

Effigies

ALLISON ADELLE HEDGE COKE descends from moundbuilders and is of Cherokee, Huron, Creek, French Canadian, Lorraine, Portuguese, English, Scot, and Irish ascendants. Raised in North Carolina, the Plains and Canada, she previously worked horses, fields, waters, and factories. Currently a fellow of the Weymouth Center for the Arts & Humanities, Black Earth Institute, and Great Plains Institute, and a 2008 summer fellow of Hawthornden Castle, Hedge Coke holds the Distinguished Paul & Clarice Reynolds Endowed Chair of Poetry & Writing at the University of Nebraska at Kearney. She previously authored *Dog Road Woman* (American Book Award for Poetry) and *Off-Season City Pipe* (Wordcraft Writer of the Year in Poetry), both from Coffee House Press; *Rock, Ghost, Willow, Deer* (AIROS Book of the Month), memoir from the University of Nebraska Press; *Blood Run* (Wordcraft Writer of the Year for Poetry) from Earthworks of Salt Publishing; and *The Year of the Rat* (Grimes Press). *Effigies* is her seventh edited volume.



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Effigies

AN ANTHOLOGY OF
NEW INDIGENOUS WRITING
PACIFIC RIM, 2009

Edited by

ALLISON ADELLE HEDGE COKE



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Miss” and “Oblong Moon” are based on stories by the poet’s
husband, Edward Wendt.

Editor's Note

From baleen row, razor clam edge, rabid willow ptarmigan plume, to white buds of plumeria, gardenia, lei, shaded grave of dried lauhala and graying niu, fertile Pacific essence swells these poems into hummock ice knolls, into layers and layers of white sea laps rolling, into mindfulness, consideration, climate care—belonging.

From ulu, to cane knife, where aurora's green vein bleeds blue and tangles into indigo or green-robed mauna combs tī stalks, palms, kukui, and pines. From Barrow to Waihe'e, tethered and hammered through wild among dark branches and snared by voices, these poems harbor whale and seal oil burning to bring sustenance to a reader's search for light and with them carry us into a seafaring world of rich embrace. Spectacular, immediate, these beaches and beeches along the shores provide a tactile relationship made immense in their stream crafted images.

It is a rare pleasure to unleash beauty upon the ever-tragic world, an exception to the plagued misfortune of greed, despair, and injury. Though elements of colonization do present certain challenges and malady to a natural world inhabited for tens of thousands of years by peoples steeped in ideologies, practical and philosophic systems, they do not overcome the lingual sensibilities and prowess of the poets representing the areas of the planet present in this text. Instead the poets overcome the intrusion.

dg nanouk okpik, Cathy Tagnak Rexford, Brandy Nālani McDougall, and Mahealani Perez-Wendt are four exceptional emerging poets. Their Pacific Rim relationship invited opportunity to publish these four chapbooks in one collected volume. Like effigy earthworks, stone, and bone carvings, the books included in this volume portray representational imagery as testimonies to the stunning spirit, landscapes, and lives from which these poets derive. A significant statement as to the changing state of the world, this collection is a rich pleasure—an honor to undertake.

ALLISON ADELLE HEDGE COKE
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In the time of Okvik

d g nanouk okpik

In the time of origin, in the formation of inuk, while the living await relatives to come back; I scribble these stories in a box. A change in sea level throughout the globe is like my outer fold of skin, brown and wrinkled, flapping like a great auk towards shale beaches. I am an appendage grown by two mother plants, a gemma conjoined to a small cellular body. I grow among tectonic plates of sod and grout. I watch my inua fly out the sealskin porthole as smoke. Buster Kailek once said, "The greatest peril of life lies in the fact that human food consists entirely of souls."

Mask of Dance

My wooden face is carving
 the *inua* inside a bird beak.
Nearby heads open the lighted
 crawlspaces of knotted plumage.

Gauze rings of dog moon,
 leashes to lifelines, sway from dwellings.
Bentwood quill eyes
 or half circles, not finished, like divided hoops.

Threaded strings dangle
 tilted soapstone heads tied from wrists.
The face twists and distorts muscles.
 The being awakens with quaking

fingers of death, snatch—
 life is not a rock of hollow thorn.
I paint with brushes an amulet shield.
 I wear soot and ashes,

with the red dial inward,
 the clock attachments outward.
I trace the day of charred white spruce,
 rimmed in hands, with no thumbs.

Storyteller in the yellowed
 mind of matter, halt and pivot.
A wingless and anchored battle,
 a gloved white patch of epidermis;
under the breast, inside which

eggs of snowy owls
 claw and peck the pink shells.
Bluebirds' song from the spotted mantle
 in motion scats on air-drums.

The palm dancers return,
with sleight-of-hand tricks
flashing over the burn pile.
The other mask surfaces
then transforms into seal whiskers.

In the time of Okvik

The smell of wormwood,
fresh snow
on beach greens,
like a place name,
from a hand scribed map.

I walk the slash lines,
forwards, backwards,
into that shadow.
I listen to the cry
of puffins, they disorient me.

I pick up a chipped blade,
start carving into plague,
carving on my arms,
slashed lines and steeples.

A handful of broken spheres,
a caribou antler,
each slice a countenance.
Open water freezes,
icing my large intestine.

The twang of palpating hands,
of sinew, snapped to vibrate.
Micro-blades, burins, chisel
my wrists, my side gouged.

Blood and root, ptarmigan and shrew,
over the veins,
onto the clefts of skin,
tapping, snap, snap.
Eyes of basalt staring
at the upper, bloody walls.

I rise from wasps in the dark-bowel
of earth. Broad loose wings,
behind the face of black feathers.
Raven eats the sting of destruction.
As I conjure the snow goose in barren skies.

Foist

Bones surfaced on the old land
as the earth thaws and cracks.

In Kuukpik area we find them,
let no one be in any doubt,

of the remedy from Anatkuq,
for the red illness. She prepares

the poultice in the mortar bowl,
Cotton grass, seal liver, rainwater.

The soil rattles with bleached
ivory bones, bones clack and claw,

at the walls of glaciers melting,
crossing all darkness into grey.

I roam in a sideslip of clouds,
I paint a sign used in music,

algebra, marking in the direction
of light-shadow, as if for a fossil record.

I meet her bringing lead pieces
for making spark, pumice burns slowly.

Coldest moon reacts to the equinox,
the age of earth is already intact.

Ninilchik

Grandfather said: drink the icy, glacier water.
Velvet sponges seep and hack disease, Ulu cuts.
We are rooted in landscapes spectrum share preserved
in tourists with oil peaking, and campgrounds full.

Eddie Bauer had rising salmon.
Us, starfish red and razor clam fed.
Ninilchik sand bluffs with fire hot grit,
joining smoke mountains then, bailing.

Russian Orthodox cross, a double helix.
Gulch the pearls, choke on splinters of fireweed.
Black trees smoldered; dunes corral ice.
The marsh is crimson with gold amulets of ivory feathers.

Safety belts strangling, strangling
us with thick hair, braided black.
Beaded sunsets, raining sinew
line the shell banks and twitch bone.

Ghosts of concrete ready to pounce.
Then daily feed of twin rainbows rise above.
Volcanoes jetting behind the gray rock
pelicans wade in crests of bubbles.

Seaweed the length of trees, salty protein,
the sea rises to snatch the spotted seal
with sharp eyes, watch the feathers,
of plucked gulls, teeth gnarled and beaks pointed.

Pecking order in delicate alder nests,
my north wind punches, squalling rubber algae.
Jellyfish plunge into cement splashing
offering pebbled soapstone and jade.

Japanese fishing floats are shattered, hovering
water glass the color of Coke bottles.

Date: Post Glacial

A fern curls and drinks water next to Chena River.
As I engrave with drill bows the tattoos

on the backside of a gray whale.
I polish with cotton in circles to bring out the design.

Over there the black whales arch and span,
four-sided sabers guard the processing barge.

Pollen lands where the air is good. Dig for chert bone.
Find an antler. Reel in the velvet then map trade.

The small wooden faces flat with skin-lined splinters ask:
Should we prune more trees for pluck or tag and replant?

We the Red Stone people keep our millwork central.
In the New Stone Age, don't let the paddle wheel rust.

Tie the knitted musk oxen hat with ivory toggles
firm and fixed, around our chins —

Kiln powder in beveled pools, on beetle rust greens.
The talc settles, no rain in seventeen days.

Cross puddle mud with dry ankles on earth,
birth to a metal egg from sledge moss.

Invent a fan to blow the north wind to cool the ivory bone etch.
The tall grass calls bent birch snowshoes to make tracks.

*Do we run a tap dry of soot and sludge to forge roots?
How many drink wild tea and dip blubber in seal oil?*

From the horizon we watch fire opals come from molten rain,
the clay mass returns to full grass baskets.

Little Brother and Serpent Sedna

I play in fields of tall grass and sticker bushes
that snag on my *kuspuk* and white tights.
My little brother skips between moose tracks
and chinked sod houses with shrill echoes
of red snapper with razor clam shells underfoot.

Blood leaches on my shins
collect in wading mosquito pools
nettle into days and fester nightfall into salmon sky blue pink.
Copper mountains and elderberries linger upon Knik Arm
just in between the knots on silver birch and burnt spruce

Mount Williwaw and purple iris
are below Polaris star.
My tent bays on the shore of Cook Inlet
next to the gulls and charred fir trees
darkening the sun cloud by cloud.

A crooked head atop mother's sucking barnacles
hold brother in bore tides of milky water.
fishing lines hook his sealskin mukluks.
they are cemented in rock bass grey quicksand
jigging the fish for smiling beluga whales.

On the mouth of Serpent Sedna
her tendril grasp is taunting him raw sienna.
She just milked him from her bosom
he nibbled at her browbeating umbilical cord
seeking a pacifier of Barter Island seal sunning.

Sedna brings him close enough smell the blue ruin
Yet far enough to build a castle made of tentacles
to play tug of war and hopscotch with next of kin.
The seahorse saddled and bucking from the spurs
of brackish headwaters and iced shells of razor clams

I left a century ago looking beyond the castle
and into the moat of beadwork, made a sand spit,
had an island erected into my likeness made of pigment
and ivory paper with black skrimshaw pictures,
suckling the berries and wildflowers of *Aleyeska*.

Sinnaktuq

Along the breakwater
she walks alone,
then kneels,
cupping her hands to the brook.
She sleeps —
walking in blackish light
awake when *Tatqiq* is lowest.

Her knuckles are whitish red,
in the silt ice water dragging,
across sharp flint
yet like bone toggles where flesh
meets sinew across the Beaufort Sea.

(maybe it was her home at Birnirk that kept her rouse.)

Her house is at the edge of the spit,
it stands on peeled driftwood stilts
where the river's lapse, folds, and stretches,
then culls the shoreline.

In her eyes the constant,
fuse of the narrow,
long, path into slate hands
and gelid tones of re-tracing,
like mooring a *umiak* with twine of grass.

Her hands track and pluck the baseline,
of skin which holds tendons,
of ribbed aluminum and sod roofs.
Each night
opening flashed windows of
the old Quonset hut.

She uses a harpoon to trammel,
and etch the fissure of ground,

each line a place to name,
to shorten the permafrost
by adding a piece.

So many thermals of wind,
to hit the hemmed dam upstream,
like a gaff clutched by blink movements.

(If she decreases the height of the pictograph,
would it make the reindeer roam on scrimshaw?)

She waits for the midnight sun,
to bleach a seal skin,
then they will come. Come
in blotches of wild cotton,
elongated and cleaned
like buoys carried
by purple martin.

There and Here

I see her inhale is a brass whistle,
from her blowhole nostril,
to gelid air,
condensing,
into white frost vapor.

She sings a 30-minute torch song,
set in a bay of black glass,
of black patent leather—
dimpled water like a tar pool.

For now, I sit alongside the shore
on a mountain of ice.
A tidewater glacier
heaves, and heaves,
upward 20 miles above.

I ascend in shades of hemlock green,
it leaves my depths in spruce swaying.
Reaching toward sunlit night dusk,
in Icy Strait,
Sandy Cove,
on Beartrack River
Marble Island,
Muir Point,
or Rendu Inlet.

I am there and here—
in thought of Shy Maiden flowers,
as I channel down the slope,
catapulting each crevasse.