



Foreign Homes

Joan Crate

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Shortlisted for the 2002 Pat Lowther Award

Foreign Homes, Joan Crate's second book of poems, explores domesticity and dislocation, where what was thought to be home becomes alien, and where the alien is, piece by piece, made into home -- often in such simple, physical acts as laying a table, or driving a highway, or reassembling a torn photograph. In Crate's careful hands, the knife that cuts the vegetables for dinner can transform the blade-edge of a distant war. Her migratory poems slip from voice to voice, from love to landscape to language, present to past, exile to return, illuminating the boundary that is also a border crossing between one person, one place, and another.

Domestic images and personal narrative surround a burning, incantatory sequence at the centre of the book, where poems circle Shawnandithit, a Beothuk who died in exile in Newfoundland in the nineteenth century, the last of her people. In giving voice to what is unknown, feared, lost, and silent, Crate's playful language is itself powerfully involved in this act-often violent-of breaking and making anew. And whether these homes are stolen or lost or stumblingly found, Crate is unflinching even as her own homes are made and un-made, watching those "who wait on the porch steps/ eager to move into our youth,/ to reassemble our bones."

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