn.
Moon rises red,
cobwebs in the grass,
patience in a star.

winter. Hard light
from the windows
meets the firelight
on the hearth.

And a fourth,
so brief,
white and wild,
when trees and girls
go mad.

Niedecker / EDWARD DORN

The strict eye
of a sparrowhawk evenly
in her survey of reality

The firm bone of the woman
at the well

The line of a simply exquisite rope

/ LARRY EIGNER

the needle getting stuck radio
the waves

miles are enormous

For Lorine niedecker / ROY FISHER

CERTAIN TREES
CAME SEPARATELY FROM THE WOOD

AND WITH NO SPECIAL
THOUGHT OF RETURNING

ite in pace / JOHN FURNIVAL

LO^{SO}NG

FOR L.N. / ALLEN GINSBERG

as her breath was
now her body,

lonely poet
far from cities

one in the world.

FOR L.N. / JONATHAN GREEN

dead?
her neighbors
surprised

a poet?
more surprise
still

wonder now
who lived, in secret,
among them

on her poetry: winter note / MICHAEL HELLER

that countryside
of thin trees
of fallen snow

to speak of almost
nothing

the house
so familiar
it is an elegy

the whiteness
so alien
a betrayal

life
narrows
to how one
picks a way

to go out
to circle back
following the axe-mark

the green
between white & bark
that one might live

An Alphabet bereft of Lorine /
DOM SILVESTER HOUÉDARD

a
b c
d f g
h j k m p q s t
u v w
x y
z

Impromptu / PEYTON HOUSTON

tribute. I saw
today one wild duck passing,
one alone:
neck out, head alert, each
feather exactly acting. About it
curving air made jubilation.

The core / RONALD JOHNSON

what we wanted
was both *words* and *worlds*

you could put your foot through. to be
eye-deep in air—

and the inside of all things
clear

to the horizon. clear

to the core.

FOR L.N. / ROBERT KELLY

will you sharpen your pencil
for claukon or hipte

when sunset knows no
better reason?

no record

olive's redheart
overripe most
bitter fruit
underfoot

make a rocky
road of such
abundance

not a word.

/ JAMES LAUGHLIN

Lorine niedecker appeared in the very first new directions Annual, the one of 1936 which was printed up in vermont by the Harvard Advocate printer, and had no page numbers. Her contributions were two very good little plays and a group of poems called 'mother geese.' After that, I think she was with us in five or six more Annuals, always a delight to have, because she was so completely original, 'the genuine u.s. article,' a person who knew exactly what she wanted to do and continued to do it, I believe, to the day of her death. Had she wished, or troubled, to play the games of poetry politics, she could probably have ended up as well known as the ladies who are now wearing the establishment's official 'laurels,' but that just wasn't her way, so it will be up to time to prove her merits, and I have no doubt what the judgment will be.

The Footprints / DENISE LEVERTOV

someone crossed this field last night:

day reveals

a perspective of lavender caves

across the snow. someone

entered the dark woods.

/ THOMAS MEYER

the most beautiful thing
I leave behind me
is sunlight
& after that
bright stars & the moon's face
& ripe cucumbers &
apples & pears

said Praxilla, poetess of Sicyon,
& Zenobius in his *Proverbs* said of her:

only a fool could compare cucumbers
& things like that with the sun & moon

Epitaph for L.N. / CHRISTOPHER MIDDLETON

Man, history's host,
she wrote, and
people, people—

who but a few
dotty poets dare
to see the creatures now

sweetened by the way
she saw the good
imaginable America.

/ STUART MONTGOMERY

Lorine
 lives
with few words
 in the summer

the leaves
 in the window
hide the river
 but winter

trees
 in silhouette
like nets
 line the lake

a snowfall
 filled the road
her mind also
 no friends came

to the funeral
 on white sheets
in the hospital
 for three weeks

eyes turned
 to the side
of the bed
 on which she died

/ GEORGE OPPEN

Lorinne's words:

it took
a long

time to weep
a deep

trickle

A Landmark in Memory of Lorine Niedecker /
CARL RAKOSI

I had written

after Jehudah Halevi:

“on the wind
in the cool of the evening
I send greetings to my friend.
I ask him only to remember
the day of our parting
when we made a covenant
of love by an apple tree.”

this was also her bond

to craftsmanship

/ CHARLES REZNIKOFF

you wrote:

"I walked

beside the trees

my father planted.

