



**Pattiann Rogers. *Holy Heathen Rhapsody*. New York: Penguin, 2013. 112 pp. Paperback \$20.00. Epub \$16.99.**

That Pattiann Rogers is an American poet of stature is undeniable. She has been awarded multiple NEA grants and a Guggenheim fellowship. She has written over ten books, and her last major collection, *Song of the New World Becoming* (2010), was an *LA Times* Notable Book. Her newest collection, *Holy Heathen Rhapsody* (2013), is full of gem-like images set with lapidary care amongst scientific observations, lyric flights, and gently-unfolding metaphors of flux. The result is not only beautiful, but especially relevant in a world that struggles to animate ecological causes with real and personal feeling.

Rogers was born Joplin, Missouri, in 1940, where she developed the love of nature that is her work's most apparent feature. Often, as in "Courting with Finesse, My Double Orange Poppy," she adopts the narrative voice of another species: "And if I did whisper to you once / of damp stamens, mesmerizing leaves / deeply lobed, spicy oil pockets / of seeds, those were merely facts." Rogers transforms the monologuing flower into a potent sexual being. The result forces us to recognize the experience of a plant as akin to our own: it is a radical de-familiarizing of nature.

Rogers celebrates the life principle, the will-to-be that imbues nature with throbbing, restless activity. "Within the Earth Beneath Us" begins in an echo of the Lord's Prayer:

Our Father, who is the Passageway in the tunnel  
of the worm and the trench of the mole,  
in the wintering eggs of the luminous beetle  
and the ragged reachings of all roots scraggly

and crooked with the network of their knitted  
inroads, who is the Deep in unseen subterranean  
rivers, the Porous of limestone, sandstone,  
and gravel through which the groundwater seeps.

Such descriptive accumulations are held together by clear rhythm, the well-chosen word, and the simple gnostic truths with which Rogers often, with quiet assurance, closes out a poem. In Romantic poetry, nature is often a mere spring-pad for human discovery. In contrast, Rogers's exuberant cataloguing celebrates nature, rather than the human feeling it inspires.

Another way to understand Rogers's work is as a challenge to a Cartesian world view, in which the physical is distinguished from the mental (and hence spiritual). In an interview in *Gettysburg Review* in 2002, Rogers stated that she aims to "dispel the dichotomy that is built into language between the material and the spiritual." This is transcendentalism for a new age, in which the experience of the physical becomes metaphysical not because of pantheistic animation, but the scientific reality of the interconnectedness of all living things. *Holy Heathen Rhapsody* is a clear-

sighted vision of the world infused with numinous awe. It is also a timely reminder how the physical world can be a deeply spiritual concern.

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