

Rogers, Janet Marie. *Peace in Duress*. Vancouver: Talon Books, 2012. 128pp.

<http://talonbooks.com/books/peace-in-duress>

Rogers, Janet Marie. *Janet Marie Rogers Stream on Soundcloud*. 2013. Web. 3 Jan. 2015.

<https://soundcloud.com/janet-marie-rogers>

Peace in Duress is Janet Rogers' fourth poetry collection available from Talon Books (214). As a recent poet laureate of Victoria, British Columbia, Rogers hails from the Mohawk-Tuscarora Nations and engages a staggering range of timely themes such as environmental justice, First Nations sovereignty and struggles for decolonization, gender and sexuality, oral traditions (see "Sky Woman Falling" and "Red-Black" especially), critiques of capitalism and more. This list is hardly exhaustive, and the collection itself resists easy reductions, as hers is a powerful, edgy voice that simultaneously thunders and soothes, aggravates and celebrates-- sometimes in the very same breath. Hers is a voice that thunders as it demands political change—"We want more/And we want it now"—and she urges readers/listeners to do the same in "Move Like a Mountain," writing "you better walk loud." Yet even as she painfully points our eyes to the "Fractures/In the Sacred," and reminds us that we are, "standing on stolen territories," Rogers likewise declares that the people are "Singing new songs" and implores the audience to "Resist the hate/keep praying." Whether she is taking aim at attacks on the land and tribal sovereignty, or rejoicing in a kiss or other act of human kindness, *Peace in Duress* is overflowing with the spirit of resistance to confining notions of both poetry and indigeneity.

Skillfully blending images and rhythms of contemporary urban experiences with Original Instructions and "the Great Laws of being" (28), Rogers' pages present "Raven/dancing on fresh concrete" (53) alongside "Visions of medicine/Dropping like acid on the skin" (38). The poet reminds the People early on in the collection that "Our greatest asset/is memory" (6) in a colonial world forcefully urging cultural and spiritual amnesia. Here, Rogers is a poet-warrior writing from the trenches, bearing witness to the epidemic of disappeared First Nations women in "Move a Mountain (Walk a Mile in Her Shoes)," which picks up the discourse of the Walking with Our Sisters activist campaign as the speaker darkly narrates, "If we could really walk in her shoes/[We'd be] running for our lives." The poet later intones, "Come back," repeating impassioned phrases meant to return the disappeared women and heal both self and community, a rebalancing poetics that links with another piece in the collection, "Giving a Shit." Here, in the second to last poem, the reader finds Rogers' telling account of the Idle No More movement, particularly a description of a round dance addressing Canadian Prime Minister Harper's failure to address Chief Theresa Spence's (Attawapiskat) request to meet with First Nations peoples to discuss the government's failures to honor the treaties and the earth. Rogers writes, "Have you nothing to say" and warns that, "The movement has just begun."

But *Peace in Duress* is far more than a catalogue of violence against peoples and the earth, for even as her poems offer harsh testimonies, "telling the stories, willingly," these are also pages filled with sensuality and love. For example, in "The Sexual Revolution Will Be Televised," Rogers speaks of the rejection of colonial shame surrounding sexuality and the reclamation of positive conceptions of erotic, what she calls "the rez-erection." Here, the very personal is very

political as, "we can have power over our own bodies/Imagine: we can have authority over our own skin." The book is likewise brimming with celebration and "powerful pleasure" (85) from front to back, resulting in a collection centered on (re)balancing and forging connections even in the midst of so much disruption and disconnection.

Rogers' rhythms pulse on the page, and I was immediately drawn to the musicality of her repetition and galloping cadences, like in "Three-Day Road" and "Forty Dayz," where "dirt doesn't want to stay down" and "welcome winds whip." Even the earth itself moves to the rhythm of the poet's voice, as "this land is my favorite song that skips at my favourite part." For these reasons, it is no wonder that Janet Rogers identifies as a spoken-word artist and maintains an active Soundcloud page devoted to experimental vocal-musical performances (Rogers, "Janet Marie Rogers Stream on Soundcloud"). Although her digital poems unarguably complement any reading of *Peace in Duress*-- sometimes even offering exciting, alternate versions of the written text-- they also function as stand-alone works in their own right, suggesting that one element of Rogers' activism as a poet is ultimately structural in nature since she not only resists easy binaries in her content but also in terms of genre as she fluidly moves from the page to the air. Some of Rogers' performances of poems in the book utilize microbeats that sound like anxious heartbeats or drops of rain hitting the sidewalk, but all along the focus still remains on her voice and the materiality of language itself. Many of Rogers' spoken works turn to reverb and delay vocal effects (see especially "Love and Protection"), which emphasize and elongate critical lines and syllables, creating haunting and, at times, chaotic and dreamlike, sonic atmospheres. Such repetitions reinforce the lingering nature of Rogers' content, where issues like violence targeting First Nations women and the destruction of nature are ongoing, or in other places where the listener is made to dwell on a single word in all of its sonic permutations. In this way, Rogers as an artist is a master of echoes, both on the page and in performance, where her poems talk back to the listener/reader as well as to each other, and necessary visions retrace their steps, audibly stumbling into one another again and again.

In these ways, Janet Rogers' *Peace in Duress* and her accompanying spoken performances on Soundcloud come together to form a sonic tour-de-force of contemporary indigenous resistance. They will appeal to readers and listeners interested in works that are both experimental and at the same time accessible, as well as audiences eager to engage narratives of survival, resistance, and strength from an unwavering voice that isn't afraid to speak the truth no matter the cost.

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