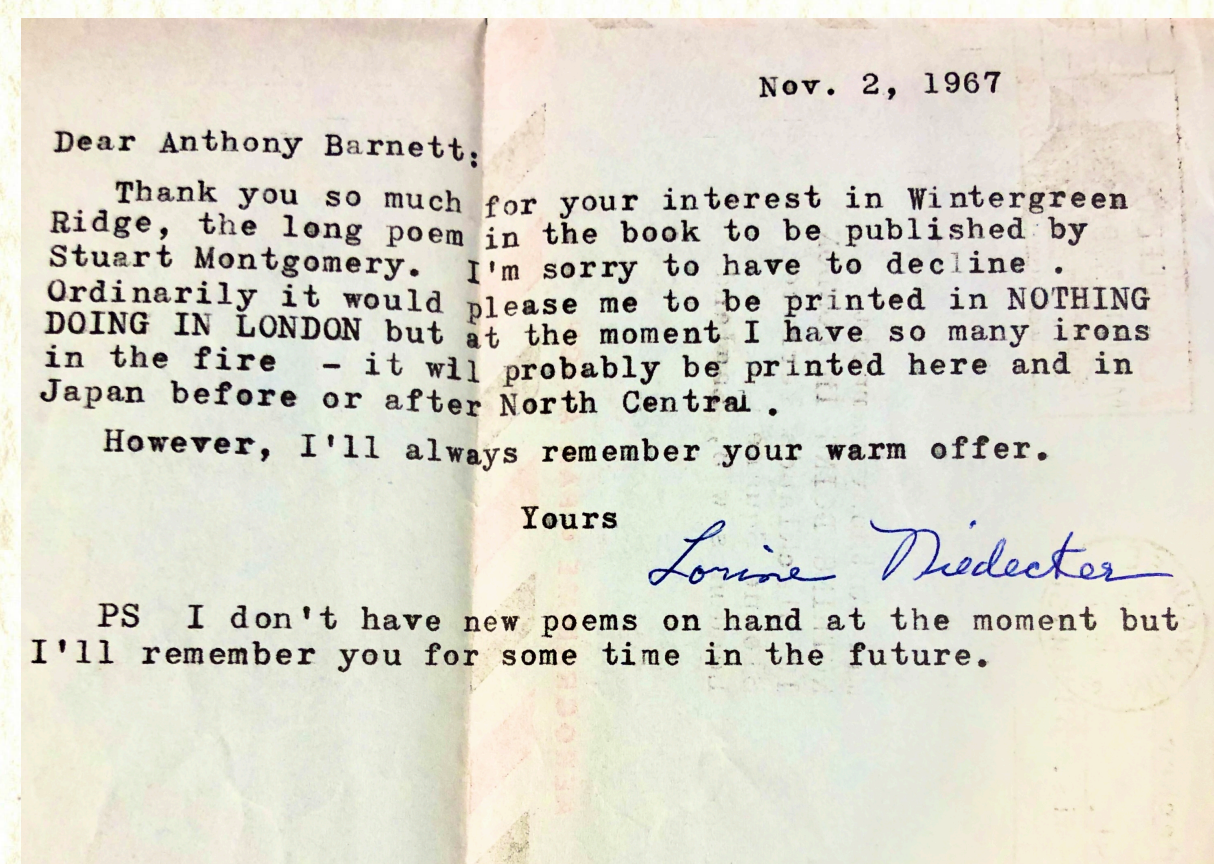


OUT OF PLACE: A TOPOPOETIC READING OF ANTHONY BARNETT AND LORINE NIEDECKER

Abstract

In 1967, Anthony Barnett, a young British poet then working at Better Books, Charing Cross, wrote to Lorine Niedecker, an Objectivist poet living in rural Wisconsin, for a contribution to the literary arts review 'Nothing Doing in London', which he had started the previous year. She wrote back:



The exchange, though minimal, illustrates a great deal about the geographies of poetic exchange then occurring between avant-garde poetries in the United States and the British Poetry Revival in the UK: That Niedecker was aware of a small press literary arts review that had been started the year before halfway across the world; that she was not able to contribute her poem 'Wintergreen Ridge' owing to its forthcoming publication by UK small press Fulcrum; that Barnett himself knew of Niedecker (who, apart from epistolary exchange, particularly with Basil Bunting in the UK and Louis Zukofsky in the United States, and a small number of publications, was not particularly 'active' in literary social life), all attest to its intensity.

My research focused on the geographies of that exchange through Barnett's role as a poet, publisher, and editor, and Niedecker's participation in and influence on the British Poetry Revival.

