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Poems that run like the waters.

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Poems That Run Like the Waters

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NORTH CENTRAL. By Lorine Niedecker. Fulcrum Press, London. Distributed by Horizon Press, New York, \$4.50.

By SISTER M. THERESE

THIS handsome third book of poems by Lorine Niedecker of Milwaukee and Fort Atkinson gives evidence of its author's deep empathy for nature — water, earth, sky, iron granite and for man who is "what the seas/have made un/longing immense."

The book has four divisions: "Lake Superior," "My Life by Water," "Traces of Living Things" and "Wintergreen Ridge." Under the first, second and third titles are various groupings of short poems in which subtle meanings hide under what at first reading might appear but a series of perceptions on simple confrontation with an object; "Ah your face/but it's whether/you can keep me warm," or at Sault Ste. Marie.

—big boats coal-black and iron-ore-red topped with what white castlework

The waters working together internationally
Gulls playing both sides

She is steeped in the history of the lake region of northern Wisconsin she knows so well — Radisson in "this world of the Lake," and Marquette and Joliet among those who brought "through all this granite land/the sign of the cross." Canoes, barges, sails, masts, crowd the lines of Miss Niedecker's poems, together with the flora of the shores, "lilies, flag and Indian reed," which in a poetry without punctuation other than the capitalizing of the first word of each sentence, the effect is of a continuous flowing of waters beside which she has lived.

In "My Life by Water" we are brought to this place where "one boat/two — pointed toward/my shore/thru birdstart/wing drip/

weedrift/of the soft/and serious — /Water."

Under "Traces of Living Things," there is an interesting variety of mood and subject matter as the poem titles indicate: "Museum," "TV," "Sewing Dress" and "J. F. Kennedy after the Bay of Pigs," while in the final long poem, "Wintergreen Ridge," her personal voice becomes more audible with terse philosophic relevances — "Woman said/a pretty thing? Truth/'the good of the heart,' " women "of good



Lorine Niedecker (Mrs. Albert Millen) is a poet of whom "Wisconsin can be proud."

wild stock" who stood "stolid/before machines" and "stopped bulldozers/cold" to save the flowering ridge — "We want it for all time/they said."

Miss Niedecker's manner is, for the most part, that of the "objectivists," in which no object is a symbol but is uniquely itself, set skillfully in sparse lines which give a sharp immediacy of rapport. In a poetry in which image qua image rarely happens, there are some delightful surprises, as toward the close of "Wintergreen Ridge" as the poet is driving "toward cities" she notes the changing church architecture.

Hers is a strong poetry, born of a keen sensitivity, and what one might call a deep cosmic consciousness with a certain Teilhardian flavor about it. She loves the world and meets it with song.

In a day when a goodly portion of poetry runs the gamut of tastelessness, one comes to Miss Niedecker's poems with special delight. Wisconsin can be proud of her.

Sister Therese, author of three books of poetry, is an associate professor of English at Mount St. Paul college, Waukesha.