Each

spoke."

They still do

but we have lost the interpreter.

For Lorine niedecker / MARY ELLEN SOLT

WATER'S

ABSOLUTE

TEAR

ERADICATES

RETURN

FALLS

AGITATO

LENTANDO

LENTISSIMO

in Memoriam: Lorine niedecker /

GILBERT SORRENTINO

A kind of making
silence, fine crystal
lambent.

slow over it
the sweet
contralto.

Exquisite measures
the heft of
millefori.

A kind of spiderweb of
thread steel.

Mid February / GAEL TURNBULL

chill finger tips—
just in from snow
adrift on the wind—
beneath his shirt—
along the ridge
and furrow of his ribs—
to press for home
in the heart's heat

/ JONATHAN WILLIAMS

she seined words
as others stars
or carp

laconic as
a pebble
in the rock river

along the bank
where the peony flowers
fall

her tall friend
the pine tree
is still there

to see

/ PETER YATES

poems like fieldstones,
not carved but graveled
and weathered to their shape

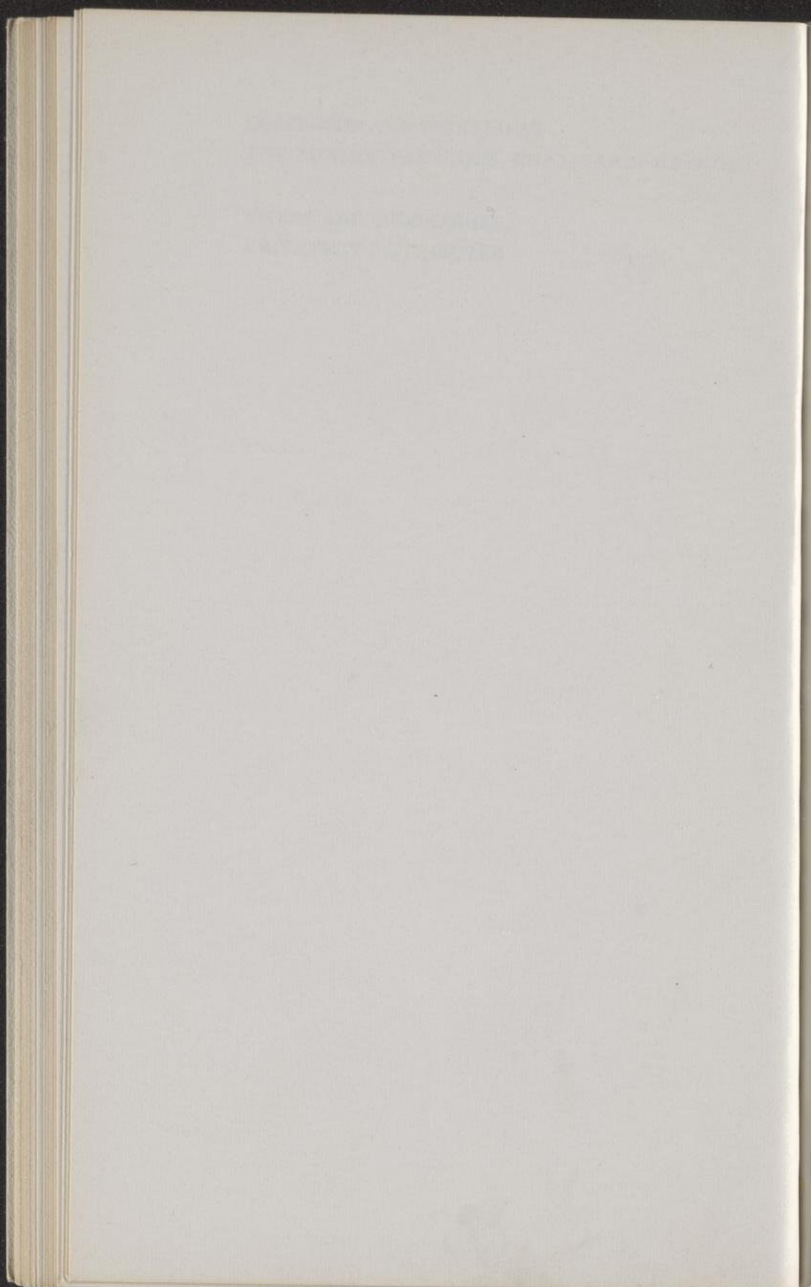
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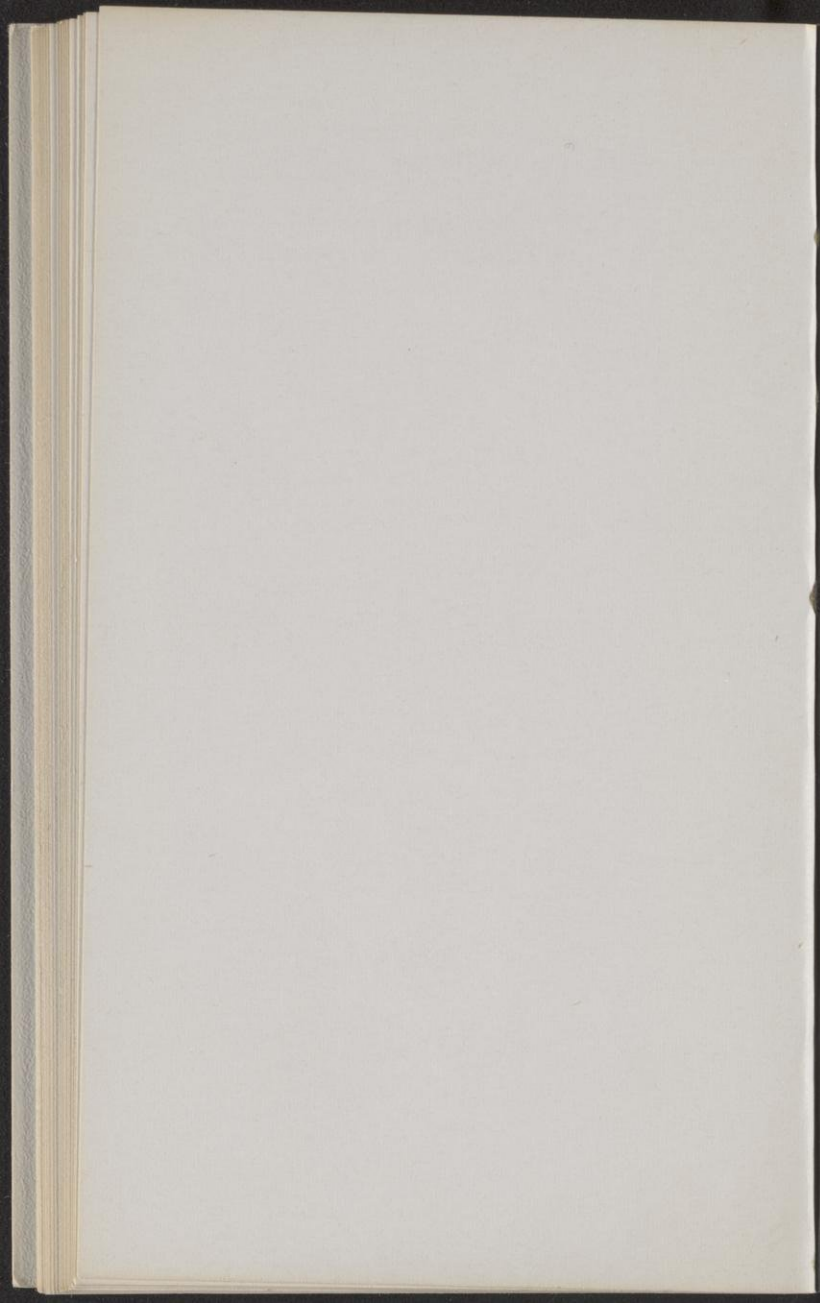
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THE MONEYTREE PRESS, CHAMPAIGN ILLINOIS

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T & G (collected poems 1936-1966)
by Lorine niedecker
available from
small publishers' company
elm street,
millerton, new york 12546
(\$4.95)

SONG
WIND
WOOD

WIND
SONG
WOOD

WOOD
WIND
SONG