By working through this narrow and hitherto unexplored connection, my research adds to scholarship on that exchange, helping to broaden its scope and develop a picture of its diversity as it extends beyond the Black Mountain and Cambridge School connection—particularly the relationship between poets Charles Olson and J.H. Prynne—to which a great deal of writing on the subject attends.

The ambiguities latent in the title "Out of Place" proved fertile ground for developing a dynamic approach to my subject. Interpreting the title one way—"Out of Place" as in, *to spring from* or *emerge from* place—allowed me to explore the degree to which place formed an important *subject matter* or *source material* for late modernist poets in the United States, including Niedecker. In this section I briefly mapped the prevalence of 'place writing' in late-modernist US poetries and made a case for the influence of this preoccupation on the British Poetry Revival.

I also outlined the geography of publication, readership, and communication that facilitated this flow of ideas.

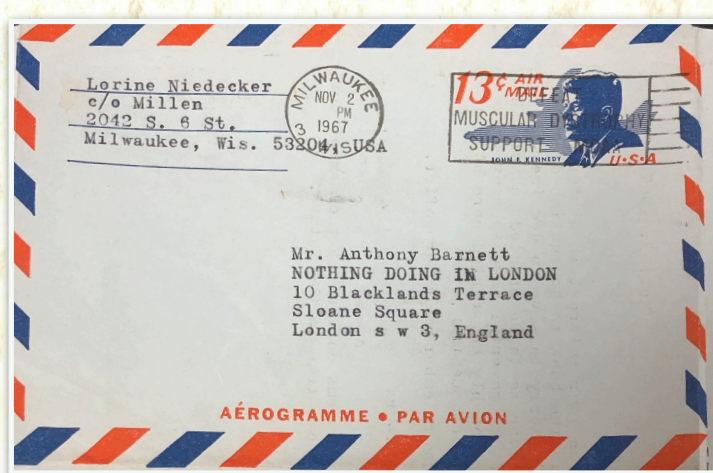
This laid the groundwork for the close readings of Barnett and Niedecker's poetries that followed. In the final section of my essay I drew on a second understanding of "Out of Place" as it refers to *displacement* or to *being outside of place*. This interpretation allowed me to explore the ways in which Barnett and Niedecker's poetries offer criticisms and navigate the complexities of place, particularly through their shared explorations of modulating scales; a materialist poetics of both the environment and the page; and a form of poetic dwelling that is nomadic, shifting, and contingent.

Archive Visits

My research involved visits to both the Cambridge University Library and the Hoard Historical Society in Fort Atkinson, Wisconsin, where Barnett's and Niedecker's papers are kept respectively; I was also able to visit Niedecker's cabin on Blackhawk Island, Wisconsin (see below).



Archival research proved invaluable to my project. The letter from Niedecker to Barnett, from which this research unfolds, was not anywhere digitised and had only been mentioned to me in passing. Whilst in Cambridge searching for the letter I uncovered several other documents that proved significant, including a manuscript of Niedecker's long poem 'Wintergreen Ridge' and many letters to and from Barnett by other UK and US poets concerning the management of small presses, the state of publishing, and the influence of American poets on the British Poetry Revival.



