

America, I Sing You Back

By Allison Adelle Hedge Coke

for Phil Young and my father Robert Hedge Coke;
for Whitman and Hughes

America, I sing back. Sing back what sung you in.
Sing back the moment you cherished breath.
Sing you home into yourself and back to reason.

Before America began to sing, I sung her to sleep,
held her cradleboard, wept her into day.
My song gave her creation, prepared her delivery,
held her severed cord beautifully beaded.

My song helped her stand, held her hand for first steps,
nourished her very being, fed her, placed her three sisters strong.
My song comforted her as she battled my reason
broke my long-held footing sure, as any child might do.

As she pushed herself away, forced me to remove myself,
as I cried this country, my song grew roses in each tear's fall.

My blood-veined rivers, painted pipestone quarries
circled canyons, while she made herself maiden fine.

But here I am, here I am, here I remain high on each and every peak,
carefully rumbling her great underbelly, prepared to pour forth singing—

and sing again I will, as I have always done.
Never silenced unless in the company of strangers, singing
the stoic face, polite repose, polite while dancing deep inside, polite
Mother of her world. Sister of myself.

When my song sings aloud again. When I call her back to cradle.
Call her to peer into waters, to behold herself in dark and light,
day and night, call her to sing along, call her to mature, to envision—
then, she will quake herself over. My song will make it so.

When she grows far past her self-considered purpose,
I will sing her back, sing her back. I will sing. Oh I will—I do.
America, I sing back. Sing back what sung you in.

Source: Streaming (Coffee House Press, 2014)