Penelope Niven

BIOGRAPHER

1939-2014

Carl Sandburg, the poet and Lincoln biographer, was losing relevance before Penelope Niven's biography of Sandburg was published in 1991. It is credited with reviving interest in the poet as a literary figure of importance and it introduced a new generation of readers to his work.

Her book was the start of a late-blooming literary career that would include acclaimed biographies of two other fading luminaries of the World War II generation: novelist and playwright Thornton Wilder, and photographer Edward Steichen.

Niven also coauthored “Voices and Silences,” with actor James Earl Jones. The autobiography was praised as a classic on acting. Niven’s children’s book on Sandburg earned the International Reading Association Prize for exceptionally distinguished literature for children.

During her career Niven received three fellowships from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Thornton Wilder Fellowship at Yale University. She lectured throughout the United States as well as overseas, served as writer-in-residence at Salem College for 12 years, and received the North Carolina Award in Literature, the highest honor the state bestows on an author.