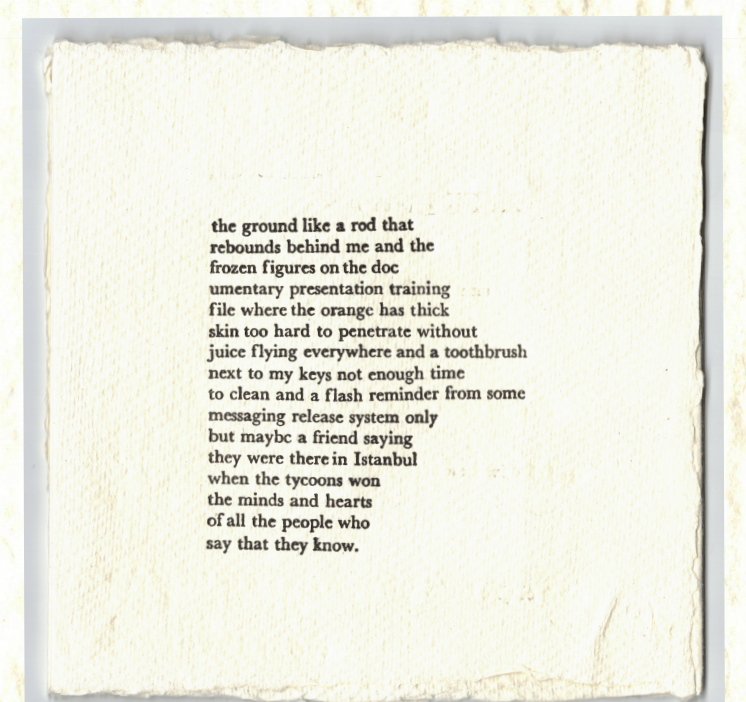
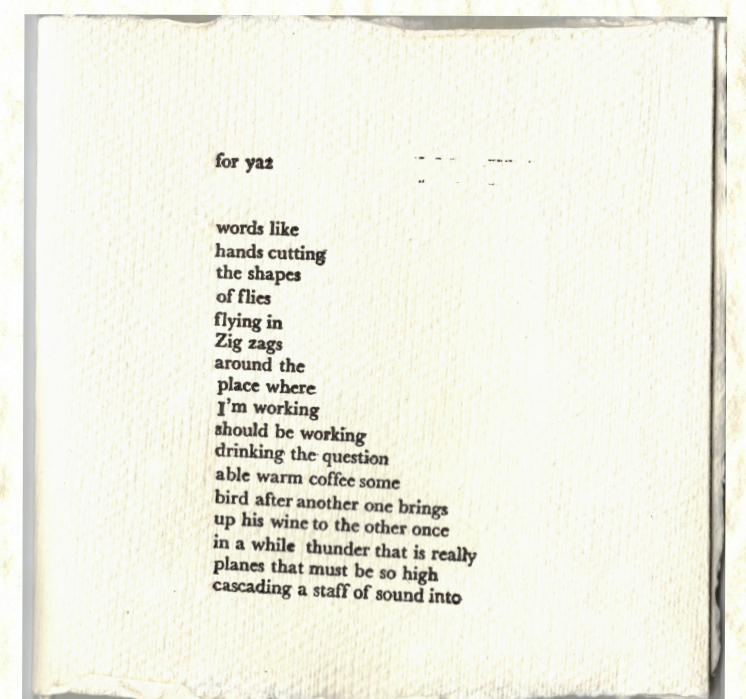
Printing on the Albion Press at Sussex

The first part of my research focused on small press printing culture in Britain and the United States during the 1960s and 70s. It explored the extent to which poets in this period—particularly those writing outside of the mainstream—'seized the means of production' in order to get their work into print, establishing small press magazines, journals, and publishing houses. In Britain especially, these presses became renowned for their exceptional physical quality and elegance of design. As a result, many American poets chose to have their work printed and published in the UK, which in turn precipitated a flow of ideas across the Atlantic and established a transatlantic readership of avant-garde poetries. Prompted by this research and in preparation for fulfilling the poster component of the JRA, I arranged to use the Albion Printing Press at Sussex in order to establish my own small press: 'BALDANDERS PRESS'. The first issue (see below) features work from three poets who read regularly at Horseplay, a local poetry-reading event.



The process also informed my close readings of both Barnett and Niedecker, which focused on the way both poets draw attention to both the materiality of the signifier and the blank space in which the

poem is located. The first issue featured contributions employing mis-en-page techniques; this provided not insignificant challenges as a printer. These difficulties, however, ultimately prompted a deeper engagement with the geographies of the poems, as they pertained to both the space of the page and the conditions of their production.



Outcomes and Opportunities for Further Research

The outcome of my research is threefold. First and foremost I have written a piece of literary criticism in which I give an overview of the transatlantic exchange of poetries facilitated by the small press scene in the 1960s and 70s; Barnett's role and influence as a publisher and editor; Niedecker's influence on the British Poetry Revival; and a close reading of Barnett and Niedecker's shared poetries. My intention is to submit this essay to various literary reviews and magazines, including *Snow Lit Rev*, *The Solitary Plover*, *PN Review*, *Fortnightly Review*, and the *JUR*.

Secondly, I conducted an interview with Anthony Barnett on the topic of small press culture in the United Kingdom; my intention is to submit a transcribed version of this interview to the same above journals.

Thirdly, the creation of *BALDANDERS PRESS*, which I intend to continue, publishing creative work by Sussex students printed on the Albion Press. Furthermore, this research will form the basis for my undergraduate dissertation, and later master's thesis.

BALDANDERS PRESS

Harriet Rose. JRA Project,
Summer 2023
Under supervision from
Dr. Anna Moser

Key Literature

My research has been conducted through the critical framework of 'topopoetics', a conceptual field pioneered by Tim Cresswell; his writing has been invaluable to the development of this research.