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Off-Season City Pipe. By Allison Adelle Hedge Coke. Minneapolis: Coffee House Press, 2005. 86 pages. \$14.00 paper.

If one were to compile a list of poets who write about work, it would most likely include the recognizable names of Philip Levine, Wendell Berry, B. H. Fairchild, and Jim Daniels, among others. The entries would include mostly men and only a sprinkling of women writers. Few of these writers would be from ethnic or racial minorities, and an even smaller number would be Native American. Such a list might seem to belie the fact that a large majority of underrepresented people, and particularly women, find themselves employed in blue-collar, manual, working-class, agricultural, or part-time labor. *Off-Season City Pipe* by Allison Adelle Hedge Coke gives voice to the struggles of a working woman. Drawing its imagery from the humid fields of North Carolina to the unforgiving streets of California, Hedge Coke's poetry succeeds in representing the toughness that women need to survive and persevere, situating itself not only as a poetry of work but of witness.

The theme of struggle is nothing new to those familiar with Hedge Coke's work, including her American Book Award-winning poetry collection, *Dog Road Woman* (1997), and her memoir, *Rock, Ghost, Willow, Deer* (2004). The work of Hedge Coke is often autobiographical; she recounts how she prevailed over experiences with alcoholism, violence, and a schizophrenic mother. Exploring the theme of survival, the poems in *Off-Season City Pipe* continue in the same vein. Hedge Coke delivers her narrative poems in a strong, often confessional voice. The setting of these poems ranges from agricultural and factory workplaces to urban environments peppered with the neglected and forgotten.

Her best poems about work—"The Change," "Off-Season," "Putting Up Beans"—reflect the voice of an early Levine, though with less nostalgia, as in "Packin' Four Courner Nabs":

fourteen, I'm packin' crates
 Fairmont Foods—Cary, NC
 only mixed-blood "Indian-blond" girl around
 only factory worksite worker not black
 all of us under white Super's thumb (31)

Poems such as these are not only about work but about differences in gender, ethnicity, and class. While Hedge Coke writes about lines of separation, "Packin' Four Courner Nabs" is also about the solidarity, particularly between women, that can bridge these differences. "Listen, you stick close to me," instructs Sadie, the youthful narrator's protector, who has taken the girl under her wing. Hedge Coke seems to suggest here that one aspect of such solidarity is how women need to look after one another to survive:

never had an older woman
 fend for me before
 defended plenty though
 guess it's fair in all (34)

Looking after others is a central notion in some of the later urban-based poems, such as “Street Confetti,” “Eternity Safeway,” and “Valencia St., Mission District.” These poems, less about work and more about street life, have the hard-edged voice of similar urban-centered pieces of E. Donald Two-Rivers. Although the tough work of the factory and fields of the country have at least the saving grace of the land or its horses, the city seems to have little other than “steel needles . . . rot and gut” (57).

Hedge Coke writes in these later poems of homeless or otherwise neglected characters, in whom she finds something familiar. She says in “Eternity Safeway”:

He was Indian, like a lot of us,
but we didn't know what tribe,
what *dialect*, he was.
He couldn't trust us to take him away from the granite curb.
Someone had pushed him out a car door where he still waited.
As if whoever dumped him like a box of styrofoam
would return, take him home. (53)

“Eternity Safeway” muses about this man and his eventual disappearance:

no one ever knew
where he went,
who abducted him this time (54)

In recounting his story, the narrator gives significance to an otherwise forgotten life. Writing about such down-and-out characters is difficult and risks descending into sentimentality and a simplistic opposition of “us” versus “them.” One could argue in defense of such work, however, that this kind of poetry fits within a tradition defined by Carolyn Forché as a poetry of witness, a socially and often politically focused verse that gives voice to an event. By documenting what happened, it becomes possible to confront, discuss, and understand it. While poetry of witness records difficult moments, it could be said that such poetry—which acts as a camera—lacks a certain degree of agency. Poetry of witness that has a didactic edge also raises the age-old question about whether poetry is an art form or a means of instruction. Hedge Coke’s poems speak in a direct voice and make little use of poetic devices such as metaphor and imagery; such poems can seem “voice heavy,” at times even garrulous.

Nevertheless, *Off-Season City Pipe* succeeds in what it seeks to do—giving voice to women who work in blue-collar or other menial jobs: “Next day he had me start out on a crew full of men,” says the narrator in “Off-Season,” “Men who’d never seen a woman work” (17). The book documents a woman who has prevailed and asserted herself despite the odds, the stereotypes, and the prejudice. The narrator of these poems recognizes in others, particularly in social castaways, something of herself or what she might have become. A poem such as “Sorrel Run,” which tells of a runaway mare, places these

struggles into perspective: “Rider and horse, yes, but one and the same” (20). The now-tame mare resembles the now-reflective narrator who looks back on difficult years and labors:

I saved her; she blessed me.
She makes a great ride now and I carry out
all her plans for escape— (20)

Like the mare, the narrator has a fiery spirit, a trait that lets her succeed in a man’s world.

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Rachel’s Children: Stories from a Contemporary Native American Woman. By Lois Beardslee. Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 2004. 160 pages. \$69.00 cloth; \$22.95 paper.

Ojibwe author Lois Beardslee’s latest work, *Rachel’s Children: Stories from a Contemporary Native American Woman* is a short but impressive novel that, at its core, is a fantastically crafted trickster tale and a bold indictment of the ongoing effects of racism on Native American children and their families. Using the conventions of both the nineteenth-century white woman’s captivity narrative and twenty-first century self-reflexive ethnography, Beardslee voices a deeply pointed critique of cultural exploitation, race relations, and the disparate treatment of Native students in public education from a surprising viewpoint—the eyes of a reluctant white woman scholar bent on exploiting her informant’s knowledge to produce her first publication, a children’s book of trickster tales. It is this perspective that echoes the standard conventions of early accounts of white women’s “life amongst the Indians” and contemporary fieldwork “accounts of entry” into the most secret corners of Native experience. And like all good captivity narratives, the story is one of revelations—and like all good ethnographies, one of . . . well, revelations.

Of course, since *Rachel’s Children* is also a trickster narrative, the narrator’s captor and informant, Rachel, an Ojibwe storyteller and education specialist, never gives the narrator the keys to salvation or reveals any deep cultural secrets. Instead, the narrator slowly comes to understand that her own privilege is something she has to own up to, however reluctant she may be to turn the gaze toward herself. This “returning” of “the gaze” through a story written by a Native woman (Beardslee) told through the eyes of a white woman (the narrator), who is herself telling the story of a Native woman (Rachel) is enough to leave literary theorists in a giddy frenzy for decades to come. However, what this novel offers, beyond interesting questions about intertextuality, genre, multiple-voiced texts, and “talking back” to the colonizer, is simply an opportunity to make readers question their own subject positions—whether Native or non-Native, urban or rural, teacher or student—as they ponder the